

TEA TOURISM IN DARJEELING

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ABSTRACT

Tea tourism is wonderful and recreational experience that can satisfy the tourist's interest. Tea tourism provides opportunity to avail all information and experience related to tea. Tea tourism has emerged as a very recent niche in the world tourism scenario. Development of tea tourism sustaining the environment and preserving the heritage and culture, will benefit the region by creating employment opportunities and boosting rural economy and thereby alleviate the insurgency and other socio-economic problems. Tea estates as well as the government are planning to develop additional facilities inside the tea garden to attract tourists which can help in generating additional revenue. There are many homestays at tea garden and tourist gets accommodation with all hospitality and recreations.

Keyword- *Tourist, Tea tourism, Homestay, Economy.*

A brief over view of tea tourism-Tea Tourism is a contemporary concept researched and talked about since the beginning of the 21st century. It is a wonderful tourism concept associated with tea gardens. The tea gardens, the process of tea plucking, tea producing, cultural festivals of the tea tribes and staying at the tea bungalows are part this tea tourism. This is a kind of unique tour experience connected to nature. Tea tourism is already popular in countries like China, Srilanka and Kenya. It is now catching up in India. Darjeeling, where the breath of the Himalayas surrounds the traveller and the deep green valley's sing all around. Darjeeling is where the world's most fabled tea is born. A tea that echoes mystery and magic in every sip. There are various tea gardens well maintained and managed by various companies. Tea tourism has become the buzz word in promoting the tourism for North East India. Tea estates as well as the government are planning to develop additional facilities inside the tea garden to attract tourists which can help in generating additional revenue. The state governments of West Bengal and Assam are working towards creating the necessary infrastructure for tea tourism. They are



re-organizing to create the best tourism infrastructure at almost all destinations, including rural and remote areas. The term 'tea tourism' will broadly include the overall experience of tourists in the midst of a tea garden or estate, staying in a heritage bungalow, at a home-stay feeling in a tea-village or in a modern resort. Trekking in the natural beauty of a lush tea garden, undertaking a tea-testing session, visiting a modern tea factory and even trying one's hand at plucking tea leaves are all within the idea of tea tourism. Tea tourism is such a wonderful and recreational concept that can satisfy the taste of tourists' interest. It provides tourists the opportunity to avail all information and experience related to tea.

Tourists can spend time amidst natural beauty of tea gardens, enjoy nature walk, trekking, rafting and even playing golf also. Tourists stay at luxurious tea bungalows, ensconced in the best of comfort. They can enjoy interacting with tea workers, partake in tea leaves plucking and participate in cultural festivals. Tea Tourism has emerged as a very recent niche in the world tourism scenario. Tea tourism in India, like in China, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Malaysia and Taiwan, is catching fast on popularity. Recently increasing number of tourists are rushing to the lush green tea estates of Darjeeling, the Nilgiris and Assam. Tea estates in India have started accommodating guests in their bungalows flagging off tea tourism.

Back ground of Darjeeling as a city of tea gardens -The name 'Darjeeling' came from the Tibetan words, 'dorje' meaning thunderbolt (originally the sceptre of Goddess Indra) and 'ling' a place or land, hence the land of the thunderbolt. Prior to its acquisition by the East India Co. in 1835, Previously Darjeeling formed a



part of dominions of the king of Sikkim, who had been engaged in an unsuccessful warfare against the Gorkhas. From 1780 the Gorkhas constantly made inroads into Sikkim and by the beginning of 19th Century, they had overrun Sikkim as far eastward as the Teesta and had conquered and annexed the Terai. E.C.Dozey in his 'Darjeeling Past and Present' wrote, 'Prior to the year 1816, the whole of the territory known as British Sikkim belonged to Nepal, which won it by conquest'. Ten years later dispute once again arose between Sikkim and Nepal, which

according to the Treaty of Titalia, were referred to the Governor General. Accordingly in 1828 Captain Lloyd was deputed to settle the dispute. Along with Mr. J.W.Grant, the Commercial Resident at Malda, he came to the hills and was attracted by the position of Darjeeling. From a Report dated 18th June 1829, in which he claims to have been the only European, who visited the place. As per the record Lloyd visited the Darjeeling in February 1829. General Lloyd was accordingly deputed to start negotiations with the King of Sikkim for the transfer of Darjeeling in return for an equivalent in money or land. The negotiations ended in the execution by the king of Sikkim of a Deed of Grant on February 1835. Darjeeling was gifted to the British. This was an unconditional cessation of what was then a worthless uninhabited mountain. The land gifted to East India Co. in 1835 did not comprise the whole present Darjeeling. It was narrow enclave of 138 square miles, about 30 miles long and 6 miles wide. It was entirely surrounded by the king's dominions - entry and exit being restricted to a narrow path, which included the sites of Darjeeling and Kurseong towns and touched the plains near Pankhabari. What the King got in return immediately was a gift parcel - one double barrelled gun, one rifle, and one 20 yards of red-broad cloth, 2 pairs of shawl- one superior quality and the other of inferior quality. Having acquired the Hill Territory of Darjeeling, Gen. Lloyd was sent in 1836 to explore the tract, to ascertain the nature of the climate and to investigate the capabilities of the place.

Heritage Homestay at tea garden-There are several gardens in Darjeeling that are over 150 years old and were established in 1800s during the British period. They are still operational. Darjeeling tea is well-known for its test



and flavour. It is famous through the world. There are 80 odd operational tea gardens in Darjeeling that span across thousands of acres of land area on open hill slopes. High on the hills with cool breeze and misty weather, planters and workers come together to form a wonderland where tea grows in the finest form like nowhere else in the world. This tea gardens have bungalows. These Bungalows were typically the residence of British tea planter built during the old colonial time. The bungalows retain the antique furnishing & aura of the colonial days, and setup amidst lush garden setting within the estate. The tourists stay in these bungalows. Food is prepared of fresh organic produces from

the backyard garden. Tourist wake up and sip a cup of finest aromatic tea that was plucked fresh from the gardens. Tourist takes a stroll through the garden, talk to the garden workers and see how they deftly pluck the two leaves with a bud, and learn about their lives. Tourist are also invited to take a look and learn about the tea processing in the factory where some of the best tea in the world are withered, rolled, dried, sorted and packaged. In some areas open car takes tourist to visit nearby attractions. Tourist can take a walk through the villages and nature trails, and get deeper insight into the lives of the people living in the mountains. Some tea estate workers and villagers have extended their houses to make home stays for tourists on low budget and offer them homemade food and a nice glimpse into the tea garden life as well. In most cases, there are all inclusive packages available including transfers, meals and garden activities. In most tea gardens, the properties are managed and services provided by those who are picked up from the estate workers community. Tea garden stay is meant to bring tourist closer to the nature and the tea garden life, organic food etc. There are some popular Tea Estate are Sing tom Tea Estate Resort, Makai Bari Tea Estate & Home Stay, Ging Tea House, Darjeeling, Glenburn Tea Estate & Retreat, Selim Hill Tea Estate & Retreat, Goomtee Tea Estate & Resort etc.



Economic effect of tea tourism -Darjeeling tea industry retains its leadership position in world tea market and keeps growing further from here. Tourism has occupied a significant position in the economy of a country of present era as an industry earning foreign currency and strengthening national economy. Development of tea tourism, nourishing the environment and preserving the heritage and culture, will benefit the state by creating employment opportunities and boosting rural economy and thereby alleviate the insurgency and other socio-economic problems. If the tea tourism is highlighted with proper planning and proper prospects, it can help the Govt. to earn much revenue and also create a new shape of the region in the map of the world tourism sector.

Conclusion -Tea tourism in Darjeeling is still evolving and in its early stages. More and more tea estates are coming forward and opening up their gardens and bungalows to the tourists. There was a time when such tea tourism was limited to the directors of the estates and owners' families. Other than the accommodation, lot many activities are now being added including nature & village hike, eco adventure activities, experiencing tea garden life & local culture, sightseeing tours, organic food etc. While this acts as an additional source of revenue for the management, it also helps creating more jobs for the villagers who work in such tea garden retreats and also in associated activities. The home stays are aimed towards creating alternative income for the garden workers and villagers who extend their houses to accommodate tourists. Over all, tea tourism is still not an organized sector in Darjeeling. Tour operators or agencies are not active in tea tourism, mainly because the tea estate owners are very selective about their guests. Prices in the main retreats are kept far higher to keep that out of reach from vast majority. Home stays of course are low scale alternatives which tend to be attractive mostly to foreign tourists on low budgets but due to improper promotional activity these are still out of reach.

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