

Potential Of Adventure Tourism In Mechukha Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the most rapidly growing sectors in the world, and adventure tourism is one of its fastest growing categories. Increasingly, countries in all stages of economic development are prioritizing adventure tourism for market growth, because they recognize its ecological, cultural, and economic value (UNWTO, 2014). In recent years adventure tourism has grown as a result of a new and different experiences, encouraged by more accessible destinations, new activities and new places almost unexplored.

From the adventure point of view, Arunachal Pradesh is unique state having diversity of adventure tourism potentials. The immense natural resources wealth for tourism in Arunachal is one of the greatest assets for the State.

The present study explores the Adventure Tourism potentiality of Mechukha Valley, located in the West Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh State. Mechukha Valley is a worth visiting tourist destination to explore the indigenous Ramo and Tagin tribe who has a unique tradition of nature conservation and natural resource management.

As tourism is still in its infancy stage in Mechukha, it is imperative to study and identify the sustainable tourism principles so as to preserve the inherent ethnicity thereby making it economically beneficial for the local community. An attempt has been made in this paper to analyze potential for adventure tourism in Mechukha Valley in particular and in Arunachal Pradesh in general.

KEYWORDS: Tourism, Sustainable Development, Adventure Tourism,

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today, Adventure Tourism is a vibrant, dynamic, and fast-changing sector with new variants routinely added into the possible experiences. Individual companies are often small, owner-operated businesses led by entrepreneurs with a drive to share their favourite places and passions with others. Adventure tourism offers an opportunity to entrepreneurs in rural areas around the world to do the same. 69% of overall international travel departures leave from Europe, North America, and South America, and together these three regions account for over USD 263 billion in adventure travel expenditures (ATTA, 2013). Both public and private sector stakeholders understand that adventure tourism is inextricably linked with human and nature capital. Protection and promotion of these resources is important, and the continued development of this sector must seek to protect these valuable assets (ATTA, 2013).¹

To date no definition of Adventure Tourism exists in UNWTO literature, however the Adventure Travel Trade Association (ATTA) defines Adventure Tourism as a trip that includes at least two of the following three elements: physical activity, natural environment, and cultural immersion.

Muller and Cleaver (2000) defined adventure tourism as “physically bracing, adrenalin-driven, somewhat risky, with moments of exhilaration punctuated by many opportunities to assess and reassess what has been done or accomplished” An essential component of adventure tourism is travel to unusual, exotic, and remote wilderness destinations (Millington, Locke, & Locke, 2001).² Activity, experience, environment, motivation, risk, and competence were identified as primary dimensions that often characterize the traveller’s perception of adventure travel (Sung, Morrison, & O’Leary, 1997).³ The adventure tourism is an outdoor activity, which is a means of income to the adventure tour operators; it needs guidance to indulge in adventure activities and every activity has its relevant equipment’s to perform, everything is done for the excitement of adventure tourists (Buckley⁴, 2004; Bentley et al.,⁵ 2000).

The adventure tourism can be divided into two categories of adventure activities 1) Hard Adventure and 2) Soft Adventure. There is a vigorous debate often surrounds which activities belong in each category. The easiest way to identify an adventure trip as hard or soft adventure is by its primary activity. The table below indicates activities and their adventure classification, according to the ATTA:

Table 1: Adventure Classification

Activity	Type	Activity	Type
Archaeological expedition	Soft	Horseback riding	Soft
Attending local festival/fairs	Other	Kayaking/Sea/White water	Soft
Backpacking	Soft	Learning new languages	Other
Birdwatching	Soft	Orienteering	Soft
Camping	Soft	Rafting	Soft
Canoening	Soft	Research expedition	Soft
Caving	Hard	Safaris	Soft
Climbing (Mountain/Rocks/Ice)	Hard	Sailing	Soft
Cruise	Other	Snorkeling	Soft
Cultural activities	Other	Skiing/Snowboarding	Soft
Ecotourism	Soft	Surfing	Soft
Educational Programmes	Soft	Trekking	Hard
Environmentally Sustainable activities	Soft	Walking tours	Other
Fishing/fly-fishing	Soft	Visiting friends/family	Other
Getting to know the locals	Other	Visiting historical sites	Other
Hiking	Soft	Volunteer Tourism	Soft

Source: ATTA, 2013

For travellers, adventure tourism means an experience-based holiday; it means added value as they learn and interact with local populations and connect with their core values. For companies and destinations, adventure travel attracts visitors outside of peak season, highlights the natural and cultural values of a destination, thereby promoting its preservation, helps differentiate destinations against the competition, and creates resilient and committed travellers. These are just some of the reasons why it is fundamental for destinations to understand and work with adventure travel professionals. Finally, from a global perspective, adventure tourism incorporates and promotes the values of the tourism that we want – a tourism that respects cultural and natural assets and protects the most vulnerable. Indeed, the expansion of adventure tourism creates immense opportunities for development, particularly in remote communities where adventure travel fuels the local economy, as well as generates income and employment (UNWTO, 2014)⁶.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To understand the potential of Adventure Tourism in Mechukha Valley.
- To identify potential strategies for developing Adventure Tourism in Mechukha Valley.

III. METHODOLOGY

The present study is a conceptual in nature and the paper is based on secondary data. The data were collected from various journals, papers, magazines, internet, Ministry of Tourism, articles and newspapers; in addition to this, the researcher, being a resident Arunachal Pradesh, is truly aware of the adventure tourism potentials of Mechukha valley.

STUDY AREA

Mechukha also known as Menchukha. Menchukha is comprised of three separate words, 'Men' meaning medicine, 'Chu'-Water and 'Kha'-Snow in Memba dialect. It is believed that the village is located in the medicinal snow water, where sick people can be treated.

It is a small town located at 28° 36' 18" North latitude 94° 07' 41" East longitude at an altitude of 6,000 Feet above mean sea level. It is only 29 Km. far away from the MacMohan line. This is situated on the North-Eastern Himalayan range valleys lies in the central part of the Arunachal Pradesh located in West Siang District, bordered by International boundary of China in the North, State Assam boundary in the South and Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh in the West direction, comprises seven Legislative Assembly Constituencies namely Liromoba, Likabali, Basar, Along West, Along East, Rumgong and Mechukha.

Mechukha is one of the lesser explored tourism destinations in the country. With cascading waterfalls and crystal clear water running on stony river beds, the exclusivity of this valley holds out a promise of serenity. Mechukha is a mountainous region endowed with rich natural resources and biodiversity of diverse flora and fauna that further enhances the natural beauty consists of hilly terrain with narrow serpentine roads and one can get a great view of snow covered mountain peaks and snowfall during winter season. The mean average temperature during summer and winter are 21.3° C and 7.0° C. The undulating grassland slopes surrounding the valley, alongside the high snow covered peaks almost in 'touching' distance hide amidst itself deep religious and historical significance.

Mechukha Valley is the home to the tribes of Memba and Ramos. Other local tribes include Tagin, Bokar and Libo in small numbers. Historically it is believed that the Membas have migrated from Tibet (Dutta, 2006)⁷. The Membas belong to Tibetan-Burma linguistic family of Mongoloid race. They account 91 households with the total population of 663 people with an average family size of 7 people having sex-ratio of 997 females per thousand male.

They are followers of Lama *CheejiLengbo* who practice the *Nyingmapa* sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The Traditional agro-pastoralism of the Membas is unique in that they apply intelligent management and sustainable utilization of natural resources for their livelihood (Lollen and Laskar, 2006).⁸

The Ramo and Tagin are the followers of the Donyi-Polo. Losar is the main festival of the Memba tribe and it is celebrated with pomp and gaiety by the local people. It is considered as the New Year for the Membas which lasts for 3 days. It is celebrated both individually and at the Community level. The Tagin Tribes celebrates Si-Donyi from 4th -6th of January every year for the good quality crops, good health and prosperity of the community. The Ramo tribes celebrates the Podi-Barbi festival for good harvest and prosperity of the people.

The SamtemYongcham monastery, situated atop a hill overlooking the valley, is believed to be more than 400 years old. This, and other tourist sites including the Siyom river which runs through the valley, make Mechukha a perfect blend of nature, spiritually and history- all combined to make one truly amazing tourist destination.

Achievements of Adventure Tourism in Arunachal Pradesh

The State Arunachal Pradesh offers an immense opportunities for terrestrial, aquatic, air based adventure tourism. The fast flowing rivers, valleys and remote mountainous unconquered virgin forests are attracting travelers. The Department of Sports and Youth Affairs Adventure Wing is trying hard to promote adventure sports in the State Arunachal Pradesh for the last decades. Within a very short period of time, state has produced renowned mountaineers with many new records Mr. TapiMra, first Everester from Arunachal Pradesh conquered Mt. Everest on 21st May 2009. Miss Tine Mena, first women from the North-East States and first women from Arunachal Pradesh to climb Mount Everest on 9th May 2011. Mrs. AnshuJansenpa, the first mother who climbed Mt. Everest twice in span of 10 days on 12th and 21st May, 2011 and on 18th May 2013 she scaled for the third time. Mr. Nima Lama reached summit on 21st May 2013.

The first and historic major mountaineering expedition was launched by State Government in collaboration with Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) New Delhi at Mt. Gorichen, 6488m height in the Indo-Tibetan border, under the leadership of Dr. K. Romeo Meetei, Adventure Wing In-charge, where all the members were summit the peak with records.

Another milestone of the adventure sports in the State is National Institute of Mountaineering & Allied Sports (NIMAS) at Dirang, West Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh is only kind of Adventure Institute in India where land, water and air base adventure are trained in one institute.

The Directorate of Youth Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh intend to bring out a Mountaineering Act for exploring the virgin and unknown snow clad mountain peaks of Arunachal Pradesh to facilitate the youths of the state to engage themselves in earning their livelihood through various adventure activities and extending their services as mountain guides, high altitude staffs, low altitude support staffs, trekking guides, porter etc. to the expedition team for future.

A three day Adventure gala organized every year in the month of November at Mechukha, Arunachal Pradesh in partnership by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India and Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh to promote adventure tourism in Arunachal Pradesh, along with Event Partners Sub-Division Administration Mechukha, District Administration West Siang & CCRD.

Problems of Adventure Tourism in Mechukha

In spite of having huge potential for tourism, Mechukha is still lacking in overall development of tourism and yet not identified as tourist destination in Arunachal Pradesh. There are many problems such as number of tourist inflow is less during Summer (May-August) due to heavy rainfall that creates problem in road connectivity and transportation services; harsh climatic weather conditions; transportation problems; accommodation problems; lack of awareness amongst local people about tourism particularly adventure sector is also observed as one of the barrier for the development of adventure tourism; lack of Information and Publicity; lack of skilled manpower; lack of Policy and implementationetc., are some of the limiting factors responsible for the slow development of tourism in this study area..

Strategies for the growth of Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism sector, attracting high value customers, supporting local economies, and encouraging sustainable practices. Thus, the continued growth of this sector creates net positive impacts not only for tourism, but also for destination economies, their people, and

their environment. Therefore, it is very important to give special consideration towards the promotion of adventure tourism in Mechukha valley, following strategies/ suggestions can be fruitful for this:

In Mechukha valley there is bottleneck of infrastructure and superstructure and connectivity of air and land transportation. However the developmental activities of connectivity are in progressing and it need priority attention. Improvement of infrastructure facilities such as transportation, accommodation and other facilities needs to be given priority to boost tourism.

Providing them awareness campaign for the sustainable development, Preservation and Conservation of rich biodiversity and other natural resources on which tourism.

In Mechukha valley there are shortages of other product for leisure tourism it needs to develop in a planned way at the tourist place to attract other forms of tourism demands so that valley could caters all forms of tourists. Hence, promotion and advertising strategy should be adopted for tourism marketing.

Government, business owners and community stakeholders must work cooperatively and strive to provide authentic and meaningful experiences to tourists that satisfy commercial objectives while also maintaining the integrity of the cultures, sites, land and wildlife.

Government should support to the undeveloped tourist areas for the development of infrastructural facilities, and lastly, educational institutions are required to do more research work on this area to identify tourist adventure site; to document natural resource potential and rich traditional culture; to encourage and strengthen the long-term socio-economic development of local communities with the help of nature based tourism in the Mechukha valley.

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