

Sustainable Tourism Development in Mizoram: Assessing the Responsible Tourism Policy 2020



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Abstract

This paper will discuss the tourism policy in Mizoram, its development, and prospects. Coming to terms with tourism as an important industry in 1993, Mizoram subsequently pursued its plan using the Responsible Tourism Policy 2020 that encourages responsible practices in line with national objectives. This study evaluates the effect of the state laws, such as the Mizoram Registration of Tourist Trade Act, on responsible tourism and tourist satisfaction by analysing secondary data. It underlines the economic importance of tourism; the necessity of adaptive policymaking to satisfy the new demands; the need to discuss the significance of branding, promotion, and timely distribution of credible tourist information to increase the popularity of Mizoram and tourism development.

Keywords: Mizoram Tourism Policy, Sustainable Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Economic Growth, Tourism Development

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important element in the development of the region as it enriches the economy, provides employment, develops infrastructure, and increases the living standards of local persons (Guluzade, 2023; Vrablikov et al., 2023). Furthermore, it is considered that the development of tourism is one of the ways of fighting poverty. Research evidence indicates that tourism and multidimensional poverty reduction in poor regions has a positive relationship, and tourism has the possibility of helping to alleviate poverty in many aspects, such as economic development, education, social welfare, and health services (Zhou et al., 2024).

The policy of tourism can be termed as being a collection of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, development goals, and strategies that have a direct effect on the long term development and daily operations of a tourist attraction site (Charles R. Goeldner & J. R. Brent Ritchie, 2012; Jenkins, 2000). In 1982, the Indian Government presented its first national policy on tourism, highlighting the importance of the sector and its objectives for tourism development in Parliament. Subsequently, the New Tourism Policy was adopted in 2002, marking a joint effort between central and state governments. This policy aims to enhance the employment potential within the tourism sector and foster economic integration by developing linkages with other sectors (Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Government of India, 2002). Mizoram, a state in the north-eastern region of India, shares domestic boundaries with Assam, Manipur,

and Tripura and international borders with Bangladesh to the west and Myanmar to the east. Mizoram was included in Assam up to 1972 when it was converted into a Union Territory and full statehood was granted to it on February 20, 1987.

Tourism is one of the major sources of economic growth and development of a hilly state like Mizoram, which is blessed with the best natural beauty and full of culture which has about 21 hill ranges. This paper examines and assesses Mizoram State Tourism Policy, outlining the activities being done by State Tourism Department to encourage the growth of tourism, the challenges and opportunities, and recommendations on future developments in tourism. The study will be analyzed using secondary data gathered based on the available sources such as the Tourism Department and Government of Mizoram. This paper is limited to an analysis of Mizoram State Tourism Policy, in that case of Mizoram, a North East Indian state.

Tourism as an Industry in Mizoram

Mizoram declared tourism an "industry" on March 18, 1993, with the aim of generating a higher income for the sector and providing benefits to service providers through promotional activities. Despite its abundant natural and cultural resources, Mizoram's tourist arrival statistics remain lower than those of other North-Eastern states in India. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of tourist arrivals in recent years. Following the pandemic, the numbers recovered in 2021-22, showing a notable increase of 67.4% from to 2021-2022 to 2022-2023.

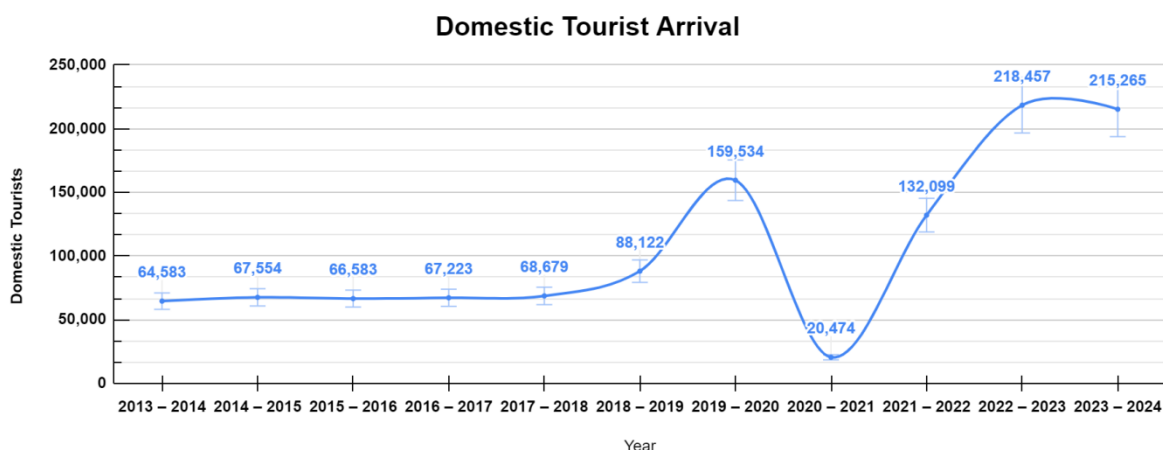


Figure 1: Domestic Tourist Arrival of Mizoram, India.



Figure 2: International Tourist Arrival of Mizoram, India.

Table 1: Tourist Arrival Data of Mizoram, India from 2013-14 to 2023-24.

Year	Domestic	International	Total
2013 - 2014	64,583	906	65,489
2014 - 2015	67,554	862	68,416
2015 - 2016	66,583	830	67,413
2016 - 2017	67,223	987	68,210
2017 - 2018	68,679	1155	69,834
2018 - 2019	88,122	1644	89,766
2019 - 2020	1,59,534	2143	1,61,677
2020 - 2021	20,474	90	20,564
2021 - 2022	1,32,099	517	1,32,616
2022 - 2023	2,18,457	3551	2,22,008
2023 - 2024	2,15,265	3884	2,19,149

The State Government framed its Tourism Policy on May 15, 2014, with the aim of placing Mizoram on the global tourism map as a leading tourist destination and key driver of economic and social development in the state. The policy’s vision and mission focus on developing tourism in a sustainable and integrated manner; with emphasis on eco-tourism and

adventure tourism. To support this, the Chief Minister established the Mizoram Tourism Development Board, a non-statutory body responsible for formulating policies and guidelines for the development and promotion of tourism. In 2020, the Mizoram Responsible Tourism Policy was introduced to promote a comprehensive and

sustainable approach to tourism. This policy emphasizes responsible tourism standards and encourages coordination among government departments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private service providers. Additionally, the state enacted the Mizoram Registration of Tourist Trade Act 2020, which created a regulatory framework for the registration of all stakeholders in the tourism sector (Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram, 2020).

1.1. Mystical Mizoram: A paradise for everyone

Mizoram's Responsible Tourism Policy outlines ten key targets aimed at achieving sustainable and responsible tourism, while fulfilling the promise of the brand "Mystical Mizoram: A Paradise for Everyone."

Target 1: "Responsible tourism development and promotion is in line with the 2002 National Tourism Policy as a State Priority"

Target 2: "Promoting sustainable management of tourism in quality Infrastructure"

Target 3: "Promotion of the brand 'Mystical Mizoram: A Paradise for Everyone'"

Target 4: "Responsible product development attracts targeted high-quality niche markets"

Target 5: "Local entrepreneurs, businesses, service providers, and transport providers are protected, and incentives and recognition are provided through awards."

Target 6: "Mizoram's Tourism products and resources are responsibly managed"

Target 7: "Mizoram's tourism industry provides improved visitor yield"

Target 8: "Mizoram's tourism development is community-based"

Target 9: "Skill Development and capacity building for quality service delivery through human resource development."

Target 10: "Facilitating sustainable tourism through inter-sectoral convergence and coordination"

In accordance with the Act, the Government of Mizoram formulated and published the following regulations and recommendations to ensure sustainable growth of the tourism industry:

- i. "Mizoram Registration of Tourist Trade Rules, 2020"
- ii. "Mizoram (Aero-sports) Rules, 2021"
- iii. "Mizoram River Rafting Rules, 2021"
- iv. "Guidelines for Caravan Tourism in Mizoram"
- v. "Guidelines for Dormitories & Hostels in Mizoram"
- vi. "Guidelines for Homestays in Mizoram"
- vii. "Guidelines for Tour Operators in Mizoram"
- viii. "Guidelines for Ticketing Sales Agent/Travel Agent in Mizoram"
- ix. "Guidelines for Homestays in Mizoram"

- x. "Guidelines for Tour Guides in Mizoram"
- xi. "Guidelines for Registration of Restaurants in Mizoram"
- xii. "Guidelines for Organizing Festivals/Fairs/Events by Non-Government Agencies in Mizoram"
- xiii. "Guidelines for Recognition of Tourism Service Providers Associations in Mizoram"

Mizoram "Responsible Tourism" Pledge

Tourists visiting Mizoram are required to take a pledge on "Responsible Tourism" during their stay. The government aims to make this pledge prominently visible at all entry points and at major tourist attractions. Additionally, tourists can take the pledge online through the State Tourism Department website.

Responsible Travel Pledge

*"I pledge to be a responsible traveler;
When I explore new places,
I will leave nothing but footprints,
and take away only memories;
I shall not harm,
what does not harm me;
I shall travel clean and green,
I shall respect the local culture;
And I shall promote sustainable tourism."*

This pledge serves not only tourists but also the general public, and is taken during all tourism-related events organized by the Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram. Tourism clubs, such as the YUVA Tourism Club at the college and university level, also take the pledge together during any activities performed by them.

2. Measures and Initiatives by the Department of Tourism

The increase in both domestic and international tourist arrivals is a testament to the tireless efforts of the state's tourism department despite its reliance on central government assistance. Recognizing its potential in the tourism sector, the Government of Mizoram is committed to advancing tourism development by improving basic infrastructure and amenities.

2.1. Fairs and Festivals

Fairs and festivals impact tourism (Hall, 1992). A well-planned festival has its purpose, objectives and outcomes. Events serve as agents of sustainable economic development (Getz & Page, 2019). The Department of Tourism organizes festivals to increase the influx of domestic tourists and boost the local economy.

Winter Festival: The Department of Tourism, Government of Mizoram, organizes the Winter Festival annually in December. Originally a two- to three-day event, it has now expanded to a weeklong

celebration, often featuring an exhibition or a music concert. The festival celebrates the diverse culture and traditions of Mizo (*People of Mizoram*) with a range of entertainment, including exhibitions of handlooms, handicrafts, and traditional cuisines. It also provides a platform for YUVA Tourism Clubs at college and university levels to showcase their initiatives and raise tourism awareness among visitors.

Anthurium Festival: The Anthurium Festival is one of the most popular festivals celebrated by Mizoram. Named after the beautiful and exotic Anthurium flower, the festival was launched as a tourism promotion venture by the Department of Tourism, in collaboration with the Horticulture Department in 2006. The festival is held in Reiek village in the foothills of Reiek mountain which is about an hour away from Aizawl, the state capital. The festival was quite successful; hence the number of Anthurium flowers cultivated was hugely increased with many Mizo women having them in large numbers. This expansion of cultivation employment was generated and the local economy was improved. The festival cover a great variety of activities such as musical performances, the traditional dances, cultural demonstrations, exhibition of regional handicrafts and handlooms, tasting of native food. These activities showcase Mizo culture and serve as tools to promote cultural tourism. Unfortunately, starting in 2024, the Department has decided to discontinue the Anthurium Festival and shift focus to a new event, the Leitlangpui Music Festival, which is planned to be held annually in mid-November in Lunglei, Mizoram. During the Christmas season, the government initiated efforts to promote decorations on streets and junctions in Aizawl. These efforts have since been continued and carried forward annually by local communities and the Young Mizo Association (YMA), a non-governmental organization. In addition, the Department of Tourism sponsors various exhibitions, trade fairs, and similar events held in and around the capital city to promote tourism.

2.2. Projects

The government initiated projects through various schemes, institutions, and funding agencies, including Swadesh Darshan, Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD), North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), North Eastern Council (NEC), and Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJKV), focusing on regional infrastructure development.

2.3. Awareness and Training Programs

The government has a series of awareness events, detailed seminars as well as special training as one of the ways of ensuring tourism service providers have the information, skills, and expertise necessary to

succeed in the industry. These efforts are meant to improve the quality of services, sustainability and make the tourism industry stay strong and competitive in the face of changing challenges. Through the targeting of major stakeholders like the travel agencies, tour guides and hotel owners, the government plays an active role in encouraging growth and success of tourism in the long run.

2.4. Publicity

The government facilitates tourism by utilizing the different social media like Facebook and Instagram and by issuing Mizoram tourism brochures on sponsored and non-sponsored events. The media team has put a concerted effort to utilize the large number of online followers it possesses through Facebook and Instagram to bring visitors to the state and promote the unique offerings it has to people by bringing attention to the site.

3. Challenges to Tourism Development

It is the socio-political and geographical factors that hamper the growth of tourism industry in Mizoram and the entire North-East India. Although the levels of literacy are high, there is still less developmental work done in the region. The state is affected by several challenges such as bad terrain, poor climatic conditions especially during the monsoon season, and poor infrastructure such as roads and means of transportation. There is lack of accessibility by the tourists due to limited air connectivity and railways. Besides this, quality accommodation in the remote places is also in short supply and even basic facilities like clean toilets are not always available and lack of proper medical facilities is an issue.

Despite the fact that Mizoram is a warm and hospitable state, there is lack of trained professionals in the tourism and hospitality sectors, which influences the quality of services offered to the tourists. The local population should be provided with skills and this can be achieved by better training and offering more courses on tourism and hospitality management in institutions of learning.

Although cultural exclusion helps to preserve culture, it is a source of a communication barrier as a result of local dialects that are used in rural as well as urban settings. The tourism stakeholders do not know English and Hindi, which has led to great difficulties in communication among the tourists. The language barrier does not only make it difficult to interact with the local service providers but also lowers the quality of the tourist experience. The domestic tourists have cited poor attitude in communication through language, food and water quality, government infrastructure, travel schedules and not being curious. Of all these problems, the impression of locals not showing an interest is the most harmful to the impressions of the tourists. Tribal societies tend to be rather closed and do not want to communicate with other people or non-tribal groups. (Deka, 2020)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Tourism Growth and Policy Impact

The tourism policy of Mizoram shows that there is a significant growth in the number of visitors, particularly after the pandemic. This development was facilitated by the emphasis of the state on sustainable tourism trends and responsible tourism. The Mizoram Responsible Tourism Policy of 2020 and the Mizoram Registration of Tourist Trade Act of 2020 have had significant influences in the development of the tourism industry. These policies are meant to improve the visitor experiences, responsible tourism as well as incorporating local communities into the process of tourism development.

4.2. Festivals and Publicity

Both the local and foreign arrivals are increasing, which can be credited to a successful event, including the Winter Festival and the Anthurium Festival. These festivals in addition to celebrating the local culture draw tourists and improve the local economy. The transition to the Leitlangpui Music Festival is an indication of diversification and expansion of tourism. Social media promotion and tourism brochures have helped to make the Mizoram attractions known to the population, but so improvement in online marketing could achieve even better outcomes.

5. Challenges and Barriers

In spite of such favorable changes, there are a number of issues that have remained. Complex topography, unfavorable weather patterns, and poor infrastructures are the factors that still restrain the development of tourism. The lack of air connectivity and railways make accessibility difficult, and lack of quality accommodation and basic facilities also affects the tourist experience. Also, the service quality is influenced by the unskilled workers in the tourism industry.

There is cultural exclusion as a result of the use of local dialects and low English and Hindi language, which creates a strong barrier to communication. This does not only influence the contact between the tourists and service providers, but also influences the quality of the experience of the tourists. The domestic tourists have cited unfavorable views regarding language communication, quality of food and water, and government infrastructure.

6. Suggestions and Recommendations

6.1. Enhancing Infrastructure and Accessibility

Infrastructure Development: Invest in enhancement of road networks, transportation systems and accommodation facilities and especially in remote areas. This increases the convenience and ease of tourists.

Air and Rail Connectivity: Find solutions to enhance air connectivity between it and the major cities and lobby to develop railway infrastructure, improve facilities and upscale frequency of service to ease accessibility into Mizoram.

App-based ride-hailing: Add lead major service providers like Uber, Ola, Rapido, etc. that would support the already existing public transport systems through provision of on-demand service, flexibility in routes, convenience in digital payment and hence enhance the overall travel experience.

6.2. Improving Service Quality

Training and Education: Develop additional training programs and courses in the field of tourism and hospitality management in order to prepare the local professionals with the required skills. Liaise with learning institutions to make tourism management a part of their curriculums.

Service Standards: Create and implement services quality criteria such as cleanliness and hospitality so that visitors have a very similar and good experience.

6.3. Addressing Communication Barriers

Language Training: Conducts language training to tourism stakeholders in order to enhance English and Hindi proficiency. This will assist in removing gaps in communication and improving communication with tourists.

Bilingual Signage: Install bilingual signs and information sources in tourist attractions to support non-local visitors to enhance their general experience.

6.4. Promote Cultural Sensitivity and Engagement

Community Involvement: Incorporate more local communities into the tourism development and encourage cultural exchange programs. This can be used to counter the problems of cultural exclusion as well as build a friendly tourist atmosphere.

Cultural training provides cultural sensitivity training to the tourism workers to make them considerate and aware of the local customs and traditions.

6.5. Leveraging Digital Marketing

Enhanced Online Presence: Increase digital marketing activities to incorporate more interactive and engaging content in the social media. Reach a broader audience by using online reviews, virtual tours, as well as influencer collaborations.

Regular Updates: Maintain tourist information and promotional contents current and relevant so that they do reflect the present state of tourism offerings.

6.6. Continuous Policy Evaluation

Regular assessments: Use of system to conduct a frequent review of tourism policies and practices. This will assist in recognizing areas to improve on

and strategic changes to suitably meet the challenges arising.

Stakeholder Feedback: Consider the feedbacks of the tourists and local businesses among other stakeholders to inform the policy changes and enhance tourism development.

Through these areas Mizoram can continue to take advantage of its tourism development, counter current challenges, and establish itself as a key tourist destination, and at the same time guarantee sustainable and inclusive growth of the visitors as well as the local communities.

7. Conclusion

This research paper will give an in-depth analysis of the Tourism Policy in Mizoram in terms of its development, challenges, and opportunities in the unique socio-political and geographical environments of the state. Tourism was officially recognized as an industry in 1993 and there has been significant development in Mizoram, and specially with the launch of the Mizoram Responsible Tourism Policy in 2020 and the Mizoram Registration of Tourist Trade Act. These programs are meant to facilitate sustainable tourism practices, responsible tourism, and better experiences to the visitors. The domestic and international tourist arrivals have been experiencing a positive trend as of late, particularly following the pandemic. Winter Festival and Anthurium Festival among other events have managed to enhance tourism and promote local economies. However, the state still has a number of problems such as poor infrastructure, poor connectivity, and communication obstacles.

Located in the scenic beauty and moderate climate, Mizoram holds a lot of prospects of receiving tourists in the domestic market and international market. It is also strategically located with its borders with Myanmar and Bangladesh and this is a boost to international trade and tourism in southeast Asia. The ability to maximize on this potential is important through improving connectivity and infrastructure. Although the Mizoram Tourism Policy is strong, it has not been effective due to the way it was implemented and enforced inconsistently. It is critical to deal with these inefficiencies especially in the infrastructure development in order to progress the growth of tourism. Besides, branding and publicity have to be improved. The tourism promotion even in Mizoram is relatively low compared to other North-Eastern states and this has led to a small inflow of tourists to Mizoram. The extension and increase in major cultural occasions like the Chapchar Kut (festival), and a better cooperation between the Tourism Department and the Art and Culture Department might go a long way into making the state interesting.

Besides, incomprehensive online information is also a significant impediment to potential tourists. The tourism site of the state should be updated with the

required information about the tour itineraries, maps and accessibility. To achieve more people, it is critical to strengthen the digital representation of the state by means of better marketing, appealing websites, and a proactive social media advertisement. To sum it up, Mizoram needs a more comprehensive and strategic approach to tourism development. Mizoram can consolidate its reputation as a leading tourist destination by ensuring that infrastructure shortages are mitigated, branding should be intensified, and online information should be more effective, which will result in long-term and inclusive development of tourism.

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