



# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RURAL TOURISM IN MANIPUR

Ellena Elangbam, Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism, Amity University Uttar Pradesh – 201301

Dr. Aruditya Jasrotia, Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Travel and Tourism, Amity University Uttar Pradesh – 201301

**ABSTRACT:** India's commitment to sustainable development has piqued the interest of various sectors, including public, commercial, and governmental bodies at both central and state levels. This approach encompasses a spectrum of initiatives spanning social welfare, clean technology (such as clean energy, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture), and human resource development. One of the states where this paradigm is being explored is Manipur, nestled in the northeastern part of the country, celebrated for its rich cultural heritage and diverse ecosystems.

This abstract delves into the potential of sustainable tourism as a catalyst for rural development in Manipur. The state's untapped natural beauty, vibrant cultural tapestry, and unique historical legacy position it prominently in the realm of sustainable tourism, presenting opportunities for environmental preservation and socioeconomic upliftment. Embracing the ethos of sustainability, community engagement, and environmental stewardship, this approach seeks to leverage tourism as a conduit for inclusive growth and conservation efforts.

The promotion of sustainable tourism in Manipur hinges on several critical factors, including advocacy for eco-friendly practices, preservation of indigenous customs, empowerment of local communities, and enhancement of visitor experiences. By integrating these elements into the tourism framework, Manipur can foster equitable development while safeguarding its natural and cultural treasures.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, India, Manipur, Rural Development, Sustainable Tourism, Environmental Conservation, Socioeconomic Empowerment, Cultural Heritage, Indigenous Traditions, Community Involvement, Equitable Development, Environmental Stewardship.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the northeastern Indian state of Manipur, the fusion of sustainable development and rural tourism offers a hopeful path towards inclusive progress. This introduction sets the scene for exploring how Manipur's vibrant cultural tapestry and diverse natural beauty can uplift communities while safeguarding local traditions and the environment (Reddy, 2024). Through active community participation and sustainable approaches, Manipur aims to carve out a brighter, fairer future for all<sup>1</sup>.

### TOURISM

Tourism is more than just going on vacation; it's about exploring and experiencing new things. It includes both leisure and business travel, and it's not limited to holidays (Barten, 2021). People traveling, whether it's within their own country or abroad, contribute to the diverse world of tourism<sup>2</sup>. According to the World Tourism Organization, tourism isn't just about taking a break; it's about stepping outside your comfort zone for different reasons, like leisure or work (UNWTO, 2010). This global movement of people has a big impact on the economies of the places they visit and where they come from<sup>3</sup>. For many countries and regions, tourism is a major source of income, supporting businesses and creating jobs in various sectors like transportation, hospitality<sup>4</sup>, and entertainment. From airlines to local markets, tourism supports a wide range of businesses, driving economic growth and allowing people to exchange cultures and ideas around the world (Okafor, 2021).

The current state of tourism is bright, with the recently released Union Budget for 2023 highlighting its importance as a key sector<sup>5</sup>. The Ministry of Tourism is actively working towards its advancement, fostering collaboration between states and facilitating significant public-private partnerships<sup>6</sup>. A unique challenge mode process has been introduced to promote comprehensive development in 50 selected destinations. As of September 2023, foreign tourist arrivals totaled 6.43 million, while domestic tourist visits across all states and Union Territories reached 1.73 billion, with an impressive annual growth rate of 305.4% in 2022 (Ministry of Tourism; India, 2023).

### TOURISM IN MANIPUR

Manipur, nestled in Northeast India and often referred to as the Switzerland of India, boasts breathtaking landscapes bordered by Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, and Upper Burma<sup>7</sup>. Known as "the jeweled land" or "the land of jewels<sup>8</sup>," Manipur is celebrated for its misty hills, shimmering lakes, lush valleys, flowing rivers, and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ifp.co.in/opinion/scope-of-rural-tourism-in-manipur>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.revfine.com/tourism-industry/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.worldpackers.com/articles/ways-to-step-out-of-your-comfort-zone-while-traveling>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.revfine.com/tourism-industry/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.investindia.gov.in/sector/tourism-hospitality>

<sup>6</sup> <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1899949>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.aeronetholidays.com/public/index.php/detail/short-escape-to-manipur>

<sup>8</sup> <https://nakshathra.co.in/my-packages/darjeeling-north-east-states/>

dense forests. Its rich cultural heritage is reflected in exquisite handicrafts, traditional clothing, and artistic expressions<sup>9</sup>.

## TOURISM IN IMPHAL

Imphal, a picturesque valley nestled in Manipur's northeastern region, offers a glimpse into India's ancient past. Its historical significance is evident through ancient palaces, intricately designed temples, and majestic ceremonial dwellings surrounded by towering trees (Mehrotra & Chadhary, 2023). The valley, often resembling a painting, is adorned with verdant fields, rolling hills, and the picturesque Namaijing and Koubrou ranges, creating a mesmerizing backdrop. Imphal's charm is further accentuated by vibrant flowers adorning its landscape<sup>10</sup>.

## SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Sustainable development and rural tourism are intertwined concepts with immense potential to drive economic growth, preserve the environment, and enhance social welfare in rural areas. Sustainable development entails a holistic approach to growth, balancing economic progress with environmental conservation and social equity. In rural areas, it involves preserving natural resources, promoting local culture and heritage, and improving community livelihoods (McCareavey & McDonagh, 2011). Rural tourism, on the other hand, entails attracting visitors to rural destinations while preserving the integrity of the local environment and society. The symbiotic relationship between sustainable development and rural tourism is evident in various aspects (Basak, Bose, Roy, Chaudhary, & Sarkar, 2021). Firstly, sustainable rural tourism can serve as a catalyst for economic diversification, reducing reliance on traditional agriculture and creating employment opportunities in the hospitality, transportation, and handicraft sectors. Secondly, it can contribute to biodiversity conservation and the preservation of natural landscapes by fostering ecosystem protection, ensuring the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry<sup>11</sup>. Thirdly, rural tourism often fosters the preservation of cultural traditions, revitalizing rural communities and safeguarding their unique identities (Widawski & Krzemińska, 2023).

However, achieving sustainable rural tourism poses challenges. Balancing tourism development with environmental and cultural preservation requires careful planning, regulation, and community engagement. Additionally, infrastructure development, waste management, and resource allocation<sup>12</sup> must adhere to sustainable principles<sup>13</sup> to avoid adverse impacts on rural areas<sup>14</sup>. In conclusion, sustainable development and rural tourism offer a promising path to rural revitalization and sustainable growth (Kant, 2023).

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.earthtrip.in/manipur/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.theceo.in/blogs/the-ceo-magazine/tcm-tourism/manipur>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-0472/13/10/2028>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unwto.org/sustainable-development>

<sup>13</sup> [efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/5\\_Gender\\_Climate/Tourism/bp\\_tourism.pdf](https://www.gendercc.net/fileadmin/inhalte/dokumente/5_Gender_Climate/Tourism/bp_tourism.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [wedocs.unep.org](http://wedocs.unep.org)

When managed effectively, rural tourism can generate economic, environmental, and social benefits while preserving the authenticity of rural communities. To fully realize this potential, stakeholders, including governments, communities, and private enterprises, must collaborate to develop and implement<sup>15</sup> sustainable tourism strategies that prioritize human well-being and social welfare (Utami, Dhewanto, & Lestari, 2022).

## RURAL TOURISM IN MANIPUR

Rural tourism plays a significant role in enhancing the tourism experience, offering a glimpse into the region's cultural heritage through folklore, traditional dances, and theatrical performances<sup>16</sup>. Manipur's rural areas hold immense potential as tourism destinations, boasting unique attractions such as the Keibul Lamjao National Park and Loktak Lake, the world's only floating lake (Singh S. J., Prospect of Rural Tourism in Manipur, 2022). Manipur's diverse flora and fauna, coupled with its favorable climate and lush greenery, make it an ideal tourism destination. The focus is on community-run tourism initiatives in Manipur's rural areas<sup>17</sup>, offering travelers authentic experiences while supporting local communities. Manipur has implemented various measures to attract more tourists, including the development of star-rated hotels, expansion of cultural festivals like the Sangai Festival<sup>18</sup>, and the promotion of adventure and nature tourism activities such as rock climbing and trekking (Jha, 2021). International events such as trade fairs and food festivals also contribute to Manipur's tourism growth.

## MANIPUR TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN RURAL AREAS

- a. **LOKTAK LAKE:** Loktak Lake, the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, is a popular tourist destination known for its unique phumdis (circular floating marshes). The lake is home to the Keibul Lamjao National Park, the world's first floating national park and the last refuge of the endangered sangai deer. Loktak Lake supports diverse flora and fauna, making it a paradise for birdwatchers and wildlife enthusiasts<sup>19</sup>.
- b. **KEIBUL LAMJAO NATIONAL PARK:** Situated on the southwest corner of Loktak Lake, Keibul Lamjao National Park is the only floating national park in the world. It is the last remaining habitat of the Manipur brow-antlered deer, locally known as the dancing deer. Visitors can also spot otters, hog deer, and various waterfowl and migratory birds in the park<sup>20</sup>.
- c. **DZUKOU VALLEY:** Dzukou Valley, located on the border between Nagaland and Manipur, is renowned for its natural beauty. The valley is adorned with lush greenery, crystal-clear streams, and seasonal flowers, offering

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unwto.org/rural-tourism>

<sup>16</sup> <https://manipur.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/tourism-policy-full-final-new.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.drishtias.com/images/pdf/Kuru%20April%202019.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://rural.tourism.gov.in/Newsletter/December2023/dec-newsletter.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.drishtias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/loktak-lake>

<sup>20</sup> <https://bishnupur.nic.in/tourist-place/keibul-lamjao-national-park/>

brehtaking views year-round. It is a popular trekking destination, attracting adventurers and nature lovers alike<sup>21</sup>.

These attractions showcase the rich cultural and natural heritage of Manipur's rural areas, offering visitors unforgettable experiences and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

## II. GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND HISTORY OF THE STUDY AREA

The study focuses on Manipur, situated in the northeastern part of India. Surrounded by Nagaland, Mizoram, Assam, and Upper Burma, Manipur is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes, including hills, lakes, valleys, rivers, and forests.

Historically, Manipur has been known as "the jeweled land" or "the land of jewels," reflecting its rich cultural heritage. It has a diverse past, influenced by indigenous communities, ancient kingdoms, and colonial eras. This diversity contributes to its vibrant identity.

Despite facing challenges like political unrest and economic disparities, recent efforts have aimed at promoting tourism for economic growth. Events like the Sangai Festival and infrastructure development highlight Manipur's cultural and natural beauty.

The study delves into how Manipur's geography and history shape tourism. By understanding these factors, one can better grasp the opportunities and challenges for sustainable tourism in the region.

## III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The research aims to understand the significance of rural tourism and sustainable development in Manipur, recognizing their vital roles in the state's overall growth and tourism promotion. The researcher seek to analyze the specific locations within Manipur that are important for tourism and examine the efforts made by the state government to promote these areas during international trade fairs and cultural events. These initiatives attract tourists from across the globe, contributing to the state's tourism industry.

## IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To Create income and employment opportunities for local people through tourism-related activities such as accommodation, dining and guided tours.
- ii. To Minimize the negative impact of tourism on the environment by implementing environmentally friendly activities, conserving natural resources and protecting biodiversity.
- iii. To educate travelers, local communities, industry stakeholders, and politicians about sustainable tourism practices and principles in order to encourage responsible traveler behavior.

<sup>21</sup> <https://hrshikeshbaruah.wordpress.com/2021/10/24/my-trek-to-dzuko-valley-detailed-itinerary-to-this-treasure-trove/>

## V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Shabina Hussain emphasizes the vitality and eco-friendliness of the tourism sector, noting its positive impact on sustainability through the sale of tourism-related products. Rural tourism greatly enriches the overall tourism experience by showcasing the cultural richness of regions. In Manipur, attractions like Loktak and Keibul Lamjao National Park draw travelers with their unique offerings, reflecting the state's diverse flora and fauna. The paper aims to explore the benefits of tourism product management, urging quick adoption of sustainable practices for rural tourism, given the current lack of infrastructure and limited rural participation.

Sanjoy Singh highlights the pivotal role of tourism in international trade, suggesting that aligning production decisions with people's aspirations can enhance livelihoods. This approach involves various stakeholders like communities, businesses, NGOs, legislators, and tourism planners. Singh's analysis, centered on rural tourism in Manipur, underscores the importance of evaluating diverse livelihood outcomes and adjusting policies to maximize positive impacts. This perspective emphasizes community benefits beyond mere economic gains, advocating for a holistic understanding of tourism's effects.

In his research, Sanjenbam Jugeshwor Singh discusses how tourism affects rural livelihoods, focusing on Manipur. He talks about how rural tourism can preserve culture and provide new sources of income. Singh's work emphasizes the importance of understanding tourism's effects on sustainable development, offering valuable insights for planning growth strategies in the region.

## VI. FINDING AND INTERPRETATION

In recent times, tourism has emerged as a significant player in international trade, offering ample opportunities for livelihood enhancement. Rural tourism, in particular, stands out for its potential to enrich cultural heritage and provide alternative income sources. In Manipur, the scenic locales of Loktak Lake and Keibul Lamjao National Park beckon tourists, showcasing the state's diverse flora and fauna against a backdrop of fresh climate and verdant forests.

This focus on rural tourism reflects a community-driven approach, aiming to immerse visitors in the rural lifestyle. As agriculture remains the primary livelihood for about 70% of India's population residing in rural areas, rural tourism opens doors to non-agricultural income streams. Over the past decade, rural tourism in India has witnessed a significant surge, emerging as a key contributor to the nation's foreign exchange earnings.

With a majority of Manipur's population residing in villages, understanding the essence of rural life is crucial for grasping the state's true spirit. Recognizing this, the Manipur government has initiated efforts to promote

and market rural tourism, aligning with broader regional development agendas outlined in the North East Regional Vision 2020. This vision emphasizes tourism as a catalyst for economic growth, offering opportunities for trade diversification, income generation, and community empowerment.

## VII. RECCOMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

In Manipur, creativity flourishes through various artisanal endeavors like skin work, ceramics, and doll making, showcasing the state's rich cultural heritage. Rural tourism holds immense potential for enhancing trade and industry, offering diverse income opportunities, and opening new markets for agricultural products. However, despite government efforts, the tourism sector faces challenges, particularly in rural areas where community involvement remains limited.

The lack of grassroots interest and awareness about the benefits of rural tourism hinder its growth. Additionally, the dominance of foreign-run tourist businesses and the bureaucratic layers involved inflate operational costs, impacting the viability of tourism ventures. Changing travel patterns further complicate matters, necessitating careful management to balance tourism demands with environmental conservation and community needs.

Effective strategies for rural tourism management include prioritizing local involvement, ensuring public health and safety, preserving cultural heritage, and safeguarding natural resources. Sustainable practices not only benefit local livelihoods but also contribute to the preservation of culture, traditions, and the environment for future generations to cherish.

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