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AN OVERVIEW OF MIZORAM TOURISM: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Ample natural beauty, strategic location, scope for international trade, possibilities for adventure tourism, and favorable conditions for rural tourism the state Mizoram can be mentioned as important tourist destination in future. Impact of tourism in the state economy is still very negligible and industrial set up for the development is also not up to the mark. Hence the state has better opportunity to develop tourism as an alternative source of earning instead of planning the mega industries. Since tourism is considered as labor intensifying industry, hence it can create job opportunities for the local to reduce pressure of the unemployment. It might be a good financial source for the state government also. To succeed all these, it sought to have a systematic study including all the aspects of tourism. A thorough study can help Mizoram tourism and it is pertinent to find out its potentials and suitability for the development of tourism in the state. The present paper is an attempt to study the overall scenario based on empirical observations.

Keywords: Mizoram tourism, development and tourism, Tourism industry, curiosity.

Introduction

Mizoram is a young and small state. Predominantly being as an agricultural state with a small base of population, Mizoram is belonging to the backward economies in the country along with the other north-eastern states. The state has few numbers of cottage industries and small scale agro-based industries. Hnahlan area is recently famous for its new winery plants producing wine from grapes. Service sector is the highest contributor to state revenue, followed by industry sector and agriculture sector. As the total income of the state is less, hence

alternative income sources may have good impact in the economy for the state. Being as a remotely located state with hilly terrain, Mizoram has less chances of large and mega industries. Lack of raw materials and labour forces are another hindrance for industrial development (Deka, 2016).

Keeping in mind all these lacks, the state government acknowledged the State Industrial Policy in March 1993. Under that policy travel and tourism was declared as industry. Perhaps the govt. did the fair decision as the state has its own natural beauty and cultural landscape which can be used as raw material in tourism industry.

Statement of the Problem

Among the north eastern states Assam and Meghalaya are getting a larger number of domestic and international visitors. The region is well endowed with few biodiversity hot spots and cultural heritage sites. The entire NE region, including Sikkim is marked as one of the most potential regions in respect to eco-tourism, wildlife tourism and cultural tourism. Mizoram is one of the parts of this same vibrant tourist belt. This small state is a unique state with its history and culture. This is also a famous state for peace and tranquility with the hospitability of the Mizos and their myth and tradition. The state is locating in the doorstep of SE Asian belt of vibrant colour and clan. Though the state government declared its tourism policies 20 years back, still the state is getting very less numbers of tourist every year. In terms of domestic tourist Mizoram is one place ahead from bottom then Nagaland, while considering the foreign tourist visit the state is at the bottom of the national ranking table.

Development of tourism is related with many more factors. Among them peaceful socio-political environment is a pre-requisite for sound tourism development. Considering peaceful situation, Mizoram is a better state among the north eastern states without much trouble of unrest and other. After 1987 onwards the state is considered as peaceful state and counted among the high literate states in India (Pachua, 2009). Comparing the national trend

of tourist arrival, Mizoram is still at a nascent stage. It is may be due to its extreme location, lack of publicity, inaccessibility, physical settings and the enforcement of Inner Line Permit.

The Study Area

Mizoram is a mountainous state which was formed in the year 1987. It was the 23rd state of the Indian Union which is sandwiched between Myanmar and Bangladesh. Apart from these foreign countries, Tripura is in the west while it is touching Assam and Manipur in the north. Mizo Hills are steep, that run north – south direction and is separated by numbers of rivers and tributaries, which flow in between the gorges. Mizo is the largest population group in the state. It is changing fast and adopting a mixture of

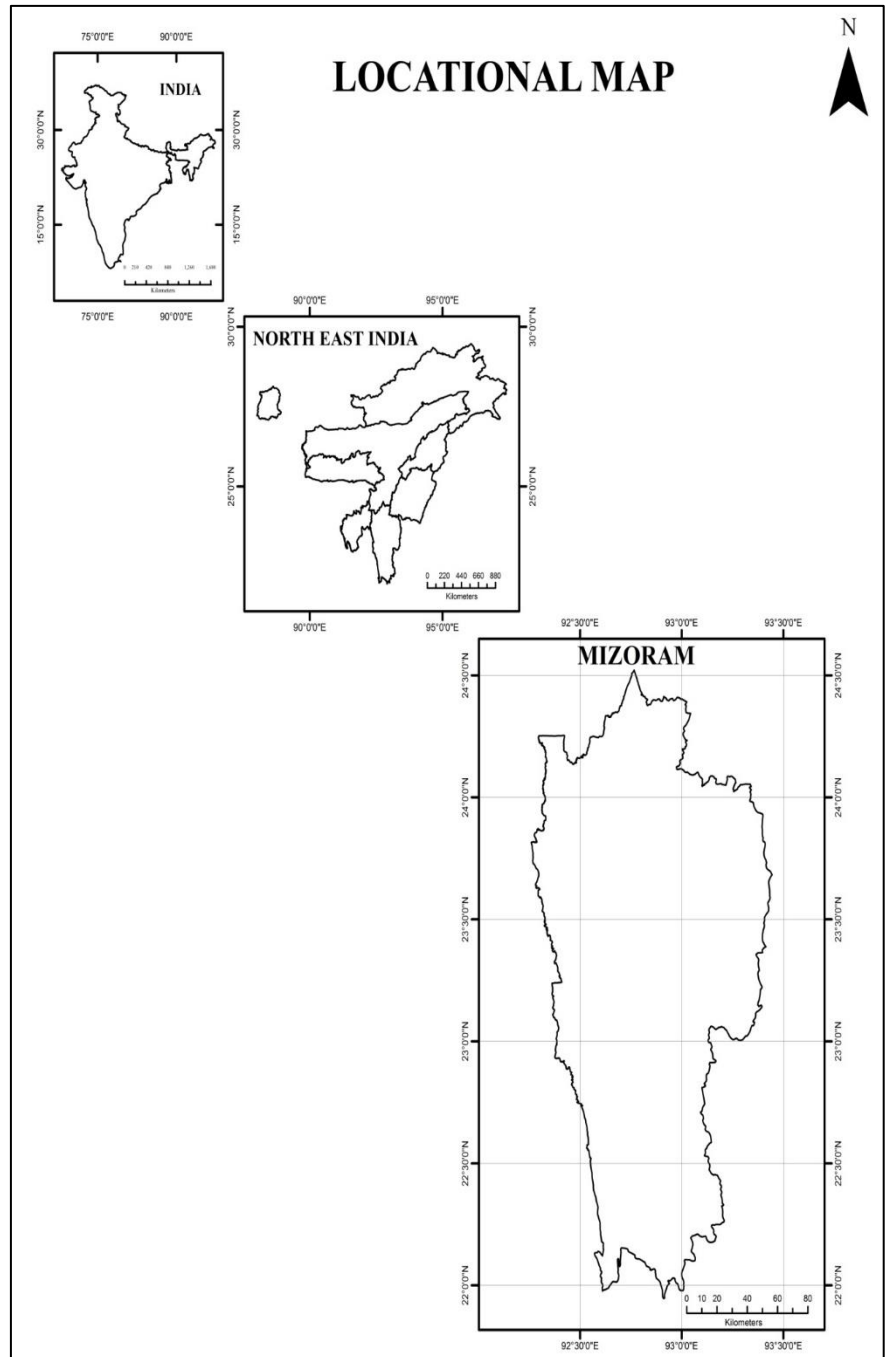


Figure: 1. Location Map

Western and South East Asian culture. Many of the present customs are either revived or the mixtures of traditional with western (Joshi, 2005). Mizoram is known for its high literacy rate

(95%). Among north eastern states it ranked first and second in the national ranking. This is one of the most peaceful states in India with hospitable people.

Database and Methodology

In the present study both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected by the researcher as direct interview with the tourists during different time. On the other hand, maps, and other information were collected from various secondary sources. The entire study is based on personnel observation and description by the author. Thus, the methodology is empirical in nature.

Prospects of Mizoram Tourism

As far as the tourist demand is concerned, Mizoram is found suitable for rural tourism, cultural tourism, nature and adventure tourism. Despite having the immense scenic beauty, total number of tourists visiting the states is low. In the ranking table of tourist arrival, Mizoram is placed in the bottom of the table. Numbers of factors are responsible for this. Lack of publicity, innovation, infrastructure, unenthusiastic to renovate of the tourist spots, poor connectivity, polarized accommodation, lack of accessibility, long rainy season, lack of private entrepreneurship etc. are the issues that came up during the study.

The state has declared tourism as an industry, but the industrial set up is yet to be completed. Again, accommodation and food are the main problem for the outsiders. The state has to create a tourism friendly environment which would bring opportunities that would ultimately energize the industry to compete at the national level.

Common Problems of Mizoram Tourism

Improper organizational setup is regarded as one of the drawbacks of state tourism. One Directorate is located in the state capital which is looking after the entire tourism activities for the state. Outside the state, all the Mizoram houses located in different parts of the country are acting as Tourist Offices for the incoming tourists. As far as mobility is concerned, the roles of

government agencies are deplorable (Deka, 2017). The state tourism department fails to organize any tour for the tourists from its end. Sometimes, display of big hoardings, availability of tourist cab, adequate information about the tourist spots, etc. are considered as the strong points to attract the tourists to a destination. But it seems that the state tourism department has completely ignored these aspects.

Tourism promotion should be emphasized from a critical perspective for the extension of this industry. Tourism advancement implies empowering deals through the spread of data. It implies attempting to motivate the real and potential clients to travel. Real goal of tourism advancement is to make vacationer item broadly publicized; to make it exceptionally attractive so as to urge numerous individuals to attempt it; to make the back rubs interesting without being deceptive.

Mizoram tourism has a major drawback regarding the foreign tourist arrival (FTA). Mizoram received few foreign tourists only, which is very less (>0.1%) to the national share. This makes the tourism planner worry. Bangladesh and Myanmar are the two important source countries for Indian FTA. Though Mizoram is sharing its international boundary with these two countries but the state miserably failed to attract tourist from these two countries. Nevertheless, the state's income is still meager from foreign tourists. However, foreign tourists are the significant income sources for the tour guides, operators and different private agencies that are related with the tourism business. Since the state receives lesser number of tourists, it dispirited the investors and tourism entrepreneurs for larger investments in tourism business.

Tourism is all about the recreation and pleasure activities. Organization of tour is an important aspect for the success of tourism. Guide services, reasonable package tour, well portrayal of destination, taking care of the tourists and the tour programs etc. are the part of well-organized tour. Since tourism is a labour intensive industry, arrangement of tour program can create the opportunities of employment. Unfortunately, Mizoram tourism is failing to

manage these aspects. Improper organization of tours (both in government and private levels) is considered as a disadvantage to the state tourism.

Tourism is more depended on publicity and popularity of the destinations. As a business it flourishes with publicity and attractiveness of the destination. In this sector, state tourism needs a lot of attention to showcase Mizoram from tourism point of view. Elephant Festival in Kaziranga, *Jon-Beel Fair* in Assam, Hornbill Festival in Nagaland etc. are now famous among the tourists because of the wide publicity and well portrayal of the destination (Deka, 2016). Tourists visiting Mizoram are poorly influenced by the state tourism department and other associated agencies. Instead of that, private tour agency from outside of the state are organizing tour program to the state with minimum management skills that leads to confusion and unhappiness among the tourists.

Information through internet is considered as an indispensable medium to attract foreign as well domestic tourists. There are numbers of websites that display the tourist information about different parts of India. These websites display little information about the state of Mizoram. Government websites like Incredible India, Indian Association of Tour Operators, and Indian Tourism etc. are displaying not as much of Mizoram tourism. This creates problems to the tourist and they doubt about the reliability of the tourist destination in the state. The state tourism website is not even updated, which can, otherwise serve as a source of information. Therefore, there is always skepticism about the authenticity of the non-governmental sites that display information about the Mizoram tourism. There are many travel sites that operate globally. Among them Tripadvisor, Makemytrip, Yatra, Goidibo, Travelguru etc. are worth to mention. These websites are helping the tourists to assess a destination and provide some ideas about the destinations. In case of Mizoram, all these sites are failing to give detail and correct information about the state. It is also worth to mention that all these websites create problems by providing wrong or inadequate information about the state. This creates

problems later on, especially when tourists booked their tours on the basis of these sites and their information.

Overall infrastructure is not well developed in the state. Numbers of tourist lodges are out dated and some of them are not suitable for the accommodation. Tourists are unhappy with the existing infrastructure. Demand of all-weather roads, improvement of the accommodation facilities, fast and comfortable transportation, improvement of food quality and services, absences of skilled and professional staff etc. are the significant issues. These need to be addressed for urgent improvement of the state tourism.

Tourists always need well attention from the hosts. Hence, curiosity is an important aspect of the study. Ideally, tribal societies are small in scale, are restricted in the spatial and temporal range of their social, legal, and political relations, and possess a morality, religion, and world view of corresponding dimensions (Fernandes and Bharali, 2008). There is a corresponding unity and coherence in tribal values that are intimately related to social institutions and are endowed with an intensity characteristic of all “closed” systems of thought. Tribal societies are supremely ethnocentric. Characteristically too, tribal languages are hard for non-tribal and hence it is always difficult to manage the communication gap with the tribal.

Being a tribal region, Mizoram also has some problems that clash with the rest of the Indians. Historical perspective, past political environment, societal behaviour, tradition and custom, food supply and structure, religious ideology, political agenda and racial characteristics make the northeastern tribal community separate from the main land non-tribal people. Therefore, lack of curiosity is a major problem to the host community in the state.

Imposition of Inner Line, ban of liquor, poor quality of water and food, higher pricing for local conveyance, poor management and display of tourist destination, lack of souvenir etc. are some other problems that are frequently encountered by the tourists during their trip. In the state, most of the budget hotels are not rated with the India Tourism Development Corporation

Limited (ITDC) ranking for which the minimum standard as per to their price tag is not facilitated to the guests (Deka, 2017). Only a few hotels provide the facilities like e-cash, telephone booking and online booking. At present, five hotels from Aizawl city are providing the facilities of dropping and pick up, while the rest are only providing the accommodation and food.

Advantages of Mizoram Tourism

Because of international scope of commercial enterprises, Mizoram occupies a strategically important place in so far as international trade is concerned. Flanked by Myanmar and Bangladesh, Mizoram offers an ideal hub for a vibrant international business and exchange with Southeast Asian Nations. With enhancing infrastructure of road, rail and air connectivity and the foundation of exchange courses with neighboring nations, the exchange assistance has gradually developed during the recent decades. Thus, the state is found to be a suitable place for international tourists and businessmen from SE Asian Region. After the implementation of Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP), southern Mizoram will be the resting shed for the tourists that travel between India and SE Asia via Myanmar. As per news paper reports, Mizoram is all set to come closer to the rest of India and Southeast Asia and is hopeful of boosting its economy with the Kaladan KMTTP (Assam Tribune, 01/02/16). KMTTP is a bilateral project between the Government of India and Myanmar Government to connect Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Myanmar by sea route and then to Paletwa in Myanmar via Kaladan river by inland water transport and then from Paletwa on to Mizoram in India by road transport. This is a 807 km-long land and sea route that is about to link the state with Myanmar and Thailand in near future. This project will boost the state tourism and the overall economic development of Mizoram.

As per the study, Assam and West Bengal are the two largest contributors of domestic tourists for the state. Business relation, easy connectivity, education friendly environment and

moderate climate are the main reasons for those tourists. During the study, a good number of voyagers from Assam and West Bengal shared their feelings of satisfaction for the moderate to wonderful atmosphere of the state during the summer. Mizoram gives immense pleasure and excitement of hill station like feelings to those tourists.

However, on a broad scale, the state is an unexplored destination for many of the mainland domestic tourists. It has a lot of advantages to attract tourists. It is a beggar free state. Less crowding and pollution free nature, cultural ethos etc. are mentionable advantages.

Disadvantages of Mizoram Tourism

The negative sides as mentioned by the domestic visitors are language and correspondence, nourishment and water quality, government set up, travel timing and lack of curiosity. Among these issues, absence of interest remains the best element giving negative impressions to the vacationers. For the most part, tribal individuals are normally segregated, murmur and not promptly eager to blend with the non-tribal and outsiders. In any case, this does not imply that they are not agreeable, as it is plainly seen from the above reality of loving that individuals and conduct is an overwhelming variable.

It might likewise be noticed that advancement of tourism in Mizoram alone cannot be planned without considering tourism improvement possibilities in the neighboring NE states. Henceforth, an incorporated methodology for tourism improvement is important to explore the whole northeastern districts of India. The new government has begun as of now the "Act East Policy" in place of earlier government's "Look East Policy". Since the state is put at the bottom of the positioning table, genuine and nonstop endeavors is essential with long haul visionary arrangement. This will make the state tourism dynamic and the prosperous.

Suggestions

In the light of the above findings, the following suggestions are brought favored for future development and improvement of tourism industry in Mizoram.

1. Mizoram is practicing the traditional way of tourism and still based the assumption rather than the assessment. State tourism is desirable to specialize in rural tourism as the present study reveal highest potential in it. Besides, adventure-based tourism, business tourism, cultural tourism may be planned effectively for long term growth and sustainable development of tourism.

International collaborative project, heritage and cultural integration, handicraft & agriculture-based tourism, geography & astronomy study centre at the Tropic of Cancer and Eco-tourism in Siaha may be the future tourism destinations in the state. State and central government, existing planner, stakeholders and other private run agencies have to set effective and practical perspective plan.

2. Intra- state connectivity is an important issue and is a big demand for growth of business and tourism development. The state has very less road density and a poor carrying capacity. The quality and transportability of many of the major roads are seasonal and inadequate. Alternative roads are optional in many important linkages. All weather roads along with smooth surface can swift the travel time and also increase the level of comfort of the tourists. Regularization of air services, assurances for minimum cost, certain alternative assistance from operating agencies, etc. are needed to serve the tourists in better ways. The state government needs to look after the cost effectiveness of transportation and accommodation from tourist view point. Development of the existing airport, helipads, increase of flight frequencies, betterment of road connectivity and initiation of international connectivity may help Mizoram tourism in long term growth.

3. Mizoram is a hilly state. It is not an easy task to cover all the tourist spots along with need based infrastructure. Therefore, concerned agencies may look for focus of destinations and tourist demand together. Mizoram is a small state with minimum resources and less budget as compared to those big states like Maharashtra, Gujarat etc. Hence, private

entrepreneurship is always demanded to entertain the state tourism industries. For these, again government mechanism must be effective to attract investors. Home stay, modification and beautification of existing spots, introduction of private sponsor, inclusion of private companies for recreation etc. may be effective for tourism development in the state.

4. Tourism is a dynamic business associated with the guests or the traveler. Hence, it is worthy to treat the guest as valued customers. To do that, skilled and professional labours are always expected. But the state does not have any institute of hotel management and association. Some students move outside Mizoram for hotel management and different hospitality training program. A few of them are completing their course and majorities prefer to serve outside the state for handsome earning. The state is suffering lake of professional workers which have to improve.
5. Lack of curiosity (about the tourists) is a serious problem noticed during the study. Most of the domestic tourist did complaint about the lack of curiosity and apathy of the local people towards them. Many of the tourist responded strongly against this problem. Mizoram is a tribal dominated state. Generally tribal people are isolated, shy and not readily willing to mix with non-tribal and strangers. But this does not mean that they are not cooperative. Only problem is the responses to the strangers are mostly reluctant. In many cases this may leads the gap between local people and the tourist. Foreign tourists are appreciably happy with the Mizos as compared to the domestic tourists. The state receives a large number of domestic tourists every year. Hence, public awareness campaign is needed to work out this problem with convinced motto like 'Tourism is a Profitable Business'.
6. Live local; think global is needed in present day world. Mizoram cannot stand apart from this idea of globalization. Instead of conservative state policy the state needed to be rather

open. Organization of national level trade fairs, cultural exchange programs, sports, activity, etc. are always related with the increasing of tourist inflow. Mizoram received higher number of business tourists every year. Regular organization of trade fairs may boost the state economy as well as the tourism industry.

7. The entire NE region is a region of unique tradition and vibrant culture. But the region has witnessed the problems of unrest, insurgency and terrorism since Independence. Therefore, the region is neither well explored nor well publicized. Hence, integrated approach for the region is sought in recent trend of development. Being the most peaceful state of the region, Mizoram may lead the integrated exposure program in an effective way. Besides, the state is bordered by two foreign countries i.e. Bangladesh and Myanmar. This may be an added advantage for the state to boost tourism as a whole. The state government needs to take initiative for international connectivity with effective foreign policy. Before that the existing infrastructure must be developed to an international standard.
8. Selling of tourism is essential for betterment of tourism. Publicity is another important issue in this regard that state tourism is needed to improve a lot. Other than the advertisement of 'Incredible North East', Mizoram has been found nowhere in the national media that display its nature, history and vibrant culture. Chapchar Kut is the only festival that is displayed in national media. As a part of tourism promotion, the state tourism is organizing Chapchar Kut (in collaboration with State Art and Culture Department) and Anthurium Festivals every year as a mega show case of Mizo culture. Lack of publicity minimizes the impact of tourist visit for these two festivals in the state.
9. Lack of up to date information is another problem with state tourism. There are many tourist websites that are frequently browsed by a large number of users. Sites like YATRA, TRIPADVISOR, MAKEMYTRIP, INDIATRAVEL, etc. are browsed by a large number of visitors every day. Information regarding Mizoram tourism displayed in those websites

are either incomplete or wrong which is necessary to update with correct and proper data.

State tourism website is also not up to date with the latest information and activities.

10. When tourists are travelling across Mizoram, it is very hard to find a souvenir shop, antique shop, handicraft shop nearby their reach. It is important to mention that tourist always interested to buy some traditional and unique mementos which reflect the art and culture of visited place or the people. Hence souvenir shops, handicraft stop, etc. are essential for tourism promotion. Different Mizoram Houses located nationwide may be ideal for this kind of promotion cum selling. Private hotels, lodges and other accommodation may also be a part of this venture.

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