

A strategy on Tea tourism development and its empirical analysis on North Bengal in India

Satyajit Sarkar¹, Bijoy Kumar Dey², Subires Bhattacharyya³ and Anil Bhuimali⁴

¹Department of Tea Science, University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur,
Dist. Darjeeling, Siliguri-734013 (India)
E-mail: satyajit.teascience@nbu.ac.in

²Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Silchar,
Cachar, Assam-788010 (India)
E-mail: deybijoy61@gmail.com

³Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur,
Dist. Darjeeling, Siliguri-734013 (India)
E-mail: subires.bhattacharyya@gmail.com

⁴Department of Economics, University of North Bengal, Raja Rammohunpur,
Dist. Darjeeling, Siliguri-734013 (India)
E-mail: anilbhuimali@rediffmail.com

Abstract

Tourism is one of India's major job creators, and tea tourism is one of them. Tea tourism is one of the innovative concepts of sustainable and nature-based eco-friendly tourism. In response to the growing relevance of tea-tourism, this paper investigates whether tourist attitudes and expectations are related to the attributes of the destination. We acquired field-level data and tested it with a regression model. Aside from that, the article also highlighted the several problems that tea tourism is currently facing and offered some recommendations to overcome them.

The theory and practice of traveling, attracting, accommodating, and entertaining tourists and the business of operating tours are often tourism for pleasure or business. Tourism may be foreign or within the country of the traveler. The World Tourism Organization describes tourism more broadly as people "beyond the common perception of tourism as being limited to holiday activity only" in terms that go "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more

than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Tourism may be domestic or foreign, and international tourism affects the balance of payments of a country, both inbound and outbound. Today, tourism is a significant source of income for many countries and affects the economies of both the initial and host countries, some of which are of critical importance²⁵. In the form of payments for products and services needed by visitors, tourism brings substantial quantities of income

into the local economy, accounting for 30 percent of the world's trade in services and 6 percent of total exports of goods and services. It also generates tourism-related job opportunities in the economy's service sector, and tea tourism is no different.

Tea tourism is such a wonderful commercial organization for leisure that can fulfill the taste of visitors' interests. Tea tourism gives visitors the ability to make use of all tea-related knowledge and experience. Tourists can spend time amidst the natural beauty of tea gardens, enjoy nature walks and trekking. Tea tourism is defined as "tourism driven by an interest in tea history, traditions, and consumption"^{11,12}. A very recent niche in the world tourism scenario has emerged as Tea Tourism. It has similarities with food-related tourism, such as wine tourism in European countries like France, widely recognized and studied by several researchers^{13,16}. Tea tourism has recently gained popularity in India, as in China, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Many tourists are rushing to the lush green tea estates of Darjeeling, Nilgiris, Kangra Valley, and Assam. Several tea estates have begun to host guests in their bungalows in India since 1990, flagging tea tourism. The stiff competition turned some tea estates into opening their campus for overnight guests in 2000. India's market opening for cheap foreign tea was primarily to earn revenue through a sideline business opportunity.

The history of tea tourism has a recent origin in North Bengal, like other parts of India. Tea estates bungalows are often well- a preserved relic of the colonial era, with large courtyards, swimming pools, century-old trees,

and green lawns that capture an old-world charm. These places, North Bengal's tea gardens, are perfect to attract tourists. If vineyards in European countries can be a significant tourist destination, the tea gardens of North Bengal can be an important tourist destination of India. All bungalows were refurbished to cater to the need and tastes of foreign Tourists. Tourist has the thrill and chance to pluck tea leaves in these places, go on nature walks, trekking and rafting, and even play golf at the links. So, by following the forecasting statement, there are many potentialities in the tea gardens of North Bengal to promote the tea tourism industry within tea garden boundaries.

North Bengal is northeast India's nature-based tourist attraction area. The mix of green destinations is enriched by hilly mountains, lakes, rivers, woods, and fountains. Many people enjoy the hilly region (Darjeeling and Kalimpong) and plans (Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, some Uttar Dinajpur, and Coach) parts of Behar visit each year. The brand value of that destination has already been achieved. But in this district, several tea gardens can be marketed as a destination for tea tourism. The critical reasons for this destination's incompetence are lack of understanding, lack of promotion, lack of funding, and lack of facilities. The current study aims to demonstrate the potential of tea gardens in North Bengal as a tourism destination and establish the relationship between tea tourist attitudes and expectations with destination attributes to take corrective action to improve the tea tourist destination.

Tea Tourism has become a current phenomena that has been investigated and discussed since the beginning of the twenty-

first century. It is a beautiful tourism concept associated with tea gardens. Tea gardens, the process of tea plucking, tea-producing, cultural festivals of the tea tribes, and staying at the tea bungalows are part of this tea tourism—this kind of unique tour experience connected to nature. Tea tourism is already popular in countries like China, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and India. In India, North Eastern states and the Northern part of West Bengal have a considerable scope to promote tea tourism and the forest diversity present in the particular area^{6,19,20,21}. Tea-related tourism has links with food-related tourism, such as wine tourism, which several researchers have investigated^{1-3,13,16}. As Jolliffe¹¹ has pointed out, in terms of its history and ties to travel, tea tourism has a lot in common with wine tourism². In many regions in China, such as Hangzhou, Wuyi Mountain, Wuyuan, Xinyang, *etc.*, the industry has already become a niche tourism program^{10,22,23}. Cheng *et al.*⁴ suggest that tea tourism has grown to highlight tea planting areas with a spectacular natural environment or outstanding historical heritage⁴. Zhou *et al.*²⁶ found that tea tourism perceptions were correlated with demographic factors via various activities that encourage sightseeing, studying, shopping, and other entertainment and tourism experiences; tea culture (local tea customs) is conveyed²⁶. Thus, tea tourism marketing should take tourist age, gender, and cultural context into account in developing market segmentation and marketing strategies. Goowalla & Neog⁹ investigated the SWOT analysis (strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats) and the issue and prospect of Assam's tea tourism industry based on visitor interaction, involving departmental officials, tour organizers, accommodation units, and

other state private stakeholders⁹.

Moreover, Katuse & Mwenda¹⁴ established that the significant challenges that face the adoption of tea tourism in Kenya are lack of information on tea tourism issues, lack of cooperation amongst the stakeholders, and lack of government support for the tea tourism stakeholders¹⁴. Koththagoda & Thushara¹⁵ established that all influential factors, including customer loyalty and customer satisfaction, must be considered by tea tourism in Sri Lanka and the six dimensions of the brand equity model of Keller to gain brand equity¹⁵. The suggested model stressed how marketers could develop and execute efficient marketing programs to empower Sri Lanka as a destination for tea tourism. According to Jolliffe & Aslam's¹² research in Sri Lanka, tea tourists had expectations about relaxation, homely environments, and tea plantations while visiting a tea destination¹². Tea tourism is "tourism driven by an interest in tea history, traditions, and consumption"^{7,8}. Another South Asian country Bangladesh also trying to promote tourism to their tea-growing areas²⁴. Nasir & Shamsuddoha¹⁷ aimed to picture the scenario of Bangladesh tea in world tea, export and import tea, and tea consumption in different countries in the world¹⁷. Chowdhury *et al.*⁵ discovered other explanations for STGs' remarkable growth, such as favourable climate and soil, infrastructure such as technology, labor, industry, government support, *etc.*⁵. Thus, farmers have opted for tea cultivation because it has a limited risk for climate change, crop failure, market shortage, *etc.* Sarkar *et al.*¹⁸ give a clear idea of different tea manufacturing processes in India¹⁸. Various people in

the world are interested to know about the manufacturing process of tea and want to visit the factories.

Based on an initial analysis of relevant literature, it is clear that, while multiple studies have been undertaken on various aspects of tourism in India and even outside, the literature lacks a study specifically on tea tourism in North Bengal. As a result, the study will aim to investigate the present incarnation of tea tourism.

Research Design and Methods :

The overall methodology of this study is structural questionnaires and follows the method of the survey. The research questions provide an insight into the research problem to understand and analyze it. The study consists of both descriptive and inferential parts, according to the nature of the research questions. For this study, the following figure shows the conceptual framework [Fig-1].

In this paper, the methodology is mainly based on primary and secondary data sources. Preliminary data have been collected by direct contact method with the questionnaires and interview schedules. Various tea associations, tea board offices, multiple newspapers, and journals have collected the secondary data. To select a sample of ten tea gardens, simple random sampling techniques were used. In the Sub-Himalayan regions of West Bengal, there are three districts: Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduar. Following tea gardens have been selected for data collection such as; Gayabari Tea Estate, Phuguri Tea Estate, Sourenee Tea Estate, Thurbo Tea Estate, Happy Valley Tea Estate, Singtom Tea Estate, Rangaroon

Tea Estate, Glenburn Tea Estate, Steinthal Tea Estate, Gopaldhara Tea Estate, Phoobsering Tea Estate, Mariabong Tea Garden, Makaibari Tea Estate, Castleton Tea Estate, Takdah Tea Estate, Nurbang Tea Estate, Sukna Tea Estate, New Chamta Tea Estate, Naxalbari Tea Estate, Raipur Tea Estate, *Aibheel Tea Estate*, Mongalkata Tea Estate, Totapara Tea Estate, Batabari Tea Estate, Sylee Tea Estate, Kurti Tea Estate, Mujnai Tea Estate, Hansimara Tea Estate, Kalchini Tea Estate, Bhatkawa Tea Estate, Vizabari Tea Estate, Majherdabri Tea Estate, Mainak Hills Tea Estate, *etc.*

Most popular gardens and factories are repeatedly visited, and various information was documented. As mentioned above, the tea sample consisted of 200 tourists traveling to tea tourism practicing destinations. It was collected by random sampling technique in the year 2018 to 2019. The researcher conducted a pilot survey for the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. (The questionnaire was considered significant due to alpha value results in more than 0.8, *i.e.*, Cronbach's Alpha= 0.798). Three variables, demographic variables, prior tea tourism experience, and their interest in tea, are analyzed through graphical representations to convey the profile of potential tea tourists. Regression analysis explores the relationship between the expectations and attitudes of tourists and tea tourism destination attributes and multiple linear regressions adopted for study variables.

Every year in India, the influx of tourists increases. That is why the tea estates of North Bengal [Fig. 2] need to draw an aggressive campaign plan to attract more tourists. The study's important aspect is to develop promotional strategies to motivate

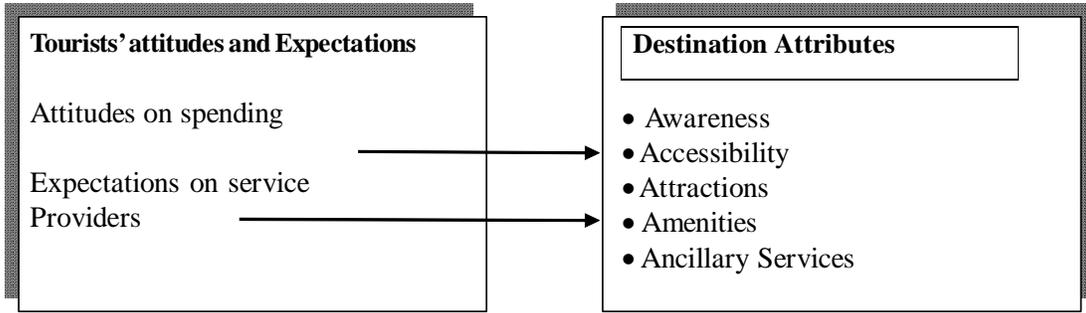


Fig. 1: Conceptual framework (Source: Authors own)

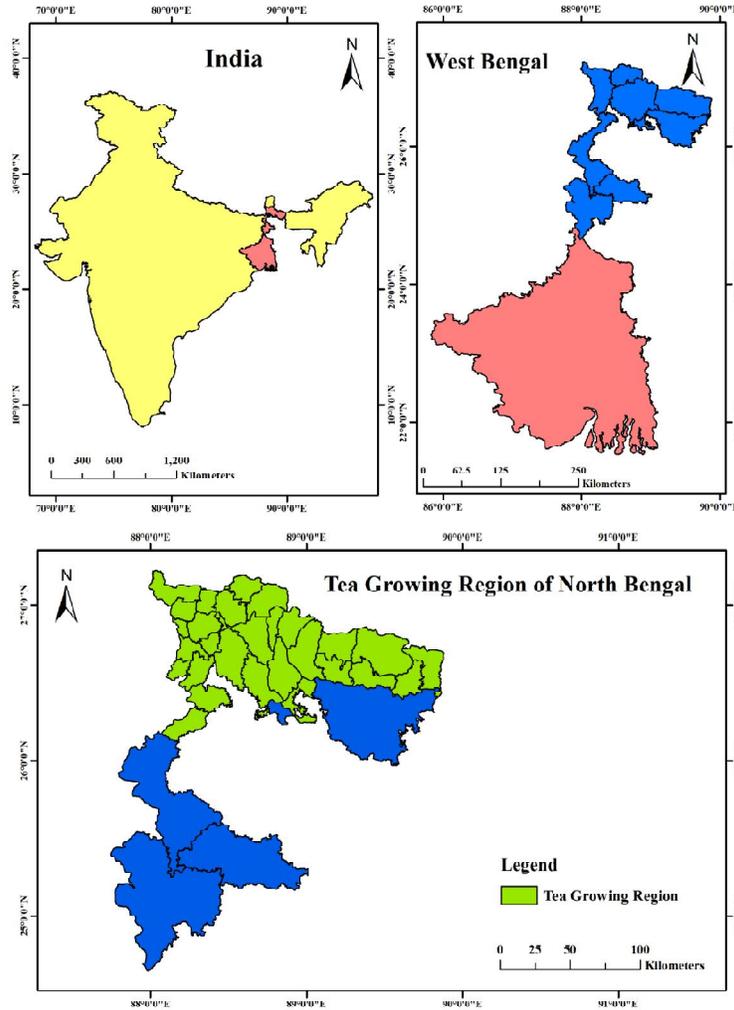


Fig. 2: Tea growing regions of North Bengal (Source: Authors own)

tourists to undertake a travel trip to various tea estates in North Bengal. In North Bengal, a more significant part of tourists has an excellent natural beauty experience, whereas tea tourism is not popular among travelers regarding hill tracks. It is mainly because of the lack of awareness and publicity of tea tourism in North Bengal. So the study has attempted to provide some guidelines that can help promote tea tourism in North Bengal.

Following are factors that determine the tea tourist attitude on arrival as a tea tourist (Table-1). These are as follows.

Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis determines the questionnaire's reliability, and the Alpha coefficient (0.798) indicates that the questionnaire's internal reliability and validity

is satisfactory. There were 200 questionnaires distributed and collected from 200 Tea tourists who visit Tea tourism locations. When considering the distribution of the region of origin, the majority were represented in Western Europe. Their percentage was 40 percent (80), and the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Denmark, and Netherland were the leading countries. Out of the total respondents, 12 percent of tourists were from the United States of America, and 17 percent belongs to Eastern Asia. The highest percentage of Eastern Asian tourists belongs to China. Japan and Hong Kong represented the rest of the others. South Asian respondent's share is 16 percent, and all of them were from India, and Australian and New Zealand tourists represented 15 percent (Fig-3).

Table-1. Factor that determines tourist attitude on arrival (Source: Author concept)

1. Awareness	Awareness about Darjeeling Tea. Awareness about Tea Tourism destination in North Bengal. Awareness about Tea Tourism Activities in North Bengal.
2. Accessibility	Availability of a proper transportation system. Availability of vehicle parking facilities.
3. Attractions	Peaceful atmosphere. Humanmade attraction. The destination offers special events. Leisure activities of destination.
4. Ancillary services	Availability of Telecommunication. Availability of safety and security. Availability of Sanitary facilities. Instructions and guidance. Availability of Health care. Availability of bank services.
5. Amenities	Availability of food and beverage outlets. Availability of Accommodation. Availability of retail shops.

Table-2. Descriptive statistics on attitudes on spending (Source: Literature Study)

	Mean	Mode	Stan. dev	variance
Accommodation	1.6	1	1.127	1.47
Food & Beverage	1.7	1	0.864	0.828
Transportation	1.51	1	1.021	1.042
Tour for Tea Tourism activities	1.27	1	0.776	0.556
Other pleasure activities	1.77	1	0.831	0.767

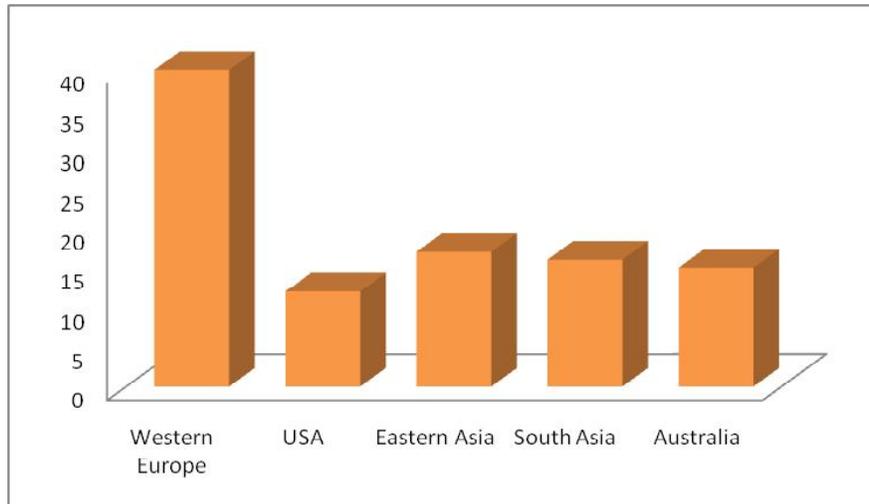


Fig. 3: Region-wise tourist distribution (Source: Literature Study)

According to table 2, the highest number of tourists attitudes on spending less than \$200 for accommodation and the lowest number of tourists spend between \$401-500 for lodging. Different foods and beverages

(F&B) consist of 1.7 mean values and imply that most tourists are expected to spend less than \$200 for F&B, transportation, and Tea tourism activities.

Table-3: Descriptive statistics on expectations of service providers
(Source: Literature Study)

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev	Variance
Expectations	3.6492	3.6667	3.67	0.83558	0.798

Expectations of service providers consist of a 3.6492 mean value (Table-3). Tea tourists almost agreed that service providers could provide enough information, capable of using international languages, and providing guidance. However, the variation coefficient is 80 percent, respectively, illustrating that

tourists have different expectations towards service providers' skills.

Regression analysis is performed to study the linear relationships between attitudes on tea tourists' spending and destination attributes.

Table-4: Results of regression (Source: Authors calculation)

Variable	Coefficients	t- value	p- value	R ²	Adjusted R ²
Constant	5.465	8.78	0.00		
Attitudes on spending on tea tourists	0.086	3.89	0.017	0.419	0.382

Table-5: Results of regression (Source: Authors calculation)

Variable	Coefficients	t-value	p-value	R ²	Adjusted R ²
constant	3.723	7.87	0.00		
Expectations on service providers	0.328	3.31	0.00	.456	.413

The coefficient of determination (R²) in Table 04 suggested that the 41percent of destination attributes' total variation is described by attitudes on tea tourists' spending and 59percent of unexplained variation in this model. Thus, it appears that the model was fitted reasonably as the explained variation is less than the unexplained variation. This implies that many variables can be related to destination attributes. Further, it can be concluded that the model is statistically significant at a 0.05 level of significance (p-value= 0.017), and there is a positive relationship between destination attributes and expectations on spending on tea tourists. The fitted regression model can be summarized as follows.

$$\text{Destination Attributes} = 5.465 + 0.086 \text{ Attitudes on spending on tea tourists}$$

Further, the researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between Expectations on service providers and Destination Attributes, as shown in Table-5.

According to Table-5, 45.5percent total variation of Destination Attributes is explained by service providers' expectations. Results of Table 05 is suggested that the fitted regression model is significant at a 5percent level of significance (p-value= 0.000), and there is a positive relationship between destination attributes and expectations on service providers. The fitted regression model can

be summarized as follows.

$$\text{Destination Attributes} = 3.723 + 0.328 \text{ Expectations on service providers} :$$

The fitted model's validity is checked at a 5percent level of significance, and all error term assumptions are satisfied. Therefore, the fitted model can use for prediction.

Problems:

Following problems are identified with the discussion of respondents from the various tea garden of North Bengal during the field survey in 2019.

1. **Language Problem-** The maximum numbers of people in this area are persistent, with only their local language. They have a problem speaking English, Hindi, which creates a problem for them to communicate with Tourist from national or international locations.
2. **Lack of Trained Manpower:** The hotel management's qualified people may not be interested in working in the rural area. It is crucial to train the rural people who will be assigned to carry out their duties. Decorate and maintain the cottages or suites. The success of tea tourism depends on service quality.
3. **Infrastructure :** The infrastructure for

tourism is obsolete and underdeveloped in many locations. Governments, tourism boards, and marketing agencies for destinations must work with the foresight to improve the existing infrastructure. In this area, potential challenges must also be tackled. Solutions could include faster airport immigration, faster hotel check-out procedures, enhanced public transit, and solution interpretation at airports, stations, or ports.

4. **Travel Marketing :** Travel travelers or tourists can sometimes deem marketing as inadequate, false, or exaggerated. Marketing entities must develop innovative marketing solutions to change this perception to attract the new crop of travelers who are becoming more discerning and informed. Furthermore, technological disruptions and the impact of social media often indicate that it is a time for both opportunities and threats. To find their way into visitors' travel plans, travel marketers must look at harnessing technology and imagination. They must also, on the other hand, pay attention to localized content.
5. **Taxation :** Tourism is one of the taxed sectors. A simple glance at the taxes paid on airline tickets and hotel rooms gives an idea of how taxation can significantly affect tourism. Therefore, the travel industry must offer competitively priced offerings to balance out the equation. However, governments must also realize that tourists already contribute to the local economy via purchases, travel retail, and other tourism expenditures.
6. **Attacks on Women :** Indian tour operators reported a 25 percent drop in business over the first quarter of 2013 after the high-profile slaying of a 23-year-old woman

who was gang-raped riding a bus in Delhi the previous December. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India said that female tourism fell by 35 percent the same quarter, with the case encouraging other victims of sex crimes to bring their stories to light. Then we record a "modest increase" in violent crime against foreigners. State Department and cautions women against driving alone in India, using public transport after the sun has gone down, and traveling to remote areas. This also indirectly affects West Bengal's tea tourism industry too.

7. **Lack of a proper tourism development policy of the government:** Lack of adequate policy on the tea tourism sector is also one of India's big obstacles.

Recommendation:

During the survey, it was noticed that some gaps should have to be filled to promote tea tourism in this region. Therefore, the details are recommended for the improvement of tea tourism.

- **Infrastructure growth:** The condition of the roads should be developed, and good health infrastructure should be made, and increase thriving hospitality and enhancement of the food quality must be needed.
- **Importance to the Small Tea Growers:** Small tea growers can play a vital role in increasing tea tourism in this region. They can make homestays, small cottages within their STGs for an alternative income and attract tourists.
- **Proper advertisement:** The extensive industries and brands can play an essential

role in developing tea tourism by appropriate advertising worldwide of their cultivated lands, production hub, and open outlets in this area. The Department of Tourism, Govt. of West Bengal may advertise the quality of tea tourism and made campaigns in collaboration with industries to increase tea tourism.

- **Ensure security:** Many people are worried about the safety of the places in this region. The government can play a vital role in this. But, first, they should campaign with local people to understand that concerning matter and help them grow the security infrastructure by engaging local volunteers.
- **Role of Govt. :** The taxation problem is a significant issue for small tea growers to promote tea tourism; Govt. should look into this matter and help them grow their infrastructure by arranging some schemes or loans for tea tourism. The local self-help groups can also be engaged and encouraged to show their ethnic culture, dance, handlooms, and tea tourism package and develop their economy. Furthermore, the Department of Tourism should be advertised regularly on national and international platforms about tea tourism and security issues.
- **Importance to higher education in this region:** There are many tea-based educational and research institutes in this region. Tea Board India has two research laboratories- Darjeeling Tea Research and Development Centre at Kurseong and Quality Control Laboratory at NJP. The University of North Bengal has a Department of Tea Science at its main campus (Siliguri).

The only Department is all over India that provides UGC recognized B.Sc. honors and M.Sc. degree in Tea Science. Besides this, the Department also offers a one-year Diploma course, *i.e.*, Post Graduate Diploma in Tea Management. This type of educational institute must be focused on the encouragement of educational visits or tours. The educational institutes or Universities of this region can introduce short-term course for different languages to solve the interpreter problem.

West Bengal is trying to enhance its economy by the best usages of its natural resources. And for this, West Bengal's government declares the tourism sector as one of the thrust sectors. North Bengal is a country full of natural resources, indigenous culture, geographic location, and new reserves of various unique and magnificent creatures. It is ideal for ecotourism development with all the tea gardens, forests, beaches, lakes, rivers, and hills. For North Bengal, although this is a relatively new sector, there exists tremendous potentiality if extensive care is taken and promote the tea tourism attractive places properly in the world. North Bengal has numerous tea gardens and incredible hill stations (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Mirik, Kurseong), so many reserve forests can quickly be promoted to Tea tourists. These places indicate the tremendous potentiality of north Bengal tea tourism prospects. But there exist some problems.

Along with the private sector, the government should develop a comprehensive master plan for developing tea tourism sites as world-class tourism destinations. The government should provide a positive look at

developing the human resource infrastructure required to create the country's tourism sector. Highly professional and technical human resource competent in tourism can positively satisfy the diversified needs of different tourists. A specialized institution for tourism education may be established to foster the tea tourism sector of north Bengal. Besides the supports mentioned above and services, the entrepreneurs in the tea tourism industry should be supported and encouraged by establishing government grants and subsidies and adopting the country's tourism policy that may be used to guide the rapid expansion of this sector.

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