

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM THROUGH GREEN TOURISM AND ARTISAN TEA

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15488618>

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**ABSTRACT:** The Nature of tea-related changes in society is pervasive in Assam, and they are now experienced as "tourism." Tourism is an industry wherein tea culture, traditional customs, services, and attractions are regarded as part and parcel of a tourism activity. Assam being both a producer and consumer of tea; possesses a considerable potential to combine tea production and consumption with tourism to boost the long-term viability of community livelihoods. This study investigates the connections between natural handcrafted tea and tourism through the perspective of a method that promotes sustainable livelihoods within a systematic framework. Additionally, prospects are augmented through a literature review of previous research conducted in tea tourism (TT) areas. A significant amount of this research came from secondary sources of information. In order to make up for the shortage of skills and resources in expanding tea and tourism integration, this study suggests that a dynamic mutual collaboration would be the way to go. Building a stronger cohesion between tea and tourism, forming partnerships, encouraging more community involvement, and highlighting local assets are crucial for its sustenance. Although the concept of tea tourism in Assam is in its nascent stage, it offers a great deal of untapped promise. Assam's tea tourism industry will not be beneficial to simply use natural-handcrafted tea as a tourist spot rather the inflow of tourists to the state ought to be regarded as a potential demand that is omnipresent for the establishment of a new market for tea tourists and the marketing of natural-handcrafted tea produced by the Tea Estates. Tea-related social changes are pervasive in Assam, and are now experienced as "tourism." It is an industry where tourists enjoy local tea cultures, customs, services, and attractions. Within a systematic framework, this study investigates links between natural handcrafted tea and tourism that promotes sustainable livelihoods. A literature review of previous research in tea tourism areas is used to supplement prospects. Secondary sources of information were used extensively in this research. According to the findings, the establishment of a dynamic mutual partnership may be able to compensate for lack of resources and competencies in the expansion of tea and tourist integration.

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**Keywords:** Tea Tourism, Natural Handcrafted Tea, Cottage Industry, Tourism, Sustainability.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the historical narrative of global tourism, tea tourism is a comparatively recent phenomenon. This relatively contemporary topic has been debated since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Jolliffe (2007) defined tea tourism as "*tourism motivated by an interest in the history, tradition, and ritual of tea.*" She then defines "tea tourists" as "*tourists who are intrigued by the history, culture, and customs associated with the rituals of tea.*" Tea Tourism also provides travellers with a pleasant leisure experience. A walk around the tea plantation, the process of

plucking tea, the traditional festivals of the tribes, and a stay at the exquisite tea bungalow create a one-of-a-kind tour experience. China, Sri Lanka, and Kenya are already popular destinations for tea tourists. (Jules, 2012). India too is on the same trail. Tea tourism began in India in the 1990's when farms began accepting visitors in their Bungalows. Asia's largest tea factory, Beesakopie Tea Estate, is situated in Assam's Tinsukia region in India, close to the Burmese border. Assam's tea has a unique taste because of their unique consistency. This is because of the frequent incidence of intense rainfall, in addition to the warm & humid daytime temperature, which together create the ideal environment for the cultivation and processing of tea of such a high grade. People say that the "Beesakopie Tea Plantation" is India's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest tea land (Sentinel Digital Desk, 2021). It is also the home of one of the most important tea estates in the state. The tea made here is known all over the world. This tea garden is owned by McLeod Russel India Limited. It is very popular because it makes well-balanced tea quickly. CTC tea is made here, which means it goes through the cut, tear, and curl process. Similarly, the history of Mokalbari Tea found in Assam is as splendid as much as spectacular. The Kanoi family has grown this plantation into one of Assam's greatest tea-growing estates. Today, Mokalbari produces a considerable amount of Tippy Golden Teas, which serve as the foundation for some of the best East Fression Blends. The family found a rare clone of orthodox tea - a secret that has been handed down from generation to generation with refinement and enhancement to the point where the tea of this garden is exclusively promoted in European markets. In international markets, the aroma of these tea's symbolises "this far and no farther!" to tea enthusiasts. Mokalbari Tea Estate has an area of 811.28 hectares and employs 1600 people to produce 18,65,000 Kg of tea every year. <sup>[1]</sup> 150 of these employees are involved in hand plucking, which creates the current orthodox variety. Natural handcrafted tea in Assam cottage industries and its linkage to tourism development would assist the state by generating job opportunities and increasing the rural economy, in addition to maintaining the environment and preserving tradition and culture. Aromica Tea is the state of Assam's biggest tea producer. The tea market is predicted to increase at a CAGR of 4.2 percent, with 1.40 million tonnes consumed by 2025<sup>[2]</sup>. Their teas combine excellent health and wellbeing. The company sells 30 tea blends that include the health benefits of natural herbs and ingredients. They receive their green teas from several organic tea estates <sup>[1]</sup> Mokalbari Kanoi Tea Estate Private Limited. (n.d.). Retrieved July 24, 2022, from Indiamart.com website:

<https://www.indiamart.com/mokalbari-kanoi-teaestate/aboutus.html>

[2]

<https://www.expertmarketresearch.com/pressrelease/indian-tea-market>

in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, assisting local growers in obtaining a fair price and a constant market for their product.

Historically, Assam is the world's second-largest tea-producing area, behind Southern China. Assam, along with southern China, is the world's only location with native tea plants, and Assam is the only place where tea is produced on plains. The region of Assam takes great pride in its tea cultivation. Bhattacharyya (2020) states that India produces twenty-three percent of the world's tea, with Assam alone producing fifty percent of the nation's tea (Chang, 2015). Tea from Assam accounts for around 11.5 percent of the world output (Das, 2019). With 53.97 percent of its area dedicated to tea plantation, Assam plays a significant role in the state's economy, culture, & politics. The number of small tea farmers has also increased, which has resulted in a large increase in tea production. Tea output has increased dramatically as the overall area under tea plants has expanded, tea productivity has increased, and more scientific tea production technology has been used. Tea is not only essential

in the economy of the state of Assam, accounting for more than half of the country's output, but it is also a vital component in the lives of the people of the state. The most popular drink amongst the people of Assam is tea which is offered at practically all social and formal meetings and is extensively used for refreshments throughout the day (Magar & Kar, 2016). Natural handcrafted tea in Assam cottage industries and its links to tourism development will benefit the state by creating job opportunities and expanding the rural economy, as well as protecting the environment and conserving tradition and culture. Tea Tourism is one of the first forms of ecotourism, and it has the potential to be a valuable source of revenue for the hospitality industry. Tea Tourism has been defined as "the art of travelling around the world in quest of enjoyment that comes with exposure to vast tracts of green tea fields" in the literature. To focus entirely on this opportunity, travel companies around the world are promoting a wide range of tea tourism packages, which include visits to tea gardens where visitors can spend a few memorable days experiencing the method of plucking, withering, rolling, drying to make the final product of Black Tea, enjoying their time in an exotic landscape and amplifying the attractions through the experiences shared by the visitors. Countries such as India, China, Nepal, Sri Lanka, as well as Japan, are becoming popular tourist destinations for tea tourists and engage in both tailored and mass-market tea tourism (Joliffe and Zhuang, 2007).

In the works on Tea Tourism, Cheng introduced the concept of stakeholders, identifying tea tourists, tea garden proprietors, local government, tour operators, as well as other tourism stakeholders including the media as the most important groups to consider. The article examined the stakeholders' perspectives on tourist development, possible roles, and apprehensions related to tea tourism. According to qualitative analysis, despite many good tea tourism attractions, tea tourism development in Xinyang, China had failed, and better tea tourism planning, marketing, and collaboration between stakeholders were suggested for successful tea tourism development. Further, local government, tea garden owners, media, travel agencies, and tea tourists are thought to be the primary stakeholders with different roles to develop tea tourism, and collaboration between stakeholders is crucial for tea tourism development (Cheng et al., 2012).

Tea Tourism could be used to boost a country's reputation as a tourist attraction. Based on the previous study, experts such as Lin and Wen (2018) believe that tea tourism can be a mechanism for cultural progress by increasing local employment and decreasing poverty. They also stated that tourism in the surrounding tea fields helps address socio-economic inequalities in tea producing areas and significantly impacts the local communities' cultural traditions. Su et al. (2019) asserted that combining tea with tourism leads to a sustainable way of life, and Weber (2018) described that tea tourism could improve cultural heritage, protect our national identity, and give tourists sensory experiences (Fernando and Colleagues, 2017).

Tea Tourism, as an "alternative form," is also identified as a vehicle for socio-economic development. It has not only uplifted rural livelihoods through social and physical development but also enhanced income generation and played a significant role in forming a destination image. However, despite its positive effects, experts claim that tea tourism has failed to stimulate the local economy and contribute to long-term growth due to insufficient policy planning and implementation (Casalegno et al., 2020).

Another study focused on the use of the shared economy concept in tea tourism in Assam, India, which is centred on a few tea farms. In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis in research on the social and economic disparities between travellers and hosts (Su et al., 2020). Furthermore, they argued that there is insufficient

research on how tea tourism can promote well-being (holistic and curative experiences) in society (Mondal and Samaddar, 2020).

Tea tourism may offer a variety of ways to make money by focusing on natural-made, handcrafted tea in cottage industries and the cultural and culinary processes that go along with it, which can be used as a development method to encourage the tea industry, revitalise local culture, and maintain rural areas' unique identities. This can be accomplished by providing a basis and including a field survey of visitors to tea tourism areas (Jolliffe and Aslam, 2009). Many tea industry players, such as tea farmers and producers, traders, and manufacturers, can be combined with accessories or souvenirs to create an additional visitor experience through natural-handcrafted tea plantations and tourism integrations. The consequences of these advantages are not limited to those directly related to tea. They may, however, extend to agricultural production, traditions, arts, and handicrafts produced by local small businesses in order to meet the needs of tourists visiting tea sites. It may have a greater impact in terms of creating a diverse range of job opportunities, which may help rural communities remain viable. Tourism could help tea-producing cottage industries improve their brand reputation and marketing. In tea plantations, there is a growing market for "homestay tourism (HST)," with most tourists drawn by a curiosity about tea's heritage and history (Kaldeen, 2020).

As per the literature study, there has been a significant amount of research on tea plantations in cottage industries up to this point. Previously, researchers examined the challenges and opportunities of tea gardens, the origins of tea gardens, and the export-import setting. Prior research on Qualitative studies dealing with the prospects of tea tourism, on the other hand, is scarce, necessitating more in-depth insights. Thus, the objectives for this study are as follows:

1. To look into the links between natural-handcrafted tea in Assam's cottage industries and tourism.
2. Research the prospects for natural-handcrafted tea in Assam's cottage industries and tourism.
3. To suggest some potential solutions for improving Assam's natural-handcrafted tea tourism.

## **2. NATURAL HANDCRAFTED TEA IN COTTAGE INDUSTRIES OF ASSAM**

The Assamese people, particularly the Singpho's<sup>[3]</sup>, have played an important role in the tea industry of Assam. They may have been the first to popularise the concept of natural-handcrafted tea in the state's tea industry. Natural handcrafted tea is becoming increasingly popular in other parts of the world. Many young people in Assam and other North-Eastern states have been inspired by the Singpho's approach to producing natural, handcrafted tea and this has played an important role in the change, as has the increasing global demand for organic tea. Margherita, located in the Tinsukia District of Assam, is home to the majority of Singpho people. When growing tea, they use organic fertilisers such as cow dung and vermin compost as manure. Over 200 small and medium-sized tea farms exist in Assam. Around 300 Singpho people work on these farms to support and meet the basic needs of their families by growing natural, handcrafted tea (Dutta, 2014; Vankan, 2014). The Singpho Tea or Phalap Tea is the traditional tea of the Singpho tribes. Because of their unique method of processing tea, it is also known as smoked tea, bamboo tea, and so on. Their traditional process for producing organic tea imparts a distinct aroma, for which they are well known throughout the state (Arya, 2013). Manufacturers receive a fair price for their products due to the global demand for such tea. Natural handcrafted tea is made in a different way than regular tea. Apart from Singpho tea, Assam's small tea growers have been promoting hand-rolled tea, Dheki

(mortar and pestle) tea, as well as CTC, orthodox, and Oolong teas. To enhance the flavour of black tea, CTC, and other beverages, ingredients such as Tulsi, Ginger, and Moringa are added. (Source: Aromica Tea).

### **3. PROSPECTS OF NATURAL-HANDCRAFTED TEA TOURISM IN ASSAM**

#### **1. Tea & Sustainable Tourism**

Tourism development in tea gardens could be a long-term strategy for boosting local economic growth if these projects have the potential to employ a significant proportion of the local population in tea tourism activities. Sustainable tourism is a potential rural economic activity (Boiko, 2020) that could serve as an adaptation and mitigation strategy (Zeppel and Beaumont, 2011). Tourists can participate in tea-green tourism from harvesting to packaging, including tea production (Chakraborty and Islam, 2020). Tea tourism is a strategy for increasing hospitality, and it provides ample employment opportunities in the cottage industry. Hospitality can help the economy and business grow by encouraging tourists to visit a specific destination that offers fun, relaxation, and new experiences, such as tea plucking, tea tasting, glamping, camping, and seeing a magnificent view of a tea carpet on a tea walk. For example, Tea tourism has provided numerous financial and non-financial benefits to the people of Pasirjambu, Rancabali, and Pangalengan, Indonesia. It has the potential to become a financially viable tourist destination in the "New Normal" era, which is an era where people are more engaged in nature tourism, or tourism that takes place in natural settings where visitors can breathe in clean air, experience a sense of well-being, and relax by taking in the beautiful natural view in the COVID-19 protocol agenda.

Similarly, the 2600 acres of ancestral land that constitute the century-old Sapoi Tea Estate in Assam's Sonitpur District produce high-quality tea and exhibit ingrained ancestral values. Visitors are welcome to join the tea factory, wherein employees gladly describe the process of plantation, harvesting, and the end product's production process. They can cycle around the estate and find joy, or use their vehicle to experience the picturesque scenery. In addition to producing high-quality tea, Sapoi Tea Garden's proprietors also welcome tourists to stay in their Bungalows to enable the tourists to experience the lifestyle in historic bungalows. There are opportunities to learn about farm-related activities during the visit. Visitors undeniably have a fantastic experience when they take a tour of the tea factory. Tea tasting is an add-on to the list. People are taught the art of picking tea leaves on the tea estate. Additionally, the process for preparing green tea from scratch is described and demonstrated, which is absolutely worth watching. In Sapoi Tea Garden, there is also an option of taking a tour of the adjacent organic farm. It educates one on the cultivation and processing of handcrafted tea. In short, the tea estate features a sumptuous landscape wrapped in resplendent beauty and displays an organic way of life in comfortable settings.

#### **2. Tea and Ecotourism**

The term "ecotourism" refers to the practice of visiting natural areas in a manner that benefits both the environment and the people who live there (Mahanta, 2014). It also demonstrates how the sustainable development pillars benefit society, the economy, and the environment (Devi, 2012). Assam is a state in India that is surrounded by hills and contains nature reserve. The region has a great potentiality for ecotourism because of the state's incredible physical and biological diversity. Other unique cultivars, in addition to tea eco-tours, have the potential to be converted into ecotourism attractions as a genetic as well as "in-situ" conservation. (Zhouyiqi and Tao, 2012). This was common practise in upper Assam's Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. Under the management of the "Tea Research Association (TRA) – Tocklai<sup>[4]</sup>", Jorhat, Assam, unique and rare tea varieties have been discovered and can be marketed to increase tourist inflow. It might be an ecotourism tea plantation

landscape design that safeguards the ecological and environmental sustainability of the area's potential tourism development. If the government focuses more on the development of ecotourism, it has the potential to become a central pillar of rural economies, for example, by providing support for infrastructure construction.

### **3. Tea and Gastronomy Tourism**

Tea-based "Gastronomy Tourism (GT)" is rapidly gaining popularity. Gastronomy tourism is a viable alternative to other forms of tourism in rural areas because it is simple to implement and visually appealing (Guzel & Apaydin, 2016). It not only offers food and drinks as the main attraction, but also other elements associated with food activities such as food products, preparation, processing, and serving. Furthermore, it provides cultural and local values, which can influence the overall tea tourism experience as well as the travel experience for visitors (Sukenti, 2014). Despite the fact that tea is the second most popular beverage after water, coffee continues to lead the way in the expansion of food tourism. Tea packages could include visits to tea cafes or tea houses located near tea estates. "Tea mixology" and "tea blending" as a form of tea art are gaining popularity amongst millennials, not only for the diverse results that can be obtained with different types of tea products, but also as a form of artistic expression. Aromica tea in Assam also sells tea made from edible pure gold flakes for Rs 2.5 lakh per kilogramme. Swarna Panam is a tea mix made with delicate petals of 24-carat edible gold. Black tea with honey overtones is made from the finest tea clones' most delicate leaves. The one-of-a-kind Assam orthodox honey tea is made by a master tea maker from Upper Assam who has made a name for himself in the specialty tea world and caused quite a stir in Europe by selling his tea at exorbitant prices. This exceptional orthodox tea is hand-rolled in cloth from the most sensitive tea leaves from the best tea clones and withered in a traditional technique.

The demand for wellness products is increasing by the day following the pandemic. To meet the demand, Aromica tea launched Aromica Fiery Tea, a special Assam organic tea blended with 'Bhot Jolokia' (ghost pepper) - one of the world's hottest chilies. Using a traditional

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[4] Tea Research Association – TRA Tocklai: Over 100 years of R&D for Indian tea. (n.d.). Tocklai.Org. Retrieved June 17, 2022, from <https://www.tocklai.org/>

Assamese tool called a 'Dheki,' the special fiery tea was blended with organic black tea, dehydrated lemon, and ginger powder. When served in a "Ban - Bati" - a bell metal bowl handcrafted by local artisans - this natural-handcrafted tea not only rekindles the age-old customs and ritual of drinking but also relieves stomach ailments. The Assamese people living mostly in rural areas, still drink tea in Ban - Bati (small bowl with a stand) or Bati (bowl) made of bell metal. (Source: Dr. Birinchi Choudhury)

The integration of natural-based handcrafted tea scenery and gastronomy centred on tea meals and drinks, promoted in homestays and rural tea cafes, may thus benefit the cottage industry and the environment of tea locations, boosting the region's sustainability. Many ancient tea items, such as "green tea chocolates," "tea chips," and "milk tea," can be found at community stalls set up near tourist attractions that specialise in Gastronomy tea (K. Sita et al 2021). Gastronomy tourism may teach tourists to be more receptive to environmentally friendly tourist attractions, engage local communities, and possibly impact sustainable livelihood for cottage enterprises in Assam (Horng, Liu, Chou, and Tsai, 2012).

#### **4. Tea Tourism and Sustainable Livelihood**

Tea tourism helps to improve the cottage industries as well as the economic status of the local community (Su, Wall, and Wang, 2019). In other words, while tea tourism does not significantly contribute to increased tea production as the primary source of revenue for the tea plantation industry, it does provide another source of revenue diversification for naturalhandcrafted tea companies. In the tea journey paradigm, more work is required to determine and relate tourism to tea manufacturing, tea heritage, tea culture, tea traditions, and everything else concerning tea experiences. If these various tea experiences can be marketed and offered in a trendy and contemporary manner, particularly for millennials, it could be a significant opportunity for the revival of the cottage business. Combining tea production with tourism in the primary producing region of Assam's tea industry has the potential to create a paradigm for a sustainable way of life. All of the elements that tea tourism has to offer, such as agro – edutourism through tea tours, ecotourism of tea's natural environment, and Gastronomy tea, which includes product variety, tea traditions, and tea culture, may help to ensure that people can live in a sustainable way near tea estates. In order to empower and expand access to tea and visitor assets (natural, human, physical, and financial), it is necessary to place an emphasis on developing deeper links and improving synergy in cooperative engagement between institutional structures or levels, such as the government, tea companies, and local communities. As a result, the quality of life at all levels, from the home to the neighbourhood or town to the community level, including cottage industries, may be improved in an environmentally friendly manner. Given the current labour shortages on tea plantations in Assam and other tea-producing districts of India, it is expected that access to labour in tea estates will be very competitive with other areas in the future, particularly tourism growth. To generate more sustainable livelihoods by taking into account local and global tea market requirements, a new tea business model must be built in the heart of tea-producing regions; one such method is combining tea and tourism into the business model.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that tea tourism in Assam is still in its early stages, providing an opportunity to organise the procedure and preparations to add value and ensure customer satisfaction. Furthermore, local governing bodies have proposed increasing investments in tea tourism and envisioning long-term growth that protects the sector, the people, and natural habitats' interests. This requires effective advice and direction in dealing with critical problems and difficulties, as well as capitalising on existing opportunities. To feed large investments in this area while keeping a close eye on the development process, a public-private partnership strategy is required. According to experts, tea tourism has a promising future if comprehensive planning involving all stakeholders is implemented. According to experts, tea tourism has a promising future if comprehensive planning involving all stakeholders is implemented. They believe that tea tourism, along with other experiences, should be included in mainstream vacation packages. Future urban planners and researchers must devise a model that is both environmentally friendly and effective in increasing tea tourism while also protecting the area's natural and cultural assets. Finally, marketing and advertising of nature-handcrafted tea within cottage industries and tourism are critical to the success of the industry.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

The authors are grateful to Mr. Ranjit Baruah, Director, Aromica Tea and his team for their inputs while preparing the paper. The authors are also indebted to Mr. Keshav Kanoi and his family, Sapoi Tea Estate, Assam for hosting the researcher and sharing the first-hand knowledge while undertaking the study.

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