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REVIEW ARTICLE

PROSPECT OF SUSTAINABLE TEA TOURISM IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT

The aroma and taste of Darjeeling tea has its own charm and mesmerizing effect that it is known as the champagne of the east. The uniqueness of the location makes it an ideal destination to enjoy the beauty of nature as well as process of tea gardening. Sustainable Rural Tourism will also help in the development of the socio-economic condition of the local community as well as contribute to the cause of sustainability of the unique eco-system. The direct and the indirect benefits of tourism will help in improving the livelihood of the local community.

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INTRODUCTION

Darjeeling tea occupies a place of pride for the whole of India. The aroma and taste of Darjeeling orthodox tea is unparalleled in the world. And the best qualities of Darjeeling tea are produced in Kurseong hill area. There are a total of 32 Tea Estates in the Kurseong hill area which have been accorded the status for its produce, as Darjeeling Tea by the Tea Board of India. These estates cover over 1879.94 hectares over 4 million kg of tea engaging about 50 percent people of the district.

The Darjeeling Tea Research Institute is located on Pankhabari Road of Kurseong. Darjeeling Tea Industry is the mainstay of the economy up in the hills and provides a rewarding life to its workers by the way of a steady livelihood and other facilities like housing, statutory benefits, allowances, incentives, crèches for infants of working mothers, children's education, integrated residential medical facilities for employees and their families and many more.

Tea is grown at an altitude ranging from 600 to 2000 meters above mean sea level and requires a minimum of 50" to 60" of rainfall in a year and for this Kurseong is the ideal place. The cool and moist climate, the soil, the rainfall and sloping terrains all combine to give Darjeeling Tea its unique "Muscatel flavour" and "Exquisite Banquet".

The combination of natural factors give Darjeeling Tea produced in Kurseong its unique distinction not found anywhere else in the world. Thus, it is the most sought and highly valued. In the affluent Western and Japanese markets, 80% of the total produce is exported every year.

Kurseong still manufactures the original methods of tea manufacture, known as the orthodox tea manufacture, as against the "C.T.C." type of manufacture adopted in the plains. C.T.C. stands for Curling, Tearing and Crushing. Now Organic Tea is a name given to tea grown using natural manure and ecologically sustainable practices. There is no use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in an organic tea garden. In recent times growing appreciation and demand for the organic products in the western countries have driven some tea gardens of Kurseong to produce organic tea. Makaibari Tea Estate is the pioneer Tea Estate in producing one of the finest qualities of Organic Tea

Tea Tourism is the latest concept being popularized in India. The tourists are encouraged to stay in tea garden Bungalows with all amenities during which apart from enjoying serene atmosphere of tea garden they can also see the tea manufacturing process and the unique culture of tea garden. Nature walks, tea plucking session, trekking, rafting and golf is also on offer.

The Darjeeling logo is a hallmark of excellence. Launched in 1986, the Darjeeling logo has come to represent high quality

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muscatel flavored tea with the unmistakable class that only Darjeeling can offer. The logo is a significant landmark in the history of the tea industry. Conceptualized by the Association of Darjeeling and launched in the international and domestic market by the Tea Board, it guarantees genuine Darjeeling Tea, tested and packed for the connoisseurs of tea throughout the world. The Darjeeling tea industry is a happening place and has more surprises to unfurl.

Different types of Darjeeling Tea

Black Tea

Black Tea accounts for over 90% of the tea consumption in the western world. During the production process of black tea the leaves are changed substantially, allowing the characteristic flavors of black tea – ranging from flowery to fruity, nutty and spicy – to emerge.

Oolong Tea

Also known as partially or semi-fermented tea, the oolongs have some of the qualities of both black and green tea. At their best, oolongs are beautiful, full-bodied tea with a fragrant flavor and fruity, sweet aroma.

Green Tea

Green tea, for centuries the beverage of choice in Asia, is rapidly gaining popularity in the western world. Its natural aroma and widely acclaimed health benefits make green tea appealing to both the tea lover and previously non-tea drinker. When preparing green tea, it is important to use water below the boiling point and to carefully watch the infusion time to avoid bitterness.

White Tea

White tea are the most delicate of all tea, the finest varieties are appreciated by tea connoisseurs for their unmatched subtlety, complexity and natural sweetness. The production of the most delicate white tea consists of only two steps, Steaming and Drying. The absence of withering, rolling and oxidation leaves the appearance of the leaves essentially unaltered.

Blended, Flavored and Scented Tea

Blended Tea

- Earl Greys
- Breakfast & Afternoon Blends
- Russian Caravan Tea
- Lapsang Souchons

Flavored Tea

- Flavored Black Tea
- Flavored Oolong Tea
- Flavored Green Tea

Scented Tea

- Jasmine
- Litchee
- Rose Tea

Seasonal Blends

- Spring
- Summer
- Fall
- Winter
- Holiday Blends

There are altogether 32 (thirty two) tea gardens distributed among 14 gram panchayats of Kurseong Sub-division. Namely:

Kurseong North Section

Ambootia Tea Estate
Balasan Tea Estate
Eden Vale Tea Estate
Dilaram Tea Estate
Margaret's Hope Tea Estate
Moondakotee Tea Estate
Oaks Tea Estate
Ringtong Tea Estate
Singell Tea Estate
Springside Tea Estate

Kurseong South Section

Makaibari Tea Estate
Castleton Tea Estate
Giddhapahar Tea Estate
Rohini Tea Estate
Sipoydhura Tea Estate
Ghoomtie Tea Estate
Jogomaya Tea Estate
Jungpana Tea Estate
Longview Tea Estate
Mahaldiram Tea Estate
Mohan Majhua Tea Estate
Monteviot Tea Estate
Mullootar Tea Estate
Narbada Majhua Tea Estate
Nurbong Tea Estate
Selim Hill Tea Estate
Sivitar Tea Estate
Tindharia Tea Estate
Dow Hill Tea Estate

Case Study of Tea Estates

Makaibari Tea Estate

One of the oldest tea estates in the Darjeeling Hills, is situated at a height of 4000 ft., and is located at a distance of 36 KM from Siliguri. The garden is also known for its superior quality fully organic orthodox Darjeeling Tea. The garden has distinction in producing very high value tea (Rs. 18,000/- per kg.). The garden is on an area of 570 ha and is under private ownership. The garden is located amidst the tranquil lush green tropical rain forest that is habitat of 13 leopards, 2 big tigers, 400 species of birds and numerous other wild life apart from innumerable species of flowers and orchids. At present the garden has employed 14 Forest Rangers for the

upkeep of this natural resource. On a clear day Kanchenjonga can be viewed from certain hilltop point. The Makaibari Tea Estate (T.E) has adopted integrated tea farming techniques using strict organic farming practices. They have their own herd of cows (700 nos). They have incorporated a Joint Body for the welfare of the workers. The owners of the garden are tourism oriented. They also have initiated village-based eco-tourism in and around the garden (endogenous tourism). At present around 55,000 predominantly foreign visitors visit Makaibari T.E. for seeing tea processing, plucking and tasting every year. Many activities may be undertaken without disturbing the present manufacturing operations in the garden.

Connectivity to other tourist location

Makaibari is well connected with almost all the major tourist interests in the Darjeeling Hill area. The major hub of Kurseong is 3 kms. Darjeeling is 32 kms, Ghoomis 24 kms, Mirik is 53 kms, Sukna Forest is 41 kms.

Location

Makaibari is located in the Kurseong Block of Darjeeling District in West Bengal.

The details of the site for Rural Tourism Centre at Makaibari is given below :

a) District	:	Darjeeling
b) Block	:	Kurseong
c) Police Station	:	Kurseong
d) Gram Panchayet	:	Pandu GP
e) Mouza	:	Makaibari Chak Bazar
f) J.L. No	:	13
f) Plot No.	:	116 and 115 part

Connectivity

Makaibari Tea estate can be approached both from the Kurseong (3 kms down from Kurseong) and Pankhabari (11 kms from Pankhabari) side. and 36 kms from Siliguri town. The road is very steep when approached from Pankhabari side. From Pankhabari to Makaibari the road width varies between 4 to 6 mtrs (approx.)

Roads

The approach roads to and from the factory entrance is 5 mtr wide road. Some of the roads inside the garden are narrow 3 mtrs. wide for jeep movement. Other roads are kutcha and narrow where the width is not sufficient for vehicular movement.

Railway

The nearest railway station on DHR is at Kurseong (3km) and Sliguri (36 Km) and NJP (45 KM). Trains passing through these stations connect Makaibari to the rest of the country.

Air

The nearest Airport is at Bagdogra which is located around 45 kms from Bagdogra Airport kms. From Makaibari by road and is about 2 hours journey by road.

Existing tourist attractions in and around the garden

A brief description of the tourist attractions are given herein below.

- Tea based activities like tea tasting; tea leave plucking and tea processing viewing can be undertaken at the garden. The tourists visiting the garden are extremely interested to view the processing and plucking procedure that makes tea.
- Kanchenjonga view from various points in the garden.
- Trekking through the garden upto the hilltop by the gardeners.
- Jungle trails through the adjoining forests by the forest rangers.
- Ride on DHR is available from Kurseong.

Existing amenities at Makaibari

Accommodation

- Visitors stay with the families in the local villages surrounding Makaibari T.E.
- The visit offer an excellent opportunity to become involved with the family life of the workers of the tea garden and get to know the local people and their culture.
- The stay includes lodging and board. The rooms are clean and the bathrooms are specially constructed for the visitors.
- There are some eco-huts in Makaibari Tea garden. The accommodations are located next to the local families. They are slightly more expensive then the homestays, however the visit includes lodging and present there are 29 facilities for homestays for 54 tourists at a time and 4 Eco Cottages for 8 tourists at a time. So there are accommodation facilities for 62 tourists near Makabari T.G.

Civic infrastructure

Water Supply System

The main water sources for the garden are its own water supply system in the form of 3 deep tube wells and municipal water lines. Apart from these the garden workers are dependent on jhora (stream) waters. The present availability of water is adequate for the activities of the garden. The water supply to the managers and other higher officials are met from the deep tube well.

Power Supply

The garden has supply from WBSEB HT power line to the factory and the quarters of the estate. Apart from this, the garden has its own generator sets as backup power system. Power to the Tea Garden is presently drawn from 33KVA substation situated at Kurseong.

Sewerage & Drainage and Solid Waste Management System

There is no provision of pucca drains in the entire hill area. Wastewater and effluent is allowed to flow through the natural channels by gravity. There is no solid waste management plan

in the entire hill area. However, all the organic wastes are disposed in the earth pit for natural decomposition.

Solid Waste Disposal

This is one of the most neglected and yet critical needs for controlling environmental pollution and undesirable visual impact in tourist spots. Garbage vats and garbage bins has been appropriately proposed for the Planning Area.

Regular collection of waste should be made by the local authorities for disposal to a suitable land earmarked for this purpose. In this context, it may be noted that organic wastes are separated from inorganic wastes and transformed into compost / fertilizer which are used in the surrounding agricultural areas. Dustbins should be set up at prominent places and a campaign should be carried out to keep the village clean.

The garden has employed volunteers to collect all plastic wastes from the locality which are then sent to Siliguri for recycling.

Sanitary Facilities

Most of the establishments have their own sanitary facilities in rudimentary forms.

Present tourist flow to Makaibari tea estate

Present Tourist Flow

Year	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists	Total
2006	30000	30500	60500
2007	32000	33000	65000
2008	19000	21000	31000
2009	19950	22050	42000
2010	20948	23153	44100
2011	21995	24310	46305
2012	23095	25526	48620
2013	24249	26802	51051

Source : Makaibari T.E.

Benefit to host community

The Rural Tourism Project at Makaibari would showcase the traditions of Darjeeling district. Tourists visiting the area will help in marketing handicraft items produced in the area from wood, bamboo bushes, dry flowers and other local materials as well as improve the socio-economic condition of the community by providing alternative livelihood to the local people as well as garnering sustainability to the environment. Tribal performing art from like dancing etc. may also develop and presented before the tourists. The Tea ...” Champagne of the East” as fondly called by the connoisseurs was once the most popular beverage drink throughout the world and the industry is more than one and a half century old. Legend goes that tea used to be grown by a tribe in Assam who spread the seeds in the forests and allowed it to grow by a tribe in Assam.
