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# Prospects and Problems of Historical Tourism in Sivasagar District, Assam

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**Abstract:** Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries in the world, with enormous potential for further expansion. Each year, approximately 700 million tourists—about 6 percent of the global population—cross international borders. Today, "tourism" encompasses all the relationships and phenomena that arise from travel and the temporary stay of people in unfamiliar places. Factors such as rapid urbanization, rising living standards, the shift of individuals away from rural environments, and increasing leisure time have all contributed to the global development of tourism. The sustained growth of the tourism industry has become a major source of funding for sustainable community development, job creation, the conservation of cultural heritage, and the establishment of diverse cultural identities. The world increasingly recognizes tourism as a significant industry that generates vast business opportunities, creates wealth, acts as an income multiplier, stimulates employment, and helps preserve both culture and the environment. In this context, historical tourism involves people visiting museums and monuments to learn about past glories, historical figures, notable landmarks, archaeological sites, and ancient ruins. This paper aims to explore the various opportunities and challenges facing tourism in Sivasagar, a historic district in Assam.

**Keywords:** Community development, historical tourism, business opportunities, cultural heritage.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sivasagar, formerly known as Rongpur, is located 369 kilometers east of Guwahati, the gateway to the North Eastern Region of India. This town is rich in historical relics that attest to the 600 years of the illustrious Ahom rule. The nearest airport to Sivasagar is in Jorhat, which was the last capital of the Ahom kingdom, situated 55 kilometers away. The closest railway station is just 16 kilometers from the town. Accommodation options in Sivasagar include a tourist lodge, a circuit house, a dak-bungalow, and various hotels. Regarding tourism prospects in Assam, and specifically in Sivasagar district—which is our focus—this area stands out as a potential hotspot due to its historical, cultural, and economic significance. The region's glorious past offers promising opportunities for future development. Sivasagar has the potential to cultivate various types of tourism, including historical tourism, cultural tourism, oil tourism, tea tourism, eco-tourism, and adventure tourism. This paper aims to examine the prospects and challenges of historical tourism in the Sivasagar district.

**Methodology:** To conduct this study, the investigator employed a field survey method to collect primary data. For secondary data, the investigator relied on official publications, monthly magazines, and various literary sources. Field studies were conducted at historical monuments, sites, and places of interest. Additionally, both published and unpublished documents related to the subject were consulted for further insights.

**Significance of the study:** The Sivasagar district in Assam is renowned for its rich historical, educational, environmental, and cultural heritage. The establishment of the Ahom kingdom in this region significantly contributed to the development of art and architecture, which holds a unique position in medieval Assam. Many

historical monuments from the glorious six hundred years of Ahom rule are scattered throughout Sivasagar district. Notable sites include the first Ahom capital, Charaideo; Kareng Ghar; Rang Ghar; Talatal Ghar; Siva Dol; Joy Dol; Sivasagar Tank; and Joysagar Tank. In addition to these historical monuments, the Satra, Namghar, and Ajan Pir Dargah play a vital role in representing the district's rich cultural heritage. Furthermore, events such as the famous Maha Shivaratri Mela, various handicrafts, traditional folk dances, and numerous festivals attract visitors from across India and abroad. Thus, Sivasagar district holds great significance for the growth and development of historical tourism.

**Objectives:** The paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the background of historical monuments.
2. To identify and highlight important historically significant monuments in the district.
3. To assess the potential for the development of historical tourism in Sivasagar.

## 2. SOME HISTORICAL HOT SPOT FOR TOURIST IN SIVASAGAR

The district of Sivasagar is home to several historical monuments, sculptures, archaeological evidence, and many other artifacts that hold significant importance, particularly in the medieval history of Assam. These historically prominent sites are scattered across various parts of the district, attracting tourists interested in exploring the region's rich heritage.

**Charaideo:** Charaideo is currently recognized as a separate district of Assam, established by the Government of Assam on August 15, 2015, from the heart of Sivasagar. A discussion of Charaideo would be incomplete without mentioning the Charaideo Maidam. It houses the oldest archaeological remains of the glorious Ahom kingdom, as Charaideo was the first capital of the Ahoms. Founded by the first Ahom king, Sukapha, in 1253, it is situated atop a hill. The historical importance of the Charaideo Maidam (cremation site) lies in the fact that Ahom rulers and their queens were cremated there according to their traditional practices. In addition to this burial system for the royal families, many historically significant temples and tanks continue to attract tourists from various parts of the world. Although the capital was later shifted to Charagua by the Ahom king Sudangpha, also known as Bamuni Konwar, Charaideo has retained its historical significance. In recognition of the archaeological importance of medieval Assam, both state and central government archaeological departments have shown considerable attention to the preservation of Charaideo. As a result, in 2024, UNESCO recognized Charaideo as a World Heritage Site, which presents immense opportunities for the tourism sector. It is anticipated that such measures will play a significant role in the growth and development of historical tourism. It is also expected that people from abroad will come to learn about the remarkable 600-year rule (1228-1826) of the Ahoms, which is indeed a rare occurrence not only in the history of Assam but also in the history of the world.

**Gargaon and Kareng Ghar:** Swargadeo Suklenmung, also known as Garganya Raja, was the son of the greatest expansionist ruler of the Ahom dynasty, Suhungmung. He occupies a unique position in the history of medieval Assam for establishing the fourth capital, Gargaon, in 1539 A.D. Suklenmung earned the name Gargayna Raja because he constructed ramparts around the capital city to ensure both internal and external security, a measure of great historical importance. Suklenmung understood that the threat from the powerful Mughals, as well as potential attacks from the Koch rulers, necessitated such defensive actions. In 1527, during his father's reign, the Mughals launched their first attack on the Ahom kingdom, during which Suklenmung himself was injured. This incident further strained relations between the Ahoms and the Koch rulers. In response to these challenges, Suklenmung decided to establish the Royal Palace, known as Kareng Ghar, within the protective rampart. Initially, during his reign, the Royal Palace was constructed using bamboo, wood, and other temporary materials. However, it was later permanently built with bricks and cement during the reign of Rajeswar Singha, the succeeding Ahom king.

**Rongghar:** Rudra Singha, the able son of the esteemed ruler Gadadhar Singha, who is regarded as the greatest among the forty-one Ahom rulers, shifted the capital from Gargaon to Rongpur in the area that is now Joysagar. During Rudra Singha's reign, Rongghar was initially constructed using wood and bamboo. It was later rebuilt with bricks by the Ahom king Pramatta Singha in 1746 A.D. Rongghar is a two-story building that once served as a royal sports pavilion, where Ahom kings and noble officers enjoyed various games and sports held at Rupahi Pather, particularly during the Rongali Bihu festival in Assam. This location is significant as it marked the first celebration

of Bohag Bihu and Rongali Bihu by the people of Assam over a span of seven days. It is often said that Rongghar was the first open theatre in Asian nations. Today, Rongghar is considered a prominent heritage site in Assam, offering ample opportunities for people in India and around the world to connect with this rich cultural legacy.

**Talatal Ghar:** Talatal Ghar is a significant milestone in Ahom art and architecture, holding great historical importance in medieval Assam. Built by Ahom king Rudra Singha in 1699, it was strategically constructed for military purposes. The present structure, constructed with bricks and indigenous types of cement, was completed under the reign of King Rajeswar Singha. Talatal Ghar is primarily a seven-storied building, with three stories underground and four above ground. It played a crucial role in military operations for over 95 years during the illustrious rule of the Ahom dynasty. Shiva Dou, Bishnu Dou, and Devi Dou were constructed by Ambika, the second wife of Shiva Singha, in 1734 A.D. Shiva Dou is located in the heart of Sivasagar town, near the historic Sivasagar tank. It stands at a height of 180 feet and has a diameter of 195 feet, topped by a seven-foot-tall golden dome. The Shiva temple in Sivasagar district serves as an important center of pilgrimage. The Sivaratri Mela, an annual festival dedicated to the worship of Lord Shiva, attracts a large number of pilgrims from various parts of the country and abroad for three to four days during this auspicious occasion. The Sivasagar tank, popularly known as Borpukhuri, is situated in the center of Sivasagar town, near Shiva Dou. It was excavated by Queen Ambika, the second wife of Shiva Singha, in 1734 A.D.

**Joysagar Tank and Joy Dou:** Joysagar Tank is located 5 km away from Sivasagar town. It was excavated by Ahom King Rudra Singha in 1697 A.D. to commemorate the memory of his mother, Joymati Kunwari, who sacrificed her life for the cause of the motherland. Joymati Kunwari is seen as an ideal figure, symbolizing the status of women in both Assamese and Indian society. It is significant to note that Gadadhar Singha, Joymati Kunwari's able husband, successfully resolved the political crisis during the Ahom period following the historic Battle of Saraighat in 1671 A.D. in exchange for Joymati Kunwari's life. Joymati Kunwari's son, Rudra Singha, who is regarded as one of the greatest rulers of the glorious Ahom kingdom, decided to build the Joy Dou on the banks of Joysagar Tank. Joysagar Tank is the largest man-made tank in the world.

**Gaurisagar Tank and Temple:** About 10 km to the west of Sivasagar town, alongside National Highway No. 37, stands the historic Gaurisagar Tank. On the banks of this tank are three prominent temples known as Shiva Dou, Bishnu Dou, and Devi Dou, constructed by Bar Raja Phuleswari Kunwari, the first wife of Ahom King Shiva Singha. Queen Phuleswari not only constructed the tank but also the temples, dedicating them to Goddess Gauri.

**Stone Bridge of Namdang:** The Stone Bridge of Namdang is a remarkable piece of historical evidence from medieval Assam. Constructed in 1703 A.D. by craftsmen brought from Bengal during the reign of Swargadeo Rudra Singha, this historic bridge measures 202 feet in length, 21 feet in width, and stands nearly 5 feet high.

**Ghanashyam Ghar:** Ahom king Rudra Singha established the Ahom capital at Rongpur. He brought Ghanashyamuddin, the chief architect from Cooch Bihar, to oversee the construction of the capital city. Thanks to Ghanashyam's skilled efforts, Rongpur quickly became a prominent city within the Ahom kingdom. The city was named after Ghanashyam, who was responsible for building masonry structures, temples, and other significant buildings in the Joysagar locality.

### 3. PROBLEMS OF HISTORICAL TOURISM IN SIVASAGAR

The issues affecting the growth and development of the historical tourism sector in Sivasagar can be summarized as follows:

**1. Lack of Proper Care:** The historical sites in the region are decaying due to inadequate maintenance. Modern scientific and technological measures are not being utilized to protect these valuable monuments

**2. Transport and Communication Challenges:** Sivasagar, being a flood-affected area, faces significant infrastructure challenges compared to other parts of Assam. This includes poor road communication, a lack of railway connectivity, and insufficient transport facilities for tourists. Additionally, geographical isolation, absence of leadership, and a shortage of funds further hinder tourism development.

**3. Insufficient Information:** Many historical sites, monuments, and temples are located in remote areas, despite

their significance. In today's business landscape, a lack of information and promotional materials makes it difficult for potential tourists to discover these attractions, limiting their visibility.

**4. Lack of Research Activities:** Some historical sites require thorough research to uncover and promote their true value. The absence of research efforts in the promotion of historical tourism impedes the development of significant sites in the district. Investment from the government or other authorities in this sector could yield substantial returns, but it remains largely neglected.

#### 4. MEASURES TO IMPROVE HISTORICAL TOURISM IN SIVASGAR DISTRICT

To enhance historical tourism in Sivasagar District, a comprehensive effort involving both the government and active participation from the community is essential. The government needs to focus on attracting tourists, and local residents should be educated about their history and cultural heritage. It is important for people to take pride in their nationality, remembering their national heroes, historical monuments, and cultural contributions. Significant financial investment is necessary from the government to establish libraries, parks, and memorials dedicated to national heroes, as well as to improve road conditions. Additionally, historical monuments and cultural institutions should be well-maintained and properly adorned. The Department of Archaeology should prioritize the protection of valuable manuscripts from Sanchiat and idols from local temples. The people of Sivasagar should advocate for the establishment of a reputable museum to house and preserve these important artifacts. Community members who are aware of the value of their history should work towards beautifying historically significant locations. Furthermore, improvements in public infrastructure, carried out by the Public Works Department (PWD), are vital for enhancing transport and communication, which will, in turn, attract more tourists. Young people should be encouraged to develop better facilities in lodges, restaurants, and hotels near historical sites, and they could serve as guides, providing tours and information to visitors. This initiative can generate income for unemployed youth, who could work as guides or drivers for tourist vehicles. To support these efforts, the government of Assam should focus on developing and repairing the district's streets and roads. Additionally, addressing the flood issues in the area is crucial for advancing tourism in Sivasagar.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

Today, this land remains relatively untouched by the challenges of the modern developed world and is largely unexplored by travelers from around the globe. Ironically, not long ago, its glorious fame, cultural heritage, and wealth attracted invaders from all over the world. From Alexander the Great onward, the Parthians, Kushanas, Turks, Mughals, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and British all came to exploit our resources and captured our land, but they could not conquer our minds or alter the cultural fabric and social ethos of the country. Historical tourism is not solely about financial gain. It reflects our golden past and serves as the foundation of our present, encompassing our name, fame, glory, and opportunities for income, gainful employment, and overall development. This can elevate Sivasagar to prominence, making it a notable destination not just in Assam but across India. Historical tourism offers an ideal platform for research for both the present and future generations, in addition to providing pleasure through visits and sightseeing. With dedicated efforts, we can transform Sivasagar into a thriving hub of tourism in Assam. The proper measures taken by the concerned authorities, non-governmental organizations, and the awareness of the local community will undoubtedly pave the way for significant advancements in the tourism sector.

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