

A Study on Prospects and Challenges in the Tourism Sector of Dhubri District, Assam

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ABSTRACT

Dhubri district in Assam holds significant potential for tourism due to its rich cultural heritage, historical sites, and scenic landscapes. The Brahmaputra River and numerous religious sites offer unique attractions. However, the tourism sector faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, poor connectivity, and limited promotional efforts. Floods and communal tensions also impede tourism development. Addressing these issues through improved infrastructure, better marketing strategies, and effective management can unlock Dhubri's tourism potential, contributing to the district's economic growth and social development.

Keywords: Potential, Cultural Heritage, Inadequate infrastructure, Economic growth and Social development.

Introduction

Dhubri district, located in the western part of Assam, India, is known for its rich historical and cultural heritage. Established as a district in 1876, Dhubri serves as an important administrative and commercial hub. The district is strategically positioned along the Brahmaputra River, enhancing its significance for trade and transportation. Dhubri covers an area of approximately 2,838 square kilometres and is bordered by West Bengal, Meghalaya, and Bangladesh, which adds to its geopolitical importance. The district is home to a diverse population, with various ethnic communities contributing to its vibrant cultural tapestry. Prominent festivals and traditional practices reflect the region's cultural richness. Dhubri is also known for its historical monuments and religious sites, such as the Dhubri Mosque, Gurdwara Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Sahib, and Panchpeer Dargah, attracting tourists and pilgrims alike. Agriculture is the primary economic activity in Dhubri, with paddy, jute, and mustard being the main crops. The fertile plains and favourable climatic conditions support robust agricultural production. Despite its potential, Dhubri faces challenges such as frequent flooding, inadequate infrastructure, and limited industrialization. Addressing these issues through strategic development initiatives can unlock the district's economic potential, contributing to the overall growth and prosperity of the region.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the regional development of Dhubri district in Assam. As a sector with immense potential, tourism can significantly contribute to the district's economic growth and social development. The unique cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and natural beauty of Dhubri create numerous opportunities for attracting both domestic and international tourists. Economically, tourism can stimulate job creation and income generation. Local communities can benefit from employment opportunities in hospitality, transportation, and various service industries. Small businesses, such as handicraft shops, local markets, and food vendors, can also thrive due to increased tourist activity. This economic stimulation can reduce poverty levels and improve living standards in the region. Socially, tourism promotes cultural exchange and understanding. It provides a platform for showcasing Dhubri's rich traditions, festivals, and way of life, fostering pride and preserving cultural heritage. Additionally, tourism can drive improvements in infrastructure, such as roads, healthcare, and sanitation, benefiting both tourists and residents.

Furthermore, tourism can enhance regional connectivity. Improved transportation links and facilities make the district more accessible, not only boosting tourism but also facilitating trade and commerce. This increased connectivity can attract investments, further driving economic diversification and development.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1.2.1 To analyse the Current Tourism Infrastructure in the study area.

1.2.2 To identify the prospects and challenges in the study area.

2. Literature Review

Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC): This model outlines the stages of tourism development from exploration to decline, providing a framework to analyse the tourism lifecycle in Dhubri District.

Doxey's Irridex: This model helps understand the social impacts of tourism on local communities, which is crucial for assessing sociocultural challenges in Dhubri.

According to Sharma and Bhattacharjee (2018), Assam's tourism sector has grown steadily, but certain areas like Dhubri remain underdeveloped due to various factors. Assam is renowned for its natural landscapes, wildlife sanctuaries, and cultural heritage.

Infrastructure Issues: Inadequate infrastructure, such as poor road connectivity and lack of quality accommodations, poses a significant challenge (Gogoi, 2020).

Accessibility and Connectivity: Dhubri's remote location and limited transport options deter tourists (Baruah, 2019).

Tourism activities, if not managed sustainably, can lead to environmental degradation. Studies by Dutta (2021) highlight the need for sustainable tourism practices in Assam.

Sociocultural Impacts: The influx of tourists can impact local cultures and traditions. According to Singh (2022), maintaining the cultural integrity of local communities is essential for sustainable tourism development.

Political and Regulatory Challenges: Regulatory barriers and lack of clear policies can impede tourism growth. Barman (2020) discusses the need for streamlined policies to boost tourism in Assam.

Untapped Tourism Resources, Dhubri's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty present numerous opportunities for tourism development (Ali, 2019).

Government Initiatives and Policies, Recent government initiatives aimed at promoting tourism in Assam can significantly benefit Dhubri (Sarmah, 2021).

Community Involvement and Benefits, Engaging local communities in tourism development can ensure sustainable growth and economic benefits (Chakraborty, 2020).

Potential for Eco-tourism and Cultural Tourism, Dhubri's diverse ecosystems and cultural sites offer great potential for eco-tourism and cultural tourism (Hussain, 2018).

Comparative studies of tourism development in other regions can provide valuable insights. For instance, the success of eco-tourism in Kaziranga National Park can serve as a model for Dhubri (Saikia, 2020).

3. Research Methodology

Study area: The geographical scope will be limited to Dhubri District, Assam.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

Primary Data:

Surveys and Questionnaires:

Designed and distributed structured questionnaires to tourists, local residents, and tourism stakeholders.

Interviews:

Conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants, including local government officials, tourism operators, and community leaders.

Secondary Data:

Review existing literature, government reports, and tourism statistics related to Dhubri District and the broader Assam region.

3.2 Sampling Techniques

Sampling Method:

Use purposive sampling to select interview participants based on their relevance to the research objectives.

Employ random sampling for distributing surveys to ensure a representative sample of the population.

Sample Size:

30 based on the population of tourists and residents, ensuring statistical significance.

3.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative Data:

Use statistical tools and software (e.g., SPSS, Excel) to analyse survey data. Perform descriptive statistics to summarize data and inferential statistics to identify trends and correlations.

Qualitative Data:

Conduct thematic analysis on interview transcripts to identify key themes and patterns.

Use qualitative data analysis software (e.g., NVivo) to organize and code data.

3.4 Validation and Reliability

Pilot Testing:

Conduct a pilot test of the survey and interview questions to ensure clarity and relevance.

Triangulation:

Cross-verify data from multiple sources to enhance the validity of the findings.

4. Current State of Tourism Infrastructure in Dhubri

Dhubri, a historically rich town in Assam, is gradually developing its tourism infrastructure. Despite its potential, the town's current tourism facilities remain underdeveloped. The accommodation, transportation, and general tourist services need significant enhancement to fully realize the area's potential as a tourist destination. Government initiatives, including the construction of major bridges and the development of inland waterways, are expected to improve the overall infrastructure, paving the way for better tourism prospects in the future.

4.1 Accommodation and Hospitality Facilities

Accommodation options in Dhubri are relatively limited, with a few budget hotels and guesthouses catering primarily to domestic travellers. The town lacks luxury or mid-range hotels, which limits its appeal to more affluent tourists. Efforts to improve hospitality services, including training for local staff, are essential to raising service standards and meeting the expectations of a broader range of visitors.

4.2 Transportation and Connectivity

Transportation and connectivity remain significant challenges in Dhubri. The ongoing construction of the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge, expected to be the longest in India, will significantly enhance road connectivity between Assam and Meghalaya. Additionally, the launch of Ro-Pax ferry services is improving waterway connectivity, reducing travel time across the Brahmaputra River. These developments are critical for overcoming the town's current accessibility issues, which have long hindered tourism growth.

4.3 Tourist Services and Amenities

Tourist services in Dhubri are still underdeveloped, with limited availability of organized tours, information centres, and other amenities such as clean public restrooms and medical facilities. The town's potential as a tourist hub is hampered by the lack of comprehensive services that can enhance the visitor experience. Addressing these gaps through better planning and investment is crucial for attracting and retaining tourists.

5. Prospects and Challenges Facing the Tourism Sector in Dhubri

The tourism sector in Dhubri holds significant potential, driven by its cultural heritage and natural beauty. However, several challenges need to be addressed to unlock this potential. These include inadequate infrastructure, poor connectivity, vulnerability to natural disasters, communal tensions, and limited investment.

5.1 Inadequate Infrastructure

The tourism infrastructure in Dhubri is insufficient to support a substantial influx of tourists. The region requires significant improvements in accommodation, road networks, and public services to become a competitive tourist destination. Without substantial investment in these areas, Dhubri's tourism sector will struggle to grow and attract a diverse range of visitors.

5.2 Poor Connectivity

Despite ongoing infrastructure projects, poor connectivity continues to be a major barrier to tourism in Dhubri. The town's remote location and inadequate transportation options make it difficult for tourists to access the area. Improving both road and waterway connectivity is essential for making Dhubri more accessible and attractive to tourists.

5.3 Floods and Natural Disasters

Dhubri's geographical location makes it particularly vulnerable to floods and other natural disasters, which pose a significant threat to its tourism sector. The frequent flooding during the monsoon season disrupts tourism activities and damages infrastructure, further deterring potential visitors. Effective disaster management strategies and resilient infrastructure development are crucial to mitigating these risks.

5.4 Communal Tensions

Communal tensions in Dhubri have occasionally created an unstable environment, deterring tourists and impacting the region's reputation as a safe destination. Promoting communal harmony and ensuring security are vital for maintaining a stable environment conducive to tourism.

5.5 Limited Investment and Resources

Dhubri's tourism sector suffers from a lack of investment and resources. The region has not attracted significant attention from investors, which hampers the development of essential infrastructure and services. To overcome this challenge, it is necessary to encourage investment through government incentives and public-private partnerships.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Summary of Findings

The study on the prospects and challenges in the tourism sector of Dhubri District, Assam, reveals that while the region holds significant potential due to its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty, it faces several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, poor connectivity, vulnerability to natural disasters, and limited investment. These factors hinder the full realization of Dhubri's tourism potential.

6.2 Strategic Recommendations

To overcome these challenges, it is essential to focus on infrastructure development, particularly in transportation and accommodation. Enhancing connectivity, both road and waterway, will make Dhubri more accessible to tourists. Additionally, promoting public-private partnerships can attract much-needed investment. There is also a need to improve disaster management systems to mitigate the impact of natural calamities on tourism.

6.3 Future Directions for Research and Policy

Future research should explore the impact of specific infrastructure projects, like the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge, on tourism development. Policymakers should focus on creating targeted investment incentives and developing comprehensive disaster management plans. Additionally, studies on community engagement in tourism development could provide valuable insights into sustainable tourism practices in Dhubri.

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