

# **The Cultural Compass: Navigating Tourism in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur States of the North-East India**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the role of cultural factors in attracting tourists to the Northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Through a quantitative analysis of survey data, it identifies interaction with tribal cultures and traditional festivals as the most influential elements shaping travel decisions, with high agreement rates and strong factor loadings (0.974 and 0.972). Additional drivers include interest in local crafts, religious sites, and performing arts, indicating a broad preference for authentic, participatory tourism experiences. The findings reveal that tourists are drawn to the region's unique cultural identity, particularly through immersive, community-based activities. Based on these insights, the study recommends a multi-pronged approach: promoting festival tourism, enhancing craft-based experiences, investing in infrastructure at major spiritual sites, and involving local communities in tourism planning. The research concludes that cultural tourism presents a significant opportunity for sustainable development, capable of fostering economic growth, cultural preservation, and regional identity in Northeast India.

**Keywords:** North East Tourism, Cultural Factors, Traditional Festivals, North East India, Tourism

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 TOURISM IN INDIA: A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

India's tourism industry has shown remarkable resilience and growth. In 2024, the country recorded substantial increases in both domestic and international tourist arrivals. The Ministry of Tourism reported that India welcomed over 30 million foreign tourists in 2024, marking a significant recovery and surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Domestic tourism also experienced a surge, with over 1.5 billion domestic tourist visits recorded in the same year, reflecting a growing trend of Indians exploring their own country.

The economic impact of tourism is substantial, with the sector contributing approximately 6.8% to India's GDP and generating millions of jobs across various segments, including hospitality, transportation, and cultural services. The government's initiatives, such as the Dekho Apna Desh campaign and the Swadesh Darshan scheme, have played a pivotal role in promoting lesser-known destinations and enhancing tourism infrastructure.

### **1.2 THE NORTH-EASTERN STATES: EMERGING AS A CULTURAL TOURISM HUB**

The North-Eastern region of India, often referred to as the "Seven Sisters and One Brother," comprises

eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim. This geographically secluded and culturally rich part of the country lies in the easternmost corridor of India, sharing international borders with China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Despite being a vital geopolitical zone and ecologically sensitive region, it has remained relatively underrepresented in India's mainstream development discourse. However, with improved connectivity and focused policy attention under initiatives like the Act East Policy, the North-East is emerging as a region of strategic, economic, and cultural significance.

Geographically, the North-East boasts spectacular natural beauty and biodiversity. It is home to the Eastern Himalayan ranges, vast river valleys like those formed by the Brahmaputra, and dense forests teeming with unique flora and fauna. States such as Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are covered with high-altitude mountain ranges, while Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram feature rolling hills and caves. Manipur's Loktak Lake—the world's only floating national park—and Tripura's lush green landscapes further underscore the ecological richness of the region. This exceptional biodiversity has earned it global recognition as a hotspot for conservation and sustainable eco-tourism.

Culturally, the North-East is a tapestry of over 200 indigenous communities and ethnic groups, each with its distinct language, customs, festivals, music, dance, and traditional attire. Tribes such as the Nagas, Mizos, Bodos, Garos, and Apatanis have preserved their unique heritages through generations. The region celebrates a variety of vibrant festivals like the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, Wangala in Meghalaya, Chapchar Kut in Mizoram, and Losar in Arunachal Pradesh, which not only showcase their cultural identity but also attract domestic and international tourists. Rich traditions of handwoven textiles, bamboo crafts, and folk art highlight the creativity embedded in the region's daily life, while music and oral storytelling continue to be core aspects of social expression.

Economically, most of the North-East remains agrarian, with rice, tea (notably Assam Tea), horticultural produce, and spices forming the backbone of its economy. Small-scale industries, particularly in handicrafts and handlooms, contribute significantly to local livelihoods. Although the region has faced historical challenges such as poor infrastructure, insurgency, and lack of investment, there are now growing signs of transformation. With increasing access to education, improved healthcare, and the establishment of higher education institutions like IIT Guwahati and NEHU Shillong, the human capital of the region is on the rise. Industrial development and international trade have also been gaining momentum, aided by new road projects, trade corridors, and logistical linkages with Southeast Asia.

Tourism in the North-East is rapidly gaining attention for its diverse attractions—from spiritual and heritage tourism to adventure and eco-tourism. Arunachal Pradesh offers the serene Tawang Monastery and the scenic Ziro Valley. Assam is known for the Kaziranga National Park, the world's largest river island Majuli, and the revered Kamakhya Temple. Meghalaya entices visitors with its wettest places on Earth, Cherrapunji and Mawsynram, as well as its living root bridges and clean villages like Mawlynnong. Manipur features the unique floating islands of Loktak Lake and the bustling women-run Ima Keithel market. Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim each offer a blend of natural beauty and cultural distinctiveness—such as the Hornbill Festival, Unakoti rock carvings, and Rumtek Monastery.

To boost tourism and development, the Indian government has initiated multiple programs like Swadesh Darshan, PRASAD, and NESIDS (North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme). Infrastructure projects like the Sela Tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh, Trans-Arunachal Highway, and the expansion of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati are improving accessibility. Community-based and sustainable tourism models are being encouraged through initiatives like

Meghalaya's Tourist Buddy Scheme, which trains local youth to assist and guide tourists, ensuring both hospitality and local engagement.

Despite these positive developments, the region still faces several challenges such as infrastructure gaps, environmental vulnerability, and the need for balanced development that preserves its fragile ecosystems and indigenous cultures. Myths about safety and remoteness also affect the perception of the region, even though many areas are now easily accessible and safe for travel. Promoting awareness, integrating communities into tourism planning, and ensuring environmental sustainability are key to unlocking the region's full potential.

### **1.3 TOURISM IN ASSAM, NAGALAND AND MANIPUR STATES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA**

Tourism in the northeastern Indian states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur is increasingly recognized as a key driver of economic growth, cultural preservation, and regional integration. These states are distinguished by their scenic landscapes, ecological diversity, and vibrant tribal traditions, offering immense scope for sustainable tourism development. Assam, often referred to as the gateway to Northeast India, has witnessed significant tourism growth, attracting over 2.43 crore tourists between 2021 and December 2024. In the fiscal year 2023–24 alone, the state welcomed around 1 crore visitors, including 26,000 foreign tourists, with prominent attractions like Kaziranga National Park, home to over 2,600 one-horned rhinoceroses, and Majuli Island, one of the world's largest river islands and a center of Vaishnavite culture. Religious tourism is also booming, as seen at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, which drew over 41 lakh pilgrims during the same period. Assam's tea tourism hubs in Dibrugarh and Jorhat continue to appeal to international travelers, supporting rural livelihoods and local economies.

In Nagaland, tourism thrives primarily during the annual Hornbill Festival, a grand celebration of the state's tribal heritage that in 2024 alone drew 58,744 visitors, accounting for a large portion of the 1.31 lakh total tourist arrivals that year. Destinations like the Dzukou Valley and traditional villages in Mon and Mokokchung offer cultural and adventure tourism experiences, though the state's reliance on seasonal events remains a challenge.

Manipur, rich in natural beauty and cultural heritage, has struggled with declining tourist numbers due to regional unrest. In 2023, it recorded only 57,700 domestic and 3,700 foreign visitors, the lowest in the Northeast. However, iconic sites like Loktak Lake, which hosts the world's only floating national park—Keibul Lamjao, home to the endangered Sangai deer—and cultural hubs such as Ima Keithel, Asia's only all-women market, continue to attract niche interest. Traditional dance forms like Raslila and martial arts like Thang-Ta also reflect Manipur's rich artistic legacy.

Tourism across these states plays a critical role in job creation, infrastructure development, and the empowerment of local communities. With domestic tourist numbers in the Northeast rising from 7.2 million in 2015 to over 11 million in 2023, and Assam leading the surge, the region's potential is gaining national attention. Government efforts—such as the Assam Tourism Development and Registration Bill (2024), Swadesh Darshan, and the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS)—are actively improving connectivity, accommodations, and marketing. Despite challenges like infrastructure gaps, seasonal tourism patterns, and political instability, especially in Manipur, the sector remains vital for inclusive development and cultural continuity in this historically underrepresented region.

## **2. CULTURAL FACTORS ATTRACTING TOURISTS IN ASSAM, NAGALAND AND MANIPUR STATES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA**

### **1. Traditional Festivals**

Traditional festivals in the Northeast are vibrant, community-centered celebrations that highlight the region's rich cultural heritage. In Nagaland, the Hornbill Festival is the most renowned, held every December in Kisama Heritage Village. It brings together all 16 Naga tribes, showcasing their distinct music, dance, attire, cuisine, and crafts. The festival alone attracts over 58,000 tourists annually and plays a major role in promoting tribal unity and cultural tourism. In Assam, the Bihu Festival—celebrated thrice a year (Rongali, Bhogali, and Kongali)—is deeply tied to the agricultural cycle and features folk dance and music, traditional attire, and festive cuisine. Manipur's Lai Haraoba, a pre-Hindu festival, reflects the Meitei community's creation myths through ritualistic dance and music, attracting cultural scholars and spiritual tourists alike. These festivals serve as immersive experiences for tourists to witness living traditions and connect with local communities.

### **2. Tribal Heritage and Customs**

The indigenous tribal communities of the Northeast represent some of the most distinct and well-preserved cultures in India. In Nagaland, tribes like the Ao, Angami, and Konyak each have their own languages, attire, rituals, and social systems. Tribal villages, such as Khonoma and Longwa, offer tourists opportunities to explore traditional governance systems, community-based conservation, and headhunting legacies (now preserved as folklore). In Manipur, tribes such as the Tangkhul and Thadou maintain unique oral traditions, handicrafts, and rituals that fascinate anthropologists and culture tourists. In Assam, tribal groups such as the Bodo and Mishing also add to the state's ethnic mosaic. The opportunity to witness traditional ceremonies, lifestyle practices, and community structures offers visitors a deep, authentic experience, often via homestays and eco-tourism initiatives.

### **3. Classical and Folk Dance Forms**

The region is rich in performative arts, which act as cultural ambassadors for tourism. Manipur's Raslila is a classical dance form depicting the divine love of Lord Krishna and Radha. It is characterized by graceful movements, elaborate costumes, and devotional themes. Recognized as one of India's major classical dance forms, Raslila is often performed during religious festivals and cultural showcases. In Assam, Satriya Dance, developed in the 15th century by Vaishnavite saint Srimanta Sankardeva, is a UNESCO-recognized art form performed in monasteries (Satras), especially on Majuli Island. These performances blend spiritual devotion with theatrical expression, drawing cultural enthusiasts and pilgrims alike. Folk dances like Bihu and various Naga warrior dances are often performed during festivals and are a tourist highlight.

### **4. Religious and Spiritual Sites**

Religious tourism is a major draw, especially in Assam, where the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati is one of the most revered Shakti Peethas in India. It attracts millions of pilgrims, particularly during the Ambubachi Mela, a tantric fertility festival. The temple complex is steeped in mysticism and mythological lore, appealing to both religious devotees and spiritual seekers. In Manipur, Loktak Lake and associated sacred sites like Sendra Island also hold cultural and spiritual importance, especially for the Meitei community. Tribal animist rituals and sacred groves in Nagaland further enhance the spiritual experience for culturally sensitive travelers. These destinations not only provide religious fulfillment but also offer insight into ancient belief systems that are still practiced today.

## 5. Local Handicrafts and Textiles

Handmade crafts and traditional textiles are integral to the cultural identity of Northeast India and serve as both tourist attractions and economic lifelines for local artisans. Assam is world-famous for its Muga and Eri silk—natural silks produced only in this region. Tourists visiting Sualkuchi (Assam), known as the "Silk Village of India", can observe silk weaving and purchase exquisite garments. In Nagaland, each tribe has a unique style of shawl weaving, beadwork, and bamboo crafts, with tribal shawls representing status and identity. Manipur is noted for its phanek (traditional skirts), black pottery from Longpi, and hand-woven materials often made using traditional loin looms. Craft tourism is often combined with workshops, demonstrations, and market visits, providing hands-on cultural engagement while supporting sustainable, community-based tourism.

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study holds substantial significance for multiple stakeholders involved in the development and promotion of tourism in Northeast India, particularly in the culturally rich states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. By identifying cultural factors—such as interaction with tribal communities, participation in traditional festivals, appreciation of local crafts, and interest in spiritual and performing arts—as primary motivators for tourists, the research highlights the untapped potential of cultural tourism as a driver of regional growth.

For policy makers and tourism authorities, the findings provide data-driven evidence to support strategic investments in cultural assets, such as improving infrastructure at religious sites and formalizing community participation in tourism planning. For local communities, the study underscores the opportunity to leverage their cultural heritage in ways that are economically beneficial while preserving their identity and traditions.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism and cultural engagement by offering quantitative evidence of what influences tourist behavior in underexplored regions. Furthermore, it supports the development of participatory, inclusive tourism models that align with broader goals of sustainable development, cultural preservation, and regional empowerment.

Overall, the research offers a clear roadmap for transforming cultural tourism into a sustainable and inclusive growth strategy for Northeast India.

## 4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the rich cultural heritage and diversity of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur, these Northeastern states remain underrepresented in India's mainstream tourism circuits. While cultural tourism has emerged globally as a powerful tool for economic and social development, there is limited empirical research on the specific cultural factors that influence tourist interest in this region. The lack of data-driven insights hinders effective tourism planning, community involvement, and sustainable promotion strategies. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the cultural elements that attract tourists to these states, with a focus on identifying the most impactful drivers of travel decisions.

## 5. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Mrigakshi Borthakur (2024)** in their study conducts a SWOT analysis to evaluate the tourism sector in Assam, India, highlighting its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The strengths identified



include Assam's rich natural landscapes, diverse flora and fauna, and prominent pilgrimage sites like Kamakhya Temple. However, weaknesses such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of awareness among locals about the economic benefits of tourism, and coordination challenges among stakeholders are noted. Opportunities for growth lie in promoting eco-tourism, cultural heritage, and adventure tourism. The paper concludes with recommendations for developing targeted marketing strategies to enhance Assam's tourism appeal.

**Vika Y Yeptomi, Santa Kar, Sujit Sikidar(2023)** in their study investigated tourist perceptions and satisfaction levels concerning various aspects of tourism in Nagaland, India. Utilizing primary data collected through structured questionnaires, the authors assess 27 destination-related factors across four demographic variables: type of tourist, age, gender, and occupation. The analysis employs the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test due to the non-normal distribution of data. Findings indicate that while tourists generally express satisfaction and a positive attitude toward revisiting, certain areas—such as infrastructure, hospitality, and accessibility—require significant improvement to enhance overall tourist experience and satisfaction.

**Lezonuo Sekhose and Dr. Mridula Mishra (2024)** in their study delves into the multifaceted aspects of cultural tourism in Nagaland, highlighting its rich tapestry of tribes, festivals, dances, cuisines, and languages. The authors examine the state's vibrant cultural heritage, emphasizing the significance of festivals like the Hornbill Festival in attracting tourists. However, the paper also addresses challenges such as the lack of well-defined concepts and the potential drawbacks of cultural tourism, including cultural commodification and environmental impact. The authors advocate for comprehensive research and strategic planning to harness the benefits of cultural tourism while mitigating its adverse effects.

**Sukanta sarkar and Suman Kalyan Chaudhry (2024)** in their study explores the economic potential and challenges of Nagaland's tourism industry. The authors highlight the state's rich ethnic tribal culture, including handicrafts, festivals, folk dances, and music, as key attractions. Nagaland's natural beauty, wildlife sanctuaries, and hill stations further enhance its appeal to tourists. The paper notes an increase in domestic and foreign tourist arrivals, although a decline occurred in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, revenue from tourism has been rising. However, the study finds no significant relationship between tourist arrivals and the state's Gross Domestic Product. Key constraints identified include the Inner Line Permit system, poor transport facilities, tribal conflicts, and geographical challenges. The authors suggest that Nagaland has substantial potential for ecotourism, cultural, and rural-based tourism, provided these constraints are addressed.

**Medona Mayengbam and Dr. K.N. Lokesh Kumar (2025)** in their study examined the evolving workforce dynamics and the necessity for skill development in Manipur's tourism and hospitality sectors. Despite the state's rich cultural heritage and natural resources, the workforce often lacks advanced training and technological facilities to meet the industry's demands. The research highlights the roles of various institutions and stakeholders in addressing these skill gaps. By enhancing workforce competencies, Manipur can unlock its full potential as a vibrant tourism destination.

**Rajkumari Jenny Devi and Laishram Guni Devi (2023)** examined the economic significance of tourism in Manipur, India. The authors highlight the state's rich natural beauty, including various tourist sites such as wildlife parks, gardens, lakes, archaeological sites, and waterfalls. Despite these attractions, the paper emphasizes the importance of traditional handlooms and handicrafts as sought-after souvenirs for tourists, reflecting the state's cultural heritage. The study underscores the potential of tourism to

contribute to the socio-economic development of Manipur by promoting its unique cultural and natural resources.

## 6. OBJECTIVES

To study the cultural factors that attracts tourists to Assam, Nagaland and Manipur states of north-east India.

## 7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Research Design:** The descriptive research design has been adopted for the present study.

**Sampling Method:** Convenience sampling was used in the present study to gather data from various respondents.

**Sample Size:** 510 Respondents

**Research Area:** The data was collected from Guwahati, Dimapur, Kohima, Imphal, Silchar, Churachandpur, Tezpur and Dibrugarh.

**Data Collection:** In this research both primary and secondary data was used. Primary data has been collected from the tourists visiting the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Secondary data has been collected from sources like Reports and Publications, Various Research Journals and Websites.

A total of 1,000 questionnaires were distributed to respondents; however, only 510 were deemed valid and complete for inclusion in the analysis.

**Research Instrument:** For the present study, the well-structured questionnaire has been designed to gather the information from the respondents. The questions in the questionnaire have been rated on the basis of five point Likert scale.

### Statistical Techniques Used

**Factor Analysis:** Factor analysis is a useful tool for investigating variable relationships for complex concepts. The factor loadings express the relationship of each variable to the underlying factor. In the present research study the researcher has analyzed the social factors affecting tourism industry in northern states of India with the help of factor analysis.

## 8. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

**Table 1: Tables showing the response related to cultural factors attracting tourists to the state of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur states of north-east India**

S. No	Cultural Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	How significant are traditional festivals (e.g., Bihu in Assam, Hornbill in Nagaland, Lai Haraoba in Manipur) in influencing your travel decisions to Northeast India?	148 (29%)	337 (66%)	7 (1.5%)	13 (2.5%)	5 (1%)
2.	To what extent does the opportunity to interact with indigenous tribal cultures (customs, attire, village life)	107 (21%)	375 (73.5%)	5 (1%)	15 (3%)	8 (1.5%)

	attract you to visit Assam, Nagaland, or Manipur?					
3.	How important are local classical and folk dance forms (e.g., Raslila, Satriya, Naga tribal dances) in your cultural tourism preferences?	74 (14.5%)	322 (63%)	25 (5%)	64 (12.5%)	25 (5%)
4.	Would the presence of spiritual or religious sites (e.g., Kamakhya Temple, sacred lakes) influence your choice to visit these states?	64 (12.5%)	352 (69%)	33 (6.5%)	48 (9.5%)	13 (2.5%)
5.	How likely are you to visit local markets or participate in craft workshops (e.g., silk weaving, tribal shawls, bamboo crafts) during your trip?	140 (27.5%)	329 (64.5%)	18 (3.5%)	18 (3.5%)	5 (1%)

Interpretation: 1. An overwhelming 95% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that traditional festivals like Bihu, Hornbill, and Lai Haraoba influence their travel decisions. This indicates that festival tourism is a major cultural draw for visitors to the region. The high agreement levels emphasize the role of festivals in promoting both cultural identity and tourism inflow.

2. With 94.5% in agreement, the opportunity to interact with indigenous tribal cultures is perceived as a key attraction. The minimal neutrality and disagreement indicate strong tourist interest in authentic, experiential, and community-based tourism that reflects tribal customs, attire, and village lifestyles.

3. A total of 77.5% of respondents value local performing arts, but a comparatively higher 17.5% expressed disagreement, indicating a mixed perception. While classical and folk dances like Raslila and Satriya are culturally significant, they may appeal more to specific tourist segments rather than a general audience.

4. 81.5% of participants consider spiritual and religious sites a reason for visiting the region, reflecting the importance of religious tourism, especially among domestic tourists. However, the 12% who disagreed show that this factor may be less relevant for international or secular travelers.

5. A significant 92% of respondents expressed a strong interest in engaging with local crafts, markets, and workshops. This suggests that handicraft tourism has high growth potential, particularly for supporting local artisans, promoting sustainable tourism, and offering tourists meaningful, hands-on cultural experiences.

**Table 2: Table showing factor loadings related to cultural factors attracting tourists to the state of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur states of north-east India**

Variables	Factor Loading
Significance of Traditional Festivals	0.972
Interaction with Tribal Cultures	0.974



Importance of Classical and Folk Dance Forms	0.84
Influence of Religious and Spiritual Sites	0.961
Interest in Handicrafts and Local Markets	0.871

Result: The result shows that Interaction with Tribal Cultures and Significance of Traditional Festivals are considered the major cultural factor attracting tourists to Assam, Nagaland and Manipur with .974 and .972 factor loading value.

## 9. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATION

### FINDING OF THE STUDY

- Interaction with Tribal Cultures are considered the major cultural factor affecting tourism industry in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur in north-east India with 0.974 factor loading value. Significance of Traditional Festivals is considered the second major factor with 0.972 factor loading value. According to the survey findings Influence of Religious and Spiritual Sites is considered the third major factor with 0.961 factor loading value.
- A significant **95%** of respondents agreed that festivals such as Bihu (Assam), Hornbill (Nagaland), and Lai Haraoba (Manipur) strongly influence their travel decisions. This highlights the promotional potential of festival tourism in Northeast India.
- With 94.5% of participants expressing interest in interacting with tribal communities, customs, and village life, the study finds indigenous culture to be the most influential factor in attracting cultural tourists to the region.
- About 92% of respondents showed a positive inclination towards exploring local markets and participating in artisan workshops. This points to a growing trend of craft-based and sustainable tourism and the need to promote local handicrafts as a tourism product.
- A combined 81.5% of respondents acknowledged that sacred sites like the Kamakhya Temple or Loktak Lake influence their travel decisions. This indicates a strong domestic tourist base interested in spiritual experiences, though this may be less significant for international tourists.
- While **77.5%** valued classical and folk dance forms, a notable **17.5%** showed disinterest. This suggests that while performing arts are important, they may appeal more to culturally inclined or academic tourists rather than mainstream travelers.
- The majority of responses across categories show that travelers prefer interactive, authentic experiences over passive sightseeing, including community engagement, live festivals, and craft-making activities.
- The findings reinforce the need for strategic tourism development focused on cultural promotion, infrastructure enhancement, and marketing initiatives in Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur, especially in rural and tribal areas.

### RECOMMENDATION

- **Promote festival-based tourism packages:** Organize tours around major festivals like Bihu, Hornbill, and Lai Haraoba to attract both domestic and international tourists with immersive cultural experiences.
- **Encourage community-based tourism in tribal areas:** Support homestays and village tours that allow tourists to experience local customs, food, and traditions while boosting rural incomes.

- **Develop craft and artisan hubs:** Set up centers where visitors can watch and participate in traditional crafts like silk weaving, bamboo work, and black pottery, supporting local artisans.
- **Improve spiritual tourism infrastructure:** Upgrade amenities at key religious sites like Kamakhya Temple and Loktak Lake to enhance visitor experience and promote pilgrimage tourism.
- **Include live cultural performances in tours:** Organize regular dance and music shows (e.g., Raslila, Satriya, Naga dances) to showcase local performing arts and engage tourists.
- **Use digital storytelling and marketing:** Promote the region's cultural richness through websites, social media, and influencer campaigns to reach a wider audience.
- **Train locals in hospitality and tourism skills:** Offer workshops on guiding, language, and customer service to improve the quality of tourist interactions and create jobs.
- **Provide policy and financial support:** Governments should offer grants and streamline regulations to encourage cultural tourism startups and community-led initiatives.
- **Create cultural tourism circuits:** Link key cultural, historical, and natural sites across states to offer tourists well-rounded itineraries and longer stays.
- **Involve local communities in tourism planning:** Ensure that tourism development respects local traditions and includes community voices to promote sustainable and inclusive growth.

## 10. CONCLUSION

The analysis clearly underscores the pivotal role of cultural elements in shaping tourism preferences in the Northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Among all cultural factors, interaction with indigenous tribal communities and participation in traditional festivals emerged as the most influential drivers of tourism, with exceptionally high agreement rates and the strongest factor loadings (0.974 and 0.972, respectively). This reveals a strong tourist demand for authentic, immersive experiences that offer insight into the unique cultural identity of the region.

The findings also highlight a substantial interest in local crafts, spiritual sites, and performing arts, indicating a multidimensional cultural appeal. While folk dances and classical performances received mixed responses, their inclusion in curated tour experiences can still enhance the cultural offering for niche segments. The consistently high agreement levels across multiple cultural dimensions suggest that travelers are increasingly seeking interactive and experiential tourism, rather than passive sightseeing.

The study's recommendations emphasize the need to leverage this cultural capital through strategic initiatives: promoting festival tourism, developing community-based experiences, strengthening craft and artisan hubs, and improving infrastructure at religious and cultural sites. Importantly, the success of such efforts will depend on the active participation of local communities, skill development, and supportive policy frameworks to ensure that tourism growth remains inclusive and sustainable.

In conclusion, cultural tourism represents a significant opportunity for Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur to position themselves as unique destinations on India's tourism map. By aligning infrastructure, marketing, and local engagement with the cultural interests of travelers, these states can not only attract more visitors but also foster cultural preservation and socio-economic development at the grassroots level.

## 11. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

While this study provides valuable insights into the cultural factors influencing tourism in Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may affect the generaliz-

ability and depth of the findings:

- **Geographic Scope:** The study is limited to three Northeastern states of India and may not capture the full diversity of cultural tourism preferences across the broader region or other Indian states with similar offerings.
- **Time Constraints:** The data reflects a snapshot of tourist perceptions at a specific point in time and may not account for evolving travel trends, post-pandemic behaviors, or seasonal variations in tourist interest.
- **External Influences:** Broader influences such as political stability, infrastructure quality, accessibility, and safety—though critical to tourism—were outside the scope of this research and may also significantly impact tourist decisions.

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