

Constructed Environment for Tourism

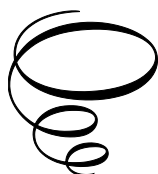
Constructed Environment for Tourism:

*A Case Study using a Conceptual
Framework and Guidelines*

By

A S Sochipem Zimik, Arup Barman
and Santosh Kumar Ranjan

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I dedicate this book to my beloved father, the late A S Mahangmi Zimik, who was suddenly taken from us to find peace in heaven. His presence in my life remains deeply cherished, and the void he left behind has inspired me to complete this work in his memory. Despite not having formal education, he was a beacon of hope, lighting the way for me to finish this book. His interest in my studies was always evident, and his encouragement meant the world to me. Words seem inadequate to express the pain of his absence, yet it brings me comfort to say that both I and my co-author have agreed to honor his memory in this dedication.

Dr. A S Sochipem Zimik

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PREFACE

*This book emerges from my enduring passion for research, driven by a desire to explore uncharted dimensions and push the boundaries of knowledge. Among the many themes that shape the discourse on tourism development, the concept of the Constructed Environment—though long present in practice—had remained unnamed and underexplored. Through this study, I have sought to define and contextualise this concept, bringing it into the academic and practical forefront. The Constructed Environment refers to a thoughtfully designed and systematically executed space created to enhance tourist satisfaction, ensure sustainability, and promote the optimal use of available resources. Its success depends on the active collaboration and competence of various stakeholders. To advance the tourism industry, it is crucial to comprehend both the tangible and intangible characteristics that influence its development. This work is presented through a structured series of chapters covering key dimensions such as an overview of the tourism industry, the theoretical foundation of the Constructed Environment, an extensive literature review, research methodology and objectives, data analysis and interpretation, findings, and strategic recommendations. The findings herein are the result of extensive fieldwork and in-depth analysis, culminating in the title: *Constructed Environment for Tourism Industries – A Case Study Based on the Conceptual Framework and Guidelines for Best Practices*. I am confident that this study will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, practitioners, students, and policy-makers who are seeking insights into the emerging relevance of the Constructed Environment in tourism. It is my hope that this work contributes meaningfully to the body of knowledge by bridging the existing gap between tourist perceptions and the vision of policy-makers—an alignment that, until now, had not been clearly articulated. Moreover, this book aspires to raise awareness among stakeholders across North-East India and beyond, encouraging a more conscious, inclusive, and strategic approach to tourism development.*

Dr. A S Sochipem Zimik

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Dr. A S Sochipem Zimik

CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW TO TOURISM

1 Introduction

Tourism, as defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2008), is a multifaceted social, cultural, and economic phenomenon that involves the movement of individuals to destinations beyond their usual surroundings, driven by either personal or professional motives. In recent decades, tourism has emerged as a central pillar of economic growth and a vital contributor to wealth generation and sustainability (Dupeyras & MacCallum, 2013). Despite occupying only around 8% of the country's total land area, the region under consideration exhibits significant potential for tourism development and destination appeal (Barman & Zimik, 2021; Asokan & Rizal, 2013; Duarah & Mili, 2013). Several locations have already been identified as promising tourist hotspots (Dam, 2013; Zimik & Barman, 2021). According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC, 2019), the global tourism sector accounted for 10.4% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and provided employment for approximately 319 million people—equivalent to 10% of total global employment as of 2018. These figures underscore the immense capacity for growth within the industry and highlight the urgent need for continued investment and infrastructure enhancement. The global expansion of tourism has opened new avenues for regional exploration, positioning the sector as one of the fastest-growing economic domains (Chutia, 2015). Between 2017 and 2019, international overnight arrivals grew by 6%, surpassing the projected target of 1.4 billion tourists ahead of schedule (UNWTO, 2019). Several critical factors have been identified as drivers of this growth, including improved transportation networks, advances in communication and information technology, logistics, increased disposable incomes, rising living standards, and the accelerating pace of globalization (Sonja & Ivana, 2016; Nusrath & Malik, 2014). Tourism's success is inextricably linked to the quality of infrastructure and the availability of support services. However, in many developing regions, infrastructure development remains significantly

underdeveloped in comparison to national benchmarks. This lag necessitates focused policy frameworks and effective implementation strategies to strengthen the sector's foundation (Zou & Prasian, 2017; Sarmah, 2018; Chutia, 2015; Gogoi, 2017; Kalita, 2016). Projections by UNWTO (2019) indicate that international arrivals were expected to grow by 3–4% that year, reaffirming the ongoing momentum in the sector.

With increased tourist inflows come higher expectations for transport systems, modern amenities, digital technologies, safety measures, service excellence, and aesthetically engaging environments. This study is rooted in the growing academic and practical interest in understanding how tourism interacts with the constructed environment (CE). The objective is to assess the awareness and perceptions of various stakeholders, encompassing both institutional perspectives and tourist psychology. While multiple initiatives have been undertaken to enhance physical infrastructure, there remains a gap in scholarly analysis regarding the role and impact of CE in tourism development. The study seeks to bridge this gap by examining how the CE—a thoughtfully curated physical and socio-cultural setting shaped by the host destination—affects tourism outcomes. By doing so, it aims to inform policymakers, urban planners, and tourism stakeholders of the strategic importance of CE. This analysis will be grounded in comparative assessments across global, national, and regional tourism destinations, providing nuanced insights into how CE influences tourism dynamics and sectoral performance.

1.1 Tourism Industries

Tourism, as characterised by the UNWTO (2010), involves individuals travelling beyond their usual surroundings for less than one year, motivated by leisure, business, or other purposes. In the context of Northeast India, the region presents a rich tapestry of tourism opportunities shaped by its vibrant natural landscapes and deeply rooted cultural traditions. As Cook (2019) observes, the region's appeal lies not only in its scenic beauty but in its cultural vitality, exemplified by events such as the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, Bihu in Assam, Losar in Arunachal Pradesh, and the Nongkrem Dance Festival in Meghalaya.

Rather than a point of contention, it is a well-grounded assertion that tourism holds a pivotal role in the economic framework of the region, acting both as a primary source of livelihood and a gateway to broader development opportunities. The very definition of tourism has grown increasingly fluid, influenced by evolving tourist preferences and the accelerated pace of globalisation. In recent years, the tourism sector in

Northeast India has witnessed a consistent upward trajectory, positioning itself as a vital economic engine for the region.

A report published by Yes Bank (2014) indicates that tourist arrivals in the region experienced a compound annual growth rate of 8%, rising from 3.13 million in 2003 to 6.68 million in 2013. Assam, due to its strategic geographic location and its role as a gateway to other northeastern states, accounted for approximately 69.5% of international tourist arrivals during this period. Its border proximity and connectivity have facilitated not only tourist inflow but also robust cross-border economic exchanges.

However, challenges remain. Inadequate marketing and communication infrastructure, shifting tourist expectations, heightened ecological awareness, and rising demand for experiential travel have collectively reshaped the trajectory of the tourism sector. As Harshasheelam (2020) notes, the industry's focus is no longer limited to traditional sightseeing but now includes ecotourism, cultural immersion, educational travel, heritage site visits, and broader sustainable development goals. These emerging dimensions necessitate a more nuanced understanding of tourist psychology and the various stakeholders' roles in shaping the tourism experience.

To grasp the underlying dynamics of this transformation, there is a pressing need for scholarly inquiry into the evolving trends, particularly concerning the role of the CE. CE refers to the carefully designed infrastructure, services, and cultural ambience developed by host communities to attract and accommodate tourists. As tourist numbers continue to grow, so too does the demand for upgraded infrastructure, prompting calls for sustained investment and strategic development.

The rising influx of visitors into Northeast India has also drawn attention from both public and private investors. The central government, in coordination with state authorities, has undertaken efforts to accelerate tourism sector growth, including the provision for 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This collaborative framework, which increasingly includes partnerships with local communities and private stakeholders, marks a promising step toward enhancing the region's tourism potential while safeguarding its cultural and environmental assets.

1.2 Tourism Trend

1.2.1 Eco-Tourism

The growing global emphasis on ecological preservation has sparked a profound shift in tourism trends, ushering in the rise of eco-tourism as a

preferred mode of travel. Increasingly, tourists are guided not merely by the allure of leisure but by a conscious desire to explore destinations that are environmentally sound and minimally disturbed by mass human activity. These travellers are often drawn to pristine, lesser-known locales, favouring authentic natural experiences such as bird watching, forest treks, and wildlife safaris—activities that encourage a deeper connection with the environment (Faridi, 2017). In this context, environmental integrity becomes an essential determinant in destination selection. Cleanliness, ecological sustainability, and the preservation of biodiversity are no longer just aesthetic considerations; they form the core expectations of the modern eco-conscious traveller. Destinations perceived as degraded or polluted risk both reputational damage and a decline in visitor numbers. With the increasing influence of digital platforms and media, news of environmental neglect can spread rapidly, potentially discouraging initial visits or repeat tourism. Today's tourists are gradually distancing themselves from the conventional patterns of travel traditionally associated with culinary exploration, cultural curiosity, linguistic immersion, religious pilgrimage, romantic escapades, or family reunions. While these remain integral aspects of tourism, they are often intertwined with emotional fatigue, nostalgia, or even grief. As such, eco-tourism has emerged as a therapeutic alternative—one that offers tranquillity, emotional renewal, and a means of escaping the pressures of modern life. The prospect of artificial eco-tourism—entailing the development of controlled, nature-like environments for visitors—has sparked global interest, attracting investment commitments on a scale of billions. Yet in places such as Northeast India, where natural biodiversity, unspoiled landscapes, and unique ecological zones abound, the focus lies not in simulating nature but in preserving and enhancing it. The region's tropical climate and dramatic topography render it a haven for nature enthusiasts and environmental travellers alike. As noted by Talwar (2006), the sector has undergone considerable transformation; particularly as mass-market tourism has become less about adventure and more about passive consumption. In contrast, the northeastern states of India possess immense potential for eco-tourism, due to their rich flora and fauna, widespread forest cover, and underexplored natural areas. Destinations such as Kaziranga National Park, Cherrapunji, Dzuko Valley, Sendra Lake Resort, and the Shirui Lily Reserve serve as exemplary models of nature-centric travel experiences that appeal to a more discerning segment of tourists. The role of the CE in shaping these experiences cannot be overstated. As Hennessy and McCleary (2011) and Neumann et al. (2017) argue, the very nature of ecological tourism relies on maintaining the fragile balance

between development and conservation. Infrastructure projects—whether for accessibility, lodging, or hospitality—must therefore be sensitively designed to reflect and respect the region’s unique environmental and cultural character. Sustainable tourism development in ecologically rich areas requires an integrative approach. Infrastructure should be planned with a focus on minimal ecological disruption, incorporating effective waste management systems, culturally congruent accommodations, and low-impact transit routes. Conservation efforts must be woven into the planning and management of tourism destinations, ensuring that human activity aligns with environmental stewardship (Ozment et al., 2015; Filazzola et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2020). By balancing ecological integrity with infrastructural efficiency, such strategies not only safeguard the environmental heritage of the region but also enable inclusive economic growth. Local communities, when involved meaningfully in eco-tourism initiatives, stand to benefit through employment, entrepreneurship, and cultural preservation. Thus, eco-tourism in Northeast India is not merely a mode of travel—it is a sustainable framework for environmental respect, cultural continuity, and socio-economic empowerment.

1.2.2 Cultural

Cultural tourism, in its broadest sense, refers to the practice of journeying to specific destinations with the aim of engaging with, understanding, and experiencing the cultural fabric of a place. This may involve attending local festivals, visiting museums, exploring sites of cultural significance, and partaking in regional cuisines and culinary traditions (Stainton, 2020). In recent decades, the focus of tourism has gradually shifted away from the conventional attraction of historical monuments and architectural landmarks toward more immersive cultural encounters. This evolution in tourist behaviour is particularly evident in the context of the United Kingdom, where cultural tourism is recognised as a major catalyst for attracting international visitors to its urban centres (Perkins, 2014). The appeal lies not merely in the physical heritage of cities but in their vibrant cultural life—the festivals, public events, traditions, and creative expressions that breathe life into the CE. The development of infrastructure, when approached with cultural sensitivity, holds immense potential not only to accommodate visitors but also to enhance and protect local heritage. Far from being a threat to cultural identity, infrastructure can serve as a powerful instrument in its preservation—provided that development initiatives are carefully aligned with the values, histories, and aesthetic preferences of the host communities (Giliberto & Labadi, 2022;

Ismagilova et al., 2015; Angelini et al., 2020). In this sense, infrastructure becomes more than a logistical necessity; it becomes a vehicle for cultural expression and sustainable economic empowerment. Central to this endeavour is the active participation of local communities. Development that is imposed from above or conceived in isolation from the lived experiences of residents risks undermining cultural authenticity. Conversely, initiatives that engage communities in meaningful dialogue and decision-making not only safeguard intangible heritage but also elevate the overall quality of the tourist experience (Mekonnen et al., 2022). In the context of Northeast India, the region's wealth of cultural diversity offers substantial promise for the growth of cultural tourism. Rich in heritage and originality, it remains largely uncommercialised and thus retains a depth of authenticity that many other destinations have lost. Events such as the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland serve not only as celebrations of culture but as platforms for conservation, dialogue, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. Similarly, festivals like the Sangai Festival in Manipur and the Shirui Lily Festival reflect the symbiotic relationship between people and their natural environment, blending cultural performance with ecological reverence. Iconic natural destinations such as Loktak Lake and the Dzuko Valley are not only scenic attractions but are imbued with cultural and spiritual significance. These sites underscore the interdependence between cultural practices and natural landscapes, highlighting the need for a holistic approach to tourism development—one that treats culture and environment as interlinked elements of place-making. Cultural tourism, when rooted in local context and guided by inclusive development principles, can serve as a dynamic force for both cultural preservation and regional revitalisation. It not only allows visitors to witness the uniqueness of a place but invites them to appreciate the stories, struggles, and celebrations that shape its identity.

1.2.3 Education

Among the many emerging forms of specialized travel, educational tourism has gained particular prominence as one of the fastest-growing sectors within the broader tourism industry. Often referred to as a vehicle for career enhancement, personal growth, or professional development (Haupt, 2010), educational tourism reflects the evolving priorities of contemporary travellers—individuals increasingly inclined toward meaningful, conscious, and experience-based journeys. Modern tourists now seek more than relaxation or recreation. There is a growing appetite for travel experiences that combine intellectual enrichment with physical

wellbeing—environments that promote ecological awareness, healthy lifestyles, and active engagement. In this regard, education and travel form a natural partnership, both intangible in nature but mutually reinforcing in impact. South Asia, and particularly the Indian subcontinent, offers a compelling backdrop for such journeys. Rich in heritage, history, and cultural complexity, the region abounds with opportunities for immersive learning. As Gurung (2017) observes, the subcontinent brims with unexplored knowledge—traditions, customs, and ways of life—that captivate the curious traveller and offer fertile ground for cross-cultural understanding. The impact and potential of educational tourism can be explored from two critical perspectives. First, there is a pressing need for educational alignment in tourism destinations. While local hospitality and friendliness are often praised, a discernible gap exists in the level of professional training and academic engagement. Many destinations lack formal training infrastructures and require greater support in developing sector-specific skills and educational frameworks (Attaalla, 2020). Addressing this gap through local capacity building and vocational education would significantly enhance the visitor experience and contribute to sustainable growth. Second, the dearth of detailed research on the unique attributes of each destination highlights a wider issue. Beyond the goal of conservation, destinations must be studied not only for their environmental value but also for their potential as hubs of learning and cultural exploration. To realise this potential, strong policy frameworks, targeted funding, and collaborative educational initiatives are essential. The success of educational tourism depends heavily on foundational support systems—adequate infrastructure, policy formulation, and local engagement tailored specifically to the needs of students, researchers, and educators alike (Ali et al., 2021; Maggi & Pădurean, 2009; Malihah et al., 2014). Key attributes such as accessibility, safety, affordability, and long-term viability must be prioritised to attract both domestic and international learners. Crucially, educational tourism also fosters cultural exchange and mutual understanding. In addition to enhancing academic quality and generating income, it offers significant opportunities for employment creation, local entrepreneurship, and knowledge sharing (Tomasi et al., 2020). These gains, however, can only be realised through a concerted effort by policymakers, destination planners, and community stakeholders—each of whom plays a pivotal role in shaping inclusive, educationally rich environments that appeal to global learners.

1.2.4 Protected Area

In the pursuit of tourism development, sustainability must form the bedrock of all planning and infrastructural undertakings. The integration of sustainable principles into construction and development projects is vital to minimise ecological disruption and ensure long-term environmental balance (Muhanna, 2006; Mirsanjari, 2012; Rostami & Hosein, 2014; Manoj & Viswanath, 2015). This involves adopting practices that reduce environmental degradation, prioritise the use of renewable energy, and encourage responsible forms of tourism that support both the well-being of local communities and the preservation of the natural world. Protected areas play an indispensable role in safeguarding biodiversity and cultural heritage. These zones serve not only as ecological sanctuaries but also as living archives of flora, fauna, and indigenous knowledge systems (Zeeshan et al., 2017; Negula et al., 2015). For nature-oriented travellers, such sites offer more than aesthetic delight—they represent a commitment to conservation, stewardship, and learning. The careful management of protected areas offers a unique opportunity to enhance and conserve the ecological and cultural wealth of a region. This necessitates a multifaceted approach: engaging in research to understand visitor expectations, improving infrastructure to cater to differently-abled individuals, and continually assessing the quality and impact of services and facilities (Parks & Benefit, 2007). Tourism in these areas should be more than a visual experience—it must evolve into an educational and transformative journey that fosters environmental awareness and cultural appreciation. Destinations such as Sendra Resort, Dzuko Valley, and Shirui Peak exemplify the balance between conservation and tourism appeal. Loktak Lake—renowned as the world’s only floating lake—stands as a compelling example of ecotourism intersecting with ecological preservation. The lake is not merely a scenic attraction; it plays a pivotal role in protecting vital habitats, including those of endangered species such as the Sangai deer and the rare Shirui lily. These ecological assets underscore the educational value inherent in sustainable tourism models. The success of such initiatives hinges on a dual commitment from both governmental bodies and local communities. Encouragingly, there is evidence of growing collaboration between the two, marked by joint efforts in conservation, ecological education, and strategic investment. This partnership is essential not only for maintaining biodiversity but also for generating livelihood opportunities and strengthening the socio-economic fabric of the region. Ultimately, sustainable tourism in protected areas offers a model for future development—one that is rooted in respect for nature, cultural heritage, and inclusive growth. It calls upon all stakeholders to reimagine tourism not as

an extractive industry, but as a participatory, educational, and regenerative force.

1.2.5 Leisure Tourism

In recent years, leisure tourism has witnessed a remarkable surge, establishing itself as a dominant form of contemporary travel. Defined by its focus on relaxation, psychological restoration, and brief respite from the pressures of everyday life, leisure tourism caters to individuals seeking pleasure-driven experiences, often within a limited timeframe (Cohen, 2015; Utama & Wirateja, 2021; Leiper et al., 2008). It is inherently recreational, offering travellers the chance to immerse themselves in unfamiliar environments, engage with local cultures, embark on new adventures, and indulge in various forms of entertainment. One of the distinguishing features of leisure tourism lies in its ability to promote local products and cultural practices. Word-of-mouth recommendations from visitors often serve as organic marketing tools, drawing new tourists and encouraging return visits (Prayogo et al., 2017; Chatterjee & Dsilva, 2021; Lai et al., 2018). Importantly, leisure tourism caters to a broad spectrum of travellers—domestic and international, individuals and groups, short weekend getaways and extended holiday breaks. The increasing accessibility of affordable travel, alongside favourable exchange rates and rising disposable incomes, has played a critical role in fuelling this trend (Kaur, 2022; Włodarczyk & Cudny, 2022; Luis & Federico, 2016; Gholipour et al., 2022). As a result, travellers are more inclined to explore previously unknown destinations, contributing to local economies and stimulating the development of small enterprises. From an economic standpoint, recreational tourism now stands at the forefront of income generation, employment creation, and entrepreneurial opportunity (Min et al., 2015). Tourist preferences for leisure destinations are influenced by a combination of personal interest, affordability, and comfort. High-quality infrastructure and service delivery—particularly in areas such as transport, accommodation, safety, and digital information systems—directly affect the satisfaction and overall experience of leisure travellers (Gronau & Kagermeier, 2007; Bieland et al., 2016). The very notion of “leisure” is closely tied to how seamlessly and enjoyably a destination can be navigated from arrival to departure. To effectively position destinations in a competitive and evolving marketplace, understanding industry trends is essential. Projecting these trends allows for targeted development, ensuring that infrastructure, amenities, and policies are tailored to meet changing expectations. Tourism, by its nature, is fluid—shaped by shifts in cultural

tastes, environmental awareness, and traveller motivations. In the context of India's northeastern region, which remains rich in natural landscapes and largely untapped in terms of tourism potential, this understanding becomes particularly significant. Many destinations within the region remain unexplored, yet they offer precisely the experiences that today's leisure tourists seek: tranquillity, novelty, and authentic cultural engagement. However, the successful realisation of these prospects depends heavily on strategic planning, timely execution of projects, and inclusive policy frameworks. The development of tourism infrastructure must be both visionary and grounded—addressing not only the demands of visitors but also the needs and aspirations of local communities. This requires a concerted effort from policymakers, contractors, infrastructure developers, and community stakeholders alike. As leisure tourism continues to redefine global travel patterns, the northeastern states of India are uniquely placed to respond. Their distinctive ecological charm and cultural depth position them as ideal candidates for sustainable and trend-aligned tourism growth, provided the region receives the necessary support, investment, and attention it merits.

1.3 Sustainable

Tourism has increasingly come to be recognised as a catalyst for poverty alleviation, aligning closely with the broader objectives of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When developed and managed responsibly, tourism offers significant opportunities for economic empowerment, social inclusion, and environmental protection, particularly in underdeveloped or remote regions. Sustainability in tourism may be most effectively understood as the delicate balance between economic advancement, environmental integrity, and social equity. This involves aligning tourism-related activities and construction development with the imperative to conserve the natural environment and protect the cultural and ecological integrity of host destinations. The rise in global environmental consciousness has encouraged more travellers to consider the ecological footprint of their journeys, with many opting for low-carbon alternatives, such as public transportation, and choosing to support businesses that actively champion environmental sustainability (Chen, 2017). This evolving mindset represents a paradigm shift in tourism—one in which travellers increasingly accept a degree of personal and financial responsibility for the long-term preservation of the destinations they visit. As Goodwin (2014) observes, this model fosters a more ethical approach to tourism, where the benefits derived from travel are reciprocated through