

Potential of Community Based Tourism in Arunachal Pradesh, India: A Study of Ziro Valley

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ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism is an emerging form of sustainable tourism. The UNWTO has guided many local communities to develop tourism under the principal of sustainability through the development of Community Based Tourism projects. Many rural tourism initiatives are being conceived within the framework of Community Based Tourism, which combines aspects of community development, poverty alleviation, cultural heritage and conservation. Community Based Tourism (CBT) or homestay is a new form of tourism product in which tourism is managed by the local communities. The local communities are fully responsible in every aspect of their tourism management ranging from decision making, planning and evaluation.

The present study explores the Community Based Tourism potentiality of Ziro Valley, located in the Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh State. Ziro Valley is a worth visiting tourist destination to explore the indigenous Apatani tribe who has a unique tradition of nature conservation and natural resource management.

As tourism is still in its infancy stage in Ziro, it is imperative to study and identify the sustainable tourism principles so as to preserve the inherent ethnicity thereby making it economically beneficial for the local community. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze potential for the development of Community based tourism in Arunachal Pradesh general and in Ziro Valley particular.

KEYWORDS: *Tourism, Sustainable Development, Community, Community Based Tourism. Homestay*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Tourism was declared as a global strategy at the World Summit at Rio De Janeiro in 1992. Since then ecotourism has gained popularity as a key sustainable development solution for achieving conservation and the alleviation of poverty. Nonetheless, ecotourism has faced similar criticisms as mass tourism for its massive expansion, in addition to lack of community focus. Consequently, Community Based Tourism has emerged, ensuring greater local benefits and sustainable use of natural resources. Typically Sustainable Tourism, Community Based Tourism, Rural Tourism and Eco Tourism has similar objectives. These are planning tourism to safeguard or destination's cultural heritage and enhance its natural heritage while at the same time improving the socio-economic welfare of communities. Community Based Tourism refers to the activities and initiatives of local people in a specific rural destination where the local residents are catering for tourists needs (Naeraa et. al 1993). Community Based Tourism centres on the involvement of the host community in planning and maintaining tourism development in order to create a more sustainable industry (Hall 1996).

Community Based Tourism is a visitor-based interaction that has meaningful participation by both, and generates economic and conservation benefits for local communities and environments. CBT is tourism that consults, involves and benefits a local community, especially in context of rural villages in developing countries and indigenous people (Mann 2001).

The idea behind the community-based approach is to create potential for empowering the community, enhancing their involvement in decision making and ensure that the will and incentive to participate come from the community itself (Armstrong et al 2003:2).

Benefits of Community Based Tourism

Indigenous people and tourism are one of the interdependent elements in the tourism development in the region. Both community and tourism go hand in hand with utmost cooperation is the best way to booming tourism in the destinations. It is important for community to get benefit revenue generation from tourism and Indigenous people must be the assets of tourism (Ross & Wall, 1999). It's multiple benefits are represented in Table 1.

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Table 1: Benefits of Community Based Tourism

| Development Area | Potential Development Benefits |
|------------------|---|
| Economic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Generates suitable and independent source of funds for community development. •Creates employment in tourism. •Increases household income. |
| Social | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Raises quality of life. •Promotes community pride. •Promotes gender and age equality. •Builds capacity for community management organizations. |
| Cultural | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Encourages respect for different culture. •Foster cultural exchange. •Embeds development in local culture. |
| Environmental | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Promotes environmental responsibility. •Raises awareness of the need for conservation for tourists and villagers. •Promotes management of waste disposal. |
| Educational | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes the acquisition of new job skills. •Creates new professions in the village. •Encourages use of new knowledge in the village. •Cross –fertilization of ideas with other cultures –promotes mutual respect. |
| Political | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Enables participation of local people. •Increases the power of community. •Ensures rights in natural resource management in community. |
| Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes good hygiene. •Increases in and diversification of food production for tourists improves nutritional status. |

Source: REST, 2003: 22; Tuffin, 2005: 182.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the potential of Community Based Tourism in Ziro Valley.
- To identify potential strategies for developing Community Based Tourism in Ziro Valley.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both based on primary as well as secondary data. Primary data were obtained through personal field visit and questionnaires with local villages Panchayat, and members of different tour operator, tourist guide, porters, homestay owners and different NGO's. Secondary data has been collected from different agencies, journals, articles, web sources etc.

STUDY AREA

Ziro Valley popularly known as Apatani Valley lies between 27° 30' 25"N- 27° 38' 5"N and 94° 46' 2"E - 94° 55' 27"E covers an area of about 120 sq. km at an altitude of 1572 meters above mean sea level comprises with a total population of about 24703 persons according to 2001 census. This valleys is situated in the central part of the Arunachal Pradesh, which is bordered by Upper Subansiri district in the northeast, East Kameng in the west, Tibet and china in the north and Assam valley in the southeast. Ziro town, the Headquarter of Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh is located 164 km away from Itanagar state capital. It's cool weather in summer is its major attraction.

Physiographically this region is characterised by Himalayan mountain system surrounded by the hills and ranges in all direction and in the middle of the valley a small river Kiile flows from the north to south which along with its tributaries supplies sufficient water to the rice cultivation of the people. The valley harbours many varieties of world rare flora and fauna belonging to high altitude species and those are accounted to this valley as the hotspot for late.

Ziro Valley- Proposed UNESCO World Heritage

The valley is a worth visiting tourist destination to explore the indigenous Apatani tribe who has a unique tradition of nature conservation and natural resource management. The cultural and historical background of the tribe is also very interesting. Tani agricultural system which is mixed farming practices that includes paddy-cum fish-culture where fish is reared with paddy simultaneously in the same terrace field which is unique among the hill tribes of the region. The beauty of man-made landscapes of the valley and the specific farming and conservation techniques of the Apatanis has attracted the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014) to propose it as a World Heritage Site.

This indigenous people had brilliantly adopted a successful method of Paddy-cum-Pisciculture during 1965-66 whilst world is experimenting this type of culture and they are the first to have paddy cum fish culture in our country. The history of course speaks that Japan is the first country to start this type of culture in 1844 A.D. The striking feature of the Apatani paddy-cum-pisciculture technique is an absence of the exploitation of animal labour and ploughing. The management of water resources, the maintenance of footpaths, fences and drainage, the preparation of nurseries and fields, as well as sowing, transplanting and harvesting are done on a group basis. At least ten numbers of mutual assistance groups (*patang*) are formed in a rather informal way by peers of the same age-group.

Potential of Community Based Tourism in Ziro Valley

Ziro valley holds huge potential of age old cultural, historical importance and custodian of unique tribal culture in Arunachal Pradesh. Ziro Valley famous for Paddy-cum-fish cultivation and offers the tourist a variety of scenic beauty. Its continued attractiveness has given the impact of a growing number of visitors. The community has diverse types of rituals, ceremonies and dances (Grewal,1997). It is because of their distinctive ways of life and the natural circumstances that tourists have been attracted to the region. Some of the attractions that will led to the development of Community Based tourism in Ziro are:

Festivals like Dree, Myoko, Murung and Yapung are celebrated great enthusiasm. *Dree* festival is celebrated on 5th July of every year. There is a great merry making and dancing *Daminda* dance during this festival. The *Myoko* festival is celebrated each year on 20th to 30th March in a cyclic way by forming three groups of villages i.e. Hong village falls in first group, Hari, Dutta and Bulla under Second group (including Kalong, Reru, Tajang, and Lempia village) and Hija, Dutta, Mudang-Tage, Michi and Bamin villages falls under third group. *Murung* is celebrated every year in the month of January. The significance of these festival are mainly to ensure better cultivation, protection of the grains from hailstone, storms, insects and wild animals and wellbeing of villagers in general and their livestock. *Yapung* is celebrated in the month of September and October.

The Apatani perform many folk songs that are related to specific occasions and traditional dances in traditional attires attracts many, the most popular dances are Daminda and Pakhu-Ittu which are also rendered under special occasions.

Walking in the Hong village (Asia second largest village and typical Apatani hut), Participating in cultural and traditional events i.e., agro-tourism (paddy-cum fish cultivation) handicrafts making, fairs and festivals and observing the local women and men who engaged work in paddy field or walking or sitting at the typical hut with traditional attires; these reflect the real unique culture of the destination and it admired tourist to interestingly interact with people to know more about their culture. Because of these special characteristics such as beautiful landscapes, unique construction style of Apatani's hut, endemic or rare flora and fauna, local agricultural products, handicraft, ornaments, local culture including festivals, local folktales, history, historical monuments and World Heritage sites etc tourist like to visit Ziro Valley as it is reflected in the domestic and foreign tourist inflows in Ziro valley as represented in Table 1.

Table2: Domestic and Foreign Tourist Inflows

| Year | Domestic | | Foreign | | Total | |
|------|----------|-------|---------|------|--------|-------|
| | State | Ziro | State | Ziro | State | Ziro |
| 2008 | 149292 | 206 | 3020 | 325 | 152312 | 531 |
| 2009 | 195147 | 527 | 3945 | 479 | 199092 | 1006 |
| 2010 | 227857 | 840 | 3395 | 281 | 231252 | 1121 |
| 2011 | 233227 | 10801 | 4753 | 1217 | 237980 | 12018 |
| 2012 | 317243 | 9892 | 5135 | 576 | 322378 | 10468 |
| 2013 | 125461 | 9284 | 10846 | 802 | 136307 | 10086 |
| 2014 | 336028 | 10960 | 6307 | 267 | 342335 | 11227 |
| 2015 | 352176 | 12150 | 5757 | 603 | 357933 | 12753 |

Source: Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh

Community Based Tourism in Ziro valley came into force since 1996 towards developing economically and culturally sensitive locations in rural parts of the country.

To tap the potential of Ziro Valley, Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) started Community Based Tourism with the support of Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bangalore in 2010. FGA began the project by imparting various trainings on tourism and benefits of home-stay facility. They also supported in the formation of an apex community institution called Ngunu Ziro. At present, the home-stay and allied activities are managed and coordinated by Ngunu Ziro have their networks with various tour operators, government agencies, expert organizations for the promotion of the home-stay units in Ziro Valley.

Food items such as vegetable, rice, fruit, meat, fish handicrafts are provided by the SHGs to the home-stay units. Not only that, cultural programme such as folk dance and songs are presented by the local artist and women of the villages. These groups are encouraged and supported to take up various activities like weaving, fish farming and kitchen garden.

The community participation in Community Based Tourism has remarkably increased the sense of ownership of the local community members in protecting and conserving pristine local environment of the Apatani Plateau. They are increasingly realizing that development and conservation is the nature gifts to the people for their livelihoods and utilising the resources as their valuable assets (Mize et al., 2016).

Strategies to Identify Potential Tourist

The potential of CBT is that it empowers the community, encouraging them to engage in such decisions: planning, evaluation and control of resources (Osman et al., 2008). In Ziro valley there is bottleneck of infrastructure and superstructure and connectivity of air and land transportation. However the developmental activities of connectivity are in progressing and it need priority attention. Economic, socio-cultural and environmental are no huge negative impacts to the destinations yet however it is better to prevent and create awareness about the negative

impacts of tourism is necessary before much negative impact happened (Mize et al., 2016).

In Ziro valley there are shortages of other product for leisure tourism it needs to develop in a planned way at the tourist place to attract other forms of tourism demands so that valley could caters all forms of tourists.

Government should support to the undeveloped tourist areas for the development of infrastructural facilities, and

lastly, educational institutions are required to do more research work on this area to encourage and strengthen the long-term socio-economic development of local communities with the help of CBT in the Ziro valley.

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