



SERVICE QUALITY IN TOURISM IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Northeast India is an undeveloped region of India with abundant natural and cultural resources and a great potentiality of tourism business. Less industrialization and no investor in big industry are the causes of its undevelopment. To develop this situation, tourism will be a helpful instrument. However, for the low quality service facility, the tourism sector doesn't grow in this area. In this note it is discussed that how the low service quality has given a negative impact on the tourism sector of Northeast India through using observations as an native and active participant of tourism field of this region. The probable solutions for this situation are also discussed that can be useful for practical implication. However, this note is not conclusive as it shows the general views and has the scope for detailed and specific segment oriented studies.

KEY WORDS: *Northeast India, Tourism, Service Quality*

Introduction

All over the world, tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries. Tourism is a service business which main motto is gaining money through giving service for the recreation and leisure-pleasure of the peoples. As a recreation service business, tourism business sector cannot grow without providing good service qualities to the tourists. Tourists are not attracted by those places, which have not developed a sound service quality. In fact, service quality is one of the most important things in the competitive tourism business scenario for growth

Tourism has three basic components: attraction, accommodation and transportation (Bhatiya 1983:39). Based on these components, the infrastructure and service of tourism business are developed. This note focused on how the low service quality has given a negative impact on the tourism sector of Northeast India through using observations as an native and active participant of tourism field of this region and a student of tourism research. The note also focused that what are the probable solutions

for this situation and which can be useful for practical implication. But this is not conclusive at all as it shows the general views and has the scope for detailed and specific segment oriented studies

The Northeast India

Covers an area over 255000 sq. km, India's northeastern region is a specific geographical land. All the eight Northeastern states - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura offer different attractions. Their languages, customs, traditions, history, folklore, festivals and handicrafts differ as much as their people do. Culturally, Northeast represents the Indian ethos of 'unity in diversity' and 'diversity in unity' (Bora & Bora, 2005: 62) through its diverse ethnic and cultural groups of people. Geographically, the Northeast is part of a great rainforest based on the foothills of the Himalayas. The landscape is the lush green and a large number of the species of flora and fauna that are native to Southeast are found here (Bora & Bora, 2005: 64).

With its very rich natural diversity and vibrant cultural heritage of more than hundred tribes who lived in here, the economically undeveloped Northeast India has tremendous scope of tourism business. However, for less and low service quality on all three basic components, it does not develop as a tourism hub until now.

Service Quality in Tourism Industry in Northeast India

Before begins the discussion of service quality, we first discuss the types of services needed by the tourists. For the help of discussion, we broadly divided the tourists into two parts:

- **Luxury services needed tourists**
- **Budget tourists**

The **luxury service needed tourists** want the best service on accommodation, best quality of food, best transport mode etc, whereas the **budget tourists** can adjust themselves on moderate or average services. However, both of tourists need hygienic accommodation, food and safety & security.

In Northeast India, The need of both tourists types are not giving important and both groups does not get proper or sufficient service quality. This makes a negative impact on tourists and on tourism business. How the service quality creates a negative impact on tourism business of North-

East India is discussing here based on three basic components of tourism mentioned in introduction,

Accommodation Sector: It's a irony of fate that although, lots of visitors visit to North East India with various purpose, and lots of peoples wants to visit Northeast India, which may recognized as potential tourists, there are no sufficient accommodation for both luxury and budget tourist in North-East India.

According to the website of **Federation of Hotels & Restaurants Association of India**, there are no five star hotels in Northeast India. There are only three four-star hotels and three three-star hotels in whole region.

The list of Member Hotels of 'FHRAI' in Northeast India:

1. **Sikkim: Gangtok:** Hotel Rendezvous, Hotel Tibet, Hotel Tashi Delek, Hotel Dengzong Inn, Hotel the Oriental, Hotel Central, Hotel Nor Khill
2. **Assam: Guwahati:** Hotel Rituraj, Hotel Brahmaputra Ashok, Hotel Maruti, Hotel Kuber International, Hotel Mayur, Hotel Nandan, Hotel Ambarish (3 star), Hotel Ambarish Grand Residency (3 star), Hotel Viswaratna (3 star), Hotel Dynasty (4 star), Hotel Rajmahal (4 star)
Jorhat: Hotel Paradise, **Dibrugarh:** Hotel City Regency, Hotel Nataraj, **Tinsukia:** Hotel Highway, **Silchar:** Hotel Borall View
3. **Meghalaya: Shillong:** Hotel Centre Point, Hotel Pegasus Crown, Hotel Alpine Continental, Hotel Polo Towers (4 star)
4. **Arunachal Pradesh: Itanagar:** Hotel Arun Suwansiri, Hotel Donyi Polo Ashok
5. **Nagaland: Kohima:** Hotel Japfu, **Dimapur:** Hotel Tragopan

There is no mention about the hotels of Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur in FHRAI website members list. Beside mentioned above some more hotels are included in the websites of different state tourism board of the eight states of N.E. region. In Sikkim Tourism's website, beside the above hotels, in Gangtok others are Hotel Trishna, Hotel Zamden and Siniolchu Lodge. In Arunachal Pradesh state tourism website, beside the above hotels in Itanagar others are hotel Itafort, hotel Bluepine, in Tawang hotel Sangrila, hoel Buddha etc. Manipur State website shows many hotels in Imphal, like hotel Imphal, State guesthouse, youth hostel etc. The other state tourism website also shows many names of Hotels that are not included in FHRAI websites

The Problems of Service quality in accommodation sector:

- There are no luxury hotels in this Region, even in Guwahati, the Gateway & economic capital of Northeast India. There are only two four-star hotels in Guwahati and one in Shillong. There are only three three-star hotels in this region, all of which are in Guwahati. So, the luxury tourists are not get sufficient accommodation and they are not attracted by these places, although, it has abandon attraction.
- There is no sufficient hotel for budget tourist also. For this reason, the rooms rent are so high without a good quality of service.
- The rooms of budget hotels are more unhygienic and have less safety and security.
- The hotels are mainly city centric. So, the tourists doesn't find suitable accommodation or even sometimes, doesn't find any type of accommodation on the other places of the states.
- For the poor number of luxury hotels, it is very difficult to organize any large national or international events, even in Guwahati, one of the main city of entire region
- This region can be built as a hub for the adventure and eco tourism. However, there is very poor camping facility in this region create barriers for it.

Attraction Sector: The North-East India is a great place for them who love the nature and culture. All the eight states are very rich in flora, fauna, and scenic beauty. This region is the habitat of more than 100 tribes of different & vibrant culture. The dance, songs, drama, arts, festivals, daily life, religious life etc. are very different from one to other tribes. These things easily attract the tourist from the various part of world. It has also a great potentiality of adventure tourism for river rafting, angling, mountaineering, trekking etc. However, although, this region has a vast potentiality, the tourists, may be they luxury or budget tourist, may be they foreign or domestic tourist, are not attracted. There are many reasons, which give a negative impact on the mind of tourist.

The problems of attraction sector:

- 1 The main problem is that the Indian tourist must to take Inner Line Permit (ILP) and foreigner tourists must to take Restricted Area Permits (RAP) to enter in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur

from the resident commissioner of the respected states from Mumbai, Kolkata, New Delhi, Chennai and at borders, which decrease the attraction of tourists.

- The attractions are not maintained in an attractive way. The maintenance of maximum attraction are very common and faced lack of basic facility like toilets, pure drinking water etc
- There are not much eating outlets, i.e. restaurant facility on maximum areas. There is no local cuisine food shop even in maximum main cities of the states where one can taste the local food. If some restaurants are there, which say that they sell local cuisine, the question is raised on its authenticity. Recently 2 or 3 local cuisine restaurants are opened in Guwahati only
- There is no authentic souvenir shop, besides the state govt. emporiums, where the tourists can buy the handlooms, handicrafts etc.
- There is no accommodation or poor accommodation facility on maximum attraction places of the states of Northeast India. The transportation system is very bad. The road connectivity among the places is very poor. Beside Assam, the other states are not linked by Rail.
- The poor safety and security of the tourists in the maximum states of this region are also matter of problem

Transportation Sector: The Transportation sector is divided into four main parts; rail, road, water, and air. In Northeast India, the transportation system is very poor and time consuming. The main transportation mode for everything in this region is the road. Beside Assam and Dimapur of Nagaland, there is no rail connectivity in the entire region just some days ago. Recently, the railways from October 5, 2008 link Agartala and Shilchar. The Air connectivity is better than the rail. The capitals of maximum states are connected by air service. The only waterway is in Assam, which is almost dead.

Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim is connected by all weather roads to Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Siligiri and also to all the district headquarters within Sikkim. The closest Indian Airport is at Bagdogra, 124 Km from Gangtok, where scheduled flights operate to and from Kolkata, Delhi, Guwahati. The Bagdogra airport is connected to Gangtok by helicopter service, which takes approx. 30 minutes to reach Gangtok. Sikkim Tourism

Development Corporation operates this service daily. The closest Railhead is at New Jalpaiguri, which is around 148 km away from Gangtok. It is connected to Kolkata (Calcutta), New Delhi, Guwahati and other major Indian cities.

Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, is connected by the other parts of India through Guwahati, the capital of Assam. There are direct flights available from Kolkata, Delhi, Bagdogra and Bangkok to Guwahati and there is a helicopter service from Guwahati Airport to Shillong. The nearest Railway station of Shillong is the Guwahati Railway Station, which is 103 kms from Shillong. Meghalaya Transport Corporation and Assam State Transport Corporation buses are available, frequently plying from Guwahati to Shillong. Taxis and Tata Sumo cabs Service are available just outside the ASTC compound.

The beautiful Imphal city, the capital of Manipur is connected by Air and Bus from other places like, Aizwal, Guwahati, Silchar, Kolkata, New Delhi etc. There is no direct train service to Imphal. However, travelers can travel up to Guwahati or Dimapur (nearest railhead from Imphal) and then rest by bus or by air.

Dimapur, the only airport in Nagaland, is connected by air to Delhi and Calcutta and rest of the country. Dimapur, the only Railhead in Nagaland, is one the main line of North-Eastern Frontier Railway. Nagaland is well connected by buses from Guwahati.

Buses through Guwahati connect Tripura and Mizoram; the two other states of this region, there are direct flights from Kolkata to both this states. Agartala, the capital of Tripura is connected by rail with Silchar and Lumding, two town of Assam from 5 October 2008. These are passenger trains with ten general second class and two sleeper coaches

Guwahati, the capital of Assam, is the only city on the whole Northeast India, which is connected well to the other parts of India by all three transport mode; rail, road and air. All the airways have direct flights to Guwahati from kolkata and New Delhi and other cities.

The main problems of this sector:

- The road conditions are very poor of maximum areas of the states. The flood and land sliding are the common factor for which the road conditions are not well. Another reason for it that the all heavy vehicle including the cargo trucks are running on the same routes for which

the roads cannot bearing the extra loads more than its capacity.

- The highways are only one or two lanes where all the vehicles runs, for which traffic jam is created and it takes more time to reach from one to another place, from its actual reaching time.
- The broad-gauge rail route is only in Assam and it is just touch one area, Dimapur of Nagaland. From this year two-passenger train are introduced between Agartala & Silchar and Agartala & Lumding. In Assam, there is only one broad-gauge line for which all the trains takes more time to reach comparative to other places of India. To transfer this one line to two lines, the works start, but not finished yet. Another problem is the trains are run by diesel engine, not by electric, and the result is the late departure and arrival of trains. So for every visitor to this region, the train journey is very miserable and boring, compare to other part of India.
- The other problem in the train journey to this region is the deterioration of basic service in trains like dirty toilets, poor compartments, less facilities with the seats, fan and electricity, no waters in some times which irritate the tourists travel by trains
- There is a great potentiality of water transport in this region for the numbers of rivers in this region. Even in ancient times, peoples use only the waterway to travel this area, especially in Assam. The mighty Brahmaputra River, one of the biggest rivers in world crossed Assam through middle. But this river is not use for public or tourist water transport
- The Bengal Assam Navigation is started cruising in the river Brahmaputra, but it is very costly for the tourists and the other river cruises are only travel for one hour in the evenings in Guwahati only.
- The airport in Guwahati, known as the **Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport** is the only international airport of the whole region, but it is not working from a long time. There is on international flights from this airport whereas Singapore, Bangkok etc are more nearby than the other cities of India, from Guwahati.
- Although Sikkim, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh are attracted most of the tourists, and the main tourist circuits are also in these states, there are no airports on these states. Only helicopter services are provided.

- The direct flights from Bangalore or Mumbai up to even Guwahati are less or sometimes not available. Therefore, it is very difficult to access this region from the other parts of India, beside New Delhi or Kolkata.

Suggestion and Conclusion

Some value additions are help to improve and increase the service quality of Tourism Business Sector in Northeast India. Based on this discussion, we can suggest some ideas for the value addition to the service quality.

- There is an urgent need to build at least one five star hotel respectively in the capitals of every state for luxury and niche tourists.
- The number of budget hotels in all states and all tourist spots must to be increased.
- The service quality of the budget hotels are must to be developed without increasing the room rents
- The hotels must to maintain the hygiene and safety & security systems.
- The hotels are must to make on not only cities or towns; rather these are building on all tourist spots of all over the region.
- More and more eco-camp and tent facilities are needed in whole the region for the tourists who come here for enjoying the beautiful nature.
- Removal the systems of Restricted Area Permits (RAP) for foreigner tourists and Inner line permits (ILP) for Indian tourists.
- The attraction must to maintain in attractive way including the basic facilities of toilets, pure drinking water etc.
- Some authentic local cuisine restaurants and souvenir shop of handicrafts and handlooms for the tourists are must to be started in every tourist spots where one can get the enjoyment of eating local foods or buying local goods.
- The highways of Northeast India must to increase up to six lanes from two lanes for avoiding traffic jam and reaching the destination in a short. Although the work for 4-lane highway is started, but it is far from go away.
- The rail network must to spread over in the all states of this region.
- The rail engines are must to improve up to electronic engine from

diesel and from one broad gauze line to two or three broad gauze lines.

- The basic service as clean toilets, pure drinking water, good fan & light condition etc. in the compartments of the rail coming to Northeast India are must to be improved.
- The water bodies of this region must to be used as a tourism resource and the water transport and cruising facility must to be increased and improved for the tourists.

Here, an attempt has done to find out the reasons that why and how the inefficiency of the service providers in offering quality service to the tourists has had a negative impact on the inflow of tourists in the region. Bad service quality of the Tourism sector of Northeast India makes a negative impact on the tourist's mind and the overall tourism business, although it has a great advantage of natural & cultural resources. Some basic suggestions are also given for the value addition in service quality. However, nobody can give perfect calculative and technical methods to improve the service quality of any service business, because the service business based on the peoples, specially the tourism business. The socio-political condition is also playing a big role in Tourism business growth. But it can say that although we cannot change the political or social condition in a short time, but by improving the service quality, we can create a positive impact and provide a thrust to the a field for the rapid growth of tourism business which helps our economic development.

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