

# 1. SWOT Analysis of Educational Tourism: A Reflection on North-East India

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## **Abstract:**

*Any programmer in which individuals travel to a location in a group with the main objective of partaking in a learning experience specifically relevant to the location is referred to as educational tourism. The tourism sector has made a substantial contribution to the global economy and has sparked growth in the employment sector. After China, India is the second-largest tourist destination in Asia. However, the North East region's tourism potential is still largely unrealized for a number of reasons, chief among them being weak connectivity and disturbed law and order. This essay looks at education tourism and assesses North East India's SWOT for growth and social change.*

## **Keywords:**

*Educational tourism, SWOT, Prospects of Educational Tourism, North-East India*

## **1.1 Introduction:**

One of the biggest sectors in the world, tourism contributes significantly to the global economy and creating a large job opportunity. According to research from the World Travel and Council, governments searching for a sector that can generate jobs and propel economic growth can concentrate on the tourism industry. It is the largest service industry in India as it is in nearly every other country in the world. India is among the twenty tourist destinations with the quickest growth rates, and it is the second-largest tourist market in Asia after China. India ranks one of the top ten worldwide tourism destinations, according to United Nations figures from 2019.

The eight states that make up the North-eastern India - Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim - are a rich mosaic of culture from various ethnic groups, nature with a wide variety of flora and animals and heritage derived from various eras.

Due to the fact that almost 90% of its borders form part of India's international borders, the region is crucial from a strategic perspective for the nation. In order to coordinate intra-state and inter-state tourism strategies, such as circuit consolidation and marketing, the NEC (North Eastern Council) established the North Eastern States Tourism Forum (NEST) in 2008. The focus on services, such as tourism, to accelerate development and create profitable employment opportunities, as part of the strategy for encompassing inclusive development of the region, is mentioned in the 2020 NER (North East Region) Vision Document on the Ministry of DONER (Development of North East Region) website. Along with West Bengal, the North East Region is a part of the 'Paradise Unexplored', 'Incredible India' campaign. North East India, which is the sixth-most biodiverse region in the world out of 25, is yet to become a popular tourist destination. It is obvious that there is a need for increased knowledge of and sensitivity to the distinctiveness of the North East Region of India, which necessitates a multifaceted strategy combining cultural understanding with socioeconomic growth.

### **A Look into the Concept of Educational Tourism:**

Travelers and the communities or institutions can profit from educational tourism's social and cultural benefits, which are far-reaching, long-lasting, and far more sustainable than those of other types of tourism. Though it is widely believed that educational tourism is only for students and young travelers, its package of combining experience with value can appeal to customers of all ages and occupations. In educational tourism, learning about another location's culture and history as well as using previously acquired skills in a new setting is the major goal of the tour or leisure activity. A personal experience in terms of seeing new places, learning about the culture, picking up a new language, and interacting with people from diverse cultures can be delivered through educational tourism in the digital age.

### **The Context of the North East:**

The concept of a North East region, which is frequently seen through lenses such as insurgency, identity politics, and hotly contested development projects, and as a heavily secured gateway to South East Asia, can be demystified through educational tourism, which is an immersion across the sub types of tourism. Living between cultures is quickly becoming a reality everywhere in the globe because to the current trends of globalization and mass migration. In order to investigate the potential of educational tourism in North East India, a SWOT analysis is suggested as follows:

#### **1.2 Strengths:**

The cultural variety and diversity of the North East area of India is practically mind-boggling, especially when it comes to the tribal population. With more than 150 tribes speaking as many languages, folk culture coexists with contemporary lifestyles. The area has abundant bio diversity, natural gas and oil reserves, coal, limestone, hydropower possibilities, and magnificent forests. The area is well-known for its unusual plants and animals, and it has the potential to become a major exporter of agricultural goods such as spices, fruits and vegetables, flowers, and herbs.

The region's diverse collection of fragrant plants can be used in the production of incense and perfumes. Its strategic location gives it access to the traditional home market of eastern India, as well as closeness to the eastern region's key states and neighboring nations like Bangladesh and Myanmar. Additionally, the area can create cross-border markets that are anticipated to be more cost-effective for North East India's surplus production than far-off national markets, providing a strategic entry point for South-East Asian markets. Organic farming, also known as a NEZ (Natural Economic Zone), is a focus sector that has seen a 200% increase in funding allocation in the 2019 budget.

The North East India Studies Program, which is available at many Indian universities, aims to introduce research experts and students to the wide range of opportunities and problems in the region and its surrounding territories. A very literate region is the North East. With the exception of Arunachal Pradesh, every other state in the region has literacy rates that are close to or higher than the 64.8% national average, creating a solid pool of educated labour in the area. North East India's higher education system has expanded quickly since independence, and the area now boasts twelve Central Universities, one Indian Institute of Technology, and one Indian Institute of Management.

### **1.3 Weaknesses:**

Infrastructure Development obstacles in the North East, the North East's whole economic development is built on a foundation of roads. The region's poor road, rail, and aviation service is due to topographical and occasionally strategic factors, and regional connectivity is a major issue.

The top 3 risks in the Eastern Region, according to the FICCI's 2013 India Risk Survey, were terrorism and insurgency, strikes, closures, and unrest, as well as political and governance instability. Some of the states, particularly in the North East region, have experienced some level of strife, from separatist movements to intercommunity and interethnic conflict. However, there is a strong yearning to escape this oppressive condition among the residents of the North East region. With improper financial management and poor performance, governance is a serious area of concern.

Although these nations are geographically close to the region – Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam – North East India's share in this trade has constantly hovered between 1 and 2%, accounting for only 5% of all exports to Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Bhutan.

This illustrates that industries located outside of the North East are responsible for commerce between India and its eastern neighbors. The north-eastern region's rate of development will have a significant impact on India's growth rate as it continues on its high-growth trajectory. The North East region of India will need to take important initiatives to instil an integrated awareness of development imperatives. The 'Look East' to 'Act East' policy must strategically anticipate the development of the North East by addressing the region's infrastructural and economic agenda needs while taking into account the region's cultural diversity.

#### **1.4 Opportunities:**

Reimagining the North East as an area with potential and the ability to perform is more important than ever. According to the top experts on the North East from think tanks, the area must make the most of its advantages, resources and connectivity with its neighbors. Regarding the North East Region, there needs to be a change in presumptions and worldviews, and this calls for a transformative learning process.

#### **1.5 Threats:**

Destinations in South East Asia include Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam are establishing themselves as new frontiers for travel in Asia. It will be crucial to comprehend how other Asian nations approach this sector with regard to educational tourism. Countries like China, Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand are promoting educational tourism, which is viewed as an experience with the goal of expanding knowledge and acquiring skills like learning a language to participating in volunteer initiatives. The economy for educational tourism has been boosted by universities like Peking University, National University of Singapore, and the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand. In order to become a center of educational excellence in the Asia Pacific Region, the Ministry of Tourism and Culture of Malaysia has declared '*Education Malaysia*' as a policy. Public and private educational institutions' infrastructure and amenities are designed to entice international students to continue their education in Malaysia. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education's plan for educational tourism is being further promoted by the Ministry of Tourism. According to the Ministry of Development of North East Region, even though the North East Region of India has focused on building physical infrastructure in the entire education system, from lower-level education to higher-level and technical education, there is a need to infuse work culture and recognition into the academic system of institutions and to develop a strong human resource base in this area (National Assessment and Accreditation Council, 2004). If the relevant public and commercial sectors work together to utilize existing infrastructure, networks, and knowledge, the North East region has the potential to become a favoured educational destination and promote tourism given its educational infrastructure and literacy rate.

#### **1.6 Prospects: Education Tourism:**

The Choice Based Credit System (CBCS), established for students seeking higher education, will provide seamless student mobility among the nation's higher education institutions. Indian universities have already started using the CBCS. Students' earned credits are transferable and would be very valuable to them if they choose to transfer to another college. This is a chance for higher education institutions in the North East to take part in the process of drawing students from all over the nation while also ensuring that they are continuously assessing their performance as Specialized Centres of Excellence. It has been suggested that the higher education institutions in the North East region create a potential forum of Specialized Centers of Excellence for a concerted representation to neighboring nations like Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, and China for a composite educational tourism product that reflects the diversity of the region. This forum may further pave the way for regional cooperation in development and peacemaking.

Another option for school field trips and activity camps that gives students the chance to experience what lies beyond the horizon of classrooms and gain an understanding of the varied hues of the North East is the initiative by the Ministry of Human Resource and Development to include chapters on North East India in school curriculum. As students encourage their parents to travel there and see the North East, tourism's potential may grow even more. Through online distance learning, a prospective scenario like this could broaden the audience for North East India Studies even more. In recent years, there has also been a surge in M.I.C.E. (Meetings, Incentive Travel, Conferences, Exhibitions, and Events) – related activities in the North East Region, including regional business meetings, information technology conferences, trade fairs, sports, music, and cultural events. The Hornbill Festival in Nagaland has come to be recognized as a symbol of the state's culture and a chance for tourists to get a better knowledge of this unusual territory. Shillong, which is also known as India's '*Rock Capital*', attracts concertgoers from all around the nation and abroad. The World War II tour of the North East, honours the lives and sacrifices of British and Indian soldiers who served in the conflict. Initiatives for community-based ecotourism are also available for destinations like Majuli Island in Assam. The North East Region's emphasis on organic agriculture and has the potential to be used to provide a variety of opportunities for volunteers, students, and other interested parties to participate in environmental apprenticeships, peace and coexistence projects.

The move by India and Bangladesh to work together to save the endangered Gangetic Dolphin is a step in the right direction for exploring important eco-conservation topics through educational travel. Nearly 52% of the area is covered in forests, which are home to 8000 of the 15,000 varieties of blooming plants. The Eastern Himalayas region is known as EBA by the International Conservation for Bird Preservation UK (Endemic Bird Area). Additionally, the area is home to a unique and diversified fauna. In order to eliminate the notion that the rhino is targeted for poaching because of its horn, the strategy for rhino conservation needs to be critically rethought. Educational tourism also needs to be included in the country and in neighboring countries. The goal of eco conservation education tourism is to alter the learner's cognitive, participative knowledge, skills and behavior.

## **1.7 Conclusion:**

Despite the region's shortcomings and difficulties, there is still room for strengths to be put to use and chances to be seized through entrepreneurial initiative so that everyone in the area can share a vision for inclusive growth. The North East may not always benefit from conventional market-based solutions. Hence, it is imperative to innovate and implement. For the North East, education tourism is still a new industry, and the development roadmap for this industry can take a variety of different paths in an effort to optimize the benefits of experiencing travel. It is obvious that a coordinated strategy will be needed to enhance education tourism product development and marketing, provide a platform for engagement with different stakeholders, and bring together a variety of governmental, private, and non-profit sector entities. The aim should be to collaborate with different service providers, resource institutions, and organizations from the public and commercial sectors to bring resources like money, technology, and marketing into the project so that the community groups can better their standard of living. The North Eastern region's tourism industry has the potential for rapid expansion and to advance cultural diplomacy.

If correctly handled, domestic and international tourism may boost the development of infrastructure, promote cultural activities, and strengthen mutual understanding and interactions between visitors and hosts.

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