Chapter 3

The Study - Relevance, Scope, Objectives and Limitations
3.1  **Relevance of the Study**

In continuation to the discussion in the previous two Chapters, it may be stated that a study exploring the needs and characteristics of the market for North-east India’s tourist destinations that would provide meaningful insights to the destination marketers of the region, needs to be undertaken. Such a study would be pertinent from the following three perspectives: (a) the importance of tourism development in the region in the backdrop of North-east India’s development scenario (b) the role of tourism marketing, particularly, the importance of market segmentation in the successful promotion of the region (c) the fact that not too many studies concerned with the marketing of tourism has been conducted in the region. A brief discussion on the relevance of the study as considered from these aforementioned perspectives, is presented in the following sections.

3.1.1 Importance of Tourism Development for the Economy of the Region

Though very rich in tourism resources, North-east India is one of the least developed regions in the country – economically and industrially. It is felt by many that labor-intensive industries such as tourism should be encouraged in the region, which would contribute to the development of the region’s economy (as already discussed in section 1.6 of Chapter 1). In many biodiversity-rich developing countries of the world, travel and tourism has emerged as a significant industry. It has been observed that in terms of economic benefits, tourism definitely constitutes an opportunity for economic development, economic diversification and the growth of related activities, especially in developing countries. Keeping this in view, it has been recognized that, notwithstanding possible negative impacts, tourism based on the natural environment does present a significant potential for realizing benefits in terms of the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components. It may, therefore, be reasonable to state that tourism development in the North-eastern region, with due consideration to sustainability, could actually usher in an overall
development of the economy, benefit the local populace and even provide the resources for conservation of biodiversity in the long run.

3.1.2 Importance of Market Segmentation in the Successful Promotion of the Region

Considering the importance of tourism development to the overall development of the region, the role of effective marketing assumes importance. It, thus, seems appropriate that conscious and concerted efforts be made for promotion of tourism in the region so as to improve the tourist arrival figures significantly. However, apart some from efforts through the ‘Incredible India’ campaign, North-east India has not been promoted aggressively. To increase the inflow of the right kind of tourists into the region, the destinations need to be marketed effectively using appropriate marketing strategies. Considering this, destination-specific studies that explore the characteristics of the market for North-east India’s tourism offerings need to be undertaken.

As a first step towards conscious marketing efforts, it is essential for the destination marketers of the region to know whom they are trying to sell to i.e. who comprises their market. Communicating to a diversified audience may not produce desired results. What is required is a more targeted strategy. Ideally, an understanding of each individual consumer’s needs and characteristics would enable the marketer to communicate most effectively with that individual. As this would not be a realistic option for the tourism destination marketers, so the next best thing would be to understand broad groups within the market each of which is a collection of individuals with similar needs and characteristics. It would be easier to communicate with these broad groups in the market in a way that would appeal to them. How can such groups be identified? The answer lies in the concept of market segmentation discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of Chapter 2. In view of the importance of tourism development to the economy and the overall development of the North Eastern region
of India, it may be noted that studies exploring various aspects of tourism promotion and marketing, need to be undertaken for the destinations of the region. Particularly, from a strategic marketing perspective, the importance of market segmentation studies that would attempt to discover the needs, characteristics and underlying motivations of the visitors to the region, can hardly be exaggerated. Thus, pursuing a study that tries to create taxonomies of tourists currently visiting the region would enable the destination marketers to clearly focus their promotional efforts thereby ensuring better response in the form of increased tourist arrivals.

3.1.3 Tourism Marketing Studies in North-east India

According to present available information, only a few studies related to tourism and hospitality have been conducted in North-east India. A thorough perusal of the University News journal that lists all doctoral theses accepted by Indian Universities revealed just a handful of studies related to travel, tourism and hospitality in the region. One study assessed the development of entrepreneurship in Nagaland with special reference to hotel enterprises (Panda, 2000). Again, a management appraisal of wildlife sanctuaries in Assam was attempted in a study of the Kaziranga National Park (Nazir, 2002). Only two studies can be found in the context of tourism marketing. One, a study on destination positioning of north-east India based on the preferences and perceptions of tourists (Sarma, 2002) and another work in which promotional and marketing practice of the State level tourism promotional organizations was studied (Bhattacharjee, 2003). Apart from these doctoral theses, there is another study on the demand pattern of tourism-oriented cottage industry in North-east India (Sarma, 2004).

As observed in section 2.2 of Chapter 2, market segmentation is the basic first step towards formulation of effective marketing strategies. However, as is evident from a perusal of all available information related to studies in the north-east, including a search on the Internet; no study, to the best of our knowledge, has so far
conducted a comprehensive segmentation and profiling of travelers coming to the North-east region. Such a study would provide a classification of travelers based on which destination marketers could determine the focus and direction of their marketing efforts. This represents a gap in available research on north-east India. Therefore, such a study may be relevant.

3.2 Research Questions

Keeping in view the above discussion, few basic questions come to mind. Answers to these questions may provide insights into what should be the focus of North-east India’s marketing efforts and where and how such efforts should be effectively concentrated. These questions relate to:

(a) How can the travel market of North East India be segmented into smaller subgroups?
(b) What would be the distinguishing characteristics of each of these segments?
(c) Is it possible to identify one or more distinct segments that would be the most promising or attractive travel market segments for North East India’s destination marketers

As there is no a-priori knowledge about the characteristics of North-east market, so, a systematic study needs to be conducted to provide the answers. Through such a study, an attempt has to be made to find out more about the market for North-east’s tourist destinations. Who are the people in the market, where do they come from, what activities do they prefer, what are underlying motivations for traveling – in brief, the needs and characteristics of the market need to be explored.

3.3 The Study Topic

In an attempt to answer the research questions posed in section 3.2 above, a study has been taken up to gain an understanding of the travel market for North-east
India. As noted in section 1.2 of Chapter 1, the travel market is often broadly classified into two groups – leisure travelers and business travelers. The primary purpose of leisure travelers is leisure or recreation. Therefore, in the context of tourism marketing it would be more relevant to understand their needs and characteristics, as they would be more likely to visit the tourist destinations of North-east India. Also, it may be noted that leisure tourists represent the largest proportion of the traveling population accounting for 62.1% globally (Foo et al.). Such figures for the relative percentages of leisure and business travelers are not available for North-east India. So, in an initial exploratory study, it may be relevant to study the preferences and characteristics of those people who come out of their homes with the primary intention of recreation or holiday. As the primary intention of business and other travelers is not leisure or pleasure, so, it would be reasonable to conduct a study on the leisure travelers alone and not business travelers and other travelers. It has already been noted in Chapter 2 that there are several examples of studies conducted in various parts of the world to segment the leisure travelers into distinct subgroups and thereafter profile or describe these segments. These studies have been found to provide meaningful marketing insights. It may thus be said that a segmentation study of this nature would be beneficial from the perspective of the destination marketers. Such a study may, therefore, be a step towards addressing the issue of successful promotion and hence tourism development in North-east India.

In view of the above, a study on segmenting and profiling the leisure travelers to North-east India has been taken up. Specifically, the topic for the study is: "Segmenting and Profiling the Leisure Travelers: A Study in North-east India". The primary purpose of this study would be to provide destination marketers with sufficient information about the leisure travelers coming to the North-east region in order to empower them with strategic inputs. However, this broad purpose first needs to be translated into definite and operational objectives.
3.4 Objectives of the Study

Keeping in view the overall purpose of the study and research questions, the following objectives have been set in order to provide a definite framework for the study. The specific objectives of this study conducted in order to provide meaningful marketing insights to the destination marketers of North-east India, are as follows:

(1) Segmentation of the leisure travel market for North East India into distinct subgroups

(2) Delineating profiles of the resultant segments and suggesting broad marketing implications for each of these segments

3.5 Information Needs

In order to assess how the above-mentioned objectives may be fulfilled, the specific information needs have to be ascertained. The first objective as outlined in section 3.4 above relates to the task of segmenting the leisure travel market. In order to fulfill this objective, the first task would be to determine how the market might be segmented, that is, using what criteria or variables. In doing this, the guidance available from the literature pertaining to segmentation studies, as detailed in section 2.12 in Chapter 2, may be useful. As noted therein, a variety of factors have been seen to affect this decision. These include an assessment of the purpose or objectives of a particular study, a review of literature pertaining to similar studies, substantiating the results from previous research, demonstration of the usefulness and applicability of a particular variable, filling up of a research gap as well as applicability of a variable to a particular market type or situation. A basic purpose of the present study is to gain an understanding of the needs and characteristics of the market, or, the structure of the market. So, it may be useful to consider the underlying motivations for leisure travel. Further, Wind (1978) has recommended the benefit sought technique if the objective of the research is to gain an understanding of the market and the reasons for its
behavior (Table 2.9 and section 2.11.3 of Chapter 2). Besides, the applicability of variables selected to the particular market type or situation in North-east India, needs to be considered. The North-east destinations provide opportunities for adventure travel as already observed in 1.4 of Chapter 1. Since activity has been found to be one of the most important variables for defining the adventure travel market, so activity preferences of tourists should be included as a key variable. Also, it has been discussed in sections 1.6 and 1.7 of Chapter 1 that tourism development in the region should take into account the sustainability aspect. Therefore, it would be relevant to incorporate some aspects related to sustainable attitudes of visitors to the region, attitudes towards local people and interest in the history and culture of the destinations in the region in the present study. Thus, it appears that it would be relevant to use variables such as motivations, benefits sought and activity preferences of leisure travelers along with their sustainable attitudes. The literature points to the appropriateness of using multiple variables rather than a single variable (section 2.11.4). Keeping this in view, a multi-dimensional segmentation including the variables noted above, may be attempted here. So, as far as information requirements are concerned, the underlying motivations of leisure travelers, the benefit sought by them, importance attached by them to the quality of the environment and concern for maintaining it as well as the activities they prefer to participate in while undertaking leisure travel, needs to be ascertained.

The second objective as outlined in section 3.4 above relates to the profiling task. Thus, to fulfill this objective, it would first be essential to determine how the segments may be described, that is, using what criteria or characteristics may the segments be profiled. For the purpose, the discussion in section 2.9.2 regarding profiling variables may serve as a guideline. Besides, from the point of view of destination marketers, it may be useful to ascertain where the leisure travelers come from, who they are, what are their travel-related preferences and so on. Keeping the
above in mind, it may be useful to ascertain the following information regarding the tourists:

(a) Accommodation preferences while traveling
(b) Travel expenditure incurred by them
(c) Travel planning and arrangements
(d) Sources of travel-related information used by them
(e) Travel party or companions
(f) Preferred mode of travel
(g) Frequency of travel
(h) Travel exposure
(i) Souvenir buying
(j) Satisfaction with North-east destinations
(k) Likelihood of recommending North-east destinations
(l) Other traveler characteristics pertaining to geographic origin, demographic and socio-economic factors

Thus, through this study, it would be necessary to gather the information identified above. Details on how this has been done are provided in Chapter 4.

3.6 Scope of the Study

With regards to scope, two aspects may be noted. The first is the geographical coverage and the second is regarding the category of travelers included in the study. The geographical coverage of this study is the North-eastern region of India comprising the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Though in recent years the state of Sikkim has been officially recognized as part of North-east India, yet in the present study Sikkim has been not been considered. Sikkim has been excluded from the purview of this study for two reasons. Firstly, traditionally and historically North-east India has been perceived as consisting of the seven-sister states excluding Sikkim. Secondly, geographically, Sikkim is not connected to this region. The North-eastern region as
mentioned earlier is geographically situated in such a way that it is connected to the rest of India through a narrow land corridor known as the Siliguri corridor. The city of Guwahati in Assam is considered to be the gateway to North-east India. Thus, tourists entering into this region through Guwahati may visit any state of this region but may not necessarily have visited Sikkim.

Further, as already noted previously, only those individuals visiting the North-eastern region for leisure purposes are included in the present study. Leisure travelers are those travelers for whom the primary purpose of undertaking the trip is leisure, pleasure or holiday (as defined in section 1.2.3.4 of Chapter 1). Business travelers and other travelers (as defined in section 1.2.3.4 of Chapter 1) have not been included within the scope of the present study. Leisure travelers to the region, both domestic and foreign, have been included in the study. Thus, the study is based on a survey of tourists, which tries to elicit information from them regarding various aspects relevant to the objectives of the study.

3.7 Perceived Limitations of the Study

Individuals traveling for business purposes were not included in this study. This was done for three reasons. First, it was considered more important to understand the motivations and preferences of leisure travelers coming to the Northeast India, as their main purpose for visiting this region is pleasure or recreation and therefore, they comprise the chief market for the leisure travel destinations. Secondly, business travelers with their distinctive needs, schedules and preferences need separate focus and treatment. Including both leisure travelers and business travelers in one study may make it difficult to maintain focus and unduly broaden the scope of the study. Thirdly, the tourism segmentation literature surveyed was all regarding pleasure travel. Not much guidance was available from the literature regarding segmentation of business travelers. However, this may represent a potential limitation, as the study would not be exhaustive due to this omission.
Apart from this, prospective visitors have not been considered in this study. This again was done for two reasons. One, it was not realistic to conduct the survey in other places outside North-east India due to lack of funds and other constraints. Secondly, it was believed that an understanding of the current market i.e. actual visitors would serve as an important first step in deciding the overall strategy for the region. However, this again may represent a possible limitation as a survey of prospective visitors may have provided further useful insights.

References


