

## **A STUDY ON SCOPE FOR DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM IN VILLAGES OF SMALL TOWNS WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARIMGANJ DISTRICT OF ASSAM**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business. This type of tourism enhances the revenue of government of a country as well as earnings of the rural community. The government at present introduced four rural tourism projects at four resourceful villages of Assam. The present study makes an attempt to search the potentials that are available even in the villages of small towns of Assam with special reference to Karimganj district. The study observed that the district is rich in its cultural, historical and natural beauty with Forts, Crematory, temples, rivers and wet lands etc. There lies huge potential in the district to attract tourists from all around the world and if the spots are recognized by the Government and if needy steps are being taken with cooperation from the Ministry of Tourism and State Government then it could help in the development of the region.*

**Key Words:** *Rural Tourism, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Continuous Monitoring.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Rural tourism simply means a form of tourism takes place in rural areas, provides employment and income to local people and offering individualized holiday products to consumers. Rural tourism is based on accommodation service which is complemented by additional services and facilities relying on the local social, cultural and natural resources, which are exploited according to the principles of sustainable development. Rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists. According to Rátz & Puczkó, it seems to be simple to define rural tourism as ‘tourism that takes place in the countryside’, but this definition does not include the complexity of the activity and the different forms and meanings developed in different countries. According to a broader definition, ‘rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business’. If this broader concept is accepted, rural tourism covers not only farm tourism, which is what rural tourism means for most people, but also special interest nature holidays, touring in rural areas, and the services include accommodation plus events, festivities, gastronomy, outdoor recreation, production and sale of handicrafts and agricultural products.. How-ever, it is impossible to find a concrete universal definition of rural tourism. It can be different from country to country and time to time, but it has many potential benefits for including employment growth, an expanded economic base, repopulation, social improvement, and revitalization of local crafts.

### **2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

In almost all the countries the general trend is people of rural area shifted towards urban area due to lack of employment which leads to increase the different problem like housing, slums, transport, water supply, sanitation, water pollution, air pollution, and inadequate provision for social infrastructure. Again, travelling in different places can increase the knowledge and ideas of the tourist. It has been observed from the different study that the trend of rural tourism is increasing in developed countries resulting into increase the rural economy as well as the knowledge and taste of tourist. In this treatise, the present study is illuminate to investigate the scope of rural tourism in the Karimganj district of Assam since the state has abundance of natural and forest resources with different diversified culture and tradition

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of this study are

1. To identify the places and merchandise of different place of karimganj district of Assam to attract the tourist

2. To examine the problems associated in developing tourism
3. To make possible recommendation and suggestion which help to make a platform to initiate the concept of rural tourism in the district of Karimganj.

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is empirical in nature. The study is conducted based on mainly primary data, which is collected through field survey. The information gathers by using snow ball sampling method from the respondents who have knowledge of history of the different rural places of karimganj. Besides, secondary data and pertinent literature was compiled from published and documented sources. Such sources are Government Report on Tourism, Local Tourism Centre, Government offices of Tourism and from the different websites

#### 5. PROFILE OF KARIMGANJ DISTRICT

Karimganj District is located in the Southern tip of Assam - a state in the North-eastern corner of India. Together with two other neighboring districts - Cachar and Hailakandi - it constitutes the Barak Valley zone in Southern Assam. Total area of the district is 1809 Sq.Kms. which comprises varied geographical features like agricultural plains, shallow wetlands, hilly terrains and forests. As in 1997-98, total forest cover in the district is more than 54 thousand hectares. That is about 30% of total geographical area is covered by forest.

The geographical location of Karimganj district is between longitudes 92°15' and 92°35' east and latitudes 24°15' and 25°55' North. The district is bounded on the North by Bangladesh and Cachar district; on the South by Mizoram and Tripura states, on the West by Bangladesh and Tripura and on the East by Hailakandi district. Located strategically, the district shares 92 Kms. of International Border with the neighboring country of Bangladesh, 41 Kms of this is demarcated by the river Kushiara while 51 Kms is land border. On some stretches, there is no natural geographical demarcation for the border which cuts across open agricultural or grazing fields. However, on most parts, the international border with Bangladesh is marked by either the river Kushiara, or the sub-mountain tracts of the Adamail range. In a sense, Karimganj, along with the neighbouring district of Cachar demarcates the frontier between the plains of the Padma-Meghna basin and the hilly North-east India. Karimganj is one of the districts of Assam. It comprises only one sub- division which is also named as Karimganj. Below this level, there are 5 Revenue Circles (Tehsils), namely - Karimganj, Badarpur, Nilambazar, Patherkandi and Ramkrishna Nagar. Furthermore, from developmental angle, the district is divided into 7 Community Development Blocks - North Karimganj, South Karimganj, Badarpur, Patherkandi, Ramkrishna Nagar, Dullavcherra and Lowairpoa. Below the block level set-up, there are 96 Gram Panchayats each comprising about ten villages on the average and governed by local-self bodies. From the angle of Police administration, the district area is divided among 5 Police stations - Karimganj, Badarpur, Patherkandi, Ramkrishna Nagar and Ratabari.

#### 6. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

**Table 1: Visiting Places**

<b>Karimganj</b>	Latu
	Sutarkandi
	Badarpur Ghat
	Sanbill
	Baropunji

*Source: Developed from Field Survey*

**Sutarkandi:** A village located at the border of Karimganj district of India and Syllhet district of Bangladesh. This place has its own significance because of its location, as it shares its border with Bangladesh. The village is situated at a distance of 10 kilometres away from the Karimganj town and is well connected by road with the district headquarter (Karimganj district). The Assam Agricultural Research Centre which is situated between Karimganj town and Sutarkandi, has the potentials to attract tourists and Researchers from different destinations.

The government of India has already taken steps to open an international market at sutarkandi with a view to exchange goods and services and to build strong bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh. An office was set up to maintain the accounts relating to export of goods like Coal and import of goods like Biscuits, Fruit juice etc.

**Latu:** It is a village which is situated at a distance of 8 kilometers away from Karimganj town and 5 kilometers away from Sutarkandi. The village is unique and has its own identity because of its historical importance.

A sad but heroic reminder of past, the **Malegarh Crematorium** is located in the village of Latu where the soldiers lost their lives during Sepoy Mutiny and were cremated there. The year 1857 saw the rise of soldiers against British and during the revolt, more than 50 soldiers sacrificed their lives. The story of the **Malegarh**

**Crematorium** is briefly presented in the following few lines.

The happenings in this region during the revolt of 1857 are normally dismissed and declared as insignificant. But during those days the British administration had already established its grip over the region and the administrative network was efficient as well as trustworthy. Though there was neither a railway track nor a telegraph present in this part of the country at that time, the British had a very reliable system of communication. It is evident from the letter written by captain Stewart on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1857 where he mentioned about the encounter that took place at Latu on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1857. Three companies of the 34<sup>th</sup> native infantry stationed at Chittgong mutinied and after burning these lines, breaking the jail and plundering the treasure, they marched in the direction of Cummila, then they turned off into the jungles of Hilltippera. Their intention was to push on into Manipur. As soon as Mr. Allen heard of their movement, he determined to intercept them. Under his orders, Major Bing, The Commandant of the Sylhet light infantry set out with about 160 men and reached Pratapgarh, then rearing the revels pass through Latu. He made a night march and arrive Latu early next morning. The revels numbering about 200 came up soon afterwards. The face to face firing started from both sides and about 26 lives were lost, Major Byng was also killed. His successors in the command did not think it advisable to follow them into jungle.

Again from another authentic source we find the information of Latu incident as narrated, in Chittagong, the government had 300 soldiers when the news meeting reached, this 300 soldiers reveled. They looted Rs. 2 Lakhs 78 thousand 267 from the collectors office, took 3 elephants, freed prisoners and through Tripura marched into syllhet when the news reached major Byng of the Sylhet like infantry, he promptly marched his infantry towards Pratapgrah (modern Patherkandi area) reaching their they learned that the sepoys had left for Latu. Major Byng and his soldiers immediately started for Latu. The British soldiers met the revels near Latu Bazar. The revels took shelter on the Malegarh, Hillock on the bank of the river and started firing on the British soldiers. The first round took Major Byng who instantly died. Soon another 5 soldiers were killed and was seriously injured. Subedar Ajodhya Singh showed great skill and won the battle. The incident left behind them 26 of their Comrades who were dead and their dead bodies were buried at Latu (Malegarh).

**Badarpur Ghat:** Badarpurghat which is at a distance of 25kms from Karimganj has a historical fort, to its potential to attract tourists. The fort was constructed by the British and lies on the bank of river Barak. Beside the Fort a Temple named Jungla Kalibari is also situated at Badarpur Ghat where a large number of devotees visit the temple specially on Tuesday and Saturday to offer prayer and puja to the deity.

**San Beel: Son Beel** is the largest wetland in the Karimganj district and Southern Assam. The size, however, has been reduced owing to inappropriate handling of the wetland. River Shingla passes through the wetland. The entire place presents a picturesque landscape with hills which lies to east and west of Son Beel.

**Baropunji:** Karimganj is a beautiful place gifted with the best of nature. Another attraction 15 kms from Karimganj is the famous **Eolabari Tea Estate**. It is a great place to unwind and be close with nature. The place has various hill ranges and it has beautiful rivers such as Longai River. The beauty of the site can be gauged by the fact that the train ride covering this stretch is considered one amongst the most picturesque rail routes in India.

The place is surrounded by some of the beautiful hillock and the local people use these hills for the purpose of rubber and tea plantation.

## 7. POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

The potentials attached with this district are summarized in few lines

1. Although government of both the countries of Bangladesh and India have started export-import of some goods through the Sutarkandi village, near the border of Bangladesh and India, and so trade centers were constructed by the countries to facilitate exchange of goods. But to attract the tourist, the government especially by making an agreement between the countries nearest Security Force Camp of both the countries can be shifted to that area to do their normal function along with some entertainment function for the visitors like Waga Border of Patiala, Punjab, India.
2. In the village of Agbarpur, in the middle of the way between Karimganj town and Sutarkandi border, an Agriculture Research Centre is situated which can be customized by plantation of different form of plants including medicinal plants to create Agro-tourism spot.
3. The village Maizgram nearest to the spot of Sutarkandi border and Agriculture Research Centre is renowned for the preparation of different form of clay made domestic products. The village people have been preparing the product for more than 200 years and almost 30 household still engaged in this work for their livelihood. The village has natural beauty as well as number of hillock which could be used for sports tourism or adventure tourism.
4. The village Latu having an historical spot of the Malegarh Crematorium could help to attract the tourists for its historical significance.
5. One of the historical spot along with the temple of Maa Kali has been identified in Badapur Ghat to catch the attention of visitors and devotees. The port available at Badarpur Ghat can be modified to make a visiting spot. Since the port is situated at the bank of a river of Barak, so restaurant can be opened by using a boat on the river nearest the site of port.
6. The area of San Bill is very large and is presently used for fish cultivation by the fishermen and fishes are carried to different parts of the state to sell. Although, government has taken a step for initiation of tourism project but is in a very nascent stage. This site can be used for boating along with facility to catch fish by the tourist for consumption. A play ground along with Children Park could also be welcomed at the open space attached to the San Bill.

## 8. PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

The main problems that become the hurdle of development of tourism are mentioned below:

1. **Problems of Communication:** The condition of road communication of the district is terrible. All the villages are well connected with the district head-quarter by road but all types of vehicle could not pass through because of either the poor condition of the road or narrow space of the road. For developing tourism in any rural area we not only need all-weather roads but should also have arrangement for safe drinking water, electricity, telephone, safety and security, etc.
2. **Language problem:** The contribution of the local community in developing or maintaining a tourism spot is very important. The maximum numbers of people of this area are very much frequent with only their local language and have problem in speaking English, Hindi or even Assamese which create problem for them to communicate with the tourist coming from national or international locations.
3. **Corruption:** The government have launched various schemes from time to time for the welfare of the citizen of the nation but in practice very few schemes and its benefits reached to the hands of the actual beneficiary because of practice of corrupted activities by different officials.
4. **Lack of Trained Manpower:** The trained people in hotel management may not be interested to go to the rural area to work. The rural people who will be appointed are required to be trained for discharging their duties. Decorating the cottages or suites and maintain them. The success of rural tourism totally depends on the quality of service provided to the tourist.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

1. At first, the government must conduct some awareness program among the local people of the district and to aware them about rural tourism.
2. The district has resources in natural, cultural, historical and location advantage (border between India and Bangladesh), so with the help of public private participation some model village can be created to attract the tourists.
3. The district has very poor connection with the other places of India and even with capital of the state. The proposed broad gauge railway connection between Gauhati (Capital of the State) and Karimganj should be finished without delay which would help the tourist to come and visit the place.
4. The place has high potential for launching rural tourism project. But the project should have facility for cottage, gardens, playground, boating facility, community hall and dining hall and also well communication with all sightseeing facility.
5. If some NGO or institution is preparing to start a project for rural tourism, the villagers should participate in developing and implementing the project, otherwise it will not be able to generate much benefit to the rural people.
6. Advertisement and sales promotion will play a very significant role in creating awareness and attracting the customers.

## 10. CONCLUSION

Karimganj district is one of the districts in the state of Assam which share its border with Bangladesh. The district is rich in its cultural, historical and natural beauty with Forts, Crematory, temples, rivers and wet lands etc. There lies huge potential in the district to attract tourists from all around the world and if the spots are recognized by the Government and if needy steps are being taken with cooperation from the Ministry of Tourism and State Government then it could help in the development of the region. Last but not the least, for any scheme and project to sustain proper planning and allocation of fund along with monitoring and evaluation is necessary. Moreover, participation of the local community in the planning process along with the Government is the urgent need of the hour for any project undertaken to sustain.

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**Annexure (Image of the Sites)**



India- Bangladesh Border



India- Bangladesh Border



Agricultural Research Centre



Malegarh Crematorium



Jungla Kalibari (Badarpur Ghat)



Artician of Maizgram



Badarpur Fort



Image of San Beel



Hill of Baropunji Village