

TOURISM AND COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES IN MEGHALAYA: A PERCEPTION-BASED STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Even though visitors' stays in tourist destinations are brief, the effects of their actions can be very noticeable on the host communities. Tourism improves the quality of life for inhabitants in popular tourist areas. Most of these tourism-related effects (which can be good or bad) have been looked at from economic, social, cultural, and environmental angles. The purpose of this study is to explore how local residents perceive the impact of tourism and whether these perceptions affect how satisfied they are with local tourism management. Residents' perceptions and attitudes on the effects of tourism are expected to be a key planning and policy consideration for the successful development, promotion, and administration of present and upcoming programmes and initiatives. For this study, 250 residents staying nearby various tourist destinations in Meghalaya were surveyed from 2018-2021. The issues discussed include the pricing strategy for goods and services, closing service quality gaps, promoting and developing cultural tourism, and protecting the environment through the best practices of responsible and sustainable tourism.

KEYWORDS: Residents, Community, Tourism, Meghalaya

I INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a significant driver of economic growth in developing countries and sustainable tourism promotes this growth (Eugenio-Martin et al., 2004). Physical aspects of the travel experience are produced by the interaction of variables that influence supply and demand and change over time. A destination evolves through a number of stages, including discovery, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline or rejuvenation (Butler, 1980).

These stages have an impact on the opinions of the residents. With each step of the life cycle, local attitudes toward tourism change. The existence of tourism and the viability of tourism destinations depend heavily on the availability of resources and the degree to which these resources are managed, developed, and upgraded sustainably to meet tourist expectations and local requirements at the destination (Uysal et al., 2011). The degree of interaction between the visitor and the visited also affects the nature of the concrete and intangible benefits of tourism (Freytag & Vietze, 2013). As such, the growth of infrastructure, the protection of natural and cultural resources, and the transfer of management, technical, and technological skills are further ways in which tourism may help (Hall & Brown, 2006). The improvement of the community's general quality of life has been facilitated by the construction of infrastructure, as well as the provision of health and educational services (Figuerola et al., 2017). Ap and Crompton (1993) measured the various stages of tourism involvement in a

host community in an effort to distil the complex relationship between resident perceptions and tourist relationships.

When it comes to economic diversification, rural economic development frequently aims to strike a compromise between preserving the desirable aspects of rural life and advancing the economic well-being of the region. A variety of local businesses may have the opportunity to expand as a consequence of increasing tourism and commerce in rural regions (McGehee & Andereck, 2004). Numerous studies have highlighted how profitable tourism is for local economies (Fredline and Faulkner, 2000). Additionally, Ritche (1984) points out that tourism fosters possible investment possibilities, boosting business activity in the local neighborhood. However, like other industries, tourism can bring changes to communities, such as a general disruption of residents' lives owing to increased population during the tourist season, increases in crime, displacement of residents by new developments, conflict in values, and impacts on the local culture. These changes may negatively alter the network of social ties and residents' affect for the community. Such disruptions may lead to feelings of alienation from the community and to a loss of an important dimension of rural living: a sense of belonging or attachment to one's community (McCool & Martin, 1994). Tourism may flourish and grow when residents recognize their role in its growth and adopt a positive attitude about it (Ambroz, 2008).

II METHODOLOGY

According to McIntosh and Goeldner (1984), a primary objective is to "create a framework for enhancing the standard of living of the people through the economic benefits of tourism." When planned properly, tourism can assist and maintain areas that may be experiencing economic or social deterioration. By addressing the economic, social, cultural, recreational, and other advantages of tourism, tourism development should aim to improve the quality of life for locals. The main information was gathered between 2018 and 2021 from several Meghalaya tourism destinations according to a schedule. The East Khasi Hills District received more attention because it is home to the majority of the tourist attractions. 250 residents made up the sample, and a one to five equal-interval scale was used to study respondents' perceptions. They represent the terms "bad," "acceptable," "good," "excellent," and "outstanding," respectively. Primary and secondary sources made up the data. In terms of economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors, the locals provided the field data. The variable names and their codes are listed in Annexure A. The frequency distribution, the central tendency measure (mainly the mean scores of the variables), and the standard deviation make up the data analysis tools. Using Cronbach Alpha, the acquired data's internal consistency and dependability were evaluated. For economic, social, cultural, and environmental perception, the values returned were 0.87, 0.86, 0.85 and 0.78 respectively, indicating a satisfactory degree of internal consistency of data.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the residents' profile and an examination of perception from an economic, social, cultural, and environmental perspective, the discussion are presented.

III.I Residents' profile

Based on data gathered in the field, a profile of the residents (Table 1) that includes gender, age, education level, marital status, number of children, and family size is presented. The residents are those who live close to tourist attractions for at least ten years or more. They

have improved their ability to recognize the expansion and growth of the tourist industry in Meghalaya in recent years. The majority of respondents were mostly between the ages of 26 and 35. As a result, we can confirm that younger locals are more positive and willing to assist tourists and contribute to the community. In Meghalaya, the majority of the tourism attractions are dispersed over rural areas. Therefore, rural areas account for the majority of the population. This explains why the majority of the sample's results indicated that their average educational attainment was <10th pass. The most desired kind of habitation is the nuclear family type. The majority of locals are also married without kids, which strengthens the rural economy and gives people in villages new options through tourism, which not only promotes visitor flows but also helps local communities.

Table 1: Residents profile

Variable	Category	Number	Average
Gender	Male	121	Mode = Female
	Female	129	
	Total	250	
Age	<26	70	Median = 26-35
	26-35	92	
	36-45	59	
	46-55	18	
	>55	11	
	Total	250	
Education Level	Illiterate	24	Median = <10 th pass
	<10 th pass	94	
	10 th pass	51	
	12 th pass	53	
	Grad & above	28	
	Total	250	
Marital Status	Single	97	Mode = Married
	Married	138	
	Separated	3	
	Divorcee	0	
	Widower	12	
	Total	250	
No. of Children	None	106	Median = None
	1-2	62	

	3-4	44	
	5-6	19	
	7 & above	19	
	Total	250	
Family Size	Nuclear	205	Median = Nuclear
	Extended	7	
	Joint	38	
	Total	250	

III.II Economic And Social Perception

In many nations, tourism has been an economic sector with rapid growth in recent years. It improves the knowledge and perception of a destination and generates value and jobs in the receiving countries (Tanrisever, 2003). According to the Residents purview, we can depict the highest economic variables as the price (3.36), job creation (3.29) and future potential (3.80). This is evident in Table 2, because for many communities, tourism is viewed as a crucial instrument for promoting local jobs, establishing new employment possibilities, especially for women, and boosting living conditions (Mason & Cheyne, 2000). Meghalaya has a wealth of natural resources, and is at a strategic location that gives it a competitive advantage over rival travel destinations. It has the capacity and resources necessary to develop into a major tourism destination. The host community starts to see the effects of tourism at this phase. Depending on how closely they are connected to the tourist industry, some of the residents go through the adjustment period while others do not. They struggle to decide whether to support or oppose the growth of tourism. When locals, particularly those who stand to gain financially from tourism, accept it and are receptive to its effects, they are said to have adopted it. The residents believe that pricing after future potential is the most crucial component since it increases state revenue, and they want the state to prosper in all respects.

The results show an average response from the residents with a mean of “three” approximately in most cases. Because tourism is still developing in this area, locals consider services like accommodation and transportation to be among the least important of all the other factors. In order to support the community and state as a whole, they also hope that additional tourism businesses and entrepreneurial possibilities are established. Hence, the lowest economic variables are estimated as accommodation services (3.00), transportation services (3.10), and number of tourism-related businesses (3.09). This entails involving the inhabitants and community in tourism-related enterprises so they may sell and promote local goods as well as provide additional information about Meghalaya tourism.

All human communities are subject to the phenomena of social change, which is a requirement in order to alter or replace the social structure to account for changing circumstances. People can improve larger social-ecological systems through learning from one another. Still change may be challenging, since people in Meghalaya have a strong attachment to their heritage and traditions. Contact with the visitors has various effects on the community's traditional values which may either be negative or positive. At the early stage of

tourism growth, residents are often welcoming to travelers and excited about the future of tourism. The presence of tourists has beneficial effects on the community as well. The arrival of tourists in a specific area helps to close the economic gap between the affluent and the poor, which in turn empowers the society at large. Tourists who are treated well raise awareness, which alters the societal view of the destination. From a local's point of view, connecting with tourists can help them develop their sense of local pride, share their expertise with guests, provide top-notch experiences, and improve their social skills. Hence, the highest social variables were found to include a welcoming and friendly attitude (3.50), competitive advantage (3.39), and empowerment (3.35). Most of the social variables also have an average mean of “three” approximately.

One issue that could have an impact on the community is how tourists interact with the host population when they might not be familiar with local norms, practices, and standards. Further, because tourists stay at the site, tourism can also have a negative impact on the community. Therefore, we may conclude that self-confidence (3.15), social Learning (3.14), and social transformation (3.17) are the lowest social variables according to Table 2.

Meghalaya is still establishing itself as a leading tourist destination, and it is acquiring new skills from tourists little by little. The residents too are learning a great deal from meeting tourists from various parts of the world. Accordingly, at least two languages, ideally Hindi and English, are required for locals working in the tourism business (apart from the native) so that there will be no communication barriers.

Table 2: Economic and Social perception

Economic Variables			Social Variables		
Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
E1	3.36	.84	S1	3.21	.73
E2	3.16	.91	S2	3.15	.77
E3	3.00	.90	S3	3.22	.76
E4	3.10	.94	S4	3.50	.78
E5	3.09	.97	S5	3.28	.84
E6	3.17	.89	S6	3.14	.82
E7	3.14	.91	S7	3.30	.92
E8	3.15	.89	S8	3.26	.92
E9	3.29	.99	S9	3.39	.95
E10	3.19	.88	S10	3.24	.97
E11	3.24	.89	S11	3.17	.89

E12	3.80	.80	S12	3.35	.86
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III.III Cultural and environmental perception

While seeking to escape the craziness of their daily lives, a destination has the potential to provide visitors with a delightful experience. Where tourists travel, is significantly influenced by their perspectives and attitudes. Meghalaya has a rich history and culture and the people here are known for their friendliness, cheerfulness, and hospitality. The state is home to many different artistic and artisanal styles. The residents like dancing and music a lot. It is a place where numerous tribes and races live side by side in harmony. In addition, Meghalaya is filled with year-round celebrations of fairs and festivals. Also, Meghalaya is known for its exquisite woodcarving, weaving, and bamboo products and has its own culture and tradition set. One of the primary means of support for the indigenous population of Meghalaya is the production of goods from cane and bamboo. These products are currently in high demand and have gained recognition on both the domestic and international markets. Jadoh, Ki Kpu, Tung rymbai, and pickled bamboo shoots are typical dishes of the Khasis and Jaintia; bamboo shoots are also a favorite food of the Garos.

Most of the residents (Table 3) believed that the culture aspect in the State is one of its most distinct unique features. It could contribute to the growth of the state's tourism industry. As a result, the highest cultural variables were computed to be cultural competitiveness (3.44), cultural infrastructure (3.22), and attitudes towards cultural promotion (3.22). The ultimate purpose of tourism is to enhance the traveler's quality of life, even though the pleasure derived from the experience may differ depending on the quantity and quality of time spent at a site, the standard of the services, as well as individual and situational variables. However, it is still in its infancy and has ways to go before it is fully developed. Additionally, it requires extensive promotion to succeed in this industry. As such, lowest cultural variables were recorded as marketing of cultural items (3.08), quality of cultural services (3.13), and values of tourism-related businesses (3.14). Most of the variables carried an average response of "three" approximately.

The lush, hilly, evergreen region of Meghalaya is renowned for its scenery and natural setting. Both domestic and foreign visitors have significantly increased in Meghalaya over the last ten years. As a result of tourism, there may be more parks, recreation spaces, and cultural facilities added, as well as a promotion of cultural events (Brunt & Courtney, 1999). Additionally, tourism may aid in the development of infrastructure, the preservation of natural and cultural resources, and the training and transfer of management, technical, and technological skills (Hall & Brown, 2006). One excellent trait shared by locals in Meghalaya is their dedication to cooperating as a society to conserve the environment. Therefore, natural setting (3.95), control on degradation of natural resources (3.80) and waste management of tourism-related businesses (3.80) were documented as the highest environmental variables. However, according to the residents, the misuse of tourist attractions in Meghalaya is endangering its natural and cultural resources. Deforestation, forest fragmentation, soil degradation, biodiversity loss, water body contamination, and silting are Meghalaya's main environmental challenges. This could be sewage, noise, air pollution, and overcrowding which is all strongly influenced by tourism. As such, overcrowding management (3.32), littering awareness (3.51), pollution controls (3.52) were assessed as the lowest environmental variables in the study.

Table 3: Cultural and Environmental perception

Cultural variables			Environmental Variables		
Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
C1	3.21	.86	EN1	3.60	.60
C2	3.22	.80	EN2	3.51	.65
C3	3.14	.83	EN3	3.52	.65
C4	3.08	.81	EN4	3.32	.74
C5	3.20	.85	EN5	3.95	.64
C6	3.13	.86	EN6	3.80	.50
C7	3.22	.90	EN7	3.76	.59
C8	3.44	.96	EN8	3.80	.72

IV FINDINGS

It is found that gender and proximity to tourist attractions have a significant impact on how locals perceive their surroundings. Tourism is a significant sector that affects the economic, social, cultural and environmental elements of tourist sites in both developing and advanced economies. There is still more that can be done to boost the tourism industry, which is still in its infancy. Since it requires a lot of labor, it creates chances for a wide range of jobs. In addition to enhancing culture, developing rural communities, and empowering women, tourism can also benefit environmental preservation. The association between at least one of the tourism consonances and resident satisfaction was mitigated by all of the demographic parameters considered. Despite all of its potential, Meghalaya's tourism sector is unable to grow to the level that is anticipated due to a number of related issues.

Infrastructural amenities at tourist destinations in terms of transportation, lodging, banking (e-services), drinking water, sanitation, and healthcare are either underdeveloped, or abominable. Construction of infrastructure for tourism reasons is currently given major attention by the state administration. In addition to all of these issues, tourists frequently experience difficulty blending in with the community. Increased sense of community pride, a strengthening of traditions and values, and an increase in volunteerism are just a few of the beneficial social effects of tourism that have been discovered. Additionally, for these respondents, the perceived economic benefit is the most crucial factor, and the perceived negative repercussions have little effect on their happiness. The requirement for competence,

decorum, and guest-friendly civility still needs to be made clear to the staff in the transportation and tourist industries.

V CONCLUSION

The effects and the stage of tourism development in the host community are clearly correlated (Allen et al., 1988). This study also highlights the importance of initial residents' attitudes toward tourism for community involvement in the sector, destination image formation, political support for development, and, ultimately, more sustainable development of the host community (Murphy, 1988). The digital revolution and low-cost airline have made travel more convenient and affordable. As more people travel, especially to remote locations, the earth's resources are depleted and local communities' lifestyles and quality of life are affected. The residents have good views throughout the early phases of tourism growth, but as the destination moves closer to stagnation; their attitudes start to turn negative. There is a void in understanding the importance of tourism as it is experienced by local residents and its implications for an effective destination brand. Also, residents are frequently excluded from the branding process, resulting in brands that convey only implicit connections to and a simplification of the essence of the area to be promoted.

In order to close this gap, the current study looks at residents' lived sense of place as the foundation and setting for experiencing a destination brand. Since they depend on elements like equality of status, similar goals, intergroup cooperation, and government support, positive interactions should be secured by coordinated efforts from several stakeholders. According to the residents perception most of the destinations in the West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills Districts, which have previously been neglected, are currently undergoing special development.

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VI ANNEXURE

Annexure A

Economic variables	Code	Social variables	Code
Pricing of tourism resources/attraction	E ₁	Communication skills	S ₁
Food-related Services	E ₂	Self confidence	S ₂
Accommodation-related services	E ₃	Self esteem	S ₃
Transportation-related services	E ₄	Welcoming and friendly attitude	S ₄
Number of tourism-related businesses	E ₅	Problem solving skills	S ₅
Items offered by tourism-related businesses	E ₆	Social learning	S ₆
Economic awareness of the entrepreneurs	E ₇	Tourism-oriented outlook	S ₇
Current levels of investment	E ₈	Business-oriented behavior	S ₈

Job creation	E ₉	Competitive advantage	S ₉
Economic vitality of tourism	E ₁₀	Tourism promotion	S ₁₀
Competitive advantage	E ₁₁	Social transformation	S ₁₁
Future potential	E ₁₂	Empowerment	S ₁₂
Cultural variables	Code	Environmental variables	Code
Display of cultural identity	C ₁	Traffic congestion	EN ₁
Attitudes towards cultural promotion	C ₂	Littering awareness	EN ₂
Values of tourism-related businesses	C ₃	Pollution control	EN ₃
Marketing of cultural items	C ₄	Overcrowding management	EN ₄
Accessibility towards cultural resources	C ₅	Natural setting	EN ₅
Quality of cultural services	C ₆	Control on degradation of natural resources	EN ₆
Cultural infrastructure	C ₇	Focus on environmental preservation	EN ₇
Cultural competitiveness	C ₈	Waste management of tourism of tourism-related businesses	EN ₈