

Chapter 6

Ethnic Tourism and Its Prospects in the Eastern Himalayas: With Special Reference to Northeast India

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector has seen great development in recent years and expanding its forms to target different segments of tourists, and Ethnic tourism is one such form, which has been a common strategy used by many nations to promote economic and cultural growth and aid in the preservation of ethnic heritage. The eastern Himalayan region includes Bhutan, southern, central, and eastern Nepal along with Northeast India. Each region has different characteristics and features, which have contributed to the region's rich ecological and cultural diversity. The Northeastern region of the Eastern Himalayas is dominated by many indigenous communities which can be distinguished on traditional values, lifestyle, and customs. Ethnic tourism in the northeastern region has a considerable number of positive impacts which can enhance the value of the present tourism scenario of the region. Thus, this study shall focus on the prospects of this special interest tourism form, while addressing the need for improvement of planning strategies for the growth of ethnic tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The promotion of ethnicity as a tourist appeal and as a means of helping ethnic groups generate money and acquire foreign currency has grown. Many nations have used ethnic tourism to promote local economic growth by using their cultural variety. Ethnic tourism has also grown to be a potent tool for preserving ethnic groups' sense of self. It offers a huge opportunity for ethnic communities to promote their diverse cultures and heritages and to rejuvenate their customs, languages, and sense of cultural pride. Ethnic tourism has been a common strategy used by many nations to promote economic and cultural growth and

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aid in the preservation of ethnic heritage. Ethnic tourism may have positive economic and social effects, but it may also have a severe negative effect on the traditional cultures, lifestyles, and sense of identity of ethnic communities. The growth of ethnic tourism has been supported by economic advantages. Although most of them are not ethnic members, the government and tourist business owners are the key forces behind the development of ethnic tourism. Their administrative and economic engagement in the tourism industry has a significant impact on how ethnic culture is staged, packaged, and represented in tourist destinations. The decisions made by the government and entrepreneurs affect the authenticity of attractions rather than the resource producers, the ethnic minority. The commercialization of ethnic culture, the creation of cultural events, and the creation of other tourist attractions are all utilized to serve commercial and political objectives. Because they have little influence over tourist resources and activities, minorities are frequently economically and politically sidelined or disadvantaged. The majority of minorities that work in tourism only have low-wage occupations.

Van den Berghe (1992) defined ethnic tourism as the type of travel where the main attraction is the exoticism of the local culture. Three groups—tourists, tourees (natives who actually make a show of themselves), and intermediaries (who facilitate contacts between tourists and tourees and offer culinary services—are divided into labor to carry out this complicated system of interethnic connections). According to Harron and Weiler (1992), ethnic tourism is described as travel that is largely driven by the desire to have direct, authentic, and at times personal interaction with individuals who have a different ethnicity or cultural background than the tourists. Direct interaction with the host culture and environment was stressed, generally through trips to local houses and villages to witness and take part in ceremonies, rituals, dances, and other traditional activities.

Ethnic minorities typically encourage the growth of ethnic tourism in their area, and they especially appreciate ethnic tourism's role in fostering economic development. The majority of people of color are optimistic about the socio-cultural effects of ethnic tourism on their neighborhood, although a small percentage sees certain drawbacks, including increasing cultural integration and harmed folk practices and regional festivals/cultural events.

Ethnic Tourism offers unique opportunities for both traveler and the communities they visit. Let's explore the significance of ethnic tourism;

- **Cultural Enrichment:** Ethnic tourism influences visitors to get involved closely with the different ethnicities and its forms. It gives an opportunity to discover specific customs, music, art, cuisines, and languages. Cross-cultural understanding and respect may fostered by the cultural enrichment.
- **Economic Benefit:** For local communities, ethnic tourism may bring revenue from the selling of its components. Like, visitors frequently buy locally created souvenirs, which help the community in earning monetary value. The community gains from the creation of jobs in the tourist industry.
- **Preservation of Traditions:** Ethnic communities have a reason to conserve and promote their roots since tourists are interested in learning about their traditions and customs. This may result in the revival of extinct customs and languages, ensuring their transmission to next generations.
- **Sustainability:** Many ethnic tourism initiatives emphasize sustainability and responsible tourism practices. This can help to protect the natural environment and cultural settings, ensuring that they remain intact for years to come.
- **Cross-Cultural Exchange:** Ethnic tourism fosters a meaningful exchange of ideas and experiences between tourists and local communities. Travelers gain insights into different customs of lifestyles, leading to promote mutual respect and understanding.

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