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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. What are the prospects of rural tourism in North-east? Discuss the steps taken by the government to boost it. (250 words)

25 Apr, 2019 GS Paper 3 Economy

Approach

- Describe briefly Rural tourism.
- Assess the strengths and challenges of rural tourism in North-East.
- Give the details of the steps taken by the government to promote rural tourism.
- Give a conclusion.

Introduction

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture, and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community, economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between the tourism and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism.

Body

Prospectus of Rural tourism in North-east can be seen by analyzing the strengths and challenges faced by North-east in promoting rural tourism.

Strengths which favor the development of Rural Tourism in North East

- **Location factors:** The rich natural beauty, serenity and exotic flora and fauna of the North-East offer invaluable resources for the development of tourism. Further North-east is biodiversity hotspot and the presence of a number of wildlife sanctuaries also provides an additional advantage.
- **Cultural factors:** The North Eastern region of the country with its unique traditions, cultural heritage an immense potential for the development of rural tourism
- **Diverse states:** The region is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each State has its own distinct features. The attractions are scattered over the entire region and are largely located in remote areas within highly fragile environment.

Challenges which hampers prospectus of Rural tourism in North-East

- **Infrastructure:** Despite the abundance of natural beauty and cultural diversity, the number of tourist arrivals has been marginal due to lack of adequate infrastructure and other tourist amenities.
- **Insurgency:** North-East India has security concerns due to the long violent insurgency which may be a concern for tourists.
- **Poor Connectivity:** For promoting tourism connectivity is paramount however north east is poorly connected with other main cities of India. Further, for foreign tourist international connectivity through the air is critical if rural tourism has to succeed.

- **Absence of Tourism industry skills:** Training for rural tourism provision is often not available or not taken up to assist improvement in the quality and appropriateness of rural tourism products.

Steps

- **Improvement of Connectivity:** Some recent decisions to enhance the connectivity of the North-East include a 4,000-km long ring road connecting the states; expediting railway projects connecting all state capitals by 2020. Twenty port townships are to be developed along the Brahmaputra and Barak river systems to enhance intra-regional connectivity. UDAN-Regional Connectivity Scheme has also been started for connectivity through Air.
- **India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) highway:** The India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway is highway under construction under India's Act East policy that will provide connectivity with ASEAN countries providing connectivity to inbound tourist from these nations.
- **The International Tourism Mart** - being organized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in association with hosting state Govt. of North East State since 2013. Participants from the country and foreign countries like China and Thailand set up information center stalls at the fair. The event gave a chance to the tourism departments and tour operators from the northeastern states to project the region as a potential tourist destination, as well as interact with participants from other parts of the country.
- **e-Tourist Visa Facility:** Facilitate arrival of international tourists, Ministry of Tourism has been working very closely with Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of External Affairs for easing of the Visa Regime in the country over a period of time. In order to make rural tourism attractive, Ministry of Tourism is promoting Farm Tourism as niche products. Ministry is also encouraging Home Stay Facilities in the rural area.
- **Aamaar Aalohi-** Rural Homestay Scheme is framed by the Tourism Department, Govt. of Assam, with the objectives of giving a new dimension and thrust to the Rural Homestay Facilities in the State of Assam. Similar schemes are also launched by other states in the NE region.

Conclusion

In recent times, fuelled by an increase in purchasing power and development of faster and cheaper modes of travel, more and more people are traveling for newer and niche experiences. Such a situation provides a massive opportunity for NE regions which can cater to niche areas in Rural Tourism owing to its strengths.