



# Tea Tourism In Sivasagar District Of Assam: Major Constraints And Its Future Opportunities

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**Abstract:** -Tea tourism is a wonderful recreational experience that satisfies the tourist while visiting tea gardens. Assam is globally recognized as the largest tea-producing state of India, and simultaneously it is a land of extraordinary historical wealth. Sivasagar District epitomizes this dual identity. The district today shelters iconic monuments such as Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, and Sivasagar Sivadol that draw heritage enthusiasts from across the world. Parallel to this architectural legacy, Sivasagar has been a cornerstone of Assam's tea industry since the mid-nineteenth century, with sprawling estates and thousands of small growers shaping its agrarian landscape. Yet, the tourism narrative of Sivasagar has remained confined to its monuments. The vast stretches of tea gardens, the colonial planter bungalows, and the lived culture of tea communities have not been woven into the tourist experience. This paper examines how tea tourism can be developed in Sivasagar by integrating it with the existing heritage circuit. The district's tea sector is not merely an economic entity; it is a cultural landscape where the history of Ahom settlement, British plantation enterprise, and the migration of Tea Tribes intersect. Through field-based observations and policy analysis, the study identifies that the absence of integrated marketing, infrastructural gaps, and regulatory hurdles have restricted tea tourism to a few isolated efforts. However, the prospects are substantial. Tea tourism in Sivasagar thus emerges not only as an economic opportunity but as a mechanism for cultural continuity and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Sivasagar, Tea Tourism, Ahom Heritage, Community Tourism, Opportunities

## I. Introduction:

Tea is the major cultivable plant in North-East India as well as in Assam. The soil, weather and The climate is preferable for tea cultivation in Upper Assam. Tea has been giving an incredible result in the economic sector of Assam from when it was started as a business-oriented product. Assam tea is exported to the different states of India as well as abroad because of its high demand. Assam is celebrated worldwide for its tea industry and its profound historical legacy. Sivasagar District represents the confluence of these two identities. Parallel to this architectural heritage, Sivasagar has been a major centre of Assam's tea industry since the colonial period, with large estates, colonial planter bungalows, and thousands of small tea growers shaping its rural economy and society.

However, tourism in Sivasagar has remained largely confined to monument visits. The tea gardens, factory heritage, and lived culture of tea communities have not been integrated into the tourist experience. This disconnect limits the district's tourism potential and denies livelihood opportunities to tea-dependent communities.

## II. Objective of the study:

The main objective of the study is to highlight the challenges and untapped future opportunities of developing tea tourism in Sivasagar District.

## III. Methodology:

The present paper discusses the constraints and future opportunities of tea tourism in Sivasagar district. Therefore, the study was conducted based on primary and secondary sources.



#### **IV. A brief history of the discovery of tea:**

The discovery of a tea plant in the jungle of Assam was an epochal incident in the history of Assam. The Singpho people of Assam have already accepted tea as their traditional drink, and it was commonly known as Phanap among the Singpho community. Phanap was unknown to the rest of the world before the British came to Assam. Then in 1823, Robert Bruce, a Scottish arms trader and mercenary soldier on the north-east frontier of India confirmed that Phanap defined tea. Maniram Dewan, an Assamese nobleman in British India, also took the important initiative to discover tea saplings in Assam. After that, the journey of tea cultivation started. Robert Bruce's younger brother Alexander Bruce collected tea saplings and dry tea from the head of the Singpho known as Gum. These tea saplings were sent to Calcutta for quality checking, and it proved that the quality of tea was the same as the quality of Chinese tea. Along with local tea, the British East India Company brought tea saplings and workers to Assam to cultivate tea from China. Seeing the potentiality of the tea industry in Assam, this capitalist group took significant initiatives. In 1838, Chief Commissioner of Assam Francis Jenkins passed the 'Wasteland Rules'; meanwhile, in the same year, he established Assam Tea Company and played a leading role in the growth of the tea industry in Assam. A few years later, many private speculators, basically British businessmen, entered this field along with the British Government.

#### **V. Following Maniram**

Dewan's pioneering efforts, many Assamese noblemen came forward to tea cultivation. Since India's independence, major changes have been seen in the tea industry of Assam. Changes basically took place in the area of cultivable land, ownership patterns, development in the production process, etc. By the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, tea cultivation can be considered one of the profitable businesses of Assam, and it has become a way of livelihood for many families. After independence, as the scenario changed, many Indian companies came forward and engaged themselves in tea cultivation and established many tea industries. Mainly in Upper Assam, they have found many tea estates and started this business professionally.

#### **VI. Discussion:**

The tea landscape of Sivasagar is not merely a plantation economy but a cultural continuum where multiple histories intersect. The district presents a rare case where the architectural grandeur of a medieval kingdom and the industrial heritage of colonial tea coexist within a few kilometres. Yet, this coexistence has not translated into a coherent tourism product. The discussion here focuses on why this disconnect exists and how it can be bridged through a new paradigm of integration. To understand this paradox, the discussion is structured into two parts: the problems that hinder tea tourism, and the prospects that can transform Sivasagar into India's premier tea tourism destination.

#### **VII. Constraints hindering tea tourism in Sivasagar district:**

The most immediate challenge is infrastructural asymmetry. Tourism development in Sivasagar has been monument-centric for decades. The approach roads to Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, and Sivadol are well-maintained under central schemes, and basic visitor amenities exist around these sites. However, this infrastructure abruptly ends at the monument boundary. The tea gardens that define the district's agrarian identity remain largely disconnected. Roads leading to heritage estates like Gaurisagar and Dikom, and to clusters of small tea growers in Demow and Amguri, are narrow, unpaved, and impassable during monsoon. The accommodation sector reflects the same imbalance. Sivasagar town has several budget hotels catering to pilgrims and transit tourists, but there is a complete absence of experiential stays that can immerse a visitor in tea culture.

Beyond infrastructure lies a deeper issue of narrative fragmentation. The official and popular imagination of Sivasagar is singularly focused on its identity as the "Land of Ahom Kings." Tourism brochures, government portals, and tour itineraries consistently project the district through its palaces and temples, with no reference to its tea legacy. This selective storytelling creates an artificial divide in the tourist's mind. The visitor who marvels at the engineering of Talatal Ghar remains unaware nineteenth-century machinery operates just two kilometres away. The historical reality



is that these two domains are deeply entangled. The Ahom state had settled various communities in this region who later became the workforce of the tea industry. The Dikhow and Dorika rivers that feed the royal Joysagar tank also irrigate the surrounding tea gardens. Even the bricks of some planter bungalows were salvaged from Ahom-era ruins. Yet, this continuity is never communicated. The absence of a unified narrative means both the monument and the tea garden are impoverished: the monument is stripped of its living socio-economic context, and the tea garden is reduced to a mere site of agricultural production, devoid of cultural meaning.

The human resource challenge is equally critical. Sivasagar has a pool of guides well-versed in Ahom history, but none who can simultaneously interpret the journey of tea from bush to cup and connect it to the local social history. Conversely, communities within tea gardens have little exposure to hospitality standards or cultural interpretation. A perceptual barrier also exists within these communities themselves. For generations, the tea garden has been a site of labour and economic struggle. The idea that it could also be a site of leisure, cultural pride, and income generation through tourism has not yet taken root. This limits the development of authentic, community-led experiences.

Institutional and policy barriers further entrench this disconnect. The governance of tourism in Sivasagar is compartmentalized across agencies with non-overlapping mandates. The Archaeological Survey of India manages the monuments with a primary focus on conservation, not tourism development. The Tea Board of India regulates the tea sector with an emphasis on production and export. The Assam Tourism Development Corporation handles promotion but has limited jurisdiction over either monuments or private estates.

The majority of tea gardens in the district still depend on chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which impact the water bodies that are integral to the Ahom monumental landscape, such as Joysagar Tank. Unregulated tourism could lead to waste management issues and physical damage to tea bushes. Similarly, the ASI-protected monuments are constructed of brick and lime-mortar and are vulnerable to excessive footfall and vibration. Any tea tourism model must therefore be anchored in sustainability, respecting both environmental limits and heritage conservation norms.

### **VIII. Future opportunities of tea tourism in Sivasagar District:**

Sivasagar has a bright future in tea tourism. The district can grow in many new ways if we connect its old monuments with its tea gardens.

Sivasagar has many big, old bungalows from British time. Today most are empty and broken. In the future, these can be fixed and used as hotels for tourists. This will save the buildings and give tourists a special place to stay. The bungalows can also show old photos and maps of Ahom times and tea history.

Sivasagar can start a yearly "Sivasagar Tea and Heritage Festival" at Rang Ghar. Here tea tasting, dance, and farmer stalls will be there. This will bring media and tourists from all over India. It will make Sivasagar famous for both monuments and tea.

In the future, if the government makes easy rules, tea tourism will grow fast. Rules like farm insurance, easy license for homestay, and one office for all papers will help. If ASI, Tea Board, and Tourism Department work together, many new projects can start quickly.

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Kaziranga and Majuli already attract many tourists. In the future, Sivasagar can join them. A "Heritage + Wildlife + Tea + River Island" package of 5 days can be sold. Tourists will see rhinos, then Ahom monuments, then tea gardens, then Majuli. This will bring Sivasagar into big tourist maps without extra cost.

Many people today want natural health care. Sivasagar can start "Tea Spa and Wellness Camps" in bungalows. Tourists can get a body massage with tea oil, drink herbal tea, and do yoga in tea gardens. This will attract health tourists who spend more money. It will also make use of tea waste like tea leaves for beauty products.



Most tourists avoid Assam in rain. But tea gardens look most green and fresh in monsoon. In the future, "Monsoon Tea Festival" can be started. Tourists can enjoy rain, fresh tea, pakora in the bungalow verandah, and see how rain helps tea grow. Hotels can give low rates in this season to pull more people.

Listing 'Sivasagar Ahom Tea' on Amazon and OneGreen with QR-enabled provenance videos converts online buyers into future tourists. Chemical-free cultivation protects Dikhow River, allowing branding as "Tea that Saves Rivers" for eco-tourists. Carbon credit tourism offers additional revenue through "Carbon-Neutral Tour" certificates.

## **IX. Conclusion:**

The findings of this article concluded that Sivasagar District possesses exceptional untapped opportunities for tea tourism development. The convergence of Ahom-era monuments like Rang Ghar, Talatal Ghar, Sivadol and over 25,000 hectares of tea gardens creates a destination proposition unique in India. While problems of infrastructure, publicity, and policy gaps exist, they are surmountable through convergence and community participation. Tea tourism in Sivasagar is not merely economic development but cultural continuity, where every cup of tea narrates a 600-year-old story - from the bricks of Ahom palaces to the leaves of colonial gardens.

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