

**TITLE:** A study on the Comparative Pricing and Accommodation Facilities in Hotels across Manas National Park

### **ABSTRACT**

The Manas National Park is located in the Northeastern state of Assam and is one of the India's premier wildlife hotspots that is renowned for its rich biodiversity and scenic beauty. The park attracts a significant number of both domestic and international tourists annually. The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of diverse lodging options for such tourists made available in the close proximity of the park. The study attempts to evaluate and compare the pricing strategies and accommodation facilities as well as highlighting the factors influencing the variations. The approach used is mixed method where the quantitative data through surveys is used to analyse room rates, seasonal pricing trends and the range of amenities provided across different establishments. The qualitative data collected by interviews, focussed on the factors affecting pricing, service quality and the practices followed by the hotels.

The key findings reveal a notable disparity in pricing and accommodation standards among the hotels. The budget hotels offer basic amenities at relatively low rates, catering to a cost-conscious segment of travellers. Mid-range and high end hotels provide a balance of comfort and affordability that are often included with additional features like guided tours and local cultural experience. It is also seen that seasonal fluctuations also significantly impact pricing, with peak tourist seasons seeing substantial price hikes. The research underscores the need for a balanced approach to pricing that considers both economic viability for hotel operators and value for tourists. Recommendations include enhancing transparency in pricing, improving standardization of accommodation facilities, and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

**Keywords:** Manas National Park, tourism, accommodation, pricing, seasonality.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1.1 About Manas National Park

Located at the far eastern region of India, lies the North eastern states of seven sisters comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. This land mass is connected to mainland India by narrow stretch of land of about 40kms also referred to as Siliguri Corridor. Each of the seven states have their own unique culture and beliefs, as well as natural diversity and habitat. Assam is one of the prominent states among the seven sisters. Covering an area of approximately 784,38 area in square km, it is second largest next to Arunachal Pradesh, among the seven sisters. A hotspot for biodiversity, the State of Assam is home to the Manas National Park. Situated beside the ephemeral river channels of the Manas- Beki River, the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary is a portion of the core zone of the 283,700-hectare Manas Tiger Reserve. The property has six national and international designations namely World Heritage Site, National Park, Tiger Reserve (core), Biosphere Reserve (national), Elephant Reserve (core) and Important Bird Area. It enjoys the highest legal protection and strong legislative framework under the provisions of Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Indian Forest Act, 1927/Assam Forest Regulation 1891. The property also benefits from government support at both national and regional levels as well as involvement of national and international conservation organisations. The National Park have a variety of forested hills, alluvial grasslands, and tropical evergreen woods that contribute to the site's visual attractiveness. For rare and endangered species including tigers, larger one-horned rhinos, swamp deer, pygmy hogs, and Bengal florican, the site offers vital and sustainable habitats. Being one of the most important natural regions that still exist on the Indian subcontinent, Manas holds a special place in the protected areas system. Manas is renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and natural setting in addition to its rich biodiversity. Manas is situated in the Eastern Himalayan foothills. The park's northern boundary is parallel to Bhutan's international border, which is marked by the towering Bhutan highlands. It extends on both sides of the magnificent Manas River, which is bordered by protected forests to the east and west. A distinct wilderness experience is provided by the turbulent river winding down the rugged mountains against the backdrop of wooded hills and the tranquillity of the alluvial plains and tropical evergreen forests.

The Bodoland Territorial Council and the Assam Forest Department are in charge of overseeing the property. The park is bordered by small hamlets and villages that poses risks of encroachment, grazing, and poaching. Therefore, the availability of sufficient infrastructure and qualified staff is essential for patrolling as well as a systematic park management. The scientific research and monitoring of habitat and animal species is also another responsibility of park management. Lastly as the park has the provisions of effective tourism, the park management is also required to provide effective tourism facilities, visitor information and interpretation on a priority basis. It is important to establish a sustainable funding system to ensure adequate financial support for the long-term maintenance of the park. The surrounding buffer zones may be managed for various uses, and it is necessary to strike a balance between conservation and the utilization of resources in these areas. It is pertinent to involve local communities residing near the reserve in efforts to protect the site, and a primary management goal is to increase their participation and awareness for the preservation of the property. This approach would be beneficial and sustainable to all the stakeholders of the park. There is potential for expanding the property to align with the boundaries of the national park, which serves as its core in order to enhance economic activities for the people of the locality.

The park is slowly becoming a hotspot for community based eco-tourism. In addition to the tourism activities, the visitors can visit the nearby Bodo villages. These villages welcome the visitors to experience their way of living, understanding the lifestyles and culture of the local communities. The visitors can enjoy the local cuisines, witness brewing the traditional rice beer, enjoy the way of rural life and see the traditions, beliefs and get hands on experience on weaving of handicrafts and handlooms. The nearby tea gardens also arrange tea garden tours and visit to the nearby tea factory. The evenings are enchanted with local cultural activities including the ‘Bihu’ and ‘Bagurumba’ dances of local Assamese and Bodo community.

#### 1.1.2. Importance of studying pricing and accommodation facilities

Tourism involves the movement of people from their place of residence to other places, locations, countries for leisure activities, entertainment, recreation, spiritual or health. Tourism is a cultural, social and economic experience of people. In 1963, The United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism agreed to use the term ‘visitors’ to describe people visiting other countries. Under this definition, tourists were classified as temporary

visitors if they stayed in a destination for at least 24 hours with their visits categorised as leisure. If the visitors stayed at a destination for less than 24 hours, they could be termed as temporary visitors. In both the cases, the domestic tourist was not taken into account. In 1991, the United Nations World Tourism Organization declared that “Tourism comprises of the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside of their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes”. Tourism may be classified into many branches such as sports tourism, religious tourism, medical tourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism, spiritual tourism, tea-tourism etc. In 2020, World Trade Organization has classified three types of tourism, namely domestic tourism, inbound tourism and outbound tourism. Three categories of tourism can be derived from the stated three types. 1<sup>st</sup> category is Internal tourism comprising domestic and inbound tourism, 2<sup>nd</sup> category is National Tourism comprises of domestic and outbound tourists and 3<sup>rd</sup> category is International Tourism comprises of inbound and outbound tourism.

The price of accommodation impact tourist destination in several ways. A diverse accommodation choice can cater to a wide range of tourists. It is an established fact that higher accommodation prices can deter the budget conscious travellers thus reducing the overall number of visitors. Conversely, lowering the prices of guests’ accommodation facilities may increase the number of visitors. Both the approaches have impact on the environment. Over tourism may impact on the local communities, straining local resources and infrastructure (Mandic & Petric, 2021). A mixed approach with both high and low-price range of accommodation may be more balanced as it will cater to the range of visitors. Moreover, a well-balanced pricing can help maintain a balance between tourism and local living standards (Biagi et al, 2011)

In context to the Manas National Park, it is also recognised as UNESCO Natural World Heritage site and is visited by national as well as international tourists all over the globe. As per the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2023; for the year 2022-23, 52975 number of tourists visited Manas National Park out of which 808 were international tourist. As of February 2024, the park authorities have reported in a substantial rise of tourists in the park, with approximately 31,200 visitors including 570 foreign tourists. There is a steady flow of tourist throughout the year with the main attraction of Jeep and Elephant Safaris with the peak visitation period ranging from November to January. The sector of tourism is a harbinger of inclusive growth as it provides employment both in a direct and indirect way. Cetin (2020)

observed that tourism has become a major global industry with an annual average growth of 4-5%. Tourism is also stated to create 8% of GDP and 10% of employment (WTO,2020). Kaur and Sharma (2018) stated the importance of tourism for the economic development of a country due to its contribution to the balance of payments, GDP and employment. The contributions of tourism towards GDP and employment have increased significantly (Subash,2015). Indian Tourism is stated to contribute around 7.5 per cent towards employment. In the words of Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru, ‘Welcome a Tourist and send back a friend’ the very essence of India’s approach to Tourism as a important instrument for national and international understanding is well documented. From the motto of ‘Atithi Devo Bhava’ to ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ all emphasising on the Indian philosophy of harmony, dignity and accountability with the capacity to improve the world through sustainability, peace and understanding, all emphasises a better experience for any guest.

## **1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The function of tourism is the most rapid and flourishing industry in the present world. Post the covid pandemic, tourism is also one of the world’s largest and fastest growing industry. The sector is encouraged by most governments as it is capable of bringing economic development as well as generate livelihood. King, Pizam and Milman (1993) suggested that residents of communities dependent on tourism clearly differentiated between its economic benefits and social costs. The awareness of certain negative consequences associated with tourism did not necessarily lead to opposition towards further tourism development. Rath and Singh (2011), stated that eco- tourism needs to be promoted so that tourism in India helps in preserving and sustaining the diversity of the India’s natural and cultural environments.

In a country’s economic growth strategy, tourism plays a important role with the potential to contribute significantly to the socio-economic aspirations of people living in tourist destinations (Alavi and Yasin 2000). Wunder (2000) also observed that economic incentives for nature conservation are imperative, but without the local communities’ support and cooperation, any conservation programs cannot succeed. Thus, sustainable tourism calls for balancing the social, ecological and economic aspects of any tourism activity.

Lincoln (2011) opined that tourism has the potential to be a strong economic and social force as it is capable of generating jobs and money and also broadens our understanding of other societies. Petrescu (2011) suggested that recreation, food, lodging, transportation, and

services are the main pillars of the travel and tourism industry. Pantouvakis (2013) was of the view that tourism is a global industry and the industry will continue to expand and develop thus having a significant impact on the global economy. Ferdoush and Faisal (2014) stated that tourism is important from a variety of perspectives, including economic, social, cultural, and political. Tourism is an employment generating industry providing employment opportunities to a large cross-section of unskilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled professionals. The tourism industry accounts for millions of jobs worldwide (Sofronov, 2018). Cianga (2017) opined that tourism industry is activity oriented and consists of trips from different corners of the world. Knobloch et al. (2017) stated that experiences are considered to be the most indispensable offerings for tourists and an exceptional experience is more likely to increase intentions to revisit and recommend a destination, and consequently facilitate the sustainable development of that destination. Lemon & Verhoef (2016) in similar lines stated that creation of a memorable tourism experience is a primary management objective of tourism more so in the sustainable tourism domain. Tourism experience is valued as it involves interactions with people, products and services through various channels and media. Tourists are likely to gain their experiences about the destination through various interaction points from pre-purchase stage to post-purchase stage. Coccossis and Parpairis, (1995) stated that most governments encourage tourism for its ability to spread economic development and reduce inequalities in income distribution by providing economic activities and jobs.

In the Indian context, tourism has a multiplier effect on India's socio-economic growth through infrastructure development, job creation and skill development. Rajasekharan Pillai (2006) research study found a close relationship between tourism and employment opportunities as the industry has the potential to provide employment opportunities to a large cross-section of unskilled, semi-skilled and highly skilled professionals. Chalip and Costa (2012) observed economic disparities between urban and rural in wealth, human capital and employment levels, and consequently reduced economic development that may be removed by sustainable tourism. Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012) have noted the economic impact of tourism as the most significant empowering factor for the host community to become self-sustainable. In India, the Ministry of Tourism is the nodal agency for the development and promotion of tourism in India and maintains the "Incredible India" campaign. A brainstorming session titled 'Tourism in Mission Mode', was organised by the Union ministry of tourism in March 2023. In the session, the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism

and Hospitality (FAITH) suggested that the country's tourism sector had the potential to be transformed by 2047 into a \$3 trillion economy. The sector is predicted to expand with over 100 million foreign tourist arrivals and over 20 billion domestic tourists, thus generating nearly 200 million jobs.

Another aspect of tourism is that it also contributes to the country's brand image by promoting the country's tradition, conventions, natural resources and history. Prior to the Covid pandemic, South Asia was ranked "the most improved region since 2017" by the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) in 2019. The region witnessed the double-digit growth leading to a contribution of \$234 billion, or 6.6 percent of the region's GDP, in 2019. During the pandemic, there was a profound impact on the world trade, tourism sector being very adversely affected. Post covid, as the situations improve, the sector is also gradually recovering. In 2024, India's ranking in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index improved to 39<sup>th</sup> position from the 54<sup>th</sup> position in 2021.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The specific objectives of the study are

1. To study the differences in pricing of accommodations in Manas National Park.
2. To identify the tourist services available in Manas National Park.

### **1.4 METHODOLOGY**

For the study, five different accommodations including hotels, resorts and homestays in the vicinity of Manas National Park were considered and selected. They are Camp Buffalo Retreat, Florican Cottage, Manas View Jungle Resort, Beki Jungle Woods Resort and Daorai Jungle Resort. They are resorts provide room accommodations as well as tents. These units were selected due to the diverse nature of accommodations they provide starting from basic tents to bungalows. The units also have good online presence in booking sites, government sites as well as social media. Thus, the clientele included a wide range of guests from across the country and abroad also.

The Camp Buffalo Resort is a resort located in Jyoti Gaon near Manas National Park. The resort offers 3star accommodation with a amenities like free parking, garden, restaurants and airport transportation. The Florican Cottage is located in the vicinity of Manas

National Park and provides comfortable accommodation for visitors. In addition to accommodation, the Florican Cottage also provide jungle activities like jeep safari, elephant safari and river rafting. The Manas View Jungle Retreat consists of independent cottages beside a stream with a natural ambience. The cottages are located in secluded hideaways with the stream and the chatter of birds for company. Beki Jungle Woods Resort is located near the National Park and offers accommodation with food and jungle activities like jeep safari, elephant safari, cultural program and bonfire. Daorai Jungle Resort is located near the National Park and offers cottages as accommodation along with all other amenities of jungle activities.

### Seasonality

The climate of the park is moist tropical with annual rainfall between 3000mm to 4000mm. The park has four seasons and the tourism activity varies with the season. Starting from October to November and December to February, the park has retreating monsoon and winters. This time period, the park opens up for visitors and this period collaborates with the peak season. Starting from March to May and June to September, the pre monsoon and monsoon season starts. This period is characterised by high frequency of rainfall accompanied with thunderstorms and hailstorms. The humidity also increases and sometimes, the park is inundated with flood waters. The park remains closed for tourism activities and this coincides with the off-season period.

The data for the study was collected through direct communication and interviews with homestay owners and managers of the resorts and hotels, on-site visits and interactions with the service providers of jungle activities and reviews from previous guests. The queries were targeted to find out the various accommodation options available in the units along with the pricing differentiation according to the type of accommodations. The pricing differentiation was also reviewed from the viewpoint of demand during peak tourism seasons and off seasons. Along with the accommodations, most of the hotels and resorts offered jungle activities like safaris, outdoor activities, leisure activities to their guests. The study tries to explore the availability and influence of such activities and amenities on the guest and their opinion to the overall interaction and experience of their stay.



## 1.5 FINDINGS

The units used for this study consists of five different accommodations including hotels, resorts and homestays near the Manas National Park and they cater to guests and families who visit the park for vacation or leisure activities. The accommodation options vary according to different preferences and budgets as well as the profile of the guest. The accommodations they offer may be classified into the following categories

- a. **Basic Tents:** These tents can house 1-2 persons on a shared basis with shared facilities as well. It is suitable for young and budget conscious travellers.
- b. **Mid-Range Rooms:** The rooms have the basic and essential amenities in the rooms. It is suitable for groups and small families.
- c. **Luxury Cottages and Bungalows:** The cottages and Bungalows are high end accommodation and has many additional service features.
- d. **Specialty Lodgings:** These accommodations offer unique offerings like seasonal tents with specific highlights in terms of pricing and service features.

### 1. Pricing:

The pricing of the accommodations varies in the different seasons. The Government of Assam declares the National parks to be opened for visitors from the month of October of a calendar year upto April-May of the next consecutive year and this period corresponds to the peak season. The peak season is characterised by increase in the number of visitors and corresponding increase in the demand of accommodations and other leisure activities. During the period of May upto September of a calendar year, the state of Assam has the monsoon seasons. The National parks are closed to visitors during this period as certain areas of the park gets inundated. This period is characterised by small number of visitors, less demand of leisure activities and overall decrease in the park related activities. The accommodations offer certain discounts inorder to lure visitors during this off-season period. The pricing is thus studied from the perspective of both the peak season and off-season basis.

#### A. Pricing in the Peak season

Sl No	Types of Accommodation	Accommodation Name	Price (INR)
1	BasicTents	Florican Cottage Tents	700-800/- per person

		Daorai Jungle Resort	2500/- for a tent with 2 people capacity
		Beki Jungle Woods Resort	1500-2000/- per tent
2	Mid-Range Rooms	Manas View Jungle Resort	2000/- for double bedroom
		Beki Jungle Woods Resort	3500/- for a room with 3 persons capacity
3	Luxury Cottages and Bungalows:	Camp Buffalo Retreat	Cottage 3600/- Bungalow ₹7000/-for 7 people 4500/- for 4 people with breakfast
		Florican Cottage Cottages	3300/- for 2 rooms
4	Specialty Lodgings	Beki Jungle Woods Resort	3500/- per rooms

Fig: Pricing of the different accommodation (Source: Primary Data)

#### B. Pricing in off-seasons

The off-season pricing can be significantly lower from the seasonal pricing. Such pricing offers budget friendly options for the visitors. In case of the Beki Jungle Woods Resort, the room rent of ₹3500 during peak season, is reduced to ₹2000 during the off-season. The price of Daorai Jungle Resort remains steady with separate additional services pricing that is optional and may or may not be opted reflecting on the final price. For Camp Buffalo Retreat, the prices remain constant and correspondingly, there is higher occupancy during peak season compared to the slack season. For Florican Cottage, the seasonal pricing does not vary much and remains almost steady. In case of Manas View Jungle Resort also the pricing does not vary due to seasonality as they have guests irrespective of the season.

#### 2. Additional services offered.

All the accommodations offer additional services that are linked to the National Park. Such activities are both leisure and outdoor activities, and is mostly accompanied by local guides thus ensuring inclusivity among the locals These include Safaris and guided tours in Jeep along with predetermined trails inside the park to watch animals in their natural habitat. Bird watching is another activity that is very common among the visitors. Outdoor activities for the visitors include rafting activities and boating in the Manas River. The visitors can also

visit the local villages through guided tours and take part in the activities of the rural life, enjoy local cuisines and beverages. Tours are also arranged to the nearby tea gardens and tea factory. In addition, each of the accommodation also arrange for bonfires and cultural programs by local artists for their guests to have a flavour of the local culture. Most of the services are bundled together and offered to the visitors as special packages both in the peak season as well as in the off season for better value.

### 3. Visitors Experience

Based on the reviews of the accommodation, many of the visitors have expressed positive experience during their stay in the properties. Visitors are happy with the variety of accommodations available according to their needs, budget and requirement. The visitors expressed satisfaction in the immersive nature experiences specially safaris, bird watching and rafting.

However certain areas for improvement have also been pointed out by the visitors. As regards the accommodations, visitors are seeking more detailed information about amenities and activities prior to the booking process. Another area of improvement is use of better signage and information within the park for navigation.

## 1.5 CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of pricing and accommodation facilities in hotels across Manas National Park has illuminated several insights into the current state of the hospitality sector in this region. Manas National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its rich biodiversity and scenic beauty, attracts a diverse range of visitors, from eco-tourists to adventure seekers. Understanding the dynamics of hotel pricing and accommodation quality is crucial for both visitors and operators in optimizing their experiences and strategies.

The study makes an attempt to highlight the significant variation in pricing across different hotels within the vicinity of Manas National Park. The luxury lodges command higher prices, exclusive amenities and services in terms of guided tours, luxury accommodations and dining. In contrast, the existence of mid-range and budget hotels tend to provide more basic amenities at lower price points, catering primarily to budget-conscious travellers. This tiered pricing structure not only reflects the diverse economic demographics of visitors but also

signifies the varied levels of service and comfort as desired by the visitors. The existence of disparity in accommodation facilities is equally notable through the study. The high-end hotels typically feature high-end infrastructure such as well-furnished rooms, modern bathrooms, and additional features like private verandas etc. Their design often emphasizes integration with nature, offering panoramic views and exclusive experiences that align with the natural setting of Manas National Park. On the other hand, mid-range and budget hotels prioritize functionality and basic comfort, with simpler amenities and fewer frills. These accommodations are generally more accessible and affordable, aiming to provide essential services without the premium extras.

The analysis also uncovers the impact of seasonal fluctuations on pricing and availability. As is evident from the data, during peak tourist seasons, prices for accommodations, surge significantly. This seasonal variability affects both booking patterns and the overall accessibility of lodging for different types of travellers. Due to this variation, budget travellers may find it challenging to secure affordable accommodations during these peak times, which highlights a potential area for improvement in managing visitor distribution and resource allocation throughout the year. Moreover, the study makes an attempt to underscore the importance of customer reviews and ratings in shaping the perception of accommodation facilities. High-end hotels may often be praised for their exceptional service and luxurious offerings. In contrast, mid-range and budget hotels may be valued for their cost-effectiveness and practical amenities.

In conclusion, it would be justified that the visitors who visit the National Park and seek accommodation have specific needs considering factors like comfort, activities, budget, and seasonal availability. Thus, the availability of diverse staying option near the park is reasonable as there is something for everybody. The visitors come for a memorable experience in the outdoor activities. Hence there must be detailed information about the services and activities along with warm and high standards of hospitability. The large number of visitors both domestic and international, increasing on a regular basis bears testimony to the fact that the guests are returning with loving, memorable and cherished experience because of these service providers. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for visitors in making informed decisions and for hotel operators in strategically positioning their services. Future studies could further explore the impact of emerging trends such as sustainability, eco-friendly practices and digital transformations on pricing and customer satisfaction. This

approach may be essential in ensuring that the hospitality industry continues to evolve in harmony with the needs of its diverse clientele and the conservation goals of the park. The insights into the accommodation landscape around Manas National Park, may offer a foundation for future studies on tourism dynamics and hospitality management.

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