

Rural Tourism and Sustainability: An Explorative Study in Garo Hills of Meghalaya

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Abstract

Rural tourism is a pure form of rural settings multiple rural phenomenon, like wide and lush green agricultural land, orchids, people seem to be busy in routine activities, colourful muddy houses, wall paintings, herds of cattle, chaupal is centre and meeting point of rural societies where they share and exchange useful information about all most every day. It is a develop to attract urban settlers to showcasing the real hardship of rural life, leisure, creative, ethnic, cultural, fair & festivals, local craftsmanship with changing seasons of the rural area. During their visit to rural site, the local rural communities act as entrepreneurs to facilitate all basis needs & comforts to tourists in order to generate extra income. These rural sites have been emerged as an important rural tourist destination which is full culture and tradition, arts and crafts, dances and music, events and delicious cuisines etc. The model of rural tourism has design to support local economy to make alternate livelihood for communities and various stake holders and create image through branding rural destination. India has agrarian economy where more than 70 per cent people attached with agricultural and allied activities for their livelihood. In India there is a big prospect for the growth of rural tourism, which will be able to increase the country's inclusive economic growth. Rural tourism creates huge opportunities for youths and women as rural entrepreneurs and generate employment opportunities. In India every one million invested in tourism sector creates 47.5 jobs directly and 85 jobs indirectly. The government, belatedly, has realized what the rural India can offer to the world. According to Tenth Five Year Plan, 'tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihoods'. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, in collaboration with United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has launched the indigenous rural tourism projects linked to the existing rural tourism scheme of the government. Rural tourism is helpful to develop rural socio-economic and environmental sustainability though capacity building among rural communities, pro-active NGOs, public-private-community based partnership etc. In this way rural tourism is able to boost up Indian inclusive economic growth. This paper aims to

study the rural tourism and sustainability, dimensions of rural tourism in Meghalaya, such as rural sustainability, rural sustainable tourism, rural entrepreneurship, role of local governance, capacity building programme by tourism departments, community participation towards rural tourism promotion, with special reference to IBDLP initiative to develop Chandigre Rural Tourism Project of Garo Hills District of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Rural Tourism and Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, IBDLP

Introduction

Rural tourism has been recognized as an important opportunity for employment and income generation, living standards of the host population. It may offer handful of opportunities in the form of tourist outflow, which circulates in local economy and has the advantage of low and negligible leakages (Bhadauria, A. & Rastogi, H. 2012). It creates jobs, economic growth, standard of living for those who are living in a tourism-targeted area (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2003). Rural Tourism has been increasing in developed countries and getting popularity as travellers seek out folklore, natural landscapes, historical landmarks, and customs of regions they visit (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Rural tourism means the rural area arranged in such a way that people visit for taking entertainment and passes holidays and leisure. Rural tourism passes informal and practical education to the children. The children knowledge are now a days limited and within the pages of books. This type of tourism imparts knowledge on different culture, historical places, different types of flora and fauna etc. Rural tourism gives a sense of noble cause. It is a form of sustainable tourism. It is always beneficial to rural area in term of rural output,

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employment opportunities, health care, rural environment and community involvement and a path for appreciative traditional beliefs and values to modern era.

Rural tourism as a concept was envisaged in the National Tourism Policy in 2002. Rural tourism was defined as a form of tourism that show cases village life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby helping the local communities economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the host for a more enriching tourism experience. Rural tourism provides ample opportunities for entrepreneurship on one hand and on the other, locally developed small scale tourism product can be less costly than other developmental strategies such as manufacturing. The importance of tourism as a creator of job opportunities can be tacit from the fact that in India every one million invested in tourism creates around 47.5 jobs directly and around 85-90 jobs indirectly. In comparison, agriculture creates only 44.6%

jobs and manufacturing a mere 12.6% jobs (Sharma, A.2015). Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside, it is multi-faceted and may entail farm, agriculture tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism.

About Meghalaya

‘Meghalaya’ originated from Sanskrit language, refers to ‘Abode of the Clouds’ was confirmed as a 21st state of the Indian Union on January 21st, 1972. Meghalaya has three hill regions known as the Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. Each respective region has own tribe and languages which also known by its same hill region name i.e. Khasi Jantia and Garo. According to Census 2011, Govrenment of India, the total population of state is 2,966,889. The population density of is 132 per sq km and total area is 22,429 Sq Km.

Table 1: Swot Analysis of the State of Meghalaya

Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
The state is rich in natural resources	The land laws of the state has always been the major hindrance to any development in the state	Government of India has accorded special attention for North East.	Competition from other tourist destinations within and outside the country
Lower population density provide adequate opportunities to sustain the population economically	The infrastructure for development more specifically for drinking water , health services, sanitation and hygiene way side amenities are grossly inadequate	Potential for private sector's investment in tourism projects	Threats from terrorism and the negative perception on the whole region
Higher literacy rate	Absence of railway network within the region	Besides the intra-regional tours there are opportunities for promoting cross border tours to neighbouring countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Thailand, Malaysia, Nepal etc	Possibilities of uncontrolled development of tourism
Rich cultural heritage- multi ethnic communities, colourful festivals .	Jhooming has become the single major cause of ecological degradation in the hills	DONER and NEC are active and are taking active interest in tourism and have kept top priority to this sector	Increasing un-employment is eroding the value system & leading to political unrest and has increased inter group conflicts
Matriarchal society	The men folk of the society lacks basic initiative for the development which probably is a fallout of the matriarchal society	Asian Highway from Malaysia via Thailand and Bangladesh to India will be passing through North East while going to Delhi and beyond.	Inadequate funding of resources for tourism promotion
Surplus power	Low awareness in the market about the tourism products of the region	Tourism re-organized as a key industry by all neighbouring states	Piecemeal development on selfish style in individual states
National park, Bio- sphere, caves, rivers and waterfalls provide unique potential for natural tourism	The displeasure among the youth has led to violence and antipathy towards the non-tribals in the state which has resulted retarded the economic growth in the state	Asian Development Bank is preparing a Sub- Regional Plan for development of tourism covering Bhutan, Bangladesh, India and Nepal, North East Region figures prominently in this Plan because of the Asian Highway	Dismantling of the APM (administered price mechanism) of petroleum products in Garo hills are likely to become scares and expensive in the near future

Strength	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
Good infrastructure to support tourist traffic	Being the hilly state, transportation & communication in general, is difficult and expensive.	Tourism in Meghalaya can bring about prosperity to the state through. large scale employment	Lack of opportunity for gainful employment and production has led to excessive use and abuse of natural resources causing environmental degradation in the hills
Availability of trained and trainable man power.	No regional tourism development or marketing plan	Connectivity between other adjoining states and countries	Lack of organization for promoting cross border tours.

Source: Compiled by the authors

Rural Tourism in Meghalaya

Rural Tourism is niche tourism product which highly consider as socio-economic and environmental sustainability tourism model. North east is a very promising in term of natural, cultural point of view. In this regard tourism planners and experts suggest promoting rural tourism only means to strengthen economic rural empowerment as a tool for rural tourism branding and creating new tourism destination with varied experiences. The Recent emerging Tourism Cooperative Societies are playing very prominent role to linking the indigenous culture and their creativity in the fields of art and craft, weaving and spinning, apiculture with the Tourism sector which are plenty of natural and ethnic attractions of the rural area of the Meghalaya. It is transforming rural economic cycle which makes busy rural youths as entrepreneurial activities through the year.

Table 2: Rural Tourism Sites in Meghalaya

Khasi Hills	Jaintia Hills	Garro Hills
Smit Village	Nartiang Village	Sasatgre Village
Mawphlang Village	Umkiang village	Damalgre Village
Mawsynram Village	Borghat Village	Aminda Rangsa
Mawlynnong Village	Looksie Village	Chandigre Village
Shoiang Villages	Syndai Village	Daribokgre Village
Umden Village	Ialong Village	
Mawlyngbna Village		
Mawphalur Village		
Nonglang Village		
Mawlyngot Village		
Kongthong Village		
Laitkynsew		

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 3: Pro-active Rural Tourism Societies in Meghalaya

1.	The Meghalaya Village Development & Promotion Tourism Cooperative Society Ltd,
2.	Ialong Tourism Promotion Society
3.	Chandigre Rural Tourism Society
4.	Mawlynnong Tourism Society
5.	Sohra Tourism Society, Maraikaphon, Sohra
6.	Mawphlang Tourism Sustainable Society, Mawphlang
7.	Meghalaya State Rural Livelihoods Society (MSRLS)
8.	Sasatgre Rural Tourism Society
9.	Mawsmat Tourism society
10.	Daribokgre Rural Tourism Society

Source: Voluntary Organizations and Sustainable Rural Development in Meghalaya

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Sustainability and Rural Tourism

Origin & Development: It can be said that the first definition given to sustainable tourism was declared by the United Nation World Tourism Organization in (1996): it says “tourism which leads to management of all areas, in such a way, that the economic, social and environmental requirements are being satisfied with the cultural amalgamation, ecological practices, biodiversity and supporting the development of societies”. In addition, regarding to the main concept of sustainable development, UNWTO (1996) stated that sustainable tourism can be called as a process that “concerned with needs of present tourists needs of the future generations as well.” (Fennel, D. 2003). Sustainable tourism views tourism within destination areas as a relationship between their communities and peoples, tourists, and the tourism industry. Earlier, the tourism industry has dominated this relationship. Sustainable tourism use to reconcile the conflicting interests between these three partners. It

minimizes environmental and cultural damage, optimizes visitor satisfaction, maximizes long-term economic growth, and balances tourism growth potential and the conservation needs of the environment (Bhadauria, A. & Rastogi, H. 2012).

Review of Literature

According to (Oppermann, M. 1996) all scholarly enquiries about rural tourism dates from the 1950s, made reference to an early publication by (Ager, T. 1958) which describes tourism in Alpine regions and the benefits that can be brought to rural farmers. Benefits include added income, job creation and a decline in rural exodus. Further studies between 1960s and 1970s directed on the positive economic effects, although all the attention was directed to socio-cultural and environmental outcomes. The indefinite significance of rural tourism was reflected in the dedication of a special issue of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism that was recalled by (Sharpley & Roberts 2004) after a decade of time. Recently, rural tourism is being observed as a mechanism of development and regeneration as far as the socio-economic issue is concerned (Sharpley, R. 2001), especially valuable in areas and sites where traditional agricultural activities are in decline (Cavaco, C. & Hoggart et al. 1995). Moreover, rural tourism can be promoted as a better alternative to mass tourism in some cases (Getz, G. 1998, Ghaderi, Z. 2004 & Sharpley, R. 2000). Rural tourism benefits destination at every different stages of development, even the world's poorest countries (Holland, J. et al. 2003). In the meantime there is a decreasing concerns about the sub-standard financial returns in special cases of the rural tourism and the bad effects and even damage to the physical and cultural landscapes (Frederick, M. 1993, Fleischer et al. 2000 & Ghaderi et al. 2012). Developing country like India is yet to realize its true potential of vitalizing its tourism assets to make a significant contribution to the country's economic development with inclusive growth. India is a country that offers various types of tourism. They are rural tourism including farm tourism, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, mountain tourism, forests tourism, history tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism including Ayurveda and other forms of Indian medications; spiritual tourism, beach tourism etc. According to the 12th five year plan, tourism sector has the potential to help achieve the objectives more faster, more inclusive and sustainable growth. The Ministry of Tourism has been allocated Rs. 15,190 Crores for 12th Five Year Plan (2012-2017) as

gross budgetary support. The contribution of tourism industry is around 6.6% of India's GDP and has created 39.5% million jobs in 2012. The total number of tourists has grown at 16% in the last 5 years and is expected to grow at 12% in the next decade. During 2013 travel and tourism industry contributed Rs. 63,160 Crores to the Indian economy. International Tourist accounts for over 5 million visitors, while domestic market is seen at more than 500 million (Manoj Dixit, 2015). The 12th plan document mentions in detail regarding the skill development at an institutional level for the support of tourism development. The grants have been made available under the 'Hunar Se Rozgar tak' scheme and a healthy outcome of this would be a boon to add incremental value to form incomes and livelihood. (Sharma, A. 2004) in his paper entitled, 'Rural Tourism: It's A Niche That India Can Offer' stated that Rural India has much to offer to the whole world. Being rich in traditions of arts, crafts and culture, rural India can emerge as an important tourist spots. The tourists in the developed world who have a craze for knowledge about traditional ways of life, arts and crafts will be attracted to visit rural India if the concept of rural tourism is marketed well. Same strategy is advocated by (Rajesh K. Aithal & R.K. Anil, 2008) in their paper entitled, 'Concept, Application & Marketing of Rural Tourism'. They stressed on the need of separation of the concept of Rural Tourism from Geo-Tourism, Eco-Tourism etc. in order to attract tourists exclusively for rural sites by making it more accessible and presentable.

As tourism becomes established as an economic activity, marketing strategies concentrate on increasing the volume of tourists. This, at times, creates a host of unforeseen consequences (Piplani N K. 2001) Thus, it is necessary that the objectives of tourism development in relation to a region, city or (a rural area) leisure spot be clearly stated. In fact, the developmental role of marketing has to be kept in mind while marketing regions, cities or leisure spots (a rural area). This developmental role is to be further strengthened by socially responsible marketing. The destination marketing in the international markets includes a variety of aspect say from information gathering to planning, image building, etc.

(Kyndiah P.R. 2001) rightly laid stress upon the need to create awareness among the people. Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, either real or recreated, and that which involves rural folk (as artists, guides, etc.) at such locations, thereby benefiting the local community,

economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience would classify as rural tourism. Rural tourism is pre-existent in India across the centuries, which is evident in the arrival of thousands of foreign tourists visit rural areas in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and south India every year. This is the proof of viability of the concept of rural tourism. The government, of late, has realized what the rural India can offer to the world. The Tenth Plan has identified tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The Union ministry of tourism in collaboration with UNDP has launched the Endogenous Tourism Project linked to the existing rural tourism scheme of the government. The UNDP has committed \$ 2.5 million for the project. UNDP will help in areas of capacity building, involvement of NGOs, local communities and artisans forge strong community-private and public sector partnerships. The government has decided to develop necessary infrastructure for facilitating rural tourism.

Sustainable tourism (ST) signifies a condition of tourism based on the principles of sustainable development, taking “full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts” (UNEP & WTO, 2005) taking the stakeholders’ needs, benefits and interests in to consideration. This wide expanded definition recognizes the main three pillars that underpin sustainable development, taking into consideration the need to act responsibly as declared in the 1987 Brundtland report (WCED, 1987), and emphasize on the concerned parties (the stakeholders) as critical element in the implementation of Sustainable Tourism.

Research Questions

Qs-1 What are prospects of rural tourism in Garo Hills of Meghalaya?

Qs-2 What are the initiatives that has been taken by the Meghalaya Tourism Department, Rural Tourism Societies, local government, communities to promote rural as livelihood and to develop as tourist destination?

Qs-3 What are major barriers to develop rural tourism in Garo Hills of Meghalaya ?

Objectives of The Study

The objectives of the study are:-

- To explore the opportunities of rural tourism potentials in Meghalaya.
- To examine the problems associated in developing rural tourism in Garo Hills.
- To evaluate role of IBDLP and Chandigre Rural Tourism Project for development of rural areas through rural markets.

Research Methodology

The study has been carried out in Garo hills of the state of Meghalaya. This paper is based on qualitative research techniques where an exploratory research approach has been applied. In this regard, personal visits and survey of Garo Hills area has been done to observe the rural potential and conducted focus group interview of various tourism stakeholders, tourism local entrepreneurs home stay owners, food outlets, shopkeepers, local tourist guides, taxi operators and taxi drivers, handicrafts and souvenirs makers, artist, Government Inspection Bungalows, local Government official like Deputy Director Tourism, Department of Tourism, West Garo Hill, local representatives i.e. Headmen of Villages, local communities specially people nearby at Chandigre Rural Project.

Secondary data has been collected from reputed journals of tourism research, books, travel magazines, national and local newspapers, annual reports of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Meghalaya Tourism, The Integrated Basin Development & Livelihood Promotion Programme (IBDLP), United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Rural Tourism Project of India, UNEP & UN-WTO(2005), Census 2011, Government of India, Report of Planning Commission now known as Niti Aayog, some useful websites. Report of State Institute of Rural Development, Community & Rural Development, National Rural Livelihoods Mission, Meghalaya Basin Development Authority, Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, North Eastern Region Community Resource Management Project (NERCORMP), Meghalaya Portal, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, Government of India.

About Garo Hills

Geographical Profile: The Garo Hills are part of the Garo-Khasi range in Meghalaya, India. It is one of the wettest places in the world. The range is part of the Meghalaya subtropical forests eco region. The entire Garo Hills having an area of approximately 8,000 Sq kms. is densely forested and hence one of the richest spots in biodiversity.

Demographical Profile: As per the population census 2011, the total Population of Garo hills are 1103542, out of which Male & Female Population are 558552 and 544990 respectively. Besides the Garo hills, there are Garo settlements in the plains of Assam and Bangladesh. The Garos call themselves Achik (Joshi, H.G. 2004).

Table 4: Garo Hills Division

Districts	Head Quarter	Area	Polulation	Rural Tourism Sites
1.North Garo Hills	Resubelpara	1,113 Sq Km.	1,18,325 (as of 2001).	Jolding Wari Lake, Resubelpara Hotsprings
2. East Garo Hills	Williamnagar	2,603 Sq Km.	317,618	Mejolgri village, Nongchram, Rongrenggiri
3. South Garo Hills	Baghmara	1,850 Sq Km.	142,574	Siju, Nengkong
4. West Garo Hills	Tura	3714 Sq Km.	642,923	Sasatgre, Aminda Rangsa, Chandigre, Daribokgre
5. South West Garo Hills	Ampati	822 Sq Km.	1,72,495 as per Census 2011,	Thakuranbari, Damalgre Village

Source: <http://censusindia.gov.in> retrieved on dated September 12, 2016.

Table 5: Natural Attractions of Garo Hill

Flora	Fauna
Lady's Slipper	Tiger and Leopard (Large Cats)
Pitcher Plant	Civet and Leopard (Lessor cats)
Cinchona plantation	Ape, Hoolock, Gibbon
Fruits: Oranges, Pineapple, Coconut, Litchi, berries, banana, cashew nut Vegetables: Jackfruit, Spices & other crops: Chillies, Ginger, Turmeric, Black Pepper, Arecanut, Tea, Bayleaf, Betel Leaf and Rubber etc.	Capped Langur
Du.Kom(Flowers with magical powers)	Orange Belled Squirrel
	Assamese Macaque & Elephants
Birds of Garo Hills: Black & Jerdon's Baza, Mountain Bamboo & White-Cheeked Partridge, Grey Peacock Pheasant, Blyth's Kingfisher, Bay Woodpecker Asian Emerald Cuckoo, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Olive Bulbul, Eye-Browed Wren-Babbler, Crested Finchbill, Dusky & Eastern-Crowned Warbler.	

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 6: Cultural Attractions in Garo Hills

Districts	Fair & Festival	Dances & Music
1.North Garo Hills	Wangala Festival, Dore Rata dance, Mangona, Den Bilsia Siroka, Miamua, Rongchugala, Saram Cha A, Christmas	Wangala Dance (Dance of hundred drums), Dore Rata dance
2. East Garo Hills		
3. South Garo Hills		
4. West Garo Hills		
5. South West Garo Hills		

Source: Compiled by the authors

Table 7: Rural Tourism Sites and Attractions of Garo Hills

Districts	Rural Tourism Sites	Tourism Attractions
1. North Garo Hills	Jolding Wari Lake, Resubelpara	Hotsprings, Cleanest village
2. East Garo Hills	Resubelpara	Resubelpara
3. South Garo Hills	Siju, Nengkong	Nengkong, Siju, Balpakram
4. West Garo Hills	Sasatgre, Aminda Rangsa, Chandigre, Daribokgre	Nokrek Biosphere, Tura Peak Rangapani, Sasatgre village
5. South West Garo Hills	Thakuranbari, Damalgre Village	Snake stone, Maa kamakhya temple

Source: Compiled by the authors

Recent Tourism Projects in Garo Hill

1. Destination Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
2. Circuit Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
3. Rural Tourism, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
4. Tourist Information Centres
5. Adventure Tourism, etc
6. Development of Wayside Amenities, Govt of Meghalaya, Tourism Deptt
7. Adventure Tourism, Government of Meghalaya, Tourism Deptt. Etc.

Source: <http://westgarohills.gov.in/tourism.html> retrieved on dated September 10, 2016

The Role of Integrated Basin Development & Livelihood Promotion Programme (IBDLP)

The Integrated Basin Development & Livelihood Promotion Programme (IBDLP) is the flagship programme launched by the government of Meghalaya for interpreting the public programme and service within the sustainability framework so that the value maximization takes place within the same natural and financial resources. The mission of IBDLP includes--

“To promote optimal and effective development and utilization of basin resources for ensuring livelihood security and inclusive growth, within the framework of sustainable development”.

Focus Areas of IBDLP

- *Knowledge Management:*

- *Natural Resource Management*
- *Entrepreneurship Promotion*
- *Good Governance*

Key Functions

The Government of Meghalaya has taken the initiative under the banner of ‘Basin’ that aims to neutralize the poverty that still lingers in the rural areas of Meghalaya.

- It also focuses on the employment generation and livelihood provisions, promoting optimal and effective development.
- Utilization of the state’s natural resources for ensuring inclusive growth within the framework of sustainable development.
- Conservation and preservation of natural resources especially water.
- Promotion of Rural Tourism as a livelihood and entrepreneurial development in basin areas.

Chandigre Rural Tourism Project- A Case Study

The rural tourism project at Chandigre is a project funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India and state flagship programme IBDLP in convergence mode with Tourism and Horticulture department, to promote community based tourism at the village level. The main objective of the project is to promote village life of India to people travelling to the country.

Rural Tourism Project at Chandigre was taken up in view of the proximity of the village to places of interests like Nokrek Biosphere Reserve, Rombagre fish sanctuary, Selbalgre Hoolock Gibbon Reserve and also the village of Sasatgre which is the traditional village of Garos. The rural tourism project therefore envisages to promote the local culture and tradition through community

participation whereby the benefits goes directly to the villages involved.

The idea behind the whole project is to involve the local community to promote their culture, way of life, tradition, livelihood, etc. by hosting tourist and visitors to the rural tourism village thereby promoting their culture etc. earning a livelihood through tourism and also preserving and protecting their way of life. Nestled amid orange orchard, tea and coffee plantation the objective of the rural resort is to showcase the lifestyle of the rural Garos to the tourist while generating means of income.

Location

Chandigre Rural Resort is located in a pristine location of the Nokrek biosphere in the Rongram block of West Garo Hills District, Meghalaya. Chandigre is 13.6km far from its district main city of Tura. It is 165km far from its state capital city of Shillong.

Objectives

- i) To involve the local community to promote their culture, way of life, tradition, livelihood, etc. by hosting tourist and visitors to the rural tourism village.
- ii) To showcase the lifestyle of the rural Garos to the tourist while generating means of income.

Resort Dimensions: The resort has two *NokA·chiks* (typical house of the Garos), *Nokpante* (dormitory cum training centre for boys), *Chu Nok* (Brewery), *Chidik* (water tank and *Nokkidik* (toilet). The tourism department has provided capacity building training to the villagers to run the resort and had converge with the department of Horticulture for the aesthetic beautification of the resort.

Community Participation

- i) the local community is encourage to be participative together in the promotion of their local way of life through village stay, trekking, culture & traditional display, cuisine etc, to visitors and tourists alike.
- ii) The Rural tourism project at Chandigre has great promise because of the hospitality of the people, their local knowledge of the area and most of all the closeness of the area to the world famous Nokrek Biosphere and other places of Interest.

- iii) The rural tourism project therefore envisages to promote the local culture and tradition through community participation whereby the benefits goes directly to the villages involved.

Table 8: Places of Tourist Interest

(All destinations are from the Chandigre Rural Resort)

Name of Destination	Distance by Road	Approximate Time Taken	Suggested Route
Nokrek Peak	22.1 Kms	45 minutes	NH 127 B/ SH1
Tura Peak	43.3 Kms	1:10 minutes	NH127 B
Rombagre	7.7 Kms	15 minutes	NH 127B/ SH1
Pelga Falls	53.4 kms	1:30 minutes	NH 127 B
Balpakram national Park	150 kms	2:45 minutes	N H 1 2 7 B / NH62
Dachi lake	50 Kms	1:30 minutes	NH 51

Source: Compiled by the authors

Rural Tourism Capacity Building

With the increase in tourist inflow we need trained and qualified manpower in hospitality, tour operation, ground operation, tour guide and adventure sports sectors. Related other areas like communication (e.g., drivers, IT professional etc) will also need human resources. Department of Tourism, Institute of Hotel Management, Shillong and Food Craft Institute, Tura are conducting training programmes under Capacity building for service providers and Hunar se RojgarTak Scheme, sponsored by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Major Challenges of Rural Tourism in Garo Hills:

- i) Lack of good communication and transportation.
- ii) Difficult to access in remote villages.
- iii) Lack of sufficient numbers of hotels.
- iv) Sanitation and drinking water facilities.
- v) Crisis for trained manpower; those who are supporting tourist from outside.
- vi) Lack of communication skills of the rural people.
- vii) Lack of education, and language problem.
- viii) Lack of financial assistance.

- ix) Infrastructure of the rural areas.
- x) Government assistance is not sufficient for the improvement.

Recommendations and Suggestions

At first, the government must conduct some awareness program among the local people of the district and to aware them about rural tourism.

The district has resources in natural, cultural, historical and location advantage (border between India and Bangladesh), so with the help of public private participation some model village can be created to attract the tourists.

The district has very poor connection with the other places of India and even with capital of the state. The connectivity may be enhanced with the inclusion of railways in the rural areas.

The place has high potential for launching rural tourism project. But the project must have facility of cottage, gardens, play ground, boating facility, community hall and dining hall and also well communication with all sightseeing facility.

If some NGO or institution is preparing to start a project for rural tourism, the villagers should participate in developing and implementing the project, otherwise it will not going to give much benefit to the rural people.

Advertisement and sales promotion will play a very important role in creating awareness and attracting the customers.

Conclusion

Garo hills are an agrarian region of Meghalaya where more than 80 percent people are attached with agriculture and its allied activities. The region has rich bio-diversity, and natural resources. The rural tourism is an alternative livelihood for rural people as farmers and local community. The unique natural and cultural diversity have generated pull and push for rural tourism activities. The recent initiatives of Meghalaya Government and IBDLP develop many livelihood programmes, i.e. horticulture, sericulture, weaving, handicraft and rural cottages industry, rural tourism etc. Among these tourism livelihood programme

focus on rural women and youth entrepreneurship, eco and sustainable tourism practices, community participation and sensitization, capacity building to promote villages as rural tourism products and develop tourist hotspot as rural areas of Garo Hills Region. Rural tourism has the potential to create new jobs, reduce poverty and increase export revenues. Various studies showed that tourism creates more jobs directly and indirectly than agriculture. So as a part of this initiatives government of India has taken various plans and projects such as 'Incredible India' campaign programme for highlighting Indian tourism in abroad. Government has taken initiatives to provide proper sanitation to each and every person across country under government pet project "Swachh Bharat Abhiyan". It is very necessary for inclusion of Panchayati Raj Institution and various NGOs for the development and popularization of the rural tourism concept. As an alternative mode of tourism it will be able to boost up country's economic growth. Rural Tourism Project at Chandigre was taken up in view of the proximity of the village to places of interests.

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