

The Tourism Policy of Meghalaya



A simple plan with simple tools results in a masterpiece

**GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA
TOURISM DEPARTMENT**

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The Draft Tourism Policy which was issued by the Government of Meghalaya on 30.11.2010 through its website has received several views and comments from the general public. Such views and suggestions have been examined and relevant suggestions have been incorporated. The Governor of Meghalaya is, therefore, pleased to finalise and announce Meghalaya Tourism Policy, 2011 below, which will take effect from the date of publication.

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S.M.Pathaw

**Under Secretary to the Govt. of Meghalaya
Tourism Department**

MEGHALAYA TOURISM POLICY – 2011

1. Introduction

Tourism in India is a growing industry, and as per World Tourism Organisation predictions, India will be a leader in using tourism as an employment generator. The State of Meghalaya must be placed in a strategic position to take advantage of this growth.

Tourism being a multi sectoral activity has the capacity to stimulate different sectors of the economy. It is evident from highly developed states and countries that tourism opens up immense opportunities for economic development, poverty alleviation and income generation. Being labour intensive, it opens avenues for a host of employment opportunities. Tourism can also make a positive impact on conserving the environment, cultural enrichment, development of rural areas and empowerment of women.

Meghalaya the “Abode of the Clouds” with its picturesque landscape of rolling hills, meandering rivers, cascading waterfalls, lush forests, diverse flora and fauna and unique culture and tradition has great potential for development of tourism. During the last few years, Meghalaya has evolved as a fast growing destination for both domestic and international tourists. The first Tourism Policy was framed in the year 2001 which was published vide Government Notification No.Tourism.136/96/264 dated 15th February 2001. With the evolving role of the tourism sector as a major engine of economic growth, it was felt necessary to revamp the existing tourism policy and come up with a new policy within which the Government helps to create the basic

infrastructure for tourism development, while the private sector helps to provide quality products and offer active support services.

Keeping in mind the requirement to provide economic opportunities to the local communities as also the need to preserve the eco-system and the ethnic identity of the people, the tourism policy has been designed to sustain the rich cultural heritage and biodiversity of the state.

2. Vision

To position Meghalaya as a preferred tourist destination by taking advantage of its rich cultural heritage and natural beauty.

3. Guiding Principles

Realising Tourism's potential as a key promoter for economic growth of the state, the Government of Meghalaya envisages the following key principles to bring about responsible growth in this sector.

The key principles are:

- a) Government will create basic infrastructure for tourism development and also act as a facilitator for private investment in this sector.
- b) Private sector will provide the quality products and offer active support services.
- c) Encouragement and assistance will be provided to promote entrepreneurship within the local communities in the field of tourism. Importance will also be given to tourism projects which are based on community participation.
- d) Tourism development will be undertaken in a manner so as to ensure sustainability and conservation of the state's environment and natural resources. Development of tourism activities around natural resources will be done in conjunction with the relevant Government Departments and in concurrence with any laws relating to protection and conservation. Sustainable development of tourism will also help generate employment for the local people without impacting on environment and local culture.
- e) To encourage hotel operators to 'go green' by strictly adhering to minimum standards with regards to environmental performance and health standards. This will include use of renewable energy sources, overall reduction in

energy and water consumption, measures to harvest rainwater, measures to reduce waste and provision of non-smoking areas etc.

- f) Tourism development will aim to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by strategic regional policies and development agencies such as the NEIIPP (North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy 2007), the State Industrial Policy, the Forest and Wildlife protection Policies, NEC (North East Council) and Ministry of DONER. It will also participate in Central Government initiatives/funding with regard to tourism.
- g) Meghalaya will build on its existing strengths to develop tourism by promoting a clean, healthy and safe environment along with friendly and efficient services.
- h) Meghalaya Tourism will aim to develop a unique brand focusing on selected niches and products in order to attract visitors to the state while differentiating itself, where necessary, from its neighbours.
- i) Construction works relating to tourism projects may be designed in such a way that the structure will merge with the surroundings and the natural environment of the area so as to present a good ambience, taking into consideration the need for durability and sustainability of the structure in a particular environment.

4. General Objectives

After due consideration of the above key principles, the broad objectives for the development of tourism in the State are as follows:

- a) To establish a holistic growth of the industry with the cooperation of the private sector/community and other stakeholders.
- b) To develop an effective marketing strategy linked with regional and national initiatives through a collaborative mechanism to project a positive identity for Meghalaya in the national and international tourism markets as a unique and preferred destination.
- c) To strengthen the quality and attractiveness of tourism experience in Meghalaya including improvements to be brought about in the conservation of the environment.
- d) To identify and promote new opportunities for the future development of tourism in Meghalaya on a sustainable basis.

- e) To strengthen the cultural aspects of the tourism product in Meghalaya and to actively promote local participation, including community-based tourism.
- f) To develop a tourism plan in concurrence with the objectives of the policy.
- g) To ensure greater emphasis on capacity building/training to local youth and tourism stakeholders in the State.
- h) To ensure acceptable service levels, training and human resource development will be provided on an ongoing basis.
- i) To take full advantage of the various institutes in the state like the Indian Institute of Management, Institute of Hotel Management, Martin Luther Christian University, Food Craft Institute (Tura), to develop courses and implement training in various categories of service providers.
- j) To make the tourism industry in Meghalaya a leader in responsible environmental practices.
- k) To establish a set of best practices in the tourism sector.

5. Strategies

- a) To survey all potential areas of tourist attraction in the entire state in order to prepare a master plan for integrated tourism development. The focus will be on development of destinations and circuit development not only within the state but with major circuits of the neighbouring states particularly Assam.
- b) To create and improve infrastructure along with better management of mega tourism projects. Availability of quality infrastructure is a vital component for the development of tourism. The aim of the Department is to facilitate building world class tourism infrastructure and efficient transportation facilities.
- c) A well-designed plan for capacity building and manpower training will help make tourism development successful. The aim of the HRD plan will be to create an efficient and professional manpower base in the tourism sector.

- d) Joint venture in cases where unique products involving special proprietary information or brand image are needed to be introduced to a location.
- e) To include tourism as an industry so that stake holders can take advantage of the various incentives under the Industrial Policy (NEIIPP). Including tourism as an industry will increase capital flow into this sector by inviting investors and this in turn will increase the employment generating capacity of the sector.
- f) To identify and promote new opportunities and products for the future development of tourism in Meghalaya. The major tourism products in Meghalaya are festivals, wildlife, culture and lifestyle of the people. The State also has potential to offer new products, the thrust areas should be rural/village tourism, MICE tourism, Eco tourism, Wellness tourism, Adventure tourism, Pilgrimage tourism etc. Emphasis is on eco-tourism, nature tourism and rural tourism through community initiatives and partnerships and encouraging small and micro enterprises and promotion of self employment schemes.
- g) To develop an effective marketing strategy so as to project a positive image for Meghalaya in the international and national market as a unique and preferred destination to visit. The marketing plan will be developed after a thorough investigation of the tourism products in Meghalaya and the markets that Meghalaya is targeting. The plan will include promotion of festivals and tribal sports, promotion of local handicrafts and cuisine, familiarisation tours for tour operators from outside the state for better knowledge of the places of tourist interest in Meghalaya.
- h) Up-gradation of visitor facilities in all tourist destinations, improve information and signages.
- i) To strengthen the quality and attractiveness of the tourism experience in Meghalaya, convergence with other Government Departments is needed in the areas of security, air and road connectivity, health and hygiene and conservation of environment. This will include-
- Launching of a state wide campaign to keep Meghalaya clean and beautiful. All stakeholders will have to contribute to this effort.
 - To educate and assist local communities to take up afforestation programs.

- Support for programmes and information aiming to limit health and safety risks in the state including the elimination of malaria, control the spread of HIV/AIDS and improvement of road safety.
 - Efforts shall be made for improvement in air connectivity to the state as well as good road connectivity to all the tourist destinations within the State by actively pursuing with the concerned departments.
 - Protection and promotion of caves in collaboration with professional and experts in the field and the local community.
- j) The Department will set up an Advisory Board which will provide direction towards development of tourism industry in the State and take the responsibility of bringing in or facilitating synergy and co-ordination with other inter-related departments.
- k) Tourism infrastructure shall be designed in such a way that the construction will merge with the surroundings and the natural environment of the area so as to present a good ambience, taking into consideration the need for durability and sustainability of the structure in a particular environment

6. Tourism Security

In order to avoid any form of harassment to tourists visiting the state, the Department of Tourism, Govt. of Meghalaya in collaboration with the local authorities will sensitise the people to treat tourists with due courtesy and decorum and also to guide and provide requisite assistance in case of any emergency encountered by them. Any complaint lodged by the tourists shall be attended to promptly so that they are not harassed. A specialised wing in the form of Tourist Police may also be created if necessary for effective security to tourists. Preventive measures, including the involvement of local communities and spreading awareness about the benefits of tourism, will be actively promoted.

7. Product Development

Meghalaya will constantly aim to improve the tourism products it offers as well as build new products and services to target the different categories of tourists. An improved investment climate is a factor that will facilitate the development of the tourism product in Meghalaya. The investment climate can be improved by developing a plan for the State which will include:

- identifying areas with investment potential,
- identify investors that fit with the development philosophy of the state,
- prohibiting certain types of activities which are environmentally unsafe.

Potential areas for the future development of tourism products in Meghalaya include:

- **Adventure/Sports Tourism** – Meghalaya has immense potential for adventure related activities including adventure sports like rock climbing, paragliding, zip lining, mountain cycling, canoeing, water skiing, etc. Some of the popular adventure activities being promoted in the state are hard and soft treks, rock climbing, boat race and indigenous sports of the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. Caving at present is the most vibrant and visible tourism activity in the state, followed by nature walks and treks on the numerous living root bridges. While promoting adventure sports, it is important to ensure maintenance of international standards of safety, quality and service by strictly following guidelines issued by the Ministry of Tourism. The Govt. will assist educated unemployed youths through scholarships for training in adventure sports to open up a source of livelihood for them. MTDC will support and promote water sports and angling. The Corporation in collaboration with Sports & Youth Affairs shall hold annual water sport events.
- **Wildlife/Eco-Tourism-** With a large area of the state covered under forest, Meghalaya has diverse wildlife. Apart from the well known Balpakram National Park in South Garo Hills, there are the Nokrek Biosphere Reserve (West Garo Hills), the Siju Wildlife Sanctuary (South Garo Hills) and the Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary in Ri Bhoi District. Tourism facilities are to be developed around the Balpakram National Park and in other National Parks and Sanctuaries with individual speciality which shall be integrated as a tourism product. Tourism Department to co-ordinate with the Forest Department for further development and improvement of the existing infrastructure for the convenience of tourists. Preservation and conservation of Sacred Groves to be given priority.

- **Cultural Tourism (Fairs and Festivals)** - Meghalaya resonates with fairs and festivals which are celebrated throughout the year. The four major festivals of the three tribes of Meghalaya are the Wangala Dance (Garo), Shad Suk Mynsiem and Nongkrem Dance Festival (Khasi), and the Behdeinkhlam Festival(Jaintia). Music is an integral part of the people of Meghalaya and it accompanies every festival and ceremony. These festivals also provide a glimpse of Meghalaya's lively collection of woven, decorative, dyed and colourful silk and cotton, their elaborate jewellery etc. More thrust to be given on publicity to make festivals a major attraction for tourists. There is a need to make them more attractive targeting tourist on well defined themes and spread over all seasons. The time and dates will be fixed and organised in a professional manner and will be given wide publicity. The calendar of events will be prepared ahead of time with the concurrence of the organisers keeping in mind its effectiveness and purpose.
- **Meetings, Incentives, Conventions & Exhibition Tourism (MICE)** - Meghalaya being one of the preferred destinations of the North East, and with tourist arrival increasing substantially every year, the demand for facilities for MICE has also increased .The Department will take steps for setting up modern convention facilities at strategic locations.
- **Wellness, Health & Herbal Tourism** – Spa holidays are becoming popular these days. Meghalaya has immense potential in this segment and can be a leading player in health and wellness tourism where professionally devised programmes can be initiated and delivered like yoga centres, ayurvedic treatments, rejuvenating treatments etc.
- Bestowed with an abundant variety of medicinal plants, the state could promote Health & Herbal Tourism. The indigenous people with their inherent knowledge for herbal medicines and massages that provides holistic healing and rejuvenation will be encouraged and promoted. Areas and locations having valuable medicinal plants will be identified for the purpose of conducting educational herbal trails. Existing herbal medicinal centres will be encouraged in a regulated manner which shall form part of an important component of wellness tourism.
- **Unique Lodging Products** – A variety of accommodation depicting traditional style and decor of the major tribes – the Khasi,

Jaintia, and Garo to be constructed by the government or on PPP mode which will have a unique selling proposition.

- **Local Souvenir Tourism** – Shopping is recognised as an integral part of tourism experience and a valued contributor to employment, income and revenue. Local markets held at various sites selling indigenous items will be included as an itinerary in the tourism conducted tours. The existing indigenous crafts produced by the local people such as pottery, basketry, handloom and weaving etc. will be promoted and developed.
- **Golf Tourism** - Meghalaya has one of the oldest 18-hole golf courses in the country. The Shillong Golf Course together with very favourable climatic conditions has the potential of attracting ardent golfers from corporate houses within the country and from neighbouring countries. With improved air connectivity, this would attract high-end tourists to the state.
- **Pilgrimage Tourism** – Meghalaya has potential for pilgrimage tourism in Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills which are already visited by many pilgrims seasonally. Promotion of pilgrimage tourism will be undertaken with basic amenities in these locations to attract more pilgrims. These amenities will be managed efficiently in coordination with the local authority. Special festivals will be given wide publicity to attract national and international tourists throughout the year.
- **Legend Tourism** - Legend tourism is a unique venture to create an innovative Tourism product based on legends and folklores. Meghalaya is very rich in age old traditions, beliefs, and customs which still exist in various forms. There are a variety of tourist destinations from caves to monoliths, waterfalls to rock formations, each with its own set of legends. The bonding that exists between the land and people makes it all the more significant to package this most picturesque state with its interesting legends. These legends will be inscribed on stone tablets at the respective destinations or documented and printed in the form of booklets.
- **Heritage Tourism** – Heritage Tourism is the oldest form of travel. In Meghalaya, particularly Shillong there are a number of important buildings, monuments, churches, etc., associated with well known personalities and events from the past. The Department will take steps to promote places, monuments, etc. connected with

famous personalities to promote Meghalaya as a destination for Heritage Tourism.

- **Music Tourism** – People of Meghalaya are known for their love of music. The Shillong Chamber Choir has put Shillong on the music map. Musical talent needs to be nurtured and recognised so that parents can encourage their children to take up music full time. The Department of Arts & Culture will be tapped to promote music festival in Meghalaya.
- **Strawberry Tourism** – Strawberry in Meghalaya is an economic success history. Strawberry cultivation is enthusiastically taken up by many farmers especially in Ri-Bhoi District. Strawberry Tourism can be promoted where farm houses could be encouraged to take in guests who could enjoy the experience of strawberry harvesting. With the involvement of the Horticulture Department a Strawberry Festival shall be organised as an annual event.
- **Premium Tourist Destinations** - This is a new area of tourism product providing clean, fresh, peaceful, unpolluted and invigorating atmosphere, such resorts to be developed for high end tourists. Constructions will be developed in accordance with the landscape local architecture and 90% green component. Traditional local material will be utilised.
- **Package Tours** - With the objective of boosting tourist traffic, attractive package tours will be developed with the help of MTDC, private sector and travel operators. The packages shall be designed keeping in mind the varied interests and budget of the tourists which will be updated from time to time.
- **Cuisine Tourism** - Tourism Department will organise traditional food festivals which will include ethnic food where local cuisines of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo will be promoted.
- **Film Tourism** - Promote Meghalaya as a film destination. Besides gaining wide publicity for the state, the local community also benefits economically from the crew during their stay.
- **Weekend/Day Tourism** - There are many locations for weekend retreats/day trips in and around the capital viz Umiam, Cherrapunjee, Mawsynram, Nartiang, Jakrem, Mawlynnong, Ialong, etc which are popular amongst tourists. State Government

will further develop these spots as well as promote new destinations preferably with involvement of the private sector on a PPP mode.

8. Village/Rural Tourism-Home Stay

Village/Rural Tourism has emerged as a new concept in the tourism industry. In this context, Meghalaya is fast evolving as a responsible and sustainable tourism product with an important social objective through people's participation. Rural tourism can be effectively implemented to boost tourism in the state. Rural tourism will ensure the dispersal of tourists from the city to villages enabling them to familiarise themselves with the unique culture and heritage prevalent so that they are rejuvenated and culturally enriched. The prime objective is to harness the vast untapped rural tourism prospective of the state so that their multiplier benefit filters out directly to the rural communities. Similar programmes taken up by NGOs and other agencies will also be streamlined by bringing them under one umbrella for convergence in the development and promotion of the product.

9. Community Participation in Tourism

The land tenure system prevalent in the State is tilted towards the community with the Government having very little or no land at all. As a result the community plays a very important role in development and promotion of community based tourism. With community providing the land, the role of the government is building capacities so as to enable the local people to run tourism related projects.

10. Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation(MTDC)

Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation has been set up for developing and promotion of Tourism in Meghalaya. The Corporation shall make efforts to increase its revenue to enable to carry out promotional activities. MTDC will organise package tours not only to Cherrapunjee but to other tourist destinations, organise training for guides, etc. The Government shall initiate implementation of online reservation of MTDC units. This will serve as an opportunity for tourist to book accommodation online for real time confirmation. The Government will continue to assist the Corporation subject to availability of fund.

11. Promotion and Investment through Public Private Partnership (PPP) Mode

The Department of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya has initiated development of tourism projects following the Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. The enormous tourism potential together with a peaceful and secure atmosphere is an ideal environment for investment in the state. The Department will facilitate the development of tourism infrastructure projects on a PPP mode.

12. Capacity Building and Training

- The quality of the tourism product will be improved at all levels from management to staff services. For this purpose, appropriate trainings will be conducted under the *Hunar Se Rozgar* Scheme of the Govt. of India, assistance from NEC etc. in collaboration with IHM, Shillong and FCI, Tura. Improvement in service will give tourists a feel good experience inviting them to be regular visitors.
- At present the Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) in Shillong offers a three year BSc degree programme in Hotel Management, Applied Nutrition, and Catering Technology. The BSc degree should be upgraded to a post graduate course to be funded by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India. Additional Food Craft Institutes will be set up in selected districts of the state depending on the requirement.
- Scholarships would be provided to eligible youth preferably educated unemployed for undertaking specialised courses in the hospitality sector. Specific amount of fund will be allocated by the Department for this purpose.
- Undertaking training needs to assess the gap between the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the service providers in the tourism sector and to determine the number and types of workers that require knowledge and skill development to meet the sector's objectives.
- On this basis, proposals will be drawn up for addressing the identified training needs of the tourism sector, including in-service training for existing employees, basic training for new entrants and courses for government officials, police officers, tour guides, taxi drivers etc. The private sector will be expected to register their employees for training.

- Working in co-ordination with the Hotel and Tourism Association/ Stakeholders to introduce and monitor appropriate standards and classification systems for the tourism sector.
- Reviewing the licensing and other regulations that have impact on the tourism industry and making recommendations for improvement.
- Provide training and establish standards for transport operators, tour operators, guides, entrepreneurs for food and beverage and hospitality services.
- Service Providers in adventure tourism, wellness tourism, etc. should have appropriate training from recognised institutes.

13. Solid Waste Management

Waste is an issue of increasing importance in the hospitality industry. Government will encourage hotels, resorts etc. to preserve the environment by implementing effective solid waste management through waste minimization, reuse, recycling etc. The Department will promote awareness programmes aimed at educating and sensitizing the staff, visitors and guests about the importance of proper management of waste and introducing the system of segregating waste into different categories at hotel rooms by guests themselves. The Department will initiate a set of guidelines on waste management for guidance of all stake holders.

14. Improvement of connectivity through development of Heliports

The Department of Tourism will submit proposals to Government of India for the development of heliports at tourist destinations which are not well connected by roads, etc.

15. Safe, Honourable and Responsible Tourism

This involves people's participation in issues that affect their lives and property, making contribution to the conservation of the environment, preservation of cultural heritage, consideration of the needs of physically challenged people, mutual respect between the locals and tourists, respect for the rights and safety of tourists and freedom from exploitation of both tourists and locals.

16. Incentives & Concessions to local entrepreneurs

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry has approved a package of fiscal incentives and other concessions for the North East Region viz. the North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy 2007. Under this Policy, incentives for Service Sector has been covered for Hotels(not below 2-Star Category) Adventure and Leisure Sports including Ropeways, Vocational Training Institutes such as Institutes for Hotel Management, Catering and Food Crafts. Other incentives are 100% income tax exemption, capital investment subsidy, interest subsidy and comprehensive insurance.

The Department of Tourism will provide incentives to entrepreneurs for new projects in the Tourism sector for infrastructure development. The incentives will be subsidy limiting the amount to 30% of the project cost for approved projects within the amount of Rs 1.00 Crores to 1.50 Crores.

Tourism Department will provide assistance for purchase of multi utility vehicles to approved resort owners/hotel owners/tour operators limiting the amount to 25% which will be the deposit amount to financial institutions providing loans for purchase of vehicles for tourism purposes.

The Tourism Department will provide incentives to registered house owners who are willing to provide Hospitality in the form of Bed 'n' Breakfast in all the prominent tourist destinations. Such owners shall initially be trained and should be willing to provide the basic amenities identified by the Department.

17. Awards & Appreciations

Awards will be instituted for categories like best maintained tourist spot, best innovative tourism project, best eco-tourism product, best hotel, best transport operator, best tour operator, best travel agency, best restaurant promoting local cuisine etc. as an incentive for good performance.

18. Creating a Brand Meghalaya - Cherrapunjee

A brand image of Meghalaya on the lines of 'Incredible India' will be created by identifying a suitable tagline, catchy slogans, signature tunes etc. with innovative and market focused ad-campaigns. Proactive promotional measures will be undertaken for creating the image of the state as a safe and enjoyable destination duly supported by good infrastructure and facilities at the destination. The Department will take steps to develop a brand image for Cherrapunjee.

Brand Meghalaya should portray the state's unique selling points in order to maximize the returns.

19. Other Initiatives

To ensure accurate data of tourist arrivals relating to nationality, length of stay and purpose of visit, the Tourism Department, which is at present collecting data from hotels within the city, will also include the guest houses and tourist information centres from all district offices in the state. Coordination with local tourism NGOs and SHGs with the Directorate of Tourism to be initiated at different tourist locations for provision of guides, setting up of garbage bins, public facilities for the convenience of tourists. Necessary signages, warnings and cautions will be set at all key locations and points.

20. Land Bank

Land is the most vital requisite for setting of tourism units. A land bank for tourism development is to be created by acquiring land at various places.

21. Publicity

Marketing of tourism products will continue through advertisements in travel magazines, leading publications, electronic media, publications of pamphlets and brochures, participation in international and national fairs and festivals, road shows, posting of information in the website and through state tourism offices (Tourist Information Centre), assistance to major festivals and organising tourism festivals within the state.

22. Implementation of the Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2011

The Tourism Department, Govt. of Meghalaya will be the nodal department for implementation of the Tourism Policy.

23. Commencement of the Policy

The Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2011 will commence on the date of publication.