



Exploring the Potential of Tourism for Tiwa Community Empowerment in Assam

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Abstract

The Tiwa community, which is an indigenous tribe of Assam has its own cultural and historical association with the natural resources of the area. However, the community undergoes socio-economic constraints in terms of resources, capital, economic activities and facilities. Tourism is one of the best ways and a noble venture that the community can embark on through the preservation of cultural practices, income generating Activities and the development initiatives. This paper encompasses an analysis on how tourism can be used to empower the Tiwa people in Assam and the potential that can improve the social welfare of the people while preserving their cultural resource. The study also investigate the factors that could potentially suppress tourism development in areas inhabited by the Tiwa people; such as lack of infrastructure and governmental support as well as awareness of cultural heritage tourism. The study calls for community based sustainable tourism that embraces Tiwa culture, resources, and contemporary socio-economic realities for a sustainable gain.

Introduction

The Tiwa community is one of the largest Scheduled Tribe (ST) of Assam resides in Karbi Anglong, Morigaon, and Nagaon districts. The Tiwa people are confined to their known tradition, language, and culture the society has confined them to a negligible economy. Tourism, particularly cultural and eco-tourism, is increasingly seen as a sustainable alternative to resource-extractive industries in fragile ecosystems like Assam. Utilising Tiwa community cultural resource, tourism can enhance community economic status by providing factors of production as seen in homestay accommodation, sale of ornaments, cultural instruments etc and many more. Tourism has significant potential to empower the Tiwa community in Assam, particularly by promoting cultural heritage and generating employment opportunities. Certain cultural practices, like the Tiwa folk traditions, Junbeel Mela and Many other fastivals of the Tiwa tribe can draw cultural tourists, which promotes economic growth and preserves traditional knowledge. Initiatives related to eco-tourism and sustainable tourism may also improve community involvement while protecting the environment. Tourism's incorporation into Tiwa culture has the potential to help the community on a larger social and economic level.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the possibility for tourism in the territories inhabited by Tiwa community in the region of Assam.
2. To identify the opportunities and challenges for the Tiwa community in engaging with tourism.
3. To propose strategies for sustainable, community-led tourism that empowers the Tiwa people economically and culturally.

Literature Review

Tourism has been widely regarded as a development tool for indigenous communities. Studies across various countries highlight the role of cultural and eco-tourism in improving the socio-economic status of indigenous people while also protecting their cultural heritage (Coria&Calfucura, 2012). By fostering community involvement, tourism can empower local populations to control their resources and narratives. Tourism encourages the preservation of traditional practices and languages, ensuring cultural continuity. Community and environmental based sustainable tourism measures will act as vehicles for employment and raising physical infrastructure of the community while at the same time protecting the environment. Assam, with its diverse flora, fauna, and indigenous cultures, has considerable tourism potential. However, tourism remains underdeveloped in many regions, including areas inhabited by the Tiwa community, due to inadequate infrastructure and promotion. Limited road connectivity and lack of accommodation facilities hinder tourist access to these rich cultural and natural resources. Studies suggest that strategic marketing and community involvement in tourism planning can enhance visibility and attract visitors (Alamineh et al.,2023). Moreover, eco-tourism initiatives could support local economies while ensuring environmental sustainability (Baruah, 2023). Tourism development, when approached from a community-led perspective, can provide a platform for indigenous people to share their culture while also reaping economic benefits. However, empowerment must ensure the community retains control over decision-making, ensuring that tourism aligns with their cultural values. The study has revealed that community based

tourism (CBT) enables the indigenous people to be involved in the planning and management of tourism thus enabling them to share their culture and at the same time increase on the economic returns. For example, Manyara and Jones (2007) have revealed that CBT in Kenya has enabled local Maasai communities to manage tourism development according to their cultural practices, which in turn has led to more sustainable tourism and economic benefits that circulate within the community. Dangi and Jamal (2016) suggested on sustainable community-based tourism discovered that if the locals especially the indigenous people are empowered to make decisions on the use of their resources then tourism can be used to promote economic development while at the same time conserving culture and heritage. They argue that empowering indigenous communities can mitigate the negative effects of mass tourism while promoting cultural integrity and environmental sustainability. Bezborah (2022) highlighted that rural tourism in Assam has a vast scope as 98.4% of the total geographical area of the state is rural. He insists that if well planned and developed and much effort is put into it, rural tourism could greatly enhance the economic status of the communities. This potential can be realized only if both the public and private sectors are involved, and the local communities are engaged. Bezdebor also points out that rural tourism is also a way for communities to express their cultural values, which is also a way of socio-cultural development besides economic one. He emphasizes that tourism stakeholders should understand and respond to the opportunities of rural tourism for the sustainable development of society, culture and economy. Gaonkhowa(2023) points out that public awareness about Assam's tourism potential remains low, which further hampers growth. Without proper initiatives from the government to enhance awareness and promote tourism, the state's industry will continue to lag behind, despite its natural advantages. This aligns with previous studies that have identified the importance of government intervention and strategic tourism policies to foster growth in the sector (Manyara & Jones, 2007; Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Consequently, improving infrastructure, ensuring safety, and raising awareness among locals are key steps toward unlocking Assam's untapped tourism potential. Supporting the statement, Gogoi(2017) suggested that collaboration among public, private, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is essential for addressing the challenges faced by the tourism sector.

Methodology

The present study employs both qualitative and quantitative research to investigate the possibility of using tourism to build competency in Tiwa people. The study involved:

Primary Data Collection: Official surveys and meetings with both people of Tiwa communities in Karbi Anglong and Morigaon districts as well as the local government authorities and representatives of the regional tourism industry.

Secondary Data Collection: Based on previous works regarding indigenous tourism, governmental reports focusing on tourism development in Assam, and findings of tourism-related entities.

Results and Discussion

1. Opportunities for Tourism development



Figure1: Key areas for tourism growth

- 1.1 *Cultural Heritage and Festivals:* The Tiwa community celebrates some special festivals like Wanshuwa and yangli which can also act as a pull factor to cultural tourism(Gargi et al,2024). Celebrating this festivals could attract tourists for watching real indigenous rituals, music or dance forms.

- 1.2 *Ecotourism Potential:* The natural landscape in and around Tiwa-inhabited regions offers significant opportunities for ecotourism. Tourists can engage in activities such as trekking, bird watching, and visiting traditional villages. The sustainable use of these natural resources can create job opportunities for local communities.
- 1.3 *Handicrafts and Local Arts:* The Tiwa women are specialized in handloom and weaving. Supporting handicrafts through tourism opens new income opportunities for artisans as well as helps to sustain the crafts.
- 1.4 *Culinary Tourism:* In culinary tourism there is also possibility to demonstrate the Tiwa's food culture as an essential aspect of tourism. Local homemade meals and unique recipes, preparation methods and local ingredients can interest gourmands and offer tourists true Tiwa cultural tasting. Marketing culinary tourism does not only improve the economy's revenue by boosting the small food businesses and local farmers, but also helping to maintain Multiple food customs. Through successful incorporation of the food tourism product into the tourism supply, the Tiwa community can offer innovative form of tourist attractions, such as food tours, cookery demonstrations, and eating places that set them apart in the market.

2. Challenges to Tourism Development

- 2.1 *Lack of Infrastructure:* The undeveloped transport networks, communication and physical infrastructures such as roads, transport vehicles and accommodation are some of the constraints that hinder tourism development in Tiwa regions.
- 2.2 *Limited Awareness and Marketing:* A lack of promotion and marketing strategies keeps Tiwa regions unknown to many people as a possible tourist destination. Preferably, few tourists have a clue of both cultural and natural endowments in these territories.
- 2.3 *Cultural Sensitivity and Control:* Despite the positive economic impacts connected with tourism, there are threats to the Tiwa people's cultural identity. Tourism could make cultures become commercialized and thus turning around and eradicating traditional cultures.
- 2.4 *Economic Barriers:* The majority of the Tiwa people remain poor, and they cannot afford to embrace the economic benefits of investing in tourism ventures such as homestays, local crafts, and guiding services. This in turn hinders their potential to exploit the full potential tourist markets. Even some of the best ideas may not get the necessary funding to be successful and thus the community shall lack the crucial demand to create a sustainably self-supporting tourist industry.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 3.1 Community-Led Tourism Initiatives: Tourism development should be led by the Tiwa community to ensure cultural preservation. Training programs in hospitality, guiding, and handicraft production can empower locals to take ownership of the tourism industry.
- 3.2 Government and NGO Support: The government and non-governmental organizations and the tourism stakeholders must therefore work together in the development of this infrastructure as well as the promotion of Tiwa culture. Public private partnerships can also offer funding and infrastructure for the development of tourism amenities.
- 3.3 Promotion of Sustainable Ecotourism: Ecotourism can be a very important tool in the conservation of the environment and at the same time provide income for the people. Conservation measures must be linked with tourism activities for the continuity of the programs in the future.
- 3.4 3.4. Cultural Awareness Campaigns: It is important that the Tiwa people should find ways on how to introduce their culture to the tourists and at the same time, encourage them to be responsible tourists. Tourist should be able to respect the Tiwa community and not interfere with their culture and their way of living.

Conclusion

Tourism has significant potential to empower the Tiwa community in Assam by providing economic growth, job creation, and opportunities for cultural preservation. By showcasing the Tiwa's rich heritage, including traditional festivals, handlooms, and unique customs, tourism can foster pride within the community while generating income. However, it is crucial that tourism development be approached in a sustainable and culturally sensitive way to prevent the exploitation of resources and heritage. For tourism to be beneficial, the Tiwa people must be actively involved in decision-making processes, ensuring that they maintain control over their cultural assets and the direction of tourism in their region. Governmental support through infrastructure development, promotion of the Tiwa culture, and sustainable tourism policies can play a pivotal role in this process. The paper emphasizes the importance of community-driven tourism models, where local ownership and involvement are prioritized, helping to balance economic benefits with the preservation of the Tiwa's unique cultural identity.

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