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Research Article

Factors Influencing Tourist Perceptions of River Tourism Destinations: A Case Study of The Brahmaputra River in Guwahati, Assam, India.

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Abstract:

River tourism is a type of tourism that is primarily fueled by water resources. The Brahmaputra River, a powerful and influential river in India, plays a significant role in the landscape, livelihoods, and tourism industry. A study conducted between 2021 and 2024 aimed to understand tourists' perceptions and factors influencing their choice of river tourism sites in Guwahati, India. This study additionally examines into the way tourists perceive Brahmaputra River tourism and their satisfaction levels. The findings revealed an upward correlation between tourists' perceptions and satisfaction levels, which influences their decision to choose a destination, such as revisiting or recommend the location. The majority of tourists are satisfied and inclined to return and recommend the location. However, a few tourists are dissatisfied with certain destination-related traits, indicating the need for responsible bodies to address these concerns. This study is expected to contribute novel perspectives to the river tourism sector.

Key Word: Tourism, River Tourism, India Tourism, Assam Tourism, Guwahati Tourism, Brahmaputra River, Tourist Perception and Tourist Satisfaction.

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1. Introduction: Rivers are a topic of considerable research because of their enormous effects on language, literature, art, culture, civilization, and environment. In the context of tourism, rivers have come to be connected in the last few decades, and worldwide attempts are being made to attract tourists. Rivers are intriguing, and river tourism is an enticing concept that blends the

romance of travel and discovery with the landscape, history, culture, adventure, and entertainment. The global tourism market has been significantly influenced by river tourism. It attracts tourists who are seeking a range of experiences that encompasses religion, culture, ancestry, and other elements including sandy beaches, recreation in the outdoors, and breathtaking scenery.

Many scholars have studied rivers in the context of tourism (Ely 2003; Prideaux et al 2009; Strossmayer 2012; Tandon 2012), and their studies on rivers such as the Volga, Croatian, Pergau, and the Ganges have successfully established that rivers are important tourism resources that provide outstanding locations, recreation opportunities, waterfront panoramas, transportation corridors, commerce and trade, and cruise opportunities.

Tourism is largely dependent on tourists, as they are the primary element that makes it possible to achieve success in the industry. The World Tourism Organization (1995) defines a tourist as someone who travels to and stays in areas other than their regular surroundings for leisure, business, or other purposes for no more than one year in a row. In 1936, the League of Nations classified a foreign tourist as someone who had spent at least 24 hours abroad. Domestic tourists are residents of a particular nation who travel solely within that country only.

A tourist's 'perception' of the travel and tourism industry can be used in two ways. The first is the mental image formed by marketing and media, and the second is the way consumers or tourists perceive it. Sirgy and Su (2000), Fauziah and Fathiah (2011) and Rajaratnam (2015) have all strengthened our understanding of tourist perceptions in the field of tourism. Tourist perception depends on through their perception of the location, which can be influenced by marketing and media, as well as previous experiences. Crompton (1979) identifies four reasons for travel: enjoyment, corporate business, personal business, and visiting family and friends. Fauziah and Fathiah's (2011) study on tourist perception emphasizes the need of improving a destination's image to attract more visitors. It also concerns visitors' prior experiences (Rajaratnam et al., 2015). Whereas Kotler, Brown, & Markens (2006) and Mcdowell (2010) highlight the importance of understanding consumer preferences and values when promoting new products and services in the travel sector. Tourists have varied expectations of the destination, which can be influenced by factors such as friends, online marketing, and previous experiences. When these expectations are met, tourists are more likely to be satisfied, while dissatisfaction arises when these expectations are not met.

India boasts a wide range of tourism resources, including history, cultural, medicinal, commercial, and sports. Assam, located in the North Eastern Region, is renowned for its red rivers and blue hills. The state's extensive riverside, tributaries, and the Brahmaputra River, are ideal for river tourism development. The Brahmaputra River is a transboundary river and one of Asia's largest, with a broad range of tourist attractions, geography, and culture. Guwahati, located on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra River, is a popular destination for river tourism.

The aim of this study is to examine the factors which influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction levels while choosing a destination, as well as their impact on destination management on the Brahmaputra River in Guwahati, India.

2. Methodology:

This research used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The technique blends secondary data collection techniques with first-hand information. Primary data was collected directly from the field through a survey conducted between 2021 and 2024 using observation and a questionnaire. The study comprises a questionnaire survey followed by personal interviews with 278 tourists using convenience sampling. This study examines the present status of the Brahmaputra River, which supports river tourism and tourist perceptions. The questionnaire form has been divided into three sections: respondent data, respondent perceptions, and respondent recommendations. Researchers have explored close correlations between variables, such as travel motivation, perception, and satisfaction level.

2.1 Area of Study:

India is located north of the equator, between latitudes 6° 44' and 35° 30' north, and longitudes 68° 7' and 97° 25' east. India's latitude and longitude are 21.7679° North and 78.8718° East. The country is South Asia's seventh-largest country, is bordered by the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal, and Arabian Sea. It has geographic borders with Pakistan, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. India lies near the Maldives and Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands share a maritime border with Indonesia and Thailand. Politically, India is divided into 28 states and eight union territories, which include Delhi, the national capital.

Assam, a northeastern state of India, is located south of the eastern Himalayas and shares borders with seven Indian states and Bangladesh. The state is known for its natural beauty, wildlife, and tea gardens. Assam is renowned for its biodiversity, with several wildlife sanctuaries and UNESCO World Heritage sites, including the Manas and Kaziranga National Parks, which are famous for the Indian one-horned rhinoceros. Assam's drainage system comprises a network of rivers, tributaries, and wetlands. Assam has a complex geography, including the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries, which influence the region's drainage system. The world's largest and smallest river islands, Majuli and Umananda, are located in Assam's Brahmaputra River.

The Brahmaputra River, originating from the Yarlung Tsangpo glacier in Tibet, flows across the Tibetan Plateau, passing through magnificent Himalayan canyons before entering Arunachal Pradesh in India named as the 'Dihang'. The Dihang flows southwest from Sadiya, where it joins the Lohit and Dibang rivers. The river becomes known as the Brahmaputra after they merge. Its journey through Assam, is crucial for its fertile plains and biodiversity. It flows into Bangladesh as the Jamuna and eventually merges with the Ganga to form the vast Sundarbans delta. The Brahmaputra River, known for its tremendous force and beauty, is more than simply a topographical marvel; it is also the region's lifeline. The Brahmaputra River in India flows through states like Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya,

Nagaland, West Bengal, and Sikkim, with cities like Dibrugarh, Pasighat, Neamati, Tezpur, and Guwahati. Guwahati being significant urban centers along its banks. The Brahmaputra, also known as the "Red River," due to its significant sediment load, especially during the monsoon season.

The case study area Guwahati is located at 26.1844 latitude and 91.7458 longitude in both Asia and the Northern Hemisphere. Guwahati, the largest city in the Indian state of Assam, serves as the state's administrative headquarters as well as a significant hub for business, education, politics, culture, and sports. Its economy is mostly based on forests, agriculture, tea, tourism, textiles, and construction, with the primary languages being Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi. Besides this, Guwahati is a major riverine port city surrounded by foothills. The Brahmaputra River flows north of the metropolis, while the city is located on its south bank.

2.2 Perspective on Brahmaputra River Tourism in the Guwahati Metropolis:

Guwahati, a historic city located along the Brahmaputra River, is an increasingly popular tourist destination with a burgeoning shoreline. The Brahmaputra River is revered and venerated by Hindus, offering insight into historical, cultural, and religious tourism. The Brahmaputra River is also a significant source of entertainment and offers a variety of tourist-oriented activities. The Brahmaputra River, a prime natural element in Guwahati, is a popular recreation source offering opportunities for water-centered activities like angling, boating, kayaking, and river cruising. The river also provides ferrying facilities offering short and long-distance river cruises on its body. Umananda island in Guwahati is located middle of the Brahmaputra which is the smallest inhabited riverine island in the world offering a unique experience of the river's legendary beauty. The city provides a comprehensive overview of its river tourism resources and activities. The table 1 shown the river the Brahmaputra River tourism resources in Guwahati:

Table 1: River Tourism Resources and Activities

Resources	Site/Activity
Religious	Umananda Temple, Kamakhya Temple, Bhuvaneshwari Temple, Pandunath Temple, Chakreshwar Temple, Nabagraha Temple, and Sukreshwar Temple
River cruising and floating restaurants	MV Zolpori River Cruise, Alfredsco Grand River Cruise, Utsav River Cruise, Manashi River Cruise, Kamakaji Discothec and Bar Restaurant, South Coast Floating Restaurant, S.B. Sukafa River Cruise, ABN Saribidov II and ABN Suka.
River Ferry Transport	Transport of river ferry to Umananda temple and North Guwahati
Riverfront Park and Heritage Site	Sati Radhika Shanti Udjan, Sukreshwar Udyan, and Mahabahu Brahmaputra River Heritage Centre
Fairs and Festivals and River ghats	Jeevan Kite and River Festival, Brahmaputra Carnival, Brahmaputra Beach Festival and Chhath Puja.
Ropeway	The Guwahati Ropeway
River Port	Pandu River Port
Iconic River Bridge	Sharaighat Bridge (Old and New)

3. Analysis of Perceptions of Tourists:

A total of 278 respondents categorized as tourists. Out of these, 237 tourists had been domestic, and 41 were international. The majority of domestic tourists 57.84% who are visiting the research area were from Assam. Most of these tourists are locals visiting the area. Continuing on, among of the 41 foreign tourists, more over 50% of the international tourists in the study region were from Nepal and Bhutan, two of the countries closest to us. Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America accounted for the majority of the remaining tourists. With very few tourists from Spain, France and Germany and other countries.

This research investigated tourist demographics and travel motivations in order to comprehend and determine the factors that influence tourists' perception and satisfaction with their choice of river tourism places to visit. After investigation, the following ten factors influence tourists perceives and satisfaction levels while choosing a destination:

3.1 Residential Status:

According to the 51.89% of domestic tourists visited selected destinations were male, with 48.11% being female. Rural tourists accounted for 34.59%, while urban tourists accounted for 65.69%. The majority of foreign tourists were male, with 53.65% being men and 46.35% being women. The majority of foreign visitors came from urban areas, with only a few from rural areas. The study found that residential status had a greater impact on choosing a destination than gender, with most tourists originating from urban areas.

3.2 Occupational Status:

The study observed that domestic tourists accounted for 32.35% of students, followed by business and service groups. International tourists were 36.58% business, 31.71% professionals, 19.52% service industry, 9.75% students, and 2.44% from other groups. The majority of the tourists to the study area were students.

This research study clearly demonstrates that the business community and students were more impressed with the destination.

3.3 Age Profile:

The investigations revealed a significant age gap between domestic and foreign tourists, with 68.29% of foreign tourists over 60 and 2.54% of domestic tourists. The 20-30 age group also showed significant differences, with 50.21% of tourists from designated regions being domestic and 4.87% international. The 40-50 age range showed a gap, with 2.43% of foreign visitors aged 30-40. However, there was little difference in the age range of local and foreign tourists under 20 and those aged 50-60.

The study reveals that tourists' age range significantly influences their destination choice, with the majority of foreign visitors being over 60 years old, and the majority of local tourists aged 20-40 years.

3.4 Educational Status:

The research shows that 10.55% of domestic visitors have completed higher education, 37.97% have graduated, 36.28% have post-graduation, 9.71% have professional education, and 5.49% are others. 21.95% of foreign tourists have completed post-graduation, 19.52% are graduates, 12.19% have higher secondary education, and 2.44% are other education.

The findings indicate significant differences in educational backgrounds between domestic and foreign tourists, particularly in destination selection.

3.5 Prior Experiences and Source of Information:

The study revealed that foreign tourists and domestic tourists have different information sources. 51.22% foreign tourists primarily sourced information from search engines or internet marketing, while 35.04% domestic tourists primarily sourced it from friends and family. The Department of Tourism provided 7.17% of information, while prior visits and search engines accounted for 18.56% and 22.36%, respectively. International tourists, on the other hand, primarily sourced information from their prior visit, word-of-mouth, and other sources.

The study reveals that a tourist's perception of a destination is influenced by their prior experiences and various information sources. The most common sources of information for tourists visiting the research area were internet marketing platforms, search engines, and friends and family, followed by past visits and experiences. These sources work together to shape a tourist's willingness to return.

3.6 Travel Companion of Tourists:

Foreign tourists primarily travel with friends and groups, while domestic tourists typically travel alone or with friends. Family members make up 20.67% of travel companions, followed by groups (15.62%), college groups (5.06%), and other 2.54%. Foreign tourists arrive by themselves, with 12.20% with family and 7.32% with other companions.

The research showed tourists' perceptions of a tourist destination are significantly influenced by their travel companions. Foreign tourists tend to prefer group travel, while local tourists in the study area typically prefer traveling with friends. This highlights the importance of companionship in shaping tourists' experiences.

3.7 Duration of Stay:

The study found that domestic tourists typically stay for 2-4 days, followed by one day and then 5-10 days, while foreign tourists stay for 2-4 days, followed by a minimum of 5-10 days, and finally one day. While there are similarities between domestic and foreign tourists, only a small percentage stay longer than 11-15 days, while only 4.65% of domestic tourists stay for more than 20 days. Both local and foreign visitors desire longer stays, often continuing for one or ten days.

The study reveals that the duration of a tourist's stay significantly influences their perception of a destination, influencing their desire to return and highlighting the importance of this duration in tourism.

3.8 Attraction of Destination:

The study found that 33% of tourists enjoyed natural river-based activities like bathing, fishing, and angling, 30% enjoyed exploring river-based religious sites like Umananda Temple and Doul Govinda Temple, and 20% preferred recreational activities like river cruising and ropeways. 12% enjoyed riverbank fairs and festivals, while 5% preferred water sports activities.

The study reveals that tourists' perception of a destination's attractiveness is highest for places of interest with natural resources and religious importance. This perception is influenced by factors such as infrastructure development, easy access, and technological advances. Tourists' responses to these attractions are significant, highlighting the importance of attractiveness in determining their choice of destination.

3.9 Purpose of Visiting a Tourist Destination:

The study found that a significant number of domestic and foreign tourists visit selected destinations for pleasure, religious reasons, adventure, and business and official travel. The majority of foreign tourists are pilgrims from Nepal and Bhutan. Adventure was the primary reason for travel for 46.24% of foreign tourists and 34.44% of domestic tourists. Only 11.5% of tourists visited Guwahati for medical reasons, mainly from neighboring states.

The research explores how tourists' travel purposes influence their perception of a destination, revealing that most domestic and foreign tourists visit Guwahati for its recreational, spiritual, and adventurous offerings, with the study showing that tourists have multiple purposes for their travel.

3.10 Tourist Perception and Satisfaction Level Varies between Domestic and Foreign Tourists:

The study reveals that 51.21% of foreign tourists were satisfied with the hospitality, security, and pleasant conduct of the host community, along with the region's natural

surroundings, vibrant culture, and pleasant weather. In contrast, 53.58% of domestic tourists expressed satisfaction with the religious significance of the Brahmaputra River and its associated religious sites, contrasting the overall satisfaction levels of both types of tourists.

The majority of foreign tourists' express dissatisfaction with tourist attractions due to lack of amenities, power supply issues, ATM shortages, and lack of entertainment. Domestic tourists, however, are less satisfied with the high costs of river-based activities, and the lack of safety precautions, particularly for boats, in river tourism. This disparity in perceptions highlights the need for improved infrastructure and safety measures in tourist destinations.

4. Findings:

The findings of the research show that a variety of factors influence how tourists perceive a destination. Positive tourist perception enhances the image of the spot and could result in drawing in more tourists. A positive perception of a spot additionally encourages the possibility of revisiting there. Understanding the tourist's perception will help develop a more engaging and important travel experience for tourists. Further, it can strengthen the destination's marketing and promotional strategies. It also shows that a large number of domestic and international tourists are satisfied and willing to revisit and wants to recommend the destinations to others. Although in some cases domestic and foreign tourists are also dissatisfied with many problems, so local community, various service providers and government authority should take responsibility and take necessary action to improve those problems. It reached a conclusion that tourist perception and destination growth throughout the study area are positively correlated.

5. Key Insight and Recommendations

The following areas were explored in order to get insight into the perceptions of river tourism possessed between foreign and domestic tourists:

5.1 Awareness of the Brahmaputra River Tourism:

According to the study, both local and foreign tourists are aware of Brahmaputra River Tourism, with 63.29% of domestic tourists and 85.63% of foreign tourists aware of Guwahati River Tourism. The Brahmaputra River, passing through Assam, has significant potential for sustainable river tourism in both semi-urban and urban areas. However, concerns about its sustainability persist due to rising pollution levels. Religious tourism increases pollution levels, while mass tourism negatively impacts the destination's carrying capacity. Despite the growing prominence of river tourism, concerns persist about its sustainability in the future.

5.2 Sustainable River Tourism:

The study reveals that while 21.11% and 19.52% of domestic and international tourists are unaware of sustainable river tourism, 78.90% and 80.48% are aware of it. Most tourists have positive perspectives on safe and

welcoming communities, while 34.60% and 26.83% have negative attitudes. Sustainable travel destinations should consider sustainable attitudes when selecting destinations, as they offer both natural attractions and leisurely pursuits.

The study recommend that river tourism should maintain a high level of consumer satisfaction in terms of product viability, enhance overall understanding of sustainability issues, and encourage ecologically responsible methods. Tourism stakeholders should adapt promotional tools by understanding different tourist demographics. Authorities, including tourism departments, tour operators, travel agencies, and tourists, should educate the community about river tourism's benefits and sustainability through thoughtful planning and environmentally friendly initiatives, rather than adopting a universal approach.

6. Conclusion:

The study concluded that a combination of attractive tourism resources boosts tourist numbers in a specific area. It also highlighted the importance of understanding tourist satisfaction for a destination's success. Strengthening the destination's quality and standards can enhance satisfaction, leading to better reputation and favorable marketing strategies, ultimately boosting the destination's success. The Brahmaputra River is a prime location for sustainable river tourism, promoting sustainable practices. Demographic factors, travel motives, and infrastructure significantly influence tourists' perceptions and satisfaction choices of destinations.

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