

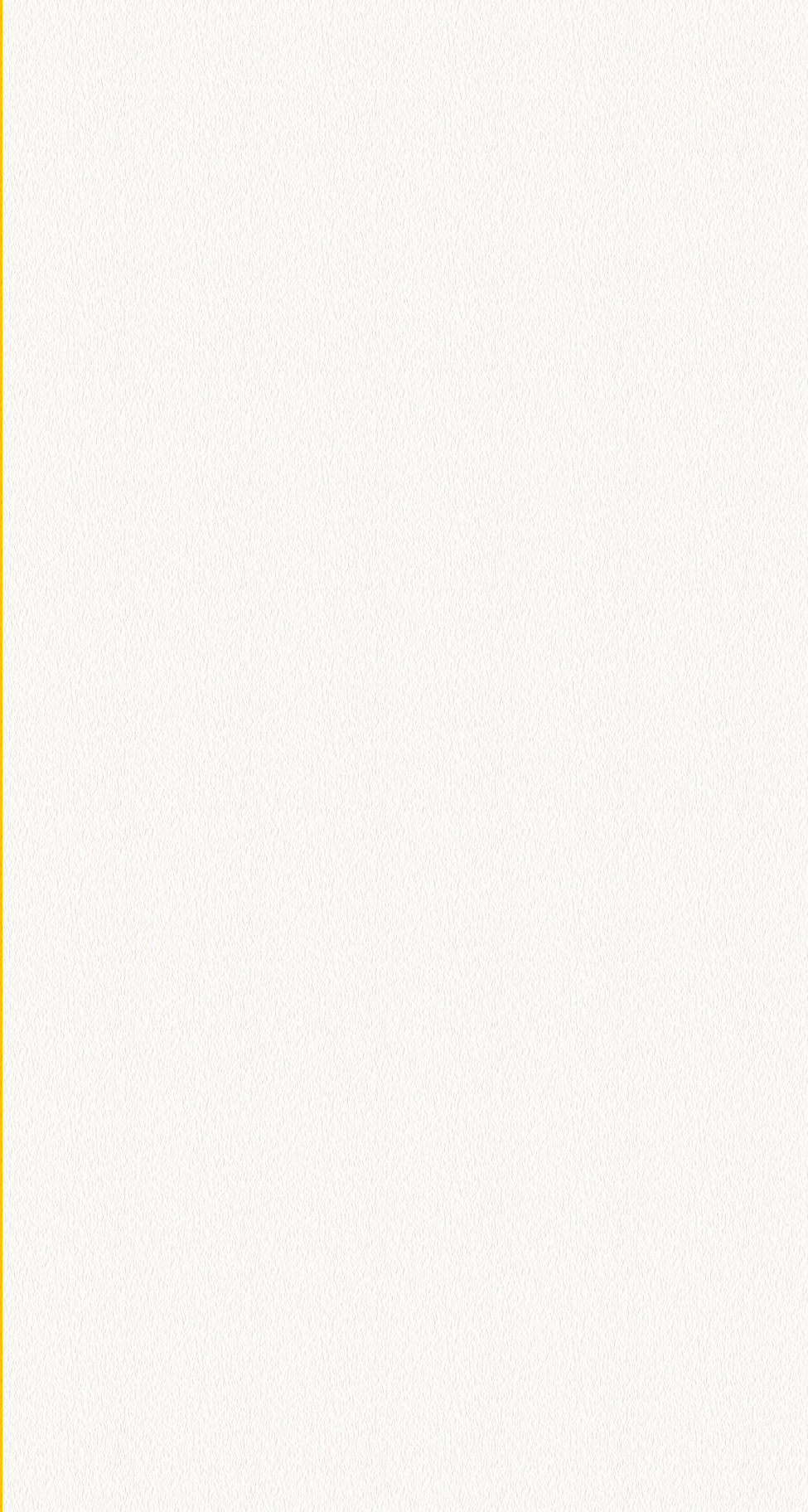
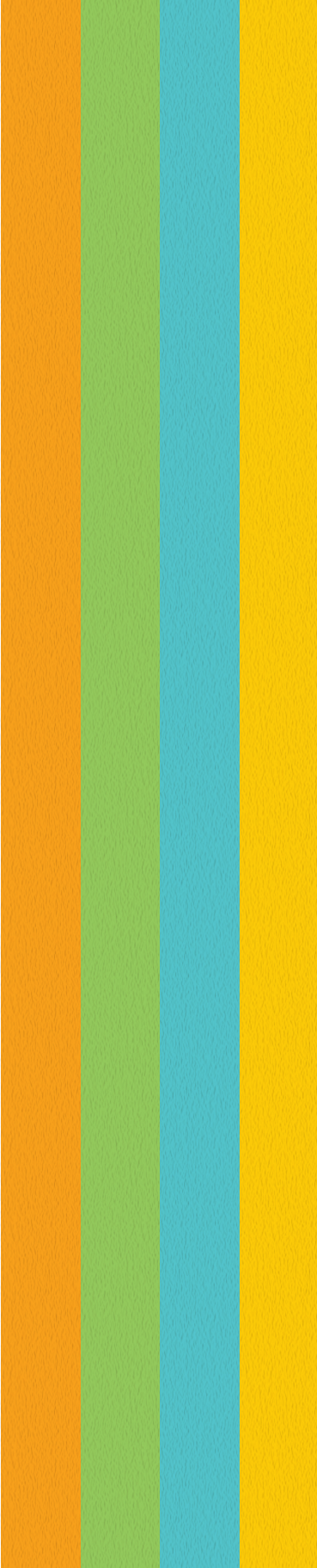


सत्यमेव जयते
GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM



Tourism Policy 2022







Tourism Policy 2022



Sadiya, Assam



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One-horned Rhino at Kaziranga National Park, Assam

Message



Assam, a beautiful state, is woven around hills, wetlands, reserve forests and lush green tea gardens. The state embraces an array of unique flora and fauna, gaining vibrancy from the mighty Brahmaputra and Barak and their tributaries.

The state has an illustrious past as a centre of astrology and oriental learning. It had a classical past, a vibrant present and a potential future as our government is on a mission to make it one of the most developed states with the right mix of development initiatives and conservation activities.

It is a home to several beautiful tribes who have enriched this state with their unique music, dance, mouth watering delicacies and their way of life. This is the land upon which Nature has bestowed its blessings and created a landscape of mystic beauty. In this beautiful Assam, tourism presents its potential in its own pristine way. In this state, tourism encompasses a social, cultural and spiritual phenomenon that enables our tourists to spend time in close proximity with nature.

Cultural and historical heritage, wildlife, adventure, nature, music, festivals, village life, mountains, river islands, golden fabric, vegetarian and non-vegetarian delicacies and above all everything else the beautiful and friendly people have made Assam one of the most preferred destinations in the country. In this backdrop, our Government is bringing out the Assam State Tourism Policy with adequate emphasis to implement it to give a new growth momentum to Assam tourism.

In this regard, I welcome entrepreneurs and investors to come forward and make Assam their investment destination.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Himanta Biswa Sarma'.

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister of Assam



Maironga Daogah Waterfall, Panimur (Dima Hasao)

Message



The term Assam best describes an incomparable state woven around hills, wetlands and reserve forests. It houses an array of unique flora and fauna, gaining vibrancy from the mighty Brahmaputra and Barak along with their tributaries. The tea gardens and the lush green golf courses developed in the beautiful milieu of the tea gardens bolster the power and potential of Assam Tourism to advance prosperity and drive for sustainable development.

The Tourism Policy of Assam 2022 holds immense promise to develop the tourism sector of the state to a new height. I am sure this policy is the outcome of meticulously crafted plans and consultations involving a multitude of stakeholders from the tourism and allied industries. The policy encompasses elements of sustainability, socio-economic development with tourism as the focal point. Moreover, the policy essentially focuses Assam Tourism in close proximity with its nature and cultural heritage.

I am happy that this policy presents a pragmatic and holistic outline of the tourism potential of Assam and promotes it as a global destination for inclusive development. One of the salient points of this policy is that it centres on a blueprint of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 to push and promote the social, cultural and economic phenomenon of tourism to enable our tourists spending time in pursuit of recreation, relaxation, pleasure and business. Another strong point of this policy is the emphasis on the local pulse of tourism within a contemporaneous global canvas to incentivize transportation expansion and augment the hospitality sector. Moreover, to catapult Assam at the forefront of globetrotters' must-visit itineraries, marketing and promotion strategies have also been drafted in this policy.

Our Government is committed to providing a conducive environment for growth of tourism in Assam. I request all the stakeholders to join us in our venture to develop Assam as a vibrant, sustainable and the most-favoured tourism destination.

Jayanta Mallabaruah

Minister of Tourism, Public Health Engineering,
Skill, Employment & Entrepreneurship, Assam



Message



Tourism in recent years has emerged as a major driver towards the overall development of the country. It stimulates the country's economy and nurtures its growth process. The benefits accrued from this sector are expansive and multi-dimensional.

Assam's unique topography, natural bounty, rich demographic diversity, historic and civilizational heritage and culture makes Assam a paradise for tourism. This land of 'Red river and Blue hill' has enchanted travelers since the dawn of history.

In spite of having such tremendous potential, there was a mismatch in the growth rate in the tourism sector and the unmatched variety of experiences and products that the state has to offer. In the last couple of years, the department has worked relentlessly to remove various bottlenecks. There is a marked improvement in the tourism-related services in the state.

The new Assam Tourism Policy 2022 has come at an opportune time when our state stands at the threshold of new beginnings. The policy aims to guarantee and safeguard the effective standardization of processes and practices, so as to foster uniformity which can result in sustainability and an overall improvement in the quality of the tourism products.

The policy had been prepared after extensive consultations with the world bank and at every stage of its preparation, the view of the stakeholders and industry experts has been given due weightage. What we have with us now is a comprehensive document, that lays down a detailed roadmap, to make Assam the most sought-after tourism destination in the country. An Action Plan and an investment plan shall soon follow.

Maninder Singh, IAS
Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam,
Department of Tourism



Kareng Ghar, Sivasagar, Assam



Chapter 1

Introduction, Vision and Mission

1.1 TOURISM – A HARBINGER OF PROGRESS AND DEVELOPMENT

Worldwide, tourism is a major driver of socio-economic progress and inclusive development. It is also one of the



Sri Surya Pahar, Goalpara, Assam

largest job creating industries, being labour intensive and employing more women and youth than most other industries. The sector has been a driving force in protecting natural and cultural heritage and preserving them for future generations to enjoy. Tourism has evolved into a way of life for millions of people throughout the world, seeking unique travel and cultural experiences, whether for business or pleasure, domestically, regionally and globally thereby acting as a bridge between cultures and fostering better understanding and mutual cooperation among the peoples of the World.

1.2 ASSAM – A DESTINATION WITH IMMENSE TOURISM POSSIBILITIES

Assam, known as the land of the red river and blue hills, is endowed with plentiful natural and cultural assets which gives it the potential to become one of the top destinations in the country. Assam is a biodiversity hotspot and falls within the Eastern Himalayas which is a priority Global 200 Eco-region, as identified by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). The two National Parks of Kaziranga and Manas are UNESCO World Heritage sites, and the state is famous worldwide for being the largest natural habitat of the great Indian One-horned Rhinoceros, having more than 70% of the world's population of rhinos. Assam is also home to around 220 ethnic groups including more than 100 different hill tribes and plain tribes, each with unique and distinct dialects, traditions, attires, accessories and colorful festivals. The major tourism possibilities of Assam also include the lush green tea gardens and the heritage colonial bungalows, cruising in the mighty river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, the Vaishnavite culture of Majuli island, historical monuments,

magnificent beauty of the landscape and the scenic villages with warm and hospitable people.

Assam registered 51,46,307 Domestic Tourist Arrivals (DTA) and 18,594 Foreign Tourists Arrivals (FTA) in 2019 just before the onslaught of Covid-19. There is a huge potential to improve the tourism segment as the state ranks 22nd in DTA and 27th in FTA in India with a percentage share of 0.23% and 0.09 % of the DTA and FTA of India as a whole. Even though the state serves as a hub and gateway for 6 other states in the NER, adequate infrastructure is not available for tourists, which showcases the need to attract private investments in building the tourism infrastructure of the state.

1.3 RESPONDING TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND REDESIGNING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IN ASSAM

As tourism slowly recuperates from the devastating effects of Covid-19 pandemic, reopening tourism-related businesses and managing their recovery in a way that is safe and attractive for tourists, and economically viable will require coordination between the government and private sector at an unprecedented level. The pandemic has provided an opportunity to assess the implications at various levels and coordinate action across different levels of the government and with the private sector. The Govt. of Assam needs to play an important role in assisting in the sector's recovery and strengthening it in the long term. It is therefore the need of the hour to have a robust policy to redesign and give proper direction to the development of tourism in Assam.

With the changing scenario, aspects like cleanliness and safety have become



Negheriting Shiva Doul, Dergaon, Assam

important considerations for tourists while choosing a destination to travel. There is a rising consciousness about the environment, climate change, ethical and responsible tourism making sustainability a key factor in policy making while envisioning the future of tourism.

1.4 THE NEED TO PRIORITIZE TOURISM AS A GLOBAL OPPORTUNITY

Tourism accounts for 10 percent of global GDP in 2019 and was worth almost USD 9 trillion. Tourism has become one of the major sectors in International Commerce and represents one of the main sources of foreign exchange and investment for many countries. This growth goes hand in hand with an increasing diversification and competition among destinations. Tourism must be viewed as a global opportunity. Tourism does not develop sustainably without government intervention. Prioritization of the tourism sector is crucial for ensuring environmental protection, social inclusion, and gender equity. Increasing investment, alignment and competitiveness is required to maximize the sector's impact for the benefit of Assam as a whole. The growth of the tourism sector would have a wide reaching impact on Assam's economy by extending benefits across the state including rural areas, and offering jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities to youth, women, marginalised groups and those in the informal sector.

1.5 ASSAM TOURISM POLICY, 2022 – A HOLISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Assam Tourism Policy, 2022 is a part of Assam's strategy to enable rapid

growth in the Tourism sector. This policy provides a comprehensive framework for the state's tourism sector to grow in an inclusive and sustainable manner. The policy's goals are to improve the state's tourism development framework, promote tourism related industries, and strengthen tourism support services.

Assam's tourism policy has been developed to closely align with the National Tourism Policy and highlights areas where collaboration will be sought from the Ministry of Tourism. This policy will replace the five-year Tourism Policy of Assam, 2017.

1.6 VISION

To transform Assam to a top tourist destination nationally and internationally, providing a world class visitor experience by developing tourist attractions, circuits and infrastructure in a responsible, inclusive and sustainable manner with adequate consideration to ecological and cultural sensitivities to provide socio-economic benefit to the entire state.

1.7 MISSION

The mission of the Policy is "to create a policy framework and strategic roadmap in collaboration with central ministries, various state government departments, local communities and tourism stakeholders to improve the tourism sector in Assam, to support the private sector engaged in tourism in the state, and to strengthen tourism support segments and its sub-sectors".

1.8 KEY STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The key strategic objectives of the Policy are:

- i. To enhance the contribution of tourism



Rang Ghar, Sivasagar, Assam

in Assam's economy by increasing tourist footfalls, duration of stay, and revenue earned per tourist (by targeting high-yield tourists both from India and overseas).

- ii. Promote different types of tourism during different times of the year to ensure round the year footfall of tourists to develop Assam into an all-season tourist destination.
- iii. To spread tourist visitation/expenditure to lesser-known destinations.
- iv. To work in close coordination with National and International Tour Operators and International Travel Trade Bodies and Associations.
- v. To help in creation of business opportunities and employment in the tourism sector.
- vi. To provide capacity building opportunities to ensure and create a skilled work force working for the sector.
- vii. To facilitate enhancement of infrastructure at par with international standards in sectors with potential like River Tourism, Tea Tourism and Golf Tourism.
- viii. To preserve the cultural and natural resources of the State.
- ix. To integrate traditional cultural festivals of the state and develop new tourism-oriented products.
- x. To focus on benefits for the local communities, women and youth from tourism.
- xi. To ensure sustainable, responsible and inclusive development of tourism in the State.
- xii. To create an enabling environment for investment.

1.9 KEY GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.9.1 To promote sustainable and responsible tourism

The Policy's fundamental guiding principle is to encourage sustainability and foster responsible tourism, to make Assam a sustainable and responsible tourism destination. The goal is to promote sustainability by limiting the negative effects of tourism on social, environmental, and economic sectors while ensuring the positive effects. The strategy shall also promote responsible tourism, which shall bring together all stakeholders to share responsibility for creating a better environment for people to live and visit.

1.9.2 To promote digitization, innovation and technology in tourism sector

One of the primary guiding principles for the promotion and growth of tourism is the use of digitization, innovation, and technology. The Policy intends to employ technology for a number of initiatives and to assist the tourism industry in taking advantage of the opportunities provided by digitization. The goal is to expand the amount of assistance given to the tourism industry in digitizing its business models and operations. The Policy will assist tourism businesses in expanding their market reach, enhancing their revenues, improving operational efficiencies, and sharpening their competitive edge. The Policy will collectively aid in the development and customization of product offerings, the improvement of destination connectivity, generation of data to track performance, and the improvement of destination management.



1.9.3 To follow an inclusive approach

The Policy takes an inclusive approach, recognizing that government and stakeholders are involved in tourism in a variety of ways, including marketing and promotion, security, market regulation, planning regulations, controlling or managing tourism attractions (such as national parks), skill development, and funding road and other infrastructure development. Tourism policy development is becoming increasingly complicated, with longer timescales and a broader scope than in the past, due to its cross-cutting and fragmented nature. An inclusive approach can handle the tourism industry's big and multi-faceted concerns, such as the infrastructure and skills required to fulfill predicted future demand.

1.9.4 Private-Sector led growth

The policy is governed by the notion that the private sector must lead tourist growth, with the public sector serving as an enabler and facilitator. Accordingly, the policy aims to reduce public involvement in the business of tourism to allow for private sector competition and development. The promotion of entrepreneurship is a priority in the tourism policy. By updating regulations and lessening the administrative and regulatory load on tourism enterprises, the Tourism Policy attempts to establish a tourism-friendly regulatory environment. This will broaden the entrepreneurial horizons while lowering regulatory costs. The policy will be focused on enhancing productivity, improving skills and capabilities, and facilitating structural transformation.

1.9.5 To follow a destination-centric and tourist-centric approach

The policy emphasizes that tourism competition is not limited to tourist service providers or a single experience but encompasses the entire destination experience. In order to organize and develop tourism, the Policy takes a destination-centered strategy. The Policy intends to improve local value chain connections so that communities can participate and benefit more. By boosting local participation, it aims to improve the tourist experience from arrival to departure, and it will be a critical component of the tourism development strategy. A tourist-centric approach will ensure that tourists have access to all pertinent information and services via the internet and enable customer comments and service rating. Tourists will also be able to submit their complaints and have them resolved.

1.9.6 Applicability and Implementation of the Policy

Unless extended further, the policy will be in effect for 5 years from the date of announcement. Most components of the policy would require simultaneous and coordinated action by the state government and local institutions, in collaboration with industry stakeholders. Specific tasks and responsibilities of various stakeholders will be spelled out in more detail in the specific strategies and action plans, schemes, and guidelines for the execution of the Policy.



Majuli, Assam

Chapter 2

Sustainable Tourism Development

2.1 MAINSTREAMING SUSTAINABILITY INTO THE TOURISM SECTOR

Sustainable tourism is tourism that takes full account of current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. The Policy recognizes that sustainable tourism is not a special form of tourism often erroneously equated with eco-tourism, nor is it just about financial viability. Rather sustainable tourism involves a triple bottom line: environmental, social, economic viability. Sustainable tourism should become the prevalent practice among all tourism

operations in the state. More specifically, sustainability should be mainstreamed into the tourism sector by encouraging energy efficiency, climate resilience, mindful consumption, conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and generation of opportunities for local communities.

These efforts will be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 to ensure a more resilient, inclusive, carbon neutral and resource-efficient future. The Policy reiterates that the State of Assam is committed to SDGs 2030 and recognizes that tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to





all of these goals. Additionally, tourism development in Assam will be aligned with climate change policies at the national and state level. The tourism sector is both a significant contributor as well as a victim of climate change. As such, strategies must be developed to help mitigate the negative impacts of tourism activity, as well as to adapt to current and future climate change impacts on the sector. This will include exploring how to contribute for implementation of the eight sub-missions of the National Action Plan for Climate Change (NAPCC).

2.2 PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY IN THE SECTOR: GENERATING LOCAL EMPLOYMENT, SUPPORTING COMMUNITY TOURISM, AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

Keeping in tune with the objective of providing employment to local youth, it is necessary to provide destination-based training for the gainful employment of local women and youth around major tourist destinations. The Department of Tourism will facilitate on-the-job training to be provided by the employers for local employees in hotels and resorts. These programs will aim to advance women for management and leadership positions in their companies and encourage employers to provide childcare support and safe transport for female workers, particularly those working at night. Particular efforts will be made to train women in male-dominated positions such as guides, cooks, waiters, drivers, and provide recognition to firms that do encourage women in these positions.

Small tourism firms run by women are often undercapitalized and less likely to receive training or public support. The department will keep gender disaggregated data on firm ownership and

ensure women-owned firms are informed about public support programs. Where capacity building is provided, care should be taken that there are women trainers.

It will also be important to ensure that local communities benefit from the state's tourism activity while avoiding under-age workers. As such, the department will support the development of homestays among Assam's local communities—especially under-represented tribal communities as part of the 'Amar Alohi' scheme. The department will also encourage the development of immersive community village experiences for tourists near important tourist destinations – these tourist experiences can also be included in the 'Amar Alohi' scheme. Additionally, it will be important to ensure that all opportunities for training, employment, and access to subsidies/credit are offered irrespective of gender. Finally, noting the vulnerability of tribal communities, training will be provided to avoid negative social impacts related to sex tourism, drugs, and other exploitation or unwanted tourism impacts.

2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ECO-TOURISM STANDARDS

To enable the mainstreaming of environmental sustainability into the state's tourism sector, it will be important to have a mechanism that can define standards for tour operators as well as provide them with incentives for adhering to the standards. The Department will therefore work closely with the Ministry of Tourism to encourage adoption of Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India (STCI) by accommodation providers and tour operators in the state of Assam. The STCI, which will be further refined by the Ministry of Tourism, has incorporated and adapted global best practices in



Jatinga, Dima Hasao, Assam

measurement, report, and verification of sustainable elements of tourism. The STCI standards relate to effective sustainable management, design and construction of buildings/infrastructure, social and economic impacts on communities, cultural heritage preservation, and environmental impacts (resource conservation, pollution reduction, and biodiversity conservation).

The Department of Tourism will provide an example by fast-tracking the certification of ATDC accommodations to serve as a model for undertaking the certification process. This will be set as a positive example for the industry and produce learnings that can help adapt the program to the local reality. The phasing out of single-use plastic will be particularly encouraged. This could be done by ATDC directly, or in collaboration with one of its private sector management partners—perhaps offering an incentive for the partner to work towards obtaining certification.

2.4 PROTECTING RIVER DOLPHINS

The endangered Gangetic River Dolphin, declared as Guwahati's "city animal," can be a key attraction and a cause for the tourism sector in Assam to intervene. The River Dolphin is spotted frequently in places like Kulsi at Kukurmara. In recent times, human activities have resulted in a decline in the dolphin population. The dolphins mostly inhabit in shallow water pools in the Brahmaputra and its tributaries and get easily entangled in fishing nets, crash with boats, and get poisoned in rivers by industrial and agricultural contaminants.

The Policy takes special cognition of the issue of River Dolphins and states the need to aid their protection by complementing efforts by various expert agencies and

stakeholders and raising awareness about the River Dolphins in the Brahmaputra River System. A way to raise awareness among youth would be to incorporate information about the dolphins and their conservation could be incorporated in school curriculum.

2.5 FORGING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The Department of Tourism will initiate partnerships with private sector partners such as hotel owners, tour operators, and transport services to raise awareness about environmental and inclusivity issues. As part of this effort, the Department of Tourism will conduct sessions with the tourism private sector to raise awareness about such issues and organize information campaigns to influence tourists to undertake more sustainable practices. These sessions will also serve as an opportunity to raise awareness about the STCI, so operators understand the key benefits and responsibilities associated with the certification scheme.

2.6 INCENTIVIZING GREEN TOURISM INVESTMENTS

The Department of Tourism will advocate appropriate incentive policies to encourage investment in sustainable tourism activities and discourage unsustainable tourism. Such policies will encourage green investment at the destinations and facilities. Such policies can further support the private sector in purchase of equipment or technology that reduces waste, encourages energy and water efficiency, or the protection of biodiversity (payments for environmental services) and the strengthening of linkages with local businesses and community organizations.

Chapter 3

Tourism and Hospitality Sector Skill Development

3.1 PROMOTING TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

3.1.1. The success of the Tourism industry lies in the hands of skilled and professional manpower. The Policy recognizes that the tourism sector provides huge employment opportunities in a range of segments including hotels, restaurants, travel agents and tours operators, tourist transport, Eco & Adventure tourism, cruise services, tourist guides and other related areas.

3.1.2. The Policy also recognizes that a trained work force is required not only to meet the demands of tourism and hospitality sector but keeping in view that tourism is driven by visitor experience. The people serving in the industry must be well trained to deliver a positive experience to the tourists. At present, the State has one Institute of Hotel Management in Guwahati, a Food & Craft Institute in Nagaon, and hospitality courses like multi-cuisine cooking, front



desk management, room attendants, food and beverages etc. A State Institute of Hotel Management in Jorhat (under process) offers hospitality courses like multi-cuisine cooking, front desk management, room attendants, food and beverages etc. It will encourage women to apply for non-gender stereotypical roles and keep data on the gender of those receiving training.

- 3.1.3. The Department will increase awareness and publicity of the facilities available at the existing Institutes of Hospitality, and Hotel Management in the State can be taken up by the Government. At present, the Food & Craft Institute at Samuguri Nagaon has introduced a central government incentive programme, 'Hunar Se Rozgar Tak' for the students of Food & Craft Institute, Samuguri Nagaon from 2022 onwards.

The Department of Tourism, Government of Assam will continue to support at

least 17 students per year (with equal gender balance) at the Institute of Hotel Management in Guwahati as part of incentive and awareness grants amongst local youth (18-25 years old).

- 3.1.4. As part of the suo-motu initiatives of the Ministry of Tourism under the Scheme of "Capacity Building for Service Providers", it was decided to provide financial assistance to Govt. sponsored Tourism & Hospitality Institutes, Private Tourism/Hospitality Institutes, State Tourism Development Corporations and State Governments to conduct Skill Development Programmes to be called "Hunar Se Rozgar Tak" (HSRT) or its verticals. The National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) approved skill development courses in the hospitality trades of Multi Cuisine Cooks, Food & Beverage Service Stewards, Room Attendants, Front Office Associates, Laundry Machine Operators, Kitchen





Traditional Snack & Savory Makers. The Directorate of Tourism, Assam has also introduced the HSRT programme from 2022. These programs will observe the gender equity considerations noted in chapter 2.

3.1.5. The Directorate of Tourism imparts training to destination-based tourist guides. Recent trainings were organized for tourist destinations like Kaziranga National Park, Dehing Patkai, Satras of Barpeta, Haflong, Pobitora and Chandubi etc. To ensure that new guides are highly qualified to meet the needs of increasingly demanding tourists, the certification course for new guides will be lengthened. Also, specialized guide training courses will be offered in areas that align with high priority market segments. One example is bird watching, given the state's ability to attract high-yield birding tourists. Other specialty course offerings should be determined in consultation with inbound tour operators. Also, given the importance of wildlife tourism, refresher trainings will be offered periodically to the guides working in relevant protected areas. Training will incorporate environmental and cultural information with a focus on training women for tour guides.

3.1.6. The Department of Tourism will engage with private sector partners to provide opportunities for skill development and apprenticeship in partnership with prospective employers in the tourism sector.

3.2 DEVELOPING AND DELIVERING IMPACTFUL TRAINING COURSES FOR TOURISM SUPPLY CHAIN STAKEHOLDERS

3.2.1. This Policy outlines the need to assess existing training frameworks and orient future capacity building programmes with support from relevant institutions, industry leaders and industry associations etc. in a way that delivers impactful and in-depth training for Tourism Supply Chain Stakeholders including Guides, Cab Drivers, Homestay Owners, local communities in and around the tourist circuits and destinations. Various aspects of training will involve language training, etiquette hospitality, hygiene and sanitation management, book-keeping, management skills besides specialist courses for Guides, Bird-Guiding, story-telling, history, basic IT and financial literacy etc. The assessment of existing training programmes will enable decision makers to learn whether courses need to be upgraded or whether duration needs are to be increased or additional centers for training need to be opened. Specialty courses on areas like bird-watching and river tourism etc will be offered to build capacity of the ecosystem to cater to a high-end tourism market to be encouraged, preferably with women. Periodic refresher courses will enable important stakeholders to keep themselves updated for tourism services.

3.3 BUILDING CAPACITY OF TOURISM OFFICERS IN HQ, FIELD OFFICES, AND DESTINATIONS

It is important for government tourism officers to expand their skills and knowledge, particularly in line with the latest trends of the fast-evolving tourism sector. As such, a series of short-courses and seminars/webinars can be developed and delivered to the state's tourism officers, based upon areas of greatest demand.

Chapter 4

Welcoming Destinations with Quality Assurance and Standardization

4.1 'ATITHI DEVOBHAVA'- THE GUEST IS GOD

Assamese people are by nature hospitable. For example, offering betel nut, tea, and water to guests is part

of Assamese tradition and culture. Northeastern states are renowned for their cultural and ethnic diversity and unique natural landscape. Yet the facilities and services such as restrooms at key attractions and destinations are



not always adequate to provide tourists with the highest quality experience.

4.2 ENSURING CLEANLINESS, HYGIENE, AND PUBLIC CONVENIENCES

Keeping in view that cleanliness, hygiene and public conveniences greatly impact visitor experience, the Department of Tourism will have a major focus on ensuring cleanliness in public conveniences at tourist destinations, particularly around those near the major attractions. The Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) will

work towards increased enforcement of food/water safety standards at tourist destinations. In places with high tourist concentration, including wayside amenities, pay and use toilet systems can be established. This type of facility will allow for hygienic toilets and also provide local employment, which can be organized through local management committees. In areas where regular toilets are not feasible, bio-toilets can be installed. These initiatives may be supported by the national government through the Swachh Bharat Mission.

4.3 TOURIST FACILITATION CENTRES

It is important to maintain facilitation





Talatal Ghar, Sivasagar, Assam

centers at key points of arrival so as to orient visitors and provide them with useful information. At present there is a facilitation center at Guwahati railway station. It will also be important to open facilitation centers at major railway stations such as Tezpur, Haflong, Badarpur, Dibrugarh, and Tinsukia. For each, it will be necessary to have well-trained, courteous, and multi-lingual information officers that can provide helpful guidance to visitors. At present there are also facilitation centers within district offices at Kaziranga, Manas, Sivasagar, Chandubi, Tinsukia, Majuli, Tezpur, Bhalukpong, Haflong, Silchar, Diphu, Pobitora, Nagaon, Jorhat, and Guwahati. It is proposed to open further offices and facilitation centers in North Lakhimpur and Dibrugarh.

4.4 ENSURING TOURIST SAFETY

It is essential to create a safe, secure, and inviting environment for tourists, including women tourists. Issues of safety also pertain to hustling, cheating, harassment by touts etc. One mechanism to promote tourist safety that the Department will consider is a tourist warden program. These will be volunteers positioned at key tourist sites that will help orient tourists and help them avoid unsafe situations. When a crime is committed, they can liaise with police, who will be more strategically positioned within tourist destinations. Other important safety measures to be implemented at key tourism sites will be the improvement of lighting and installation of CCTV cameras.

Dedicated Tourist Police stations will be established at major tourist destinations. The Department of Tourism will facilitate training of police personnel designated as Tourist Police to familiarize police personnel with the

common safety issues faced by tourists with an emphasis on speedy resolution of cases while providing avenues for follow up using digital technology.

To avoid inconvenience to tourists and minimize reputational damage caused by bandhs/strikes, several measures will be taken. The Department of Tourism will liaise with the District Administration to ensure safe and easy passage of vehicles carrying tourists during times of unrest. In particular, the route to the nearest airport should remain free and open for tourists to exit as quickly as possible.

Also, being able to provide night navigation by tourist vessels on the Brahmaputra River would be highly advantageous to tourists and operators. Therefore, the Department of Tourism will work with relevant state and national authorities, including the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) to improve infrastructure and operational procedures to ensure that night navigation can take place in a safe manner.

4.5 STREAMLINING TRANSPORT LICENSING

Currently, the transport licensing process is lengthy and inconvenient, thereby putting a strain on transport providers and discouraging others from entering the sector. Efforts are currently underway to streamline the process. The Department of Tourism will continue this work with the Transport Department by helping to address existing bottlenecks. One mechanism for this collaboration would be the tourism Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) group. Additionally, for tourist vehicles that have been licensed, Awesome Assam logos can be provided for display on their vehicles.

Chapter 5

Access and Infrastructure

5.1 SYNERGY IN TRANSPORT AND TOURISM – ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE.

The Policy recognizes that seamless connectivity to tourist destinations and

transport infrastructure can greatly enhance visitor experience. Tourism depends upon existing core infrastructure such as roads, rail, aviation, and waterways. Effective management of transport and tourism synergies can

improve visitor mobility to and within destinations and help to secure the economic viability of local transport systems and services by servicing both residents and tourists. There should be close collaboration between the Departments of Tourism and Transport in this area, with the Department of Tourism clearly signaling the highest priority in transport infrastructure that can help unlock new investments and destinations, as well as providing convenience and ease of access to visitors.

5.2 ROADWAYS

The Department of Tourism will liaise with PWD(R), NH and NHA to help

improve road connectivity between destinations and to specific attractions. This will improve the state's tourism competitiveness by improving the overall visitor transport experience including signages and road-side amenities. Ensuring all tourists' sites are correctly located on Google online maps and navigation tools is an important public responsibility. It will also help in the bid to diversify the state's tourism offerings and spread tourist expenditure more broadly. It will be important to ensure time bound implementation of high priority road projects like the Assam State Roads Project, which is an Externally Aided Project (EAP) implemented by





Pahugar, Sivasagar, Assam

the Public Works Roads Department (PWRD) through the Assam State Road Board (ASRB) for improvement of State Highways (SH) and Major District Roads (MDR) in the State. It will be particularly important to ensure that last mile connectivity is provided to key tourism sites. Additionally, the process for movement of tourists should be made as hassle free as possible where minimal or automated check points, toll collection stations, fuel stations etc. can minimize delays and streamline experiences.

5.3 RAILWAYS

Railways are prevalent in most areas of the country, with many tourist destinations being accessible by train. The Indian Railways is working for promotion of tourism by operating more trains ranging from budget to high-end offerings. The introduction of the Vistadome coach in Assam with more to follow will be beneficial for tourism. Additional tourist trains could be introduced to enhance and promote tourism products such as the lush green tea gardens, the scenic beauty of the Borail Range in Dima Hasao, and the exotic locations in Karbi Anglong. The Department of Tourism will study the feasibility of leasing dedicated trains from the Indian Railways under the Bharat Gaurav scheme. The scheme will also be promoted by the Department of Tourism to encourage private investment in new business opportunities in the sector.

5.4 AIR TRANSPORT

Air transport is an integral part of the tourism industry. It is now possible to reach areas that were previously inaccessible or remote. The Department of Tourism through the Ministry of

Tourism may collaborate with the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) to improve air connectivity to and within Assam. This includes opening new international routes, seizing upon the opportunity to connect to fast-growing markets within South and South-east Asia. In this regard the Assam Transport Department has already communicated to MoCA suggesting routes such as Guwahati – Bangkok, Guwahati – Dhaka, Guwahati – Kathmandu, and Guwahati–Singapore for consideration. The Department of Tourism will urge the Ministry of Transport to advocate for the opening of these key regional routes.

The Department of Tourism has been working on improving domestic inter-state and intra-state air connectivity as well. Three airports and 24 routes were identified for development in Assam under the Ministry of Civil Aviation's Regional Connectivity Scheme. The Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) has started operating subsidized flights between Guwahati and Silchar to ease transportation during the flood season. New helipads are being developed at Nagaon and Haflong. The Department of Tourism will explore the feasibility of arranging charter flights from major cities across India in addition to package tours for Golf and Religious tourists.

Additionally, there is potential for sea plane operations to serve high-end tourists. Two potential locations for sea plane bases have been identified: Guwahati near the High Court and Umrangsu. Tour operators should be consulted to help to determine potential market demand for this type of product. Potential environmental and socio-cultural impacts would also need to be studied.



Rash Mahotsav at Majuli, Assam

5.5 RIVER TRANSPORT

The Department of Tourism will also work with the Transport Department and the IWAI to help improve and expand river tourism on the mighty Brahmaputra River. This will require important infrastructural investments, including the construction of new jetties along the river. Also, periodic dredging will be required to allow passage for larger vessels and to areas beyond Guwahati. A detailed study of jetty and dredging requirements should be undertaken in collaboration with relevant government authorities and private sector operators and in consideration of the protection of the Gangetic River Dolphin.

Presently, there are some high-end cruises such as 'Mahabahu' and 'Charaideo' that are running successfully but there is an opportunity to introduce vessels aimed at middle-income groups. It will be important to further study demand for river cruises and based on the findings, help promote investment in additional vessels that meet the identified demand. Tourism vessels should also be subject to strict safety standards and the criteria for safety certification of such vessels will be reviewed by the Department of Tourism in collaboration with the Department of Transport.

5.6 ROPEWAYS

At present, Guwahati boasts the longest ropeway over a river, in India. Traversing a distance of about 1.8 KM, it connects Guwahati with North Guwahati. The Passenger Ropeway Project, as it is called, demonstrates the efficacy of ropeways as a tourist attraction. Not only can the ropeways efficiently facilitate the movement of tourists, but they also provide the opportunity to enjoy the scenery of attractive locations. The

development of additional ropeways by the private sector supported by the Government of Assam should be encouraged in light of their touristic value. The Department of Tourism can also explore the possibility of investment in ropeways by the NHAI and its subsidiaries.

5.7 DEVELOPMENT OF WAYSIDE AMENITIES

Adequate clean and hygienic wayside amenities for travelers should be constructed on all National Highways and State Highway at reasonable distances. These should include a combination of fuel stations, public conveniences, and restaurants. In some cases, they could also incorporate other facilities such as local handicraft shops, information kiosks, and vehicle repair centers. The Department of Tourism should involve the PWD (Roads), NH as well as NHAI and ensure that such facilities are set up at appropriate locations on roads leading to tourist destinations. Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) will be encouraged to develop standardized public conveniences at fuel stations. All such facilities should be, wherever possible, developed and managed by the private sector as competitive business opportunities.

5.8 IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN NATIONAL PARKS

National Parks are one of the main tourism draws in Assam, yet some are lacking in key infrastructure. The Department of Tourism will work closely with the Forest Department to identify the most important infrastructure needs and available sources of funding, keeping in mind the Green Belt Acts and Rules.



Son Beel, Karimganj, Assam

Chapter 6

Destination and Product Development

6.1 IMPORTANCE OF DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

The Policy recognizes that Assam is endowed with natural and cultural resources that form the foundation of a tourism industry that can be lucrative and create employment in both urban centres and rural areas. Insurgency issues, remoteness, a sense of perceived insecurity and negative publicity are now things of the past. Presently, because of its magnificent tourism products like exotic wildlife, awesome scenic beauty, colourful fairs and festivals, age-old historical monuments, lush green tea gardens and golf courses, the massive Brahmaputra,

serene and tranquil countryside, and warm hospitable people, Assam has become one of the most sought after destinations in the country.

Destination development should be an ongoing exercise and the key components need to be completed before the arrival of the tourist, along with revenue generation. These will help in enhancing further investment in the destinations and encouraging public-private partnerships.

6.2 CREATING DESTINATION MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

Destination Management structures are necessary for coordinating with



Charaideo Maidam, Assam

the relevant agencies and tourism service providers for strategic planning, development, monitoring and marketing of the tourist destinations. Several different destination management structures can be explored, depending on the size, maturity, and specific dynamics of destinations. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are often found in well-established and well-funded destinations, as they generally require having a secretariat with an office and staff, as well as a significant operating budget. For emerging destinations, a Public-Private Dialogue (PPD) mechanism will be adopted, which can help to foster close collaboration and coordination among key tourism stakeholders, yet does not require having a fixed secretariat or operating budget.

6.3 STATE TOURISM PERSPECTIVE PLAN

The Ministry of Tourism will support and provide necessary guidance for the development of a State Tourism Perspective Plan under Swadesh Darshan 2.0. The State Tourism Perspective Plan will be for a horizon of twenty years categorically with short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for guiding tourism development in our State. The plan will ensure that tourism development is carried out in a planned manner for socio-economic development of the state. The Department of Tourism of Assam will seek a partnership with the Ministry of Tourism to help develop the State Tourism Perspective Plan.

6.4 PREPARATION OF DESTINATION MASTER PLANS

The Department of Tourism of Assam

will request the Ministry of Tourism to support the development of master plans for one or two destinations within the state. Selection of these pilot destinations will be based on criteria that should be agreed upon by key tourism stakeholders including the private sector. The master plans should include recommendations on core product development, safety and sanitization, site infrastructure, access/transport, marketing and promotion, capacity building, destination management structures, digitization, inclusion etc. The master plans should be closely monitored and revised periodically to incorporate the latest developments at the destinations.

6.5 MODEL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Tourism will work with the Ministry of Tourism to select and develop model tourist destinations. The focus of the program will be the holistic development of iconic sights with wide appeal to both international and domestic tourists. The North-East region has been accorded priority for development under various themes and initiatives of the Government.

6.6 SPECIAL TOURISM ZONE CREATION

The Department of Tourism will work with the Ministry of Tourism to explore the creation of one or more Special Tourism Zones (STZ) in Assam in order to develop world class tourism infrastructure and services and attract private sector participation. Special Tourism Zones will be developed through a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), which will invite various private sector players to develop various



Ghanashyam's House, Assam

components of the STZ. In order to attract large-scale private investment, the Ministry of Tourism will provide assistance for developing basic support infrastructure and the Assam State Government will provide requisite incentives for attracting private players.

6.7 IDENTIFICATION OF NEW HILL DESTINATIONS

Assam's only hill station at Haflong in Dima Hasao has become an increasingly popular destination, based upon its serene and picturesque beauty, trekking facilities on the Borail range, the mysterious Jatinga, introduction of adventure sports such as paragliding, and ethnic cuisines. It still requires important investments, particularly in terms of transport and accommodations. Meanwhile, it is thought that there is potential to develop other hill stations in the state of Assam. Employing a demand-based approach that includes close consultation with the travel trade, one or two other destinations could be identified for development.

6.8 DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TOURISM CIRCUITS

The Department of Tourism can first develop a classification system through which destinations are divided into key themes such as wildlife, religious/spirituality, adventure, medical/wellness, etc. The themes can then be used to develop new circuits, taking into consideration geographic proximity and access. Some of the circuits that have been preliminarily signaled as high priority in Assam are tea tourism, golfing, and off-the-beaten-track destinations. The Department of Tourism proposes to build up schemes for these circuits with the help of other stakeholders. Specific

circuit development initiatives may include development of a brand and promotional campaign for the circuit, creation of thematic maps and other informative materials, signage creation, specialized training for key service providers, and transport and tourism infrastructure upgrades.

6.9 GUWAHATI KAMAKHYA RIVER FRONT DEVELOPMENT

Smart City Guwahati has recently initiated a three-year riverfront development initiative. The new development will include a park, gardens, recreation/health facilities, an exhibition space, a model fish market, and a riverside boulevard featuring craft and food stalls. The Department of Tourism will provide ongoing technical assistance to the project to ensure it will afford a high-quality experience for visitors and encourage private sector investment and management.

6.10 ORGANIZATION AND PROMOTION OF EVENTS & FESTIVALS

The Department of Tourism will continue to submit a list of events and festivals to the Ministry of Tourism to be featured in their annual events calendar and the Utsav portal. The Department of Tourism will also promote these events and festivals as part of their own marketing efforts and encourage tour operators to incorporate them into their packages. Additionally, the Department of Tourism will provide small grants to organizers of events and festivals that have potential to enhance the visitor experience. The Department of Tourism will also explore the feasibility of "live darshan" through the Utsav portal at important religious sites in Assam.

Chapter 7

Promoting Tourism Sector Investment

7.1 PROMOTING INVESTMENT IN TOURISM SECTOR


Tourism growth is to be led by the private sector. A positive eco-system for operating businesses and investment will be key. This requires investing in enabling core infrastructure so that the private sector finds it attractive to invest

in the State. Additionally, effective policy creation and planning will be important to provide a long-term view and sense of security to the private sector.

7.2 DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Department of Tourism will develop





a Tourism Investment Strategy, which is an important instrument for identifying public and private investments that can generate strong returns and widespread benefits for stakeholders. The investment strategy should identify supply-side private investment needs, enabling public investments needed to unlock demand, and cross-cutting investment mobilization instruments and policies. It should also provide recommendations on key investment promotion issues such as incentives, subsidies, and access to finance. The strategy can explore how to bring investment to lesser known destinations and under-developed tourism assets.

7.3 FILLING KEY ACCOMMODATIONS GAPS THROUGH NEW INVESTMENTS

The quantity and quality of accommodation in the state is unable to adequately meet market demands. This is the case both in primary and secondary destinations. Gaps have been identified particularly for mid-level accommodation, including 3 to 4-star hotels. One of the areas that is most lacking is around tea estates, although discussions are underway with some investors. The Tourism Investment

Strategy can help better identify the most significant gaps in accommodation, both in terms of type and location. It will also provide guidance on how to proactively promote investment to help fill those gaps.

7.4 PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

The PPP mechanism is very important for bringing investment as well as management at various destinations. The State of Assam has a PPP policy that provides the relevant framework and set of procedures. However, the processes prescribed can be long and cumbersome, which can discourage investment. It will therefore be important to review the current PPP framework, particularly in relation to tourism investments, to identify opportunities for streamlining the approval process.

7.5 MANAGEMENT OF ATDC ASSETS BY ESTABLISHED PRIVATE PLAYERS

More than half of ATDC's assets are already being managed privately through PPP arrangements. Transferring management to private entities is an ongoing process through which ATDC aims to eventually have all its assets under private management while avoiding



Holi festival in Assam

adding additional public investments in areas that are being served by the private sector. However, in some cases for new or remote destinations, ATDC is unable to find interested or suitable private sector partners, so for a limited time, ATDC will continue to manage essential services to encourage further development.

ATDC will review its current procedures and processes with the aim of being able to better attract reputable private sector partners and make its assets more competitive. Additionally, the Department of Tourism will explore potential opportunities for tourist accommodation, tour operations and craft facilities to be fully privatized.

7.6 IMPROVING TOURISM ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

It has been observed that obtaining permissions and clearances from many different departments is an onerous task for investors in the hospitality sector, as well as producers who want to shoot films or web series in the state. Therefore, the process for obtaining permissions and clearances will be streamlined. The Department of Tourism will create a single-window clearance system for investors and film makers. The hospitality and tourism sector should be included under various initiatives taken by the Department of Industries and Commerce like the Ease of Doing Business platform and the MSME Facilitation of Establishments & Operations Act. The Department of Tourism will also explore the feasibility of granting industry status to the tourism sector for the purpose of various state government programs.

7.7 RATIONALIZATION OF TAXATION

Rationalization of taxation is required to make businesses within the hospitality

industry more competitive. The current taxation rates are higher than most competing tourism destinations. As such, the current tax regime including all costs and procedures for tourism operations needs to be reviewed and rationalized.

7.8 REFINING INVESTMENT INCENTIVES AND SUBSIDIES

The Assam State Government already provides a range of incentives and subsidies to attract investment into the tourism sector. These cover accommodation, cruise boats, home stays, and film production. They include tax reimbursements, capital investment subsidies, and contributions towards expenses for approach road construction, renewable energy, etc.

Yet, the incentives and subsidies have had mixed success in recent years. It will therefore be important to conduct a review of the current incentive and subsidy schemes to determine which have been most effective and which need to be altered or replaced. The review could be conducted as part of the tourism investment strategy development process.

Some ideas to consider for providing long-term land leases on favorable terms and giving infrastructure status to hospitality projects which will help the investors to access bank financing with longer terms and lower interest rates. As part of the review, other state's tourism incentives and subsidies should be benchmarked to determine which best practices should be replicated in Assam. It will also be important to study how state-level schemes can be harmonized with those at the national level.



Chapter 8

Marketing, Branding and Promotion

8.1 NEED FOR A COHERENT MARKETING STRATEGY

Marketing and promotion are keys to generation of demand and driving both visitor arrivals and expenditure. A coherent marketing and promotion strategy is required to make Assam a top notch destination. The basis of the marketing strategy should be the prioritization of key source markets and

market segments. Ideally, this should be informed by market research to better understand each market's interests, alignment with Assam's product offerings, yields, and growth potential. In designing a marketing strategy, it will be important to collaborate closely with the Ministry of Tourism. It will also be critical for the private sector to be closely involved in the process so as to promote synergy and collaboration.





8.2 KEY MARKETING INITIATIVES

The marketing strategy will outline all the specific initiatives to be undertaken. It will include a combination of the following activities, which have been undertaken in past years:

- Participation in national tourism fairs and a select number of international fairs
- Conducting road shows in strategically selected national and international markets, organized along themes such as film tourism, tea & golf tourism, river tourism, wildlife and nature tourism, agri and rural tourism, medical & wellness tourism, adventure tourism etc.
- Organizing familiarization tours for national and international tour operators, as well as travel media such as magazine/newspaper journalists, bloggers and social media influencers
- Development of print materials such as travel guides, leaflets, maps, and coffee-table books
- Launching a targeted advertising campaign in national print media
- Participating in meetings and forums to help facilitate travel from neighboring countries
- Budget permitting, national television advertising and the organization of a travel mart in Assam will also be considered. Also, increased focus will be placed on digital marketing, as outlined in the following section.

8.3 DIGITAL MARKETING

The official Awesome Assam digital platform shall be upgraded to contain more useful holiday planning tools such as interactive maps, more detailed activity descriptions, and listings of private sector operators. An accompanying mobile application will

also be developed that allows direct booking of the state's tourism products and activities and helps tourists to locate these attractions.

Awesome Assam's social media presence will also be expanded, with continual generation of compelling content. It will also explore new ways of engaging with customers such as competitions and giveaways. User generated content (UGC) will also be leveraged on social media and other online platforms to expand its reach.

The Department of Tourism will pursue online marketing partnerships with Online Travel Agencies (OTAs). Additionally, capacity building initiatives will be initiated to help marketing officers effectively design and manage digital marketing campaigns.

8.4 CONNECTING WITH ASSAM DIASPORA

The Assam Diaspora represents an important market segment that can be tapped into to increase visitation to the state. The Department of Tourism will encourage NRIs and PIOs to "rediscover their roots". The Assam Diaspora will be encouraged and incentivized to visit Assam for special events such as the Ambubachi Mela, Bihu, Durga Puja and other major events. The overseas Assamese community can also serve as ambassadors for Assam tourism and can contribute significantly in promoting the visitation of others in their respective countries of residence.

8.5 DOMESTIC MARKETING

The domestic tourism market is critical for Assam, as the number of domestic tourists visiting the state far exceeds the number of international tourists. To further promote domestic tourism, the Department of Tourism should



Asharikandi, Dhubri, Assam

participate aggressively in the “Dekho Apna Desh” campaign run by Ministry of Tourism. To support the domestic marketing effort, promotional offices/ kiosks have been opened in New Delhi and Kolkata. Others can be opened within strategically selected cities such as Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Goa, and Chennai.

Promotional activities should aim to raise awareness of some of the state’s lesser-known destinations, as well as important fairs and festivals. Additionally, schools and colleges can be encouraged to organize excursions to various destinations in the state.

8.6 STRENGTHENING THE ASSAM TOURISM BRAND

The Awesome Assam brand was created to communicate the state’s exotic beauty and uniqueness. Although it has become better known in recent years, it still lacks the strength of some other Indian state tourism brands. As part of the state’s tourism marketing strategy, efforts will be made to increase awareness of the brand in Assam’s key markets. One important initiative will be the selection of a new brand ambassador that will represent the state in promotional campaigns and at important events.

The umbrella of Awesome Assam brand will be expanded to include sub-brands targeting specific sectors such as tea & golf tourism, river tourism, wildlife and nature tourism, agri and rural tourism, medical & wellness tourism, adventure tourism etc.

8.7 CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

A public relation (PR) crisis occurs when negative events or reviews threaten to impact the brand’s reputation. The

experience of COVID-19 demonstrated the need for a clear plan and cohesive, constantly updated information protocols.

Bad PR such as related to a crime or health/security incidents is likely at some point, and how the destination responds can determine how detrimental the impact becomes. It is important to limit the damage to the brand and emerge unscathed. In order to limit potential fallout from crises, it will be important for the Department of Tourism to define, along with other relevant government agencies, a set of procedures for producing timely and effective crisis communications. These procedures can be developed using the State’s Public-Private Dialogue mechanism and adopt a safety-first and information-transparency approach.

8.8 MARKET DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR MSMEs

Accessing markets can be highly challenging for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), who often lack the requisite know-how. Digital tools and platforms (such as Airbnb, Viator, GetYourGuide etc) offer MSMEs an unprecedented opportunity to directly connect with tourists. Most MSMEs are yet to take advantage of these digital portals and other marketing tools and require training and support. Therefore, a training course and ongoing technical assistance should be provided to tourism MSMEs to allow them to harness these digital portals as well as more traditional marketing channels. The program should be offered for accommodations, food businesses, artisans, guides and other tourism services.



Chapter 9

Statistics Collection and Research

9.1 SYSTEMATIC COLLECTION OF DATA ON ASSAM TOURIST VISITATION LEVELS

Robust visitor data collection is essential for tourism destination planning, management, and monitoring. To improve its visitation data collection efforts, the Department of Tourism will bolster its current system so as to provide better estimates for international and domestic tourism visitation to the state. This could be through a combination of guest statistics from accommodations, visitation statistics at popular sites, and perhaps even usage of big data (such as

data gathered from telecommunication providers).

9.2 DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF VISITOR SURVEYS

Visitor surveys are one of the destination's most valuable tourism management and marketing tools. They enable more strategic decision making and higher returns on investments. More specifically, the survey should provide key data such as visitor demographics, travel patterns, satisfaction levels, and expenditures. The Department of Tourism will design the survey and





Tea Garden in Dibrugarh, Assam

administer it twice per year, in the high and low seasons. It will be administered at key exit points such as the Guwahati airport. The survey should be conducted annually so as to not only gain valuable baseline information in the first year, but also to be able to discern important changes and trends in subsequent years. The Department of Tourism will analyze the results, publish an annual report on the findings, and disseminate it to stakeholders through a link on its website.

9.3. INVENTORY OF TOURISM BUSINESSES

Tourism business inventories are important for measuring supply-side capacity, growth, and employment generation. The Department of Tourism will therefore design a tourism business inventory questionnaire and develop a corresponding methodology for its administration. It will then undertake tourism business inventory exercises no less than once every two years. More specifically, the inventory will collect data in areas such as the number and type of establishments, location, full capacity, and number of employees (broken down by age and gender). The gender of business-owners and managers will also be included in the inventory and gender disaggregated reports to be produced for tracking the progress in the state towards gender equity.

9.4 ENHANCING MARKET RESEARCH CAPACITY

Other areas of market research that would help support strategic planning and decision making include a comparative analysis of competitor destinations, benchmarking of global best practices, and consumer research

regarding strategic segments and source markets.

9.5 COLLABORATION WITH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Some of the research mentioned in the preceding sections can come from or be produced in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism. Relevant datasets will also be sourced from other national and international agencies. The private sector is another important partner in market research. In some cases, they produce their own data which can be utilized by the Department of Tourism. In other cases, their active participation and collaboration will be important for the Department of Tourism's data collection efforts. Collaboration can also take place with universities and other higher educational institutions with hospitality and tourism research capabilities. These could be institutions based in Assam or elsewhere in India.

9.6. RESEARCH DISSEMINATION TO THE INDUSTRY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Much of the tourism data collected and market research undertaken will be relevant for other stakeholders as well. This includes other government agencies at the state and national level, tourism business owners/managers, and prospective investors. As such, all data and research should be widely disseminated through mechanisms such as the Department of Tourism website and quarterly newsletters or email bulletins. In some cases, presentations or seminars/webinars can be organized to present important findings to the industry and other key tourism sector stakeholders.



Parvati Pahar, Boko, Assam

Chapter 10

Institutional Framework, Stakeholder Engagement and Implementation Arrangements

10.1 TOURISM, A COMPLEX DOMAIN – NEEDS EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Tourism is a complex domain covering a wide range of activities spread across several Ministries, State Governments, Local Governments and the private sector. While the tourism industry is led by the private sector, the government has a crucial role in enabling tourism in terms of planning

and policy creation, developing cultural and natural resources, and investing in physical and social infrastructure. This requires effective governance for the tourism sector to grow in a sustainable manner and benefit a wide range of stakeholders across the state.

10.2 INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR TOURISM SECTOR IN ASSAM

The Department of Tourism, which





Borduwa Than, Borduwa, Assam

is the State Government's primary tourism body, has regulatory and promotional functions. But the private sector operates within the framework set by various other government agencies. It is well understood that successful tourism destinations require strong coordination and collaboration between the relevant public and private sector entities. As such, all principal tourism stakeholders should be involved in key aspects of tourism development and promotion through a participatory public-private dialogue (PPD).

10.3 ENSURING SUCCESSFUL OPERATION OF STATE-LEVEL PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIALOGUE (PPD)

Assam has utilized an ad hoc PPD to obtain important feedback from key stakeholders, most notably in the development of the tourism policy. Given the need for close collaboration between the public and private sectors, the Department of Tourism will seek to establish a more structured PPD group that will meet regularly. In establishing the PPD structure, some key best practices and lessons learned from tourism PPDs in other destinations will be applied. These include:

- Having a professional and totally neutral facilitator that can ensure the group stays on the appointed task.
- Having a non-hierarchical structure.
- Maintaining a relatively small group of participants (10-15 people) that represent the key stakeholder groups and demonstrate gender equity.
- Clearly defining the group's objectives and priority intervention areas.
- Holding regular meetings (ideally

once per month) during a defined time period.

10.4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Tourism development and promotion requires engagement with a very diverse set of stakeholders. As such, stakeholder engagement will be essential for the success of the policy. Stakeholders should be involved in the roll out and implementation of the policy. This should include presenting the policy and action plan to stakeholders, involving them in specific initiatives and events, and periodically updating them on implementation. Policy development and updating should be ensured to incorporate gender considerations.

10.5 COLLABORATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF TOURISM

The national tourism policy highlights a number of areas in which collaboration with State Departments of Tourism will be important. In the case of Assam, some of the most relevant areas are highlighted below and elsewhere in the document.

- Working proactively towards promoting and developing sustainable and responsible tourism, including through the roll out of sustainable tourism criteria for tourism businesses in Assam.
- Helping implement national service quality standards.
- Working to prepare strategies for the development of various tourism sub-sectors such as tea & golf tourism, river tourism, wildlife and nature tourism, agri and rural tourism, medical & wellness tourism, adventure tourism etc.



Khaspur, Cachar, Assam



Son Beel, Karimganj, Assam

- Working to ensure safe and hygienic conditions for tourists.
- Working with stakeholders in preparing a perspective plan for the State, master planning of destinations and their development.
- Jointly promoting tourism to the State in overseas markets, including through participation at major international travel fairs.

10.6 STATE LEVEL COORDINATION

The PPD will be the primary state level coordination mechanism. However, a separate mechanism to promote synergy across levels of the State government and resolve inter-departmental issues could be created. The Inter-Departmental Coordination Committee on Tourism (IDCCT) may be

set up under the chairmanship of the Chief Secretary with representation from all relevant departments. The Department of Tourism would provide the necessary adequate support.

10.7 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION STRUCTURE

Implementation of the policy will be the primary responsibility of the Department of Tourism, to be carried out by the Directorate of Tourism and Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). An accompanying action plan will set specific milestones and timelines. The Chief Secretary will appoint a policy implementation focal point that will monitor implementation of the action plan and periodically report on progress, gaps, and delays.



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