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Cultural Heritage Tourism: A Study of Development Prospects in Tuipuiral Region, Mizoram

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Abstract

Tourism has emerged as a key driver of cultural preservation and rural development, particularly in regions endowed with rich cultural heritage. The Tuipuiral Region of Mizoram, rich in archaeological sites, folklore, beautiful landscapes, and traditional villages, remains largely unexplored despite its cultural significance. This study examines the cultural heritage potential of the Tuipuiral Region by identifying major heritage sites, assessing community participation, and evaluating the socio-economic and environmental implications of tourism development. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the research draws on primary data from local stakeholders and secondary sources such as government reports, archaeological records, and published literature. Findings reveal that although the region possesses substantial cultural assets, tourism development is hindered by inadequate infrastructure, poor road connectivity, lack of accommodation, limited institutional support, and absence of trained tour guides. Nonetheless, the region shows strong community interest in conservation and tourism promotion, supported by initiatives such as the Rural Homestay Scheme, heritage site maintenance by local committees, and increasing involvement of NGOs. With improved connectivity projects like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP) and the Bairabi–Sairang railway that was innaugurated on 13th Sept. 2025. The Tuipuiral Region has the potential to emerge as a major cultural heritage destination. Sustainable planning, community-based tourism models, and systematic heritage management will be crucial for unlocking the region's socio-economic and environmental benefits.

Keywords: Cultural heritage tourism, Tuipuiral Region, Mizoram, Rural tourism, Sustainable development, Heritage conservation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide, with cultural and heritage tourism gaining increasing attention for its role in preserving traditions and promoting local development. Cultural heritage tourism allows visitors to engage with the history, identity, and living traditions of a community, offering a deeper understanding of its cultural landscape. In regions with rich indigenous cultures, such as the northeastern states of India, cultural tourism has become a powerful tool for strengthening community pride while creating new economic opportunities.

Mizoram, known for its vibrant ethnic traditions, historical narratives, and scenic landscapes, presents significant potential for developing this form of tourism. Within the state, the Tuipuiral region stands out

as an area endowed with unique cultural assets, including archaeological sites, folklore, traditional practices, historical monuments. Despite its cultural richness, the region remains largely unexplored and undocumented in tourism studies, resulting in limited recognition of its heritage value at the state and national levels.

With the growing demand for authentic cultural experiences, there is a pressing need to assess the cultural heritage resources of the Tuipuiral region and examine their potential for tourism development. Such an assessment is essential not only for promoting sustainable tourism but also for ensuring the preservation of local traditions and community knowledge systems that are increasingly vulnerable to modernization and socio-economic changes.

This study aims to explore the cultural heritage potential of the Tuipuiral region by identifying significant cultural sites, analysing community perspectives, and evaluating the challenges and opportunities associated with tourism development. By highlighting the unique cultural identity of the region, the research seeks to contribute to policy discussions, strengthen heritage conservation efforts, and offer pathways for inclusive and sustainable tourism growth in Mizoram.

2. Literature Review

Cultural and heritage tourism has emerged as an important catalyst for local economic development, attracting visitors interested in a region's historical, artistic, scientific, and cultural assets (Silberberg, 1995). It promotes immersive experiences through landscapes, arts, traditions, and festivals. Singh (1994) similarly views cultural tourism as expressions of human creativity reflected in lifestyles, customs, markets, beliefs, and architectural forms.

Rural tourism, as described by Sampson (2011), provides an escape from urban life by engaging visitors with rural environments, traditions, and livelihoods. It blends agricultural, ecological, cultural, and adventure experiences, yielding economic and social benefits for local communities.

Richards (2007) argues that cultural tourism has grown rapidly due to rising interest in unique cultural identities and authentic experiences. He notes that tourists increasingly seek meaningful engagement rather than simple sightseeing. McKercher and du Cros (2002) highlight the need for balancing cultural preservation with tourism development, emphasizing that unmanaged tourism can threaten heritage resources. Timothy and Boyd (2003) further underscore the role of cultural heritage in shaping destination identity, suggesting that heritage sites, traditions, and cultural landscapes can significantly enhance tourism attractiveness when properly managed.

3. Objectives

1. To examine the potential and prospects for the development of cultural heritage tourism in the Tuipuiral region.
2. To assess the socio-economic impacts, challenges, and opportunities related to tourism development in the Tuipuiral region of Mizoram.

4. Methodology and Data Collection

The study employs both **quantitative** and **qualitative** research approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of cultural heritage tourism in the region.

- **Quantitative Data**: Derived from local residents, as well as statistical data obtained from government records and reports from the Department of Tourism.

- **Qualitative Data**: Collected through interviews with key stakeholders, including tourism department officials, Village Council Presidents (VCPs), school headmasters, and leaders of the Young Mizo Association (YMA). Supplementary information was gathered from souvenirs, magazines, and relevant publications.

The study draws on both primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data**: Collected through whatsapp with local stakeholders.
- **Secondary Data**: Compiled from existing literature, official tourism reports, publications from the Archaeological Survey of India, departmental documents, and media articles.

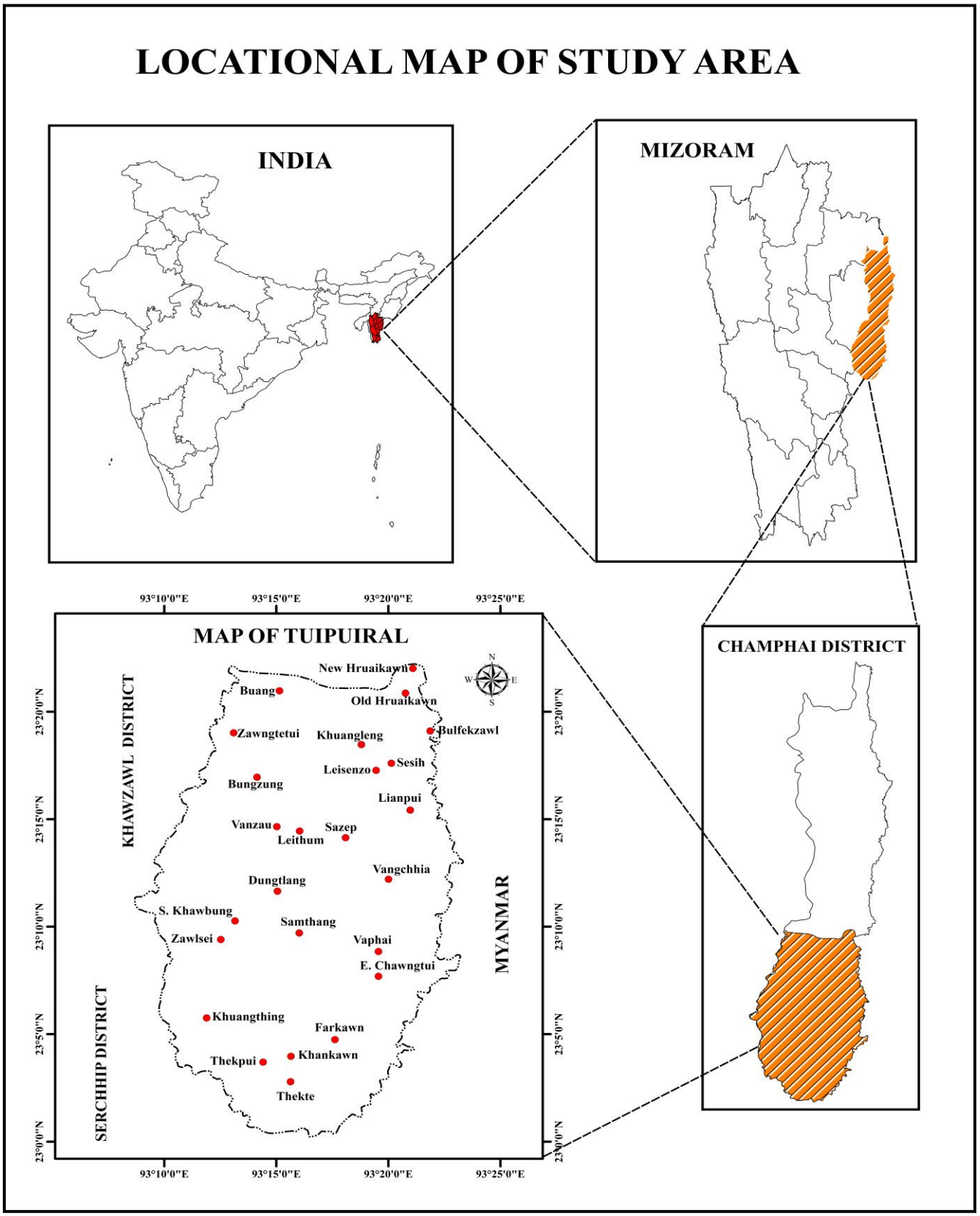
5. Study Area

The Tuipuiral Region, officially recognized as the 25th East Tuipui Constituency, is located in the southern corner of Champhai District. It falls under the jurisdiction of Khawbung Rural Development Block. Geographically, it is situated between 23°00'N to 23°23'N latitude and 92°58'E to 92°23'E longitude.

The region shares an international boundary of 79.31 km with Myanmar in the East, accounting for 15.49% of Mizoram's total international border. Covering an area of 704.56 sq. km, Tuipuiral comprises 3.33% of the state's total geographical area. It includes **25 villages** such as Zawngtetui, Buang, Khuangleng, Bulfekzawl, Hruaikawn (Old and New), Sesih, Leisenzo, Bungzung, Vanzau, Dungtlang, Leithum, Sazep, Lianpui, Vangchhia, Vaphai, Samthang, S. Khawbung, Zawlsei, E. Chawngtui, Farkawn, Thekte, Khankawn, Thekpui, and Khuangthing. The Block Development Officer (BDO), headquarter is at S. Khawbung which oversees the administration.

As per the 2011 Census, the region has a population of 22,137, representing 2.02% of Mizoram's total population. It consists of 4,479 households. Of the total population, males account for 11,195 (50.57%) and females 10,942 (49.42%). Children aged 0–6 years comprise 13.88% (3,074). The literacy rate is 80.15% with 9,080 literate males (40.01%) and 8,663 literate females (39.13%). The illiterate population is 4,394 (19.84%). Total workers stand at 10,408 (47.01%), while non-workers number 11,203 (50.60%).

Topographically, the region is mountainous, with elevation ranging from 400 m to 1,936 m. Three of the top 10 hihest peak of Mizoram is located in this region. The highest peak is Lurh Tlang (1,936 m) and followed by Tan Tlang (1,929m) and Zopui Tlang (1,850 m) (Statistical Handbook, 2020). The Tiau River forms the international boundary with Myanmar in the eastern site. Vegetation primarily consists of Sub-Himalayan Evergreen Forests, with Subtropical Pine Forests in the northern and western parts (Pachuau, 1987).


LOCATIONAL MAP OF STUDY AREA
INDIA
MIZORAM
MAP OF TUIPUIRAL
CHAMPHAI DISTRICT
KHAWZAWL DISTRICT
SERCHHIP DISTRICT
MYANMAR
New Hruaikawn
Buang
Old Hruaikawn
Zawngtetui
Khuangleng
Bulfekzawl
Leisenzo
Sesih
Bungzung
Lianpui
Vanzau
Sazep
Leithum
Vangchhia
Dungtlang
S. Khawbung
Samthang
Zawlsei
Vaphai
E. Chawngtui
Khuangthing
Farkawn
Thekpui
Khankawn
Thekte
93°10'0"E
93°15'0"E
93°20'0"E
93°25'0"E
23°20'0"N
23°15'0"N
23°10'0"N
23°5'0"N
23°0'0"N
N
S
E
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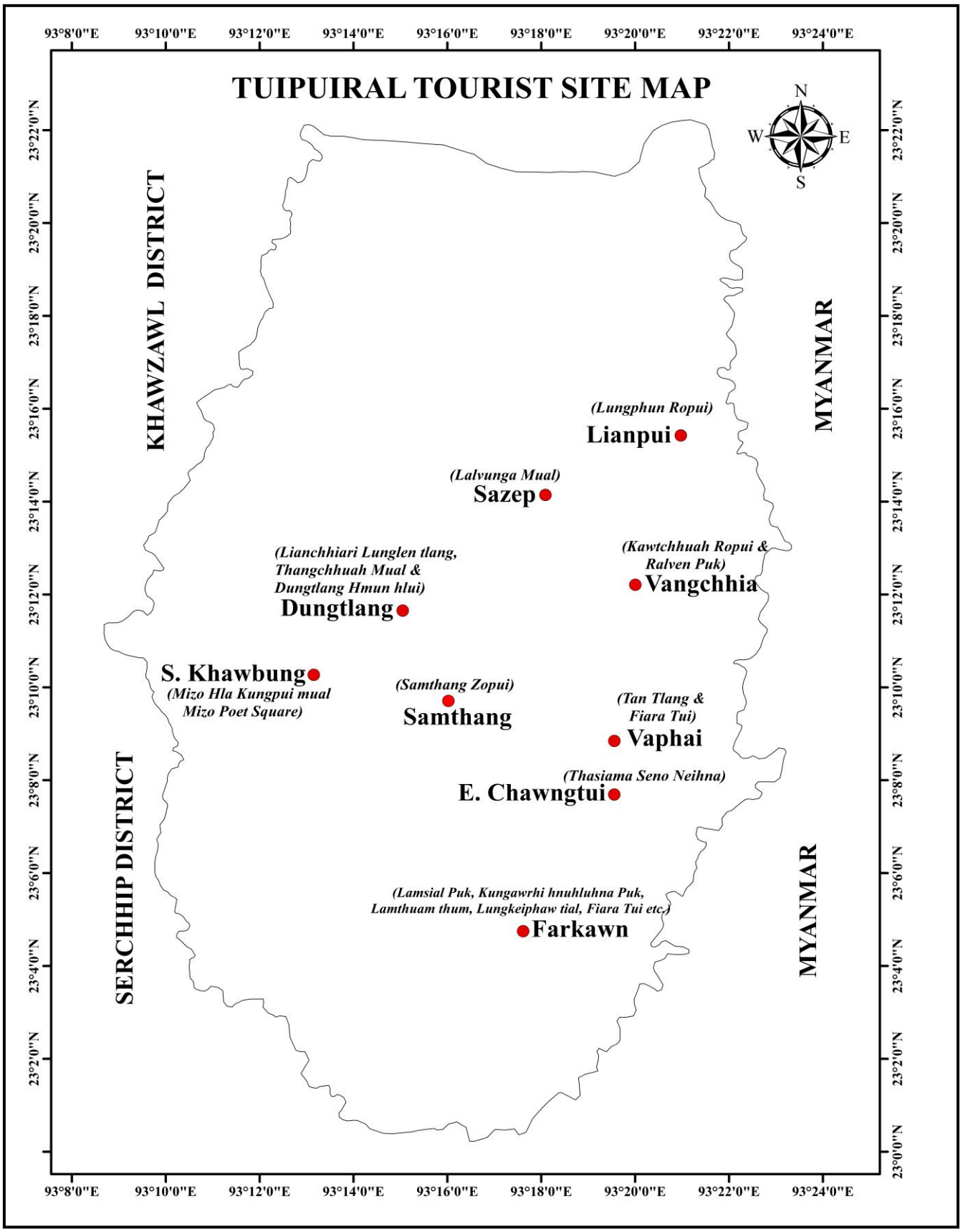
TUIPUIRAL TOURIST SITE MAP
N
W
E
S
93°8'0"E
93°10'0"E
93°12'0"E
93°14'0"E
93°16'0"E
93°18'0"E
93°20'0"E
93°22'0"E
93°24'0"E
23°22'0"N
23°20'0"N
23°18'0"N
23°16'0"N
23°14'0"N
23°12'0"N
23°10'0"N
23°8'0"N
23°6'0"N
23°4'0"N
23°2'0"N
23°0'0"N
KHAWZAWL DISTRICT
MYANMAR
(Lungphun Ropui)
Lianpui
(Lalvunga Mual)
Sazep
(Lianchhiari Lunglen tlang, Thangchhuah Mual & Dungtlang Hmun hlui)
Dungtlang
(Kawtchhuah Ropui & Ralven Puk)
Vangchhia
S. Khawbung
(Mizo Hla Kungpui mual Mizo Poet Square)
(Samthang Zopui)
Samthang
(Tan Tlang & Fiara Tui)
Vaphai
(Thasiama Seno Neihna)
E. Chawngtui
SERCHHIP DISTRICT
MYANMAR
(Lamsial Puk, Kungawrhi hnuhluhna Puk, Lamthuam thum, Lungkeiphaw tial, Fiara Tui etc.)
Farkawn

6. Cultural and Heritage Sites and Steps Taken to Increase Tourism Developments in Tuipuiral Region

(I). Vangchhia Village

(a) Kawtchhuah Ropui: It is the first Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) Site of 'National importance' in Mizoram. Located 1.173 km east of Vangchhia Village (23°20'02''N and 93°34'10''E), Kawtchhuah Ropui means "Great Convergence Point." The site features 225 megaliths, 103 of which contain intricate embossed carvings. With no inscriptions, the origins remain mysterious. According to oral traditions and historians like Prof. J.V. Hluna, this site may mark a major migratory route known locally as "Mi Rawng Kawng" and "Pipute Lamlian" by INTACH used by Mizo ancestors during their migration from the Shan State (15^{th} –17^{th} century AD).

(b) Zofate Thlangtlak Gate: This symbolic gate, located just before Kawtchhuah Ropui (23°20'02''N, 93°34'9''E), commemorates the migration of the Mizo people into present-day Mizoram. Built by the local community, it bears inscriptions in Mizo, English, and Hindi. Cultural illustrations on either side depict traditional dance and migratory image.

Vangchhia is emerging as a key tourism destination:

- A Tourist Inn, funded under the Border Area Development Programme (BADP), has been constructed.
- Following its declaration as a Site of National Importance**,** Rs. 17 lakhs has been sanctioned for the construction of fencing, installation of garden chairs, and solar lights within the ASI-protected site**.**
- Tourist statistics (recorded by the Young Mizo Association**)** from 28th February 2015 to 3rd June 2016: Total visitors: 1,638, Local: 1,595, Domestic: 4, Foreign**:** 39**.** Highest visitors were from educational institutions, followed by adventure clubs.
- Vangchhia has been selected under Ministry of Tourism, Swadesh Darshan, PRASHAD scheme on 7^{th} March. 2024 with Rs 5.59 crore for construction of Tourist Information Centre with Public convenience, Care taker cabin Multipurpose Hall, Cafeteria, Kitchen & Dormitory, Parking, Solar Panel & Illumination (IS), Rain Water Harvesting Tanks, Waste Collection & Disposal (LS), Compound Wall, Signage (LS), Gate with Security Cabin, 3D Scanning (LS).

(II). Lianpui Village

(a) Lungphun Ropui: This site has recently declared by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) 2^{nd} Site of "National Importance" in Mizoram on 14^{th} July 2025. It is located at 23°25'08''N latitude and 93°34'09''E longitude, Lungphun Ropui features 105 carved stones and has many similarity with Kawtchhuah Ropui at Vangchhia. Managed by the Heritage Site & Monument Preservation Committee since 2012.

Lianpui village focuses on heritage conservation:

- The historic site **'**Lungphun Ropui' is preserved by the Historical Site & Monument Preservation Committee of Lianpui**.**
- A entry gate was constructed with funding from the Department of Art & Culture, Mizoram.

(III). Dungtlang Village

(a) Lianchhiari Lunglen Tlang : It is located at 23°19'21''N latitude and 93°24'07''E longitude, this rocky cliff is a symbol of tragic love. Lianchhiari, daughter of Chief Vanhnuaithanga, fell in love with Chawngfianga of Chhingzawl village. Social differences and rumors thwarted their love, and she would gaze at his distant village from this cliff, lamenting her lost love.

(b) Thangchhuah Mual: It is located at 23°19'21''N latitude and 93°24'07''E longitude, this memorial site was established in 1994 to honor the Mizo title of "Thangchhuah," once conferred for heroic hunting or public feasts. With the shift toward conservation, it now celebrates achievements in education, sports, politics, and public service etc. Over 50 commemorative stones are erected here.

Dungtlang village has undertaken several initiatives to promote rural tourism:

- A Rest House, constructed using MGNREGS funds, can accommodate six guests and includes a dome with a capacity of 20–30 people. The facility is managed by the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), which also collects usage fees.
- The village has built a traditional 'Zokhua' (Zo Village), comprising four traditional houses and one 'Zawlbuk' (traditional men's dormitory).
- A community group called 'Pipu Sulhnu Humhalhtu Pawl' has been formed to maintain and preserve local heritage sites. They engage in regular cleaning, trimming of bushes, and environmental upkeep.
- The village community has also undertaken a conservation project protecting 100 acres of forest land, where they have planted native trees to attract and restore endangered and rare species of birds and animals once native to the region.

(IV). Khawbung Village

(a) Mizo Hla Kungpui Mual: It is located at 23°16'18''N latitude and 93°21'08''E longitude, Mizo Hla Kungpui Mual is also known as "Mizo Poet Square". It was established in 1986 to honor eminent Mizo poets and writers. Initially, only two poets were interred. Subsequent commemorations in 1996, 2006, and during the Silver Jubilee celebration brought the total to 36. 5 are to be added in 2026. This site can also be called the "Westminster Abbey of Mizoram" and holds significant literary and educational value for Mizo society.

As the Block Headquarters, Khawbung is seeing growing tourist interest:

- A Tourist Lodge, managed by a local family, can host up to 21 guests:1 VIP room, 7 double rooms, and a dormitory.
- A new dormitory with a capacity of 25 persons was constructed in 2018.
- Tourist arrivals: 2016 **:** 2,913 visitors

(V). Farkawn Village

(a) Lamsial Puk: Located 10 km north of Farkawn Village (23°48'01''N, 93°33'26''E), Lamsial Puk is a large cave containing ancient human remains, including bones, skulls, and hair. The cave, associated with the Lamsial clan, was first explored in 1952 and dated to around 1650 years old by the Archaeological Survey of India. Local folklore suggests it was used as a refuge during migration**.**

(b) Fiara Tui : Fiara Tui, a natural spring associated with folklore, holds deep emotional significance in Mizo literature. It is referenced in over 30 Mizo folk songs.

Farkawn has made significant strides in developing tourism infrastructure:

- **A** Government-run Tourist Lodge, staffed by two workers, includes three buildings and one hall, accommodating up to 14 guests: 2 VIP rooms, 4 double rooms, and 2 single rooms.
- All local heritage sites are managed and maintained by the Heritage Preservation Society of Farkawn**.**

(VI). Vaphai and East Chawngtui

(a) Thasiama Seno Neihna: This small plateau, near Vaphai village at East Chawngtui area (23°14'40''N, 93°31'08''E), lies close to Tan Tlang (1,929 m). According to legend, a brave hunter named Thasiama encountered Lasi (mythical maidens) who blessed him with success in hunting. It is believed that his mithun (domesticated gaur) miraculously gave birth atop this rugged plateau; a symbol of divine intervention**.**

(b) Fiara Tui: Fiara Tui, a natural spring associated with folklore, holds deep emotional significance in Mizo literature. Located near Vaphai village, it is referenced in over 30 Mizo folk songs.

(c) **Tan tlang**: It is the third highest mountain peak of Mizoram (1,929 m) (Statistical Handbook, 2020) and is believed to be home of Legendary Chawngtinleri. This peak is not to be missed by trekking lover and bird watcher and a perfect place for adventure sport.

Vaphai is actively working to become a cultural tourism hub:

- The community constructed a 'Mizo Village', featuring: A Zawlbuk**,** the Chief's House**,** Chief Adviser's House**,** Pum In (Blacksmith's House), and a Common Man's House.
- A Cultural Centre, funded under the BADP, aims to host state-level festivals**.**
- The village is also developing tourist cottages and dormitories, including a lodge, meeting rooms, and recreational facilities for visitors.
- Plans are underway to erect commemorative monuments for renowned Mizo folk figures such as Thasiama and Chawngtinleri, with inscriptions of their biographies.

(VII). Sazep Village

(a) Lalvunga Mual: It is located at 23°52'03''N latitude and 93°30'08''E longitude, this site honors Lalvunga, a legendary Mizo chief. A commemorative stone with inscriptions was erected on a hilltop in 2012, offering panoramic views and historical reflection.

Sazep contributes to cultural heritage tourism:

- Lalvunga Mual was established to commemorate Lalvunga, one of the most prominent Mizo chiefs. It stands as a symbolic monument preserving local history and identity.

(VIII). Samthang

Samthang is one of the important village of Tuipuiral. 3 kms from Samthang lies Samthang Zopui which is an old Settlement of famous mizo Chief Lallula. In this place Chief Lallula killed hundreds of Thlanrawn tribe which is known as "Thlanrawn rawt". It is now a beautiful grassland area and one of tourist destination. Samthang zopui recieved fund for the development of 3.59 crore from NEC which includes approach road, fencing with guard room, market shed, cafeteria, homestay, camping and hiking equipment etc.

7. Rural Homestay Scheme

The Rural Homestay Scheme is designed to promote tourism in rural areas by allowing tourists to stay with local families, participate in their daily lives, and experience their culture firsthand. Guests not only lodge with host families but also share meals and engage in local traditions, offering a unique cultural exchange and authentic rural experience.

The scheme is structured into three main components, with a total allocation of Rs. 100.15 lakhs. This component involves building homestay facilities. Each homestay unit includes a separate guest room of 120 sq. feet with an attached bathroom of 28 sq. feet. The cost of constructing one such unit is Rs. 2.29

lakhs. A total of 35 households across six villages in Mizoram, all located in the undivided Champhai District, have been selected for this initiative. The total expenditure under this component amounts to Rs. 80.15 lakhs (35 × Rs. 2.29 lakhs). Of these, three villages Vangchhia, Vaphai and Dungtlang villages, comprising 15 households (43%) are from Tuipuiral Region**.**

8. Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI**)**, functioning under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for archaeological research and conservation of cultural heritage in India. Its headquarters is located at Janpath, New Delhi, and it is led by the Director General. The ASI currently operates through 27 regional circles, each headed by a Circle Superintendent.

A new ASI Circle had been established with its headquarters in Aizawl**,** covering Manipur and Tripura, reflecting increased focus and accessibility for heritage management in the region on 16th September 2017. Currently there are 2 Sites of National Importance in Mizoram namely, Kawtchhuahropui at Vangchhia and Lunphun ropui at Lianpui. Dungtlang is soon expected to be one in the future.

9. Socio-Economic and Environmental Potential of Tourism in Tuipuiral Region

Despite currently receiving the lowest foreign tourist inflow in the Northeast, Mizoram and particularly the Tuipuiral Region - holds substantial untapped tourism potential. With the completion of key infrastructure such as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, the Zokhawthar road, and the Bairabi–Sairang railway line, major shifts in accessibility and tourism patterns are anticipated. These changes, however, are likely to generate both positive and negative consequences. On the negative side, increased visitation may lead to inflation, higher living costs, cultural dilution, and identity concerns particularly in border areas like Zokhawthar and Bairabi, where cross-cultural interactions and marriages are already common. Unplanned growth could also strain existing infrastructure, create overcrowding, and heighten public health risks such as prostitution and disease transmission.

Conversely, the region stands to gain significantly from tourism-led development. Local NGOs already play a key role in safeguarding cultural and archaeological sites, as seen in Vangchhia's long-standing protection as YMA Park since 1992, while villages like Dungtlang have initiated community-led forest conservation. Tourism expansion can generate employment for guides, hospitality workers, drivers, and artisans, while promoting foreign exchange earnings once cross-border connectivity improves through the Eastern Economic Corridor of Mizoram. It can also stimulate infrastructure development, support alternative livelihoods for communities dependent on agriculture, and enhance the cultural and academic value of the region as a repository of Mizo heritage and archaeological wealth. Strengthened connectivity with the Chin State of Myanmar is expected to further deepen cultural exchanges and position Tuipuiral as a significant cultural destination. In line with Singh's (1994) view of tourism as a mechanism for redistributing wealth and promoting regional development, the Tuipuiral Region could benefit from integrating agricultural landscapes with tourism since the region has potential for agro-tourism thereby fostering sustainable, eco-friendly, and community-based development.

10. Findings

The study reveals that the Tuipuiral Region possesses a remarkable concentration of cultural and archaeological heritage sites, including megalithic complexes, legendary landscapes, literary memorials, ancient caves, and traditional village structures. Communities across villages such as Dungtlang,

Vangchhia, Farkawn, Vaphai, Khawbung, Lianpui, and Samthang actively participate in heritage preservation through tourism committees, NGOs, and cultural associations. Despite this cultural richness, tourism remains underdeveloped due to poor road connectivity, limited accommodation, low institutional prioritization, and the absence of trained guides. Infrastructure gaps particularly in lodging, site accessibility, and all-weather roads are major constraints. There are schemes like the Rural Homestay Programme, BADP-funded infrastructure, and ASI's designation of national monuments, indicating growing institutional attention. While tourism growth poses risks such as cultural dilution, inflation, and identity concerns in border areas, it also offers significant opportunities for employment generation, foreign exchange earnings, environmental conservation, and supplementary livelihoods. The region's proximity to Myanmar and upcoming connectivity projects position it strategically for cross-border cultural tourism.

11. Conclusion

The Tuipuiral Region holds exceptional potential for cultural heritage tourism owing to its unique blend of archaeological resources, folklore landscapes, and strong community driven conservation efforts. However, its development remains limited by infrastructural deficiencies, low administrative attention, and seasonal inaccessibility. With major connectivity projects nearing completion, the region is at a pivotal moment where tourism can become a transformative force for local socio-economic growth. For tourism to develop sustainably, heritage preservation must be balanced with community participation and planned infrastructure expansion. Strengthening institutional support, improving accommodation facilities, and formalizing visitor management systems will be essential. If properly managed, the Tuipuiral Region can evolve into one of Mizoram's most significant cultural tourism destinations while ensuring that its traditions, historical narratives, and natural landscapes are preserved for future generations.

12. Suggestion

Tourism development in the Tuipuiral Region requires a coordinated and sustainable approach grounded in community participation. Improving road connectivity and developing all-weather access to key heritage sites should be prioritized, as the current road conditions significantly discourage tourist inflow. Institutional support must be strengthened by expanding the Tourism Department's role beyond BADP funds, including dedicated heritage development plans and annual maintenance grants. Establishing dormitory-style and budget accommodations in each of the major heritage villages would enhance visitor stay duration. Trained tour guides, preferably selected from local youth should be deployed to provide culturally accurate interpretations and ensure visitor safety. Community-based tourism models, including homestays and cultural villages, should be expanded, ensuring that local households directly benefit from tourism income. Cross-border cultural tourism with Chin State should be developed carefully, with strong regulatory frameworks to prevent social issues such as trafficking or uncontrolled migration. Finally, long-term planning must integrate environmental conservation measures, visitor monitoring systems, and collaboration between ASI, local committees, and academic institutions to ensure sustainable heritage management.

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