

Rural Ecotourism: Key to Sustainable Development in North-East India

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Of many initiatives to bridge the development gap between different regions, rural ecotourism is perhaps the least expensive and most effective one. Its benefit is manifold -from employment generation to preservation of natural heritage. Because of the difficult terrain, means of transport and communication is still limited in most of the north-east India. Thus politically, most of it falls into the rural region. How-

ever, unlike the infrastructure the resources are unlimited. Major attractions can be categorized into:

1. Rich Bio-diversity - flora, fauna, forest, medicinal and aromatic plants
2. Immense cultural diversity
3. Tremendous ethnic diversity - people and their traditions
4. Matrilineal social system amongst Khasis and Jaintia tribes as also a variation of matriarchal system among Garos are the world's remnant of ancient civilization
5. Mountains, rolling hills, forests, lakes, valleys, rivers
6. Variety of village life fold and livelihood options, rural diversity
7. Diversity of religious celebrations
8. Spread of History
9. Tea and Raj nostalgia
10. Gateway to South East Asia.

A proper blueprint of sustainable development can trigger the development multiplier to the advantage of local community and at the same time preserve the natural beauty of the region till eternity. Only then India's North-East can be a befitting reply to Europe's Switzerland.

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