

4

Tourism in Meghalaya and Prospects of Rural Tourism in Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya

Outline of the Chapter

This chapter highlights the tourism resources of the state of Meghalaya and analyses the great potential of alternative tourism forms like rural tourism in the study area. This chapter explains the concept of rural tourism. It also gives a brief description of the study area i.e., Ri-Bhoi district and analyses the resources available for the development and growth of rural tourism initiatives in the district. This chapter gives the profile of the respondents involved in the research study. The respondents in the research are the local community inhabitant of the district. The chapter also gives a brief glimpses of existing tourism destinations in the study area.

4.1 Meghalaya a Tourism Paradise: -

The state of Meghalaya is also known as the *Abode of Clouds* and *Scotland of the East*. Due to rich tourism endowments, the state has become an important tourist hub of the north-east. The state is not only blessed with some picturesque landscape, but also with rich flora and fauna, gigantic waterfalls, magnificent valleys, and a rich vibrant cultural fabric. As the state is classified into three hills namely the *Khasi hills*, *Jaintia Hills* and *Garo Hills*. Some of the prominent destinations of the state, which has been witnessing a lot of tourist foot fall are the following:

Jaintia Hills:



DAWKI - SHNONGPDENG



KRANGSHURI FALLS



KUDENGRIM



NARTIANG MONOLITHS



IALONG & SYNTU KSIAR

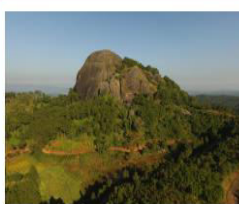


NARTIANG DURGA TEMPLE

Khasi Hills



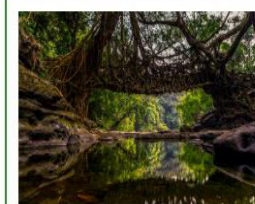
SOHRA



KYLLANG ROCK



SHILLONG



MAWLYNNONG VILLAGE



NONGRIAT ROOT BRIDGES



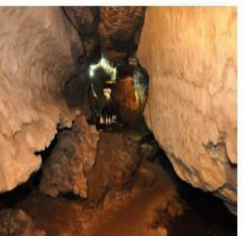
MAWPHANLUR



NONGKHNUM RIVER ISLAND



UMIAM LAKE



ARWAH CAVE



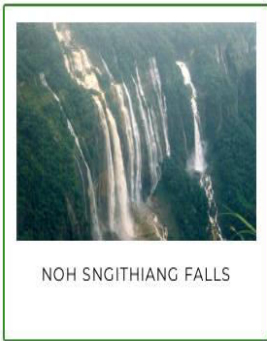
DAINTHLEN FALLS



MAWSMAI CAVE



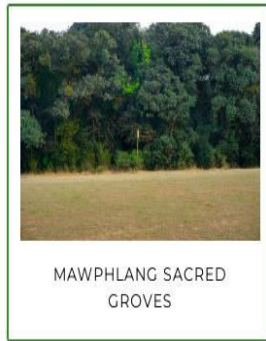
NOH KA LIKAI FALLS



NOH SNGITHIANG FALLS



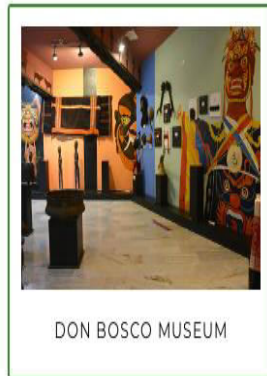
KHAT-AR-SHNONG,
KONGTHONG



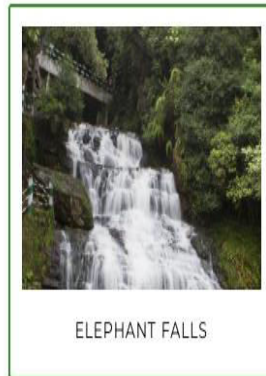
MAWPHLANG SACRED
GROVES



PYNURSLA



DON BOSCO MUSEUM



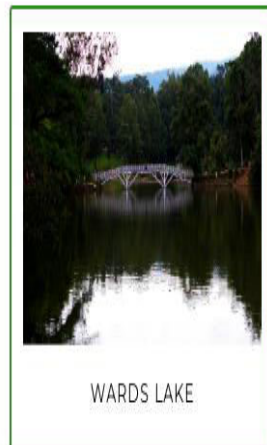
ELEPHANT FALLS



GOLF LINKS



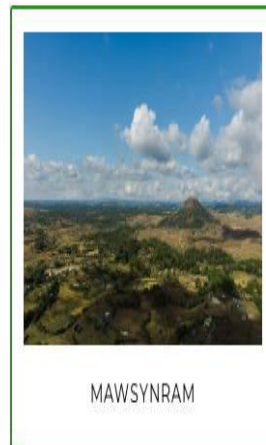
PHAN NONLAIT PARK



WARDS LAKE



MARNGAR LAKE



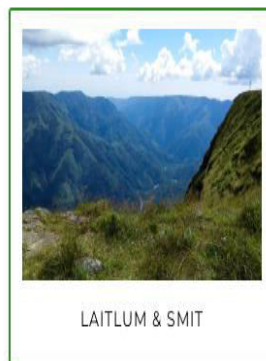
MAWSYNRAM



WEINIA FALLS

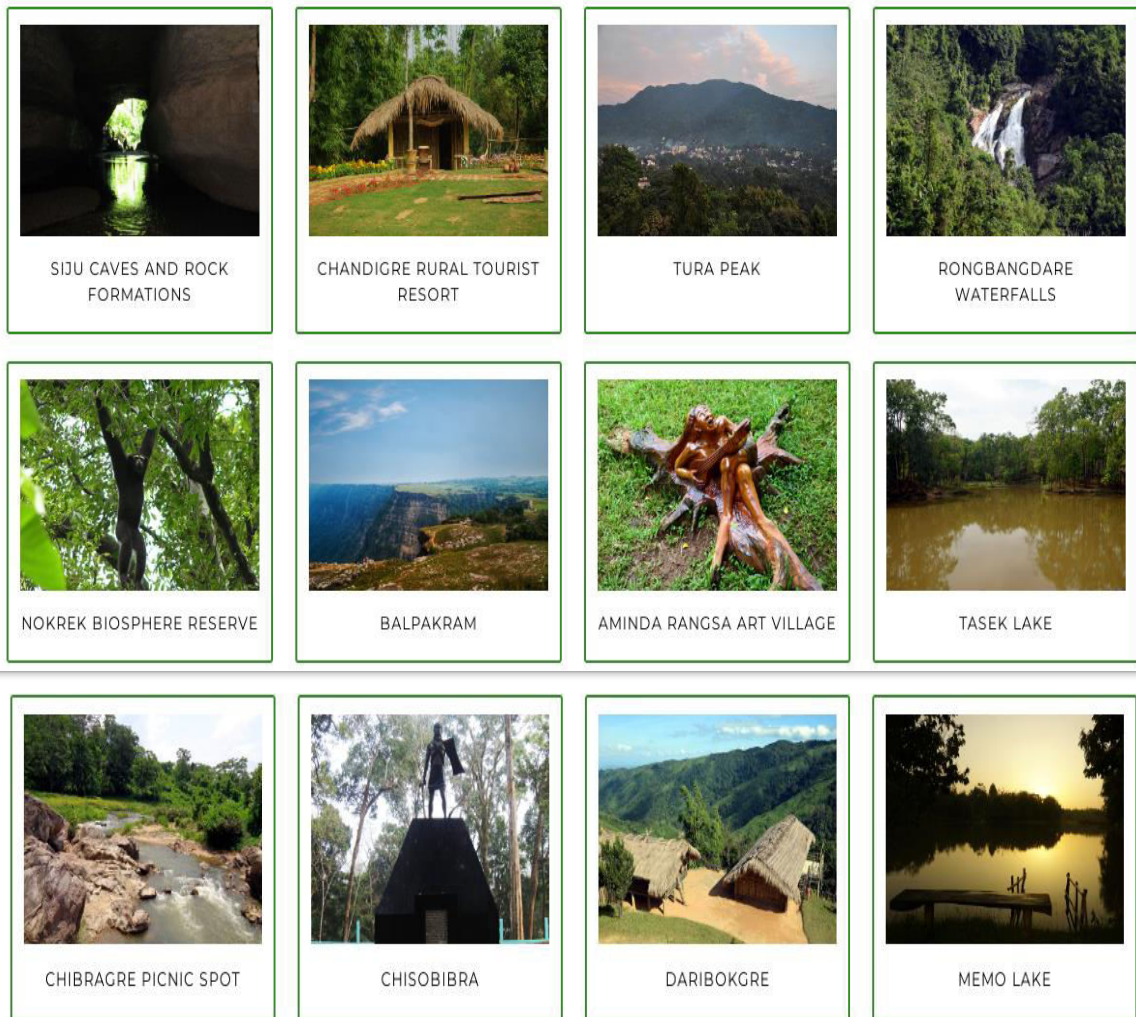


LUM SOHPETBNENG



LAILUM & SMIT

Garo Hills



Source: Directorate of tourism, Government of Meghalaya

Since the attainment of statehood in 1972, Meghalaya has witnessed conventional tourism mostly mass tourism, where there was large gathering of tourist in selected destinations, which led to rapid and short-term economic gains. Mostly the tourist visiting this destination in large numbers had limited concerns for the ecology and the host community culture and practices. However, in the last two decades or so in the state of Meghalaya, there has been sincere effort from Government and Non-government agencies to develop tourism in a sustainable manner. Alternative tourism forms like rural tourism, eco-tourism, village tourism etc has been initiated in the rural regions so that sustainable tourism development can be achieved. The benefits of Alternative tourism forms are that it is in a small scale, under local community control, safeguards environment resources, economic benefits are directed towards the local

economy and local community and there is meaningful enrichment engagement between tourists and host communities.

Table 4.1: Number of Tourist spots and Tourists visiting Meghalaya since 1999 to 2017

Year	No. of Tourist Spots	No. of Visitors		Total
		Foreign	Indian	
1999	69	1971	159730	161701
2000	64	2327	169929	172256
2001	64	2390	178697	181087
2002	64	3191	268529	271720
2003	64	6304	371953	378257
2004	64	12707	433495	445902
2005	70	5099	375911	381010
2006	70	4259	400287	404546
2007	70	5267	457685	462952
2008	70	4919	549954	554873
2009	70	4522	591398	595920
2010	-	4177	652756	656933
2011	101	4803	667504	672307
2012	101	5313	680254	685567
2013	99	6773	691269	698042
2014	99	8664	717789	726453
2015	99	8027	751165	759192
2016	99	8476	844354	852830
2017	99	12051	990856	1002907

Source: NEDFi Databank

Tourism footfall - Meghalaya

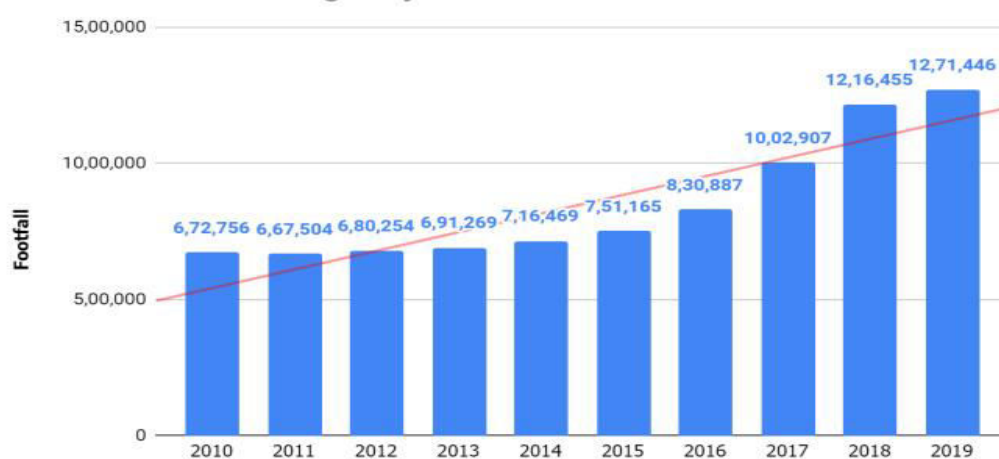


Figure 4.1: Tourism Footfall in Meghalaya

Source: NEDFi Databank

Though Meghalaya has 12 districts, but a few districts namely East Khasi Hills, North Garo Hills, West Jaintia Hills and Ri-Bhoi district have been more proactive in developing tourism activities. Due to development of tourism, positive impacts have been seen in these districts in terms of employment generations across all sectors and various skill levels. Especially in East Khasi Hills district due to expansion of tourism development, other sectors like transportation, construction, handicraft, etc has been witnessing indirect expansionary effects. As of 2020, total number of accommodation unit available in the state stands at 2000 units³². In 2022 with the opening of two five-star hotel in Shillong, the Government is also looking at high value low volume tourism concepts. Since the last two decades the National Highway & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) has been very active in development of road connectivity in the state, especially the highways. For tourism activities to be expended uniformly throughout the districts of the state, the development of major infrastructure like road connectivity is pertinent. Since the state is landlocked and due to topography and other political issues, the development of road networks throughout the state is viable at the present moment. Some of the major work proposed, undertaken, and completed by NHIDCL are listed in (Fig-4.2). The status of on-going work undertaken by NHIDCL in the state of Meghalaya as on 30/04/2023 is 17 projects encompassing about 388 km with a total project cost of 7195 crores.³³

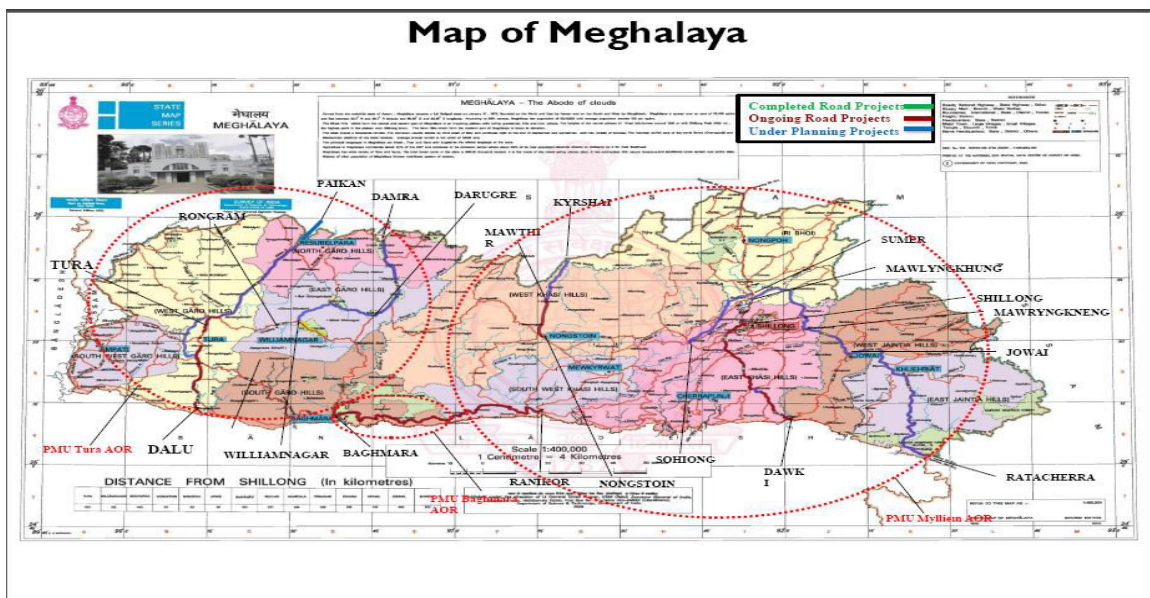


Figure 4.2: Major work proposed, undertaken, and completed by NHIDCL in Meghalaya

Source: nhidcl.com

³² [www.ceicdata.com/Ministry of Tourism](http://www.ceicdata.com/Ministry_of_Tourism)

³³ <https://nhidcl.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/All-States.pdf>

The government of Meghalaya recently launched its tourism policy 2023 and predicts that the tourism sector will be key to achieving the dream of taking the state's economy to \$10 billion by 2028.³⁴ The Tourism Policy 2023 envisions to position Meghalaya as a favoured tourism destination by harnessing its tourism potential. The policy has several thrust areas including core and auxiliary infrastructure, connectivity infrastructure, new circuits, private sector participation, tourist safety etc. According to the policy, the government will endeavour to work towards creating land banks across all major tourist locations/destinations/routes which can then be handed over/leased to interested and eligible third parties to build infrastructure or undertake tourism related activities. This will be done in collaboration with all stakeholders including local communities and such endeavours will be in accordance with the state's PPP policy.

To develop and expand tourism eco-system in the state of Meghalaya various organisations and agencies are actively involved and are listed below:

- Directorate of Tourism (DOT): This department of the Government of Meghalaya is responsible for tourism related policy formulation and implementation of schemes and programs of both State and Central Government. DOT is also associated with the development of tourism related infrastructure and tourism promotion through festivals, tourism related fairs and marts and promotional campaigns in all the medias.
- Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC): This corporation is primarily involved in developing and managing tourism related infrastructure like accommodation units. MTDC is also engage in tourism related projects and scheme funded by both State and Central Government. MTDC operates under the administrative control of DOT.
- Meghalayan Age Limited (MAL): MAL is a non-profit State Government owned company incorporated under the Planning department of Government of Meghalaya. The main function includes implementation and mobilising of funds of projects and schemes funded from externally aided agencies, promotion of tourism and conservation and preservation of heritage sites in the state. Other activities carried out by MAL include organizing festivals and events, tourism

³⁴ <https://theshillongtimes.com/2023/07/01/10-bn-economy-dream-meghalaya-launches-tourism-policy-2023/#:~:text=%2410%20bn%20economy%20dream%3A%20Meghalaya.>

branding activities, promoting local entrepreneurship in the tourism sector and assist private sector participation in tourism.

- The Meghalaya Rural Tourism Cooperative Federation Limited: This agency is primarily involved in supporting primary cooperative societies engaged in rural tourism projects by monetary support, guidance related to technical and management skills. Travellers Nest accommodation scheme and markets in high tourist foot fall tourism destination are supported by this agency and are operated through the local rural cooperative societies. Till date there are about 36 rural tourism projects which are operated under the primary cooperative societies in the state.

4.2 Rural Tourism Concept

To upgrade the local economies, a niche tourism form like rural tourism has been found to be very effective for generating employment and increasing livelihood opportunities for the rural masses. Though rural tourism initiatives are generally developed in small scales and at comparatively low cost of infrastructure, but there are high advantages of less economic leakages, [210]. The very concept of rural tourism is at rural settings, with abundance of natural landscapes and the tourism activities based on agrarian and allied rural activities. Since the rural tourism initiatives are maximum controlled and operated by the local communities hence the maximum benefits are routed to the local economies and the local communities, and the approaches adopted for tourism development are sustainable. Rural tourism can also be seen as an important connect between the urban and the rural folks, through meaningful tourist host engagements, the rich cultural fabric of the local host communities could be showcased and likewise the modern urban lifestyles of the urban masses could also be highlighted.

Tourism development in rural areas and allied tourism activities based in rural locations cannot be termed as rural tourism initiatives, it can be metropolitan in type and simply be in rural areas. Rural tourism is a niche form of tourism that takes place in areas outside urban domain, predominantly in rural areas and where the inhabitants are primarily the local agrarian or indigenous communities and comprises of rural tourism attractions ,[107]

Rural tourism initiatives besides being located in rural areas, should be in small scale setups and should have the component of rurality characteristics with lots of open spaces and a sustainable approach , [211].

4.3: Brief Geographical outline of the study area.

4.3.1: Demography, Land use pattern and drainage:

Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya was carved out from erstwhile East Khasi Hill district, and it assumed the hierarchical status of a district on 4th June 1992. The total area of the district stands at 2448 square kilometre and located at E 91⁰ 20' 30'' and E 92⁰ 17'00'' longitude and N 25⁰ 40' to N 26⁰ 20' latitude³⁵. The total population of the district is about 258840 (Census 2011). Ri-Bhoi district is bounded in the north by the districts of Kamrup and Goalpara and in the east by the district of Karbi Anglong of the state of Assam, while the south and the west are bounded by the districts of East Khasi Hills and West Khasi Hills respectively³⁶.

Nongpoh town is the district headquarter and is about 53 kilometres from the capital city of Meghalaya, Shillong and about 45 kilometres from the capital city of Assam, Dispur³⁷. The National Highway (NH) 40 passes right through the centre of the district (Fig 4.3). The local road networks are all well connected to NH 40 within the district, and it has been observed that it plays a significant role in developing the local economies of the blocks and overall livelihood opportunities of the district. The villages located in the periphery of the NH-40 and other district roads has been seen developing faster with more concentration of population.

As the accessibility within the district is well connected, rural tourism initiatives in the various blocks of the district can be initiated or existing initiatives could be further developed.

³⁵ <https://ribhoi.gov.in/>

³⁶ <https://ribhoi.gov.in/>

³⁷ <https://ribhoi.gov.in/>

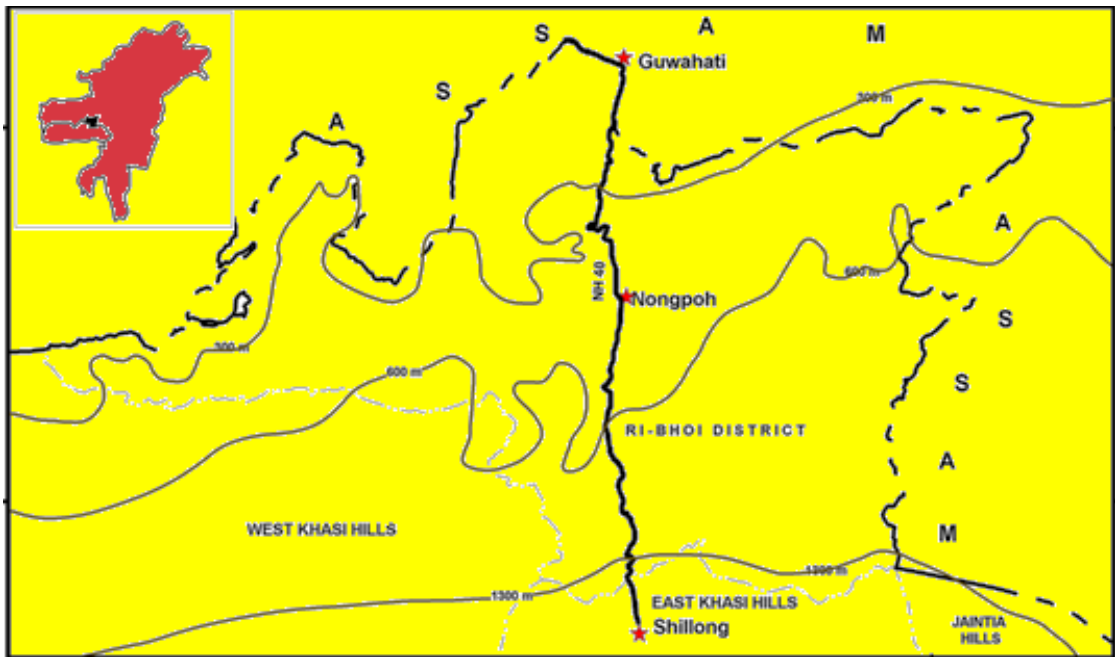


Figure 4.3: National Highway-40 passing through the Ri-Bhoi district.

Source: National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation

The district comprises of four Community and Rural Development (C & RD) blocks namely *Jirang*, *Umling*, *Umsning* and *Bhoirymbong*. The total population of the district stands at 258840 with male population of 132531 and female population of 126309 and urban population of 25154 and rural population of 233226 (Census 2011). The total number of villages is 648 and the villages are located in an around the periphery of the NH-40 and the other district roads (Fig.4.2 & 4.3)

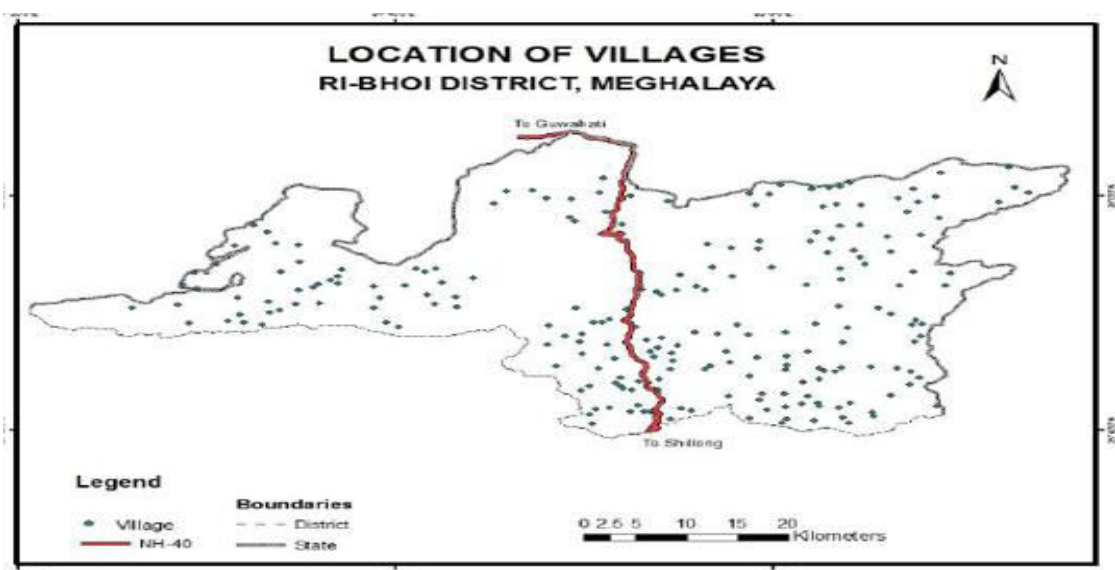


Figure 4.4: Location of Villages in Ri-Bhoi district.

Source: National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation

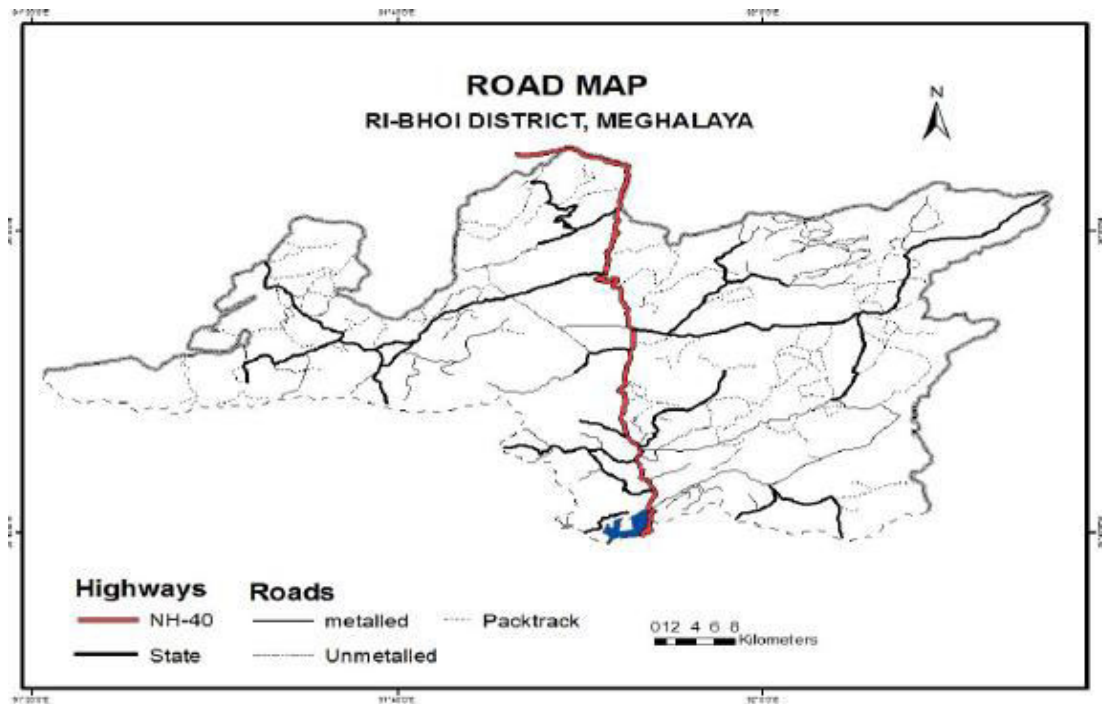


Figure 4.5: Road Map in Ri-Bhoi district

Source: National Atlas and Thematic Mapping Organisation

The subgroup of the Khasi tribe called the Bhois and are the main habitants of Ri-Bhoi district and mostly the Bhois use the Khasi dialect. The other habitant tribes of the district are the Garos, Karbis, Marngars, Mikirs, Bodos and Lalungs, the Garos use the Garo dialect, whereas the other tribes commonly use Assamese as their Lingua Franca. The foremost occupation of the habitants in the district is agriculture. Due to the rich tribal culture and heritage, the cultural fabric of the district could be showcased in rural tourism initiatives.

4.3.2: Land Use Pattern

The physical factors of land like soil, climate and topography play a significant role in determining the land use pattern of an area. The level of land use in an area is ascertained by the level of economic and socio-cultural practices of the people, [212] and also due to the high demand of agricultural crops for the domestic consumption [213]. The Land use pattern and statistics are presented in the Table 4.2. Since majority of the district land is under forest cover and cultivable waste land and groves there is tremendous prospects for developing tourism initiatives in the village levels so that it benefits the local economy and the local community and the tourists visiting these rural tourism circuits can have the experience of typical village agrarian rural life.

Table 4.2: Land utilization statistics of Ri-Bhoi District (2010-11)

Land Classification	Area (sq. km.)	Percentage
Geographical area	2448	
Forest area	869.07	35 %
Non-Agricultural area	140.58	6 %
Cultivable Waste Land and groves	861.91	34%
Fallow Land	150.42	5 %
Net Area Sown	222.59	9 %
Area Sown more than once.	29.10	1 %
Gross cropped area.	251.69	10%

Source: Directorate of Economic and Statistics, Meghalaya

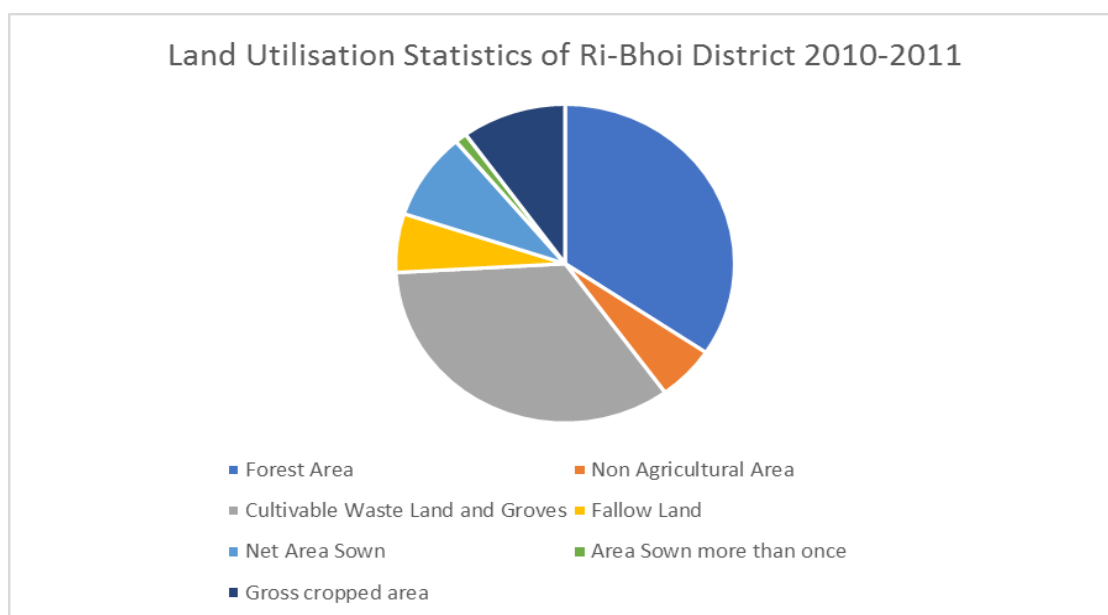


Figure 4.6: Total Land utilisation statistics of Ri-Bhoi district.

4.3.3: Drainage

The topography of a place regulates the drainage systems. The important rivers and tributaries of Ri-Bhoi district are *Umtrew, Umsiang, Umiam, Umladew, Umthew, Umshyaw, Umlet, Umkhen, Umran* etc (Fig-4.7). The rivers flowing north of the district joins the Brahmaputra River of Assam. Most of the rivers in the district flows through a gentle slope of longitudinal contours hence there are no major waterfalls or deep gorges in the district. The pattern formed due to the flow of the rivers and its tributaries are mainly trellis pattern³⁸ and it is primarily due to the presence of hard and soft rocks in parallel formations.

³⁸ Trellis: - A drainage pattern in which tributaries join at high angles, often approaching right angles, which is common in areas with rocks of different strengths (thus resistance to erosion) and in areas

4.4: Climate and Rainfall

The human habitat and settlement of an area is directly related to the climatic condition of an area. Areas of the district bordering Assam are generally humid and hot during peak summer months and average temperatures in this region can go up to 30⁰ centigrade , whereas areas of the district adjoining the East Khasi Hills district have pleasant weather during summer and cold climate during the winter months, this is primarily due to the flow of warm and moist winds from the south and south west during summer and due to the flow of cold winds from the north west during the winter. As compared to other districts of the state, witnessing to heavy and highest rainfall in the world like *Mawsynram* and *Cherrapunjee*, Ri-Bhoi district because of its location lies under the rain shadow area with moderate to less rain.

Ri-Bhoi district experiences both tropical and temperate climate, areas bordering the state of Assam experiences tropical climate and areas adjoining to East Khasi Hills experiences temperate climate. Climate and rainfall are directly related to the altitude of an area. For a comparative study three stations has been identified in the district, namely Byrnihat (lower foot hill of the district at 300m), Nongpoh (central part of the district at 600m) and Barapani (higher plateau at 100m) Table 4.3. The livelihood options of a region are directly depended on the climatic conditions, and it tends to control the lifestyle of the people like habitat, types of agricultural crops, housing structures, types of food to be taken, types of clothes to be worn etc. Due to global warming and climate changing pattern, sometimes climatic conditions may not be conducive for certain agricultural endeavours hence farmers need to look at other alternative livelihood options along with their agrarian activities for sustenance. Rural tourism initiatives at village level in all the four blocks of Ri-Bhoi districts can be initiated as a means of additional livelihood options for the rural communities of the district. As Ri-Bhoi district experiences both temperate and tropical climate, the overall climatic condition of the district favours a variety of tourism initiatives.

Table 4.3: Climatic Temperature and Rainfall in three stations of Ri-Bhoi district namely at Barapani, Nongpoh and Byrnihat (2011)

Months	Barapani			Nongpoh			Byrnihat		
	Temp ⁰ C (Max)	Temp ⁰ C (Min)	Rainfall (mm)	Temp ⁰ C (Max)	Temp ⁰ C (Min)	Rainfall (mm)	Temp ⁰ C (Max)	Temp ⁰ C (Min)	Rainfall (mm)
January	18.90	5.10	1.60	16.60	12.60	1.50	19.70	9.50	6.00
February	23.90	8.40	18.00	20.10	15.30	29.50	23.90	12.50	0.00
March	27.80	12.60	54.80	23.30	18.20	62.40	27.80	17.00	4.10
April	27.80	14.50	182.00	24.80	20.70	52.80	29.50	17.00	54.20
May	28.90	17.00	429.90	25.30	22.80	157.20	29.70	17.20	186.00
June	28.90	19.50	635.10	26.40	24.40	263.70	31.10	25.00	204.20
July	28.90	19.70	338.60	26.40	24.60	90.30	30.90	25.60	151.00
August	29.20	19.50	380.80	26.10	24.20	338.60	30.70	23.50	216.00
September	29.40	18.80	294.30	25.70	23.90	405.60	30.60	24.20	137.80
October	28.50	15.50	187.90	24.60	22.20	96.30	29.90	23.10	162.80
November	24.30	9.20	101.30	19.80	16.80	0.00	23.70	15.10	0.00
December	22.10	6.90	12.30	17.40	14.20	0.00	22.20	13.60	5.40

Source: 1. Indian Council of Agriculture Research, Regional Centre, Umiam, Meghalaya.

2. District Agriculture Office, Nongpoh, Ri- Bhoi District

3. Horticulture Inspector, Byrnihat, Umling Block, Ri Bhoi District

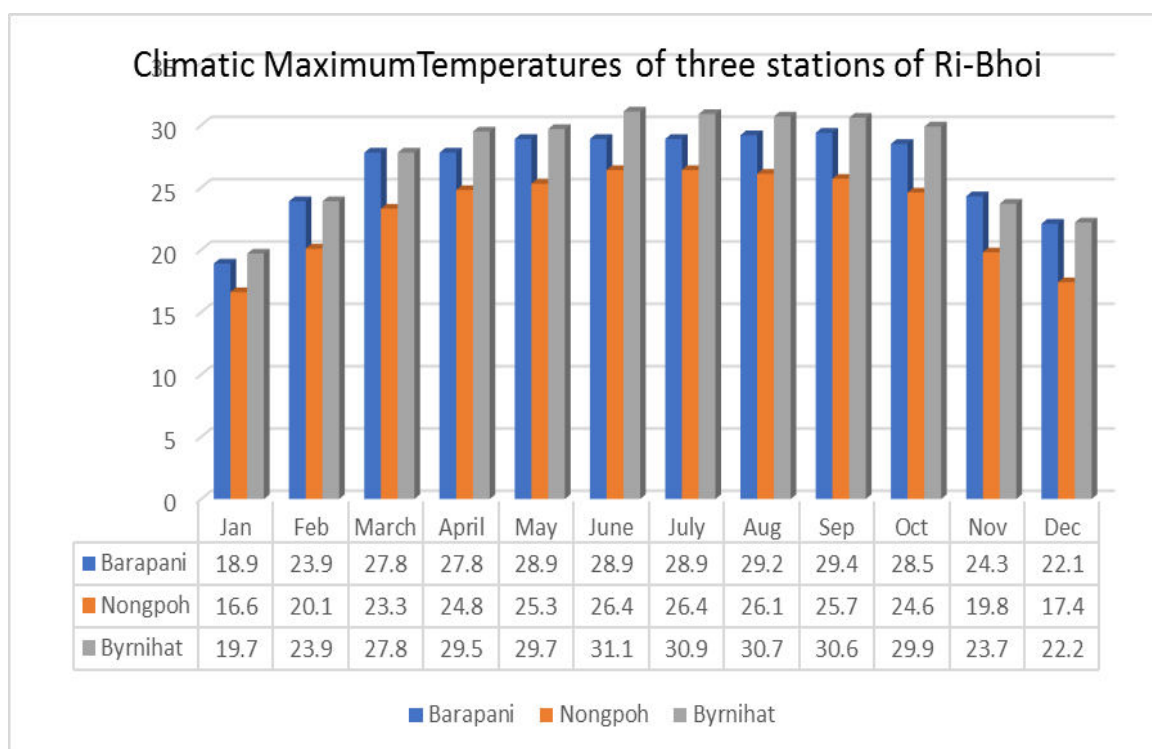


Figure 4.8: Climatic maximum temperatures of three stations of Ri-Bhoi district.

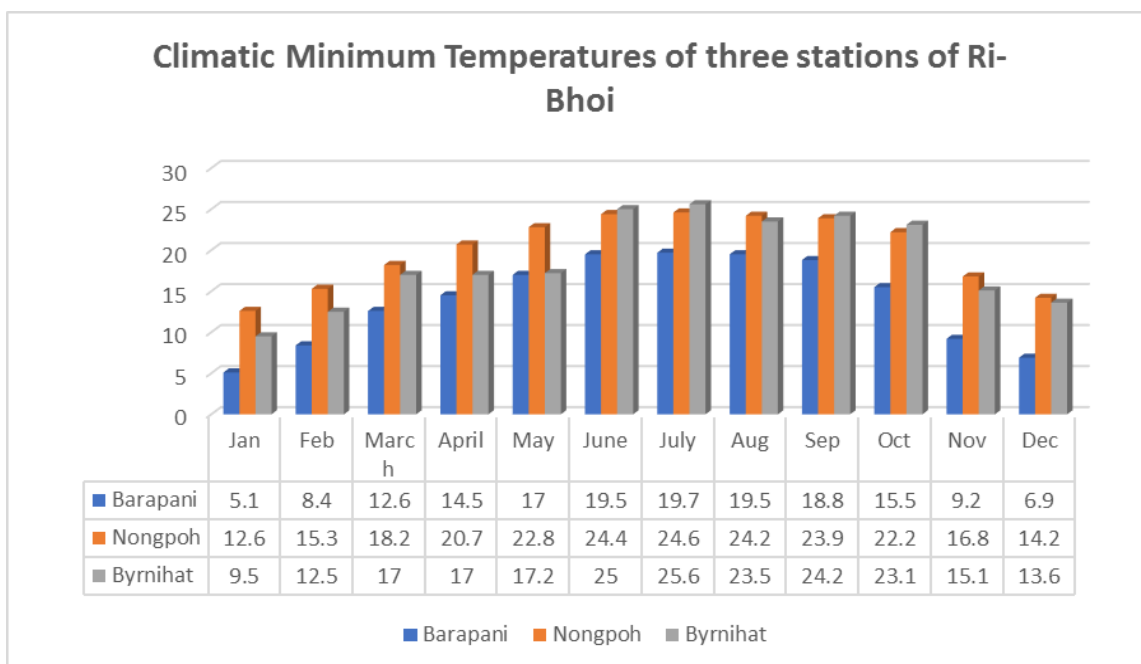


Figure 4.9: Climatic minimum temperatures of three stations of Ri-Bhoi district.

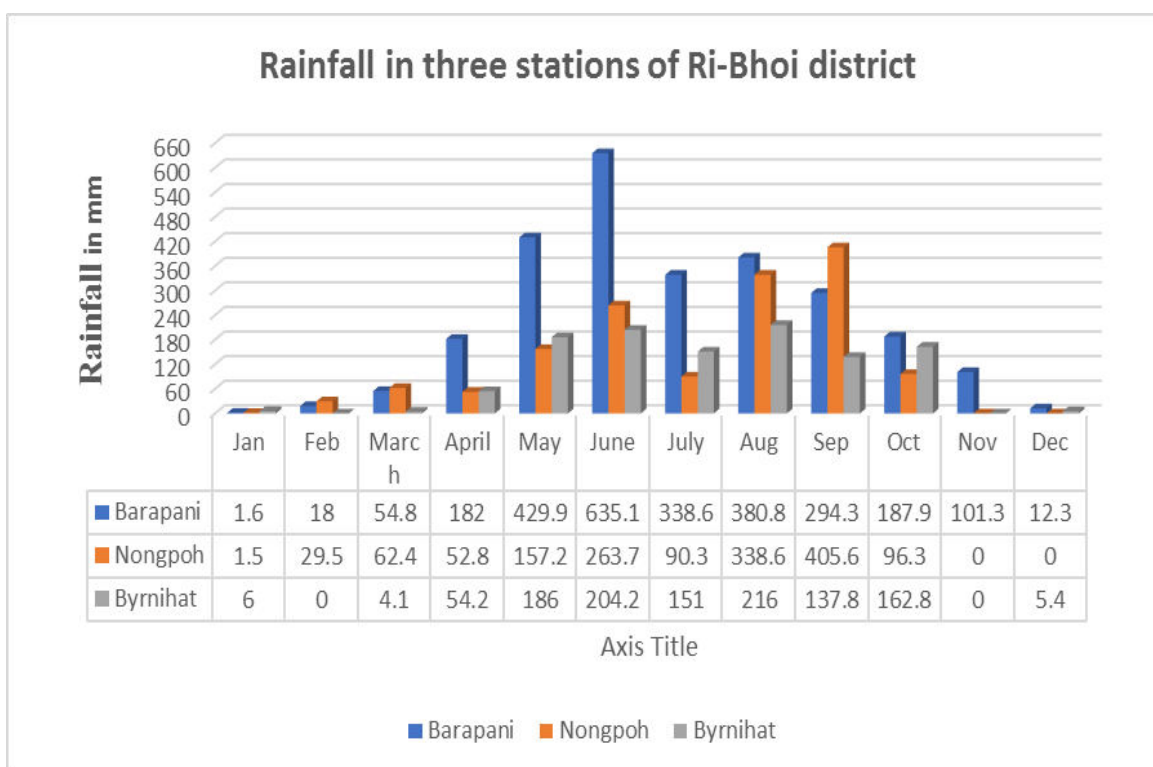


Figure 4.10: Monthly Temperature (Maximum & Minimum⁰C) and Rainfall (mm) (2011)

4.5: Population Structure

According to Census 2001 and 2011 the population of Ri-Bhoi district grew from 1,92,790 to 2,58,840 and the male and female sex ratio increased from 941 to 953

female per 1000 males and the districts literacy rate increased from 62.6 percent to 75.48 percent, indicating improved demographic quality of the population of the district. With improved district's connectivity, coupled with higher growth rate in population, sex ratio and literacy aspects in the given period, the district has highlighted its growth and indicating quick changes in the livelihood options of the people. In comparison to urban and rural population, there has been negative growth in the given period between 2001 to 2011, indicating enhancement of rural livelihood opportunities and there by checking on the rural urban migration Table 4.4. Rural tourism initiatives in the district will further enhance livelihood opportunities for the local rural communities and in some cases, it can facilitate reverse migration from urban to rural.

Table 4.4: Population Structure of Ri-Bhoi district (2001 & 2011)

Ri-Bhoi	Census-2001			Census-2011		
Total Population	192790			258840		
Urban Population	25448			26065		
Rural Population	167342			232775		
% Share of Urban Population	13.2%			10.07%		
Sex Ratio (per thousand males)	941			953		
Literacy Rate Percentage	62.6%			75.48%		
Cast break up	SC	ST	Others	SC	ST	Others
	489	169655	22646	590	230081	28169

Sources: Census of India 2001 and 2011

4.6: Economy

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of all the districts of Meghalaya and in context to Ri-Bhoi district, agriculture is the main backbone of the district economy, where majority of the population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities. Total geographic area of the district is about 2448 square kilometre, however only about 10 percent of the total area is under cultivation with low crop intensity, primarily due to the district's topographic constraints. Though majority of the population is engaged in agriculture and allied activities, introduction of modern agricultural practices is not very significant, hence majority of the agrarian masses are poor , [214]. Crops like rice, jute, ginger, chilly, mustard leaves etc and horticulture and commercial crops like pineapple, banana, eracanuts, papaya, strawberry, rubber, tea etc are the major components of the economy.

Ri-Bhoi district despite being bestowed with rich natural resources and located in close proximity to Guwahati city of Assam, the industrial sector's growth is not very significant. There has been a complete absence of large industrial units in the district,

except a few small and medium scale industries ranging from steel, plastic, food processing, chemical etc. For boosting the economic growth of the region, there is urgent requirement of rapid industrialization. The vast natural endowment and human resource capital of the district has remained untapped by the secondary sector, primarily due to inadequate elementary infrastructure facilities, high cost of road transportation and other factors. The tertiary sector of the district has shown some growth as compared to the primary and secondary sector. The sectoral composition of State Domestic Product (SDP) in RI-Bhoi district in percentage is depicted from 1993 to 2008 in (Table:4.5 and Fig:4.6)

Table:4.5: State Domestic Product in Ri-Bhoi district from 1993 to 2008

Year	Primary %	Secondary %	Tertiary %	Total
1993-94	31.64	27.39	40.97	100
1994-95	33.10	22.58	44.32	100
1995-96	34.74	23.15	42.11	100
1996-97	36.77	21.99	41.24	100
1997-98	35.79	23.91	40.30	100
1998-99	35.27	21.90	42.83	100
1999-00	37.11	22.49	40.40	100
2000-01	34.02	13.51	52.47	100
2001-02	34.89	13.40	51.71	100
2002-03	33.21	18.28	48.51	100
2003-04	28.97	20.37	50.67	100
2004-05	27.24	22.75	50.02	100
2005-06	27.50	22.77	49.73	100
2006-07	28.33	23.62	48.06	100
2007-08	27.11	25.43	47.46	100

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics Shillong (2008)

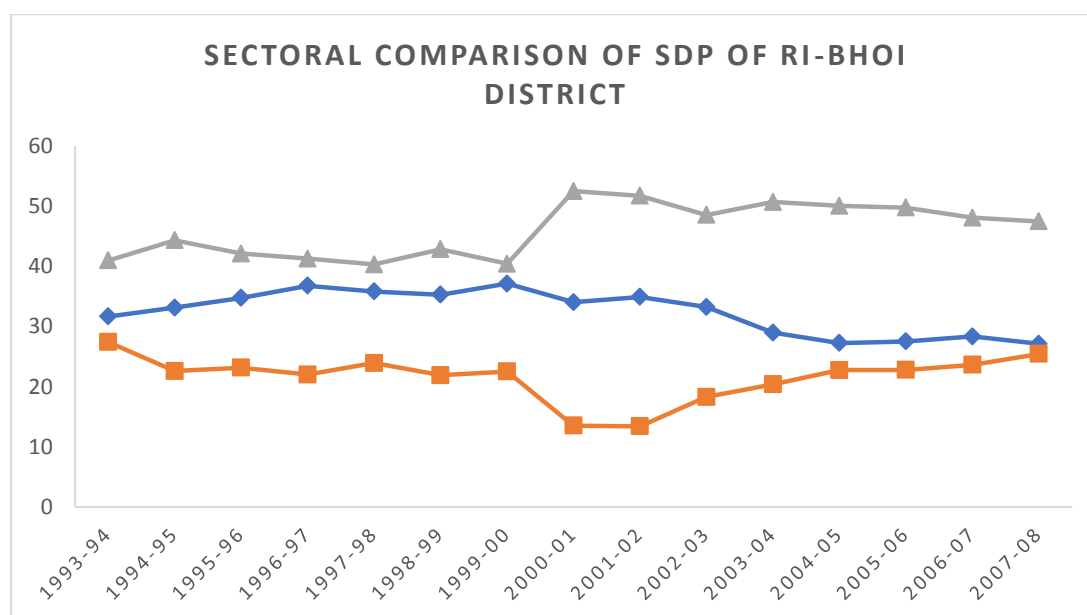


Figure 4.11: Structural Composition of the Domestic Product Share Period (1993 – 2008).

Ri-Bhoi district situated between the Guwahati city, the gateway of the Northeast in the north and Shillong city, the capital of Meghalaya in the south and with the NH-40 passing through the central part of the district, it has not been able to grow at a faster pace despite the location advantages. Though the districts economy can still be stated as rural agriculture based, the other sectors like secondary and tertiary has shown growth. In the tertiary sector like tourism sector especially the rural tourism has been able to flourish in certain pockets, but this niche form of tourism has tremendous prospects to flourish in the entire district due to the rurality and accessibility of the district.

4.7: - Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The data was collected from the rural residents of the four blocks of Ri-Bhoi district. Out of the 648 villages, 110 villages were selected and 4 respondents from each village was recorded hence, the total number of respondents were 440. Data was collected with the help of self-administered survey questionnaire between March 2021 and April 2022 and a response rate of 100 % was achieved with all 440 responses.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study were measured by name of the village, name of the block, gender, age, tribe, marital status, educational qualifications, occupation, monthly household income, income depended on tourism and main source of income of the villagers.

The descriptive statistics of the respondents were tabulated by means of a single indicator-so that varied observations and analysis could be arrived at. Descriptive data through the help of tabulated portrayal, graphical representation and statistical observations helps to evaluate the data of the study ,[215]

Table:4.6: Profile of the Respondents.

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER	MALE	237	53.9 %
	FEMALE	203	46.1 %
BLOCK	JIRANG	131	29.8 %
	UMSNING	123	28 %
	UMLING	127	28.9 %
	BHOIRYMBONG	59	13.4 %
AGE	20 TO 30	69	15.7 %
	31 TO 40	181	41.1 %
	41 TO 50	157	35.7 %
	51 TO 60	27	6.1 %
	ABOVE 60	5	1.4 %
TRIBE	KHASI	359	81.6 %
	JAINTIA	13	3 %
	GARO	47	10.7 %
	OTHERS	21	4.8 %
MARITAL STATUS	MARRIED	318	72.3 %
	UNMARRIED	122	27.7%
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	UNDER MATRIC	61	13.9 %
	MATRIC	111	25.2%
	SENIOR SECONDARY	22	5%
	GRADUATE	208	47.3 %
	POSTGRADUATE	37	8.4 %
	PhD	1	0.2 %
OCCUPATION	FARMING & ALLIED ACTIVITIES	120	27.3%
	SELF-EMPLOYED	222	50.5%
	GOVERNMENT SERVICE	48	10.9%
	PRIVATE	47	10.7 %
	UNEMPLOYED	3	0.7 %
MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	LESS THAN Rs 20,000	95	21.6 %
	Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000	194	44.1 %
	ABOVE Rs 50,000	151	34.3 %
INCOME DEPENDEND ON TOURISM	NOT AT ALL	102	23.2 %
	PARTIALLY DEPENDEND ON	164	37.3 %
	FULLY DEPENDEND ON	174	39.5 %
MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME	AGRICULTURE	343	78%
	SELF EMPLOYED	39	9%
	GOVERNMENT SERVICE	14	3%
	PRIVATE JOBS	44	10%

4.7.1: Gender Composition of the Respondents

As the research focusses on the study of rural tourism: its prospects and challenges with reference to Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, the gender distribution of the respondents are as follows: -

Table 4.7: Frequency and Percentage of Gender distribution of the respondents.

G E N D E R	FREQUENCY		IN PERCENTAGE
	MALE	237	53.9 %
	FEMALE	203	46.1%
	TOTAL	440	100 %

The above table (Table 4.7) portrays the gender distribution of the respondents of Ri-Bhoi district. The gender distribution gap between males and females is not very significant, with males standing at 53.9% and females at 46.1 %. In such a scenario, both the males and females' perspectives can be evaluated with equal weightage.

4.7.2: Block Composition of the Respondents

Table 4.8: Frequency and Percentage of Block distribution of the respondents.

B L O C K	FREQUENCY		IN PERCENTAGE
	JIRANG	131	29.8 %
	UMSNING	123	28 %
	UMLING	127	28.9%
	BHOIRYMBONG	59	13.3 %
TOTAL	440	100%	

The above table (Table 4.8) portrays the frequency and percentage of block distribution of the respondents of Ri-Bhoi district. Jirang Community and Rural Development (C&RD) block has the highest frequency distribution percentage of 29.8 percent, closely followed by Umling and Umsning block at 28.9 percent and 28 percent respectively and the least respondents are from the Bhoirymbong block at 13.3 percent.

4.7.3: Age Composition of the Respondents

The age composition of the respondents of the study area have been categorised in to five age groups.i.e., 20 years to 30 years, 31 years to 40 years, 41 years to 50 years, 51 years to 60 years and above 60 years. Maximum number of respondents are between the age group of 31 years to 40 years, having a percentage of 41.1 %, followed by the age group of 41 years to 50 years with a percentage of 35.7%, the age group of 20 years to 30 years has a percentage of 15.7 %, age group of 51 years to 60 years has a percentage of 6.1 % and least number of respondents is from the age group of above 60 years with a percentage of 1.4 % (Table 4.9)

Table 4.9: Age Composition of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
AGE	20 Years to 30 Years	69	15.7 %
	31 Years to 40 Years	181	41.1 %
OF	41 Years to 50 Years	157	35.7 %
	51 Years to 60 Years	27	6.1 %
RESPONDENTS	Above 60 Years	6	1.4 %
	TOTAL	440	100%

4.7.4: Tribe Composition of the Respondents

In the state of Meghalaya, the major inhabitants are the three major tribes namely the Khasis, Jaintias and the Garos hence the respondent's tribe composition is categorised into four groups namely the Khasis, Jaintias, Garos and others. In the study area Ri-Bhoi district, the maximum of the respondents is from the Khasi tribe at a percentage of 81.6%, followed by the Garo tribe at a percentage of 10.7%, Jaintia tribe at 3% and other tribes (Bodo, Karbi, Kuki, Rabha, Missing, Ahom and Tiwa) clubbed together at 4.8% (Table 4.10)

Table 4.10: Tribe Composition of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
TRIBE	KHASI	359	81.6 %
	JAINTIA	13	3 %
OF	GARO	47	10.7 %
	OTHERS	21	4.8 %
RESPONDENTS	TOTAL	440	100%

4.7.5: Marital Status of the Respondents

For this study, the marital status of the respondents was examined, and it was observed that majority of the respondents were married having a percentage of 72.3%, followed by unmarried respondents with a percentage of 27.7 % (Table:4.11)

Table 4.11: Marital Status Composition of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
MARTAL	MARRIED	318	72.3%
	UNMARRIED	122	27.7%
STATUS	TOTAL	440	100 %

4.7.6: Educational Qualifications of the Respondents

The respondents of Ri-Bhoi district from the 4 C&RD Blocks were analysed with respect to their educational qualifications. In total 6 categories were made namely Under Matric, Matric, Senior Secondary, Graduation, Post-Graduation and PhD. Most of the respondents in the study were Graduates with a percentage of 47.3%, followed by Matric having a percentage of 25.2%, Under Matric having a percentage of 13.9%, post-Graduation at 8.4%, Senior Secondary at 5% and PhD at 0.2%.

Table 4.12: Educational Qualification of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	UNDER MATRIC	61	13.9%
	MATRIC	111	25.2%
	SENIOR SECONDARY	22	5%
	GRADUATION	208	47.3 %
	POST GRADUATION	37	8.4 %
	Ph D	1	0.2 %
	TOTAL	440	100 %

4.7.7: Occupational Composition of the Respondents

The respondent's occupational engagement is classified in to five categories namely Farming and Allied activities, Self-Employed, Government Service, Private service and Unemployed. Majority of the respondents are engaged in self-employed category like their own businesses etc with a percentage of 50.5%, followed by Farming and Allied activities at 27.3%, Government Service at 10.9%, Private Service at 10.7% and Unemployed at 0.7% (Table 4.13)

Table 4.13: Occupational Engagement of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
OCCUPATION	FARMING & ALLIED ACTIVITIES	120	27.3%
	SELF-EMPLOYED	222	50.5%
	GOVERNMENT SERVICE	48	10.9%
	PRIVATE	47	10.7%
	UNEMPLOYED	3	0.7%
	TOTAL	440	100%

4.7.8: Monthly Household Incomes of the Respondents

The monthly household incomes of the respondents will help to analyse the income levels of the respondents and make observations at enhancements of income levels through Rural Tourism initiatives. The monthly household income schedule has been classified into three categories namely less than Rs 20,000, Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000 and above Rs 50,000. Majority of the respondent's monthly household income is in the bracket of Rs 20,000 to Rs50,000 at a percentage of 44.1%, followed at the bracket of Rs less than Rs 20,000 with 29.3% and above Rs 50,000 at 26.6%.

Table 4.14: Monthly Household Incomes of the Respondents

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
INCOME	LESS THAN Rs 20,000	129	29.3%
	Rs 20,000 to Rs 50,000	144	44.1%
	Above Rs 50,000	117	26.6%
	TOTAL	440	100%

4.7.9: Income of the Respondents depended on Tourism.

To understand whether the respondents are involved in tourism activity and their income is dependent on tourism hence the income dependent schedule is classified in to three categories namely not all dependent on tourism, partially dependent on tourism and fully dependent on tourism. Majority of the respondents have stated that their monthly household income is fully dependent on tourism having a percentage at 39.5%, followed closely by partially dependent with a percentage of 37.3% and the respondents whose monthly income is not at all dependent on tourism is at 23.2%.

Table 4.15: Monthly Household Incomes depended on tourism of the Respondents.

INCOME		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
DEPENDENT	NOT AT ALL	102	23.2%
	PARTIALLY DEPENDENT	164	37.3%
	FULLY DEPENDENT	174	39.5%
TOTAL		440	100%

4.7.10: Main source of income of the villagers.

To ascertain the primary sources of income of the villagers, the primary source income schedule is classified into four categories namely agriculture, self-employed, government service and private jobs. Majority of the respondents about 78% stated that the primary source of income of the villagers is agriculture and about 10% are engaged in private jobs and about 9% are self-employed and about 3% are in government service. Thus, from the Table 4.16 we can assume since majority of the villagers depend on agriculture as their main source of income, thus, rural tourism initiatives could be beneficial to the agrarian communities and an alternative source of livelihood could be developed through rural tourism initiatives.

Table 4.16: Main source of income for the villagers.

		FREQUENCY	IN PERCENTAGE
MAIN SOURCE	AGRICULTURE	343	78%
	SELF EMPLOYED	39	9%
	GOVERNMENT JOBS	14	3%
	PRIVATE JOBS	44	10%
TOTAL		440	100%

4.8: Tourist Destinations in Ri-Bhoi District

Ri-Bhoi district is an important tourist destination of the state of Meghalaya. Apart from having location advantage and being the second most least populace district of the state, the district has abundant tourism resources, to be an important tourist hub of the state. Some of the major tourist destinations are the following:

- **Umiam Lake:** One of the most popular tourist destinations not only of the district but also for the whole state of Meghalaya. The word Umiam in local dialect translates into “water of the eyes” or “crying river” and some legends also interprets in to “crying river” or “flood of tears.” The myth behind this is that two sisters from heaven decided to descent to Earth and during their journey one sister was lost in transit and the other manage to descent to the state of Meghalaya. Owing to the grief of losing the sister in their journey, the sister descended shed her tears and gradually these tears formed the Umiam Lake. The Umiam Lake is also called Barapani, primarily due to its size. The umiam lake is a man-made lake with a catchment area of 222.5 square kilometre. The lake is situated at about 15 km north of Shillong city along the National Highway (NH)37. The lake was made in the early 1960’s and consequently a dam was constructed for Hydro Power project. Till date the Umiam Lake has been a popular tourist destination and a popular picnic spot for people from nearby places. The lake offers aquatic sports facilities like kayaking, boating, water skiing etc. Along the periphery of the lake many Government and private resorts, guest houses and homestays have come up to cater for the tourists.
- **Lum Sohpetbneng:** Lum Sohpetbneng peak is a very important legendary and sacred peak of the Khasi community. As per Khasi mythology, this peak is an important link between Earth and Heaven. As per legends there were 16 families who descended and ascended through this link also commonly known as golden staircase and eventually only 7 families decided to remain on Earth and these 7 families were believed to be the 7 sub-tribes of the Khasi clan, who were believed to be the first settlers on Earth. The word Lum Sohpetbneng means navel or heaven and for the Khasi community this peak is very auspicious and sacred and on the first Sunday of the month of February religious ceremonies and rituals are carried out. The total height of the peak is about 1344 metres and is located near the Umiam Lake. The view from the top of the peak is breath-taking overlooking the Umiam lake and the countryside.
- **Diengiei Peak:** This peak is the second tallest peak in the state of Meghalaya and is situated in Ri-Bhoi district, towards south of Shillong. From the top of the peak, the view of the Umiam Lake and Shillong city on the background is breath-taking and mesmerising.

- **Lum Nehru Park:** It is a beautiful park located in the periphery of the Umiam Lake and just adjacent to the Orchid Lake Resort. This park is also known as Nehru Park. It consists of beautiful, manicured lawns and abundance of different varieties of flowers and other exotic plants. This park also has an attached Orchidarium and Aviary.
- **Dwar Ksuid:** Dwar Ksuid means the Devils Doorway in local Khasi dialect. The fall of the river in both sides have deep gorges and near the fall the water is very dark, hence the name Devils Doorway. Dwar Ksuid is in Bhoirymbong block of Ri-Bhoi district and is also known as Lovers Paradise. The main attraction of the area is the rumbling flowing Umiam river with lot of stones, which is an ideal attraction of picknickers, photographers and film makers.
- **Umden- Diwon:** It is also referred as Eri Silk village. The village is situated in a picturesque location with gashing streams and lush green pastures. There is also a scared grove forest comprising of exclusive flora and fauna. For tourists visiting this village, there is accommodation available and there are a host of activities tourists can do like visiting the village handicraft society, hiking to the historical sites and sacred grove, experience the skills of the villagers in weaving and natural dyeing, fishing, cycling etc. The village is situated at about 74 km from Shillong city in Ri-Bhoi district.
- **Marngar Lake:** The lake is situated in Umling block of Ri-Bhoi district and is about 58 kilometres from Shillong city. Marngar lake is a mesmerizing water body and is a popular place for picnickers and those seeking for solace from the urban mundane with beautiful views and pleasant climate.
- **Sohlya Village:** This village is also popularly known as the strawberry village and is located about 35 kilometres from Shillong city in Ri-Bhoi district. The village in about a decade has transformed into a vibrant model for horticulture led development and is commonly referred as the originator of strawberry revolution in the state of Meghalaya. The village is famous for its large hectares of strawberry farms, where visitors can experience the farms by taking a beautiful nature walk and see the different varieties of birds and the picturesque landscapes and meet the local farmers and have meaningful engagement. The village also has

small tea plantations, but it is more famous for its strawberry revolution. For tourist accommodation facilities are available in the village itself.

- **Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary:** The sanctuary is situated in Umling block of Ri-Bhoi district and about 53 kilometres from Shillong city. The Nongkhylllem Wildlife Sanctuary is spread over an area of about 29 square kilometres, and it falls in the Eastern Himalayan Global bio-diversity hot spot. The sanctuary is rich in floral and faunal wealth especially the clouded leopard and some rare species of birds like Rufous Necked Hornbill and Brown Hornbill.

4.9 Content Analysis

To analyse qualitative data in social science research, content analysis is a popular tool. Through the content analysis technique adopted in research, inferences can be arrived at from text and message contents to the background of their use [216]. To state in brief, content analysis technique can be categorised as a scientific study to deduct and examine the pattern of the content in a rational procedure. This qualitative data analysis technique helps in interpreting the content and arriving at appropriate inferences and conclusions from the content itself [217].

For this study, the inputs and the responses were collected from village headmen's, women village community representatives and other tourism stakeholders. Content analysis was carried out in the study to examine and analyse the responses and views of the respondents. The stakeholders were community members involved in tourism businesses in the Ri-Bhoi district, district tourism officials and concerned Blocked Development Officers (BDO) of the four blocks of the study area, tourism academicians and Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the five constituencies of the study area. Some of the key aspects of a few responses are presented below.

Meghalaya an important state of the north-eastern Indian with picturesque landscape, lush greenery, and vibrant rich cultural fabric. The state commonly referred as the abode of clouds has become a popular tourism destination among the tourism circuits primarily due its natural attractions. Initially the tourism circuits within the state were concentrated primarily around the city of Shillong and in the East Khasi Hills district, however tourism officials of the Directorate of Tourism (DOT) have now been promoting other tourism destinations in the other districts of the state. Since that state of Meghalaya is primarily depended on agriculture and since the absence of

significant industrial development, the tourism sector can be an important tool to boost economy, create job opportunities and promote cultural exchange. There has been earnest effort from DOT since the inception of the statehood to develop tourism infrastructure and support the growth of tourism by improving accessibility, accommodation facilities and promoting eco-friendly tourism practices. The natural attractions and the rich indigenous cultural fabric have been promoted at regional, national, and international forums through various marketing campaigns and initiatives. In the tourism policies of the state, there has been earnest efforts to promote rural, community based, responsible and sustainable tourism forms so that the local economy and the local communities can be benefitted. With proper planning and development, the tourism sector can be a source of livelihood for the community members involved in tourism.

District Tourism Officials

Interviewed on 5th and 7th September 2020

Rural tourism initiatives in Ri-hoi district of Meghalaya can have multiple benefits for the holistic development of the local economy and the local community at large. In the East Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, the tourism sector has been able to successfully contribute for the upliftment of the economy and development of the local community and hence similar kind of initiation in Ri-Bhoi district through rural tourism initiatives can echo similar benefits. Primarily, for the initiation of rural tourism in Ri-Bhoi district, effective awareness campaigns are required among the local community members and the stake holders, so that the pros and cons of rural tourism can be analysed and subsequent benefits arising therefrom can be addressed. Rural tourism initiatives can stimulate economic growth. By engaging in tourism activities, the rural community members can have the opportunities to generate income through various hospitality services, local handicraft and handloom products, farm products, local delicacies, and guided tours. Rural tourism initiatives can boost employment generation in the rural areas for the local community members and there is a scope for the opportunity for local entrepreneurs to start some tourism related ventures. Government agencies along with other stakeholders can facilitate infrastructure development in the local rural areas like developing road connectivity, improvement of basic amenities like sanitation, electricity etc. in the tourist places and rural areas. Another aspect of rural tourism benefits is the promotion of cultural

exchange, and the rich cultural heritage and traditions could be showcased among the tourists so that they have an enriching experience and help the local communities in preservation of their cultural heritage and resulting in strengthening of community pride and identity. Since the rural settings have fragile eco-systems, hence rampant unplanned development and expansion for tourism should be checked. To mitigate negative tourism impacts, tourism initiatives should be implemented in an environmentally sustainable manner and stakeholders should propagate eco-friendly practices and create awareness for both tourists and host communities about preservation of the rural biodiversity and ecological balance. For any rural venture to be successful and especially in the case of rural tourism initiatives, the involvement and participation of the local community is of essence importance so that tourism initiatives are aligned with the needs and aspiration of the local community.

Block Development Officers (BDO) of Ri-Bhoi district

Interviewed on 17th, 21st and 23rd September 2020

In the state of Meghalaya, the tourism sector can contribute immensely in economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects. The state being blessed with abundant natural resources like its scenic landscapes, waterfalls, wildlife sanctuaries, caves, and rich bio-diversity forests. The need of the hour is to promote and preserve the natural resources through sustainable tourism practices. Along with the natural assets the state has a rich indigenous tribal cultural heritage which could be highlighted and showcased so that tourists have an enriching experience. Since tourism flow is mostly concentrated in an around Shillong city and centred around East Khasi Hills district so at times there has been cases of tourist footfall over the carrying capacity. In such cases some conflicts could arise between the tourists and the host communities. Hence it would be feasible to develop other tourist's destinations spread over other districts of the state and, to start alternative tourism forms like eco-tourism, rural tourism, village tourism etc. Ri-Bhoi district well connected with NH-40 and near Guwahati city has tremendous potential for development of alternative tourism forms. However, in developing or expansion of tourism initiatives in the fragile eco-systems the importance of responsible sustainable practices is pertinent to mitigate the ecological footprint of tourism activities and the involvement and participation of local communities in conservation efforts. To support the growth and expansion of tourism there is a need for adequate infrastructure development in terms of accessibility,

accommodation and catering services, tourist centres and proper signages so as to enhance the overall tourist experience and to appeal to different segments of tourists. To combat expansion and growth of tourism there would requirement of trained and skilled manpower, hence it is important for capacity building and training in the tourism sector especially for the local stakeholders to enhance in tourism related skills and to promote entrepreneurship. There is also a need to have an effective marketing and promotion strategy so that tourism circuits of the entire state could be promoted to create an awareness among all the segments of tourists about Meghalaya being an ideal tourist destination. With the tourism markets becoming very competitive, there is a requirement of aggressive marketing strategies through print, electronic, digital, and social media platforms. Collaborations are required in tourism business among various stakeholders, government agencies, local host communities and academic to foster effective policy formulation, community involvement and participation and to achieve inclusive development of the tourism sector in a sustainable manner. Some of the major challenges faced by the tourism sector in the state of Meghalaya is the infrastructure inadequacy, accessibility issues specially to remote areas, regulatory obstacles and most importantly the need for clear policies and guidelines. The need for extensive tourism related research covering the various aspects of tourism dynamics in the state of Meghalaya is required so that viable findings and suggestions could be arrived at to achieve sustainable tourism development.

Tourism Academicians

Interviewed on 18th, 19th, 21st and 23rd October 2020

Since Ri-Bhoi district is the main gateway for tourists arriving in the state of Meghalaya and most of the major tourist destinations is centred around East Khasi Hills district, there seems to be little disadvantage for Ri-Bhoi district in terms of being an important tourist hub. However, the district is blessed with vast array of tourism resources both natural and manmade. Initiation of alternative tourism forms like rural tourism, eco-tourism, village tourism, etc would be apt for Ri-Bhoi district primarily due to inadequate infrastructure development to cater to mass tourism forms and due to the fragile eco-systems. The districts unemployment level is quite high; hence the development of alternative tourism forms would boost economic development through generation of income and employment opportunities for the rural communities. Government schemes for rural development in the district along with

collaborations with stakeholders and local entrepreneurs may support for infrastructure development like hospitality services, transport networks and tourism amenities to appeal to attract tourists. The rural tourism initiatives in the four blocks of the district will help in community empowerment and socio-economic upliftment. The stakeholders operating tourism operations must be from the local communities so that the benefits are directed towards the community and the local economy. Rural development agencies both government and non-government should create awareness among the local rural communities through various capacity building programmes about the benefits of rural tourism schemes so that there is general development to uplift the socio-economic condition of the people living in these areas. Since the scale of rural tourism initiatives in village level is small and require nominal investments so local entrepreneurs could be motivated and required tourism infrastructure for tourism growth could be supported through various centrally and state government sponsored schemes. However, at initial stages of rural tourism initiatives implementation a lot of hand holding would be required from all stakeholders and there should be equitable benefits to the communities at large and the development and expansion should be through sustainable approach.

Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the five constituencies of Ri-Bhoi district

Interviewed on 11th, 21st, 22nd and 24th November 2020

The responses from the respondents were recorded through personal interviews via semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews and were analysed through content analysis tool. The contents recorded were categorised by using certain codes depending on related meaning and frequency of occurrences using MAXQDA-22 software tool. MAXQDA is a powerful qualitative data analysis software that enables content analysis, coding, text retrieval and data visualization. It supports various data types and office tools for analysing textual, audio, video and image data. The current tourism scenario in the state of Meghalaya and prospects and challenges of rural tourism in the study area were given more emphasis.

4.9.1: Tourism as a source of livelihood

Majority of the population of the state reside in rural areas and have very limited livelihood options, apart from depending primarily on agriculture or agrarian allied activities. Due to the rich tourism endowments mostly present in the rural and semi-

rural areas of the state, the rural folks do get an opportunity to be fully or partially involved in tourism operations. Due to multi-faceted characteristics of the tourism sector, rural folks with various degrees of skilled level could easily be involved and find employment opportunities in this sector. Tourism agencies both Government and private have been active in not only promoting tourism, developing tourism infrastructure but also developing the manpower resources to be absorbed in the sector through various capacity building programmes, skill enhancement courses and training. Tourism experts have shared the views that people from the regions are always hospitable and friendly and as result the youths of the state with basic hospitality trainings have already been working successfully not only other parts of India but also overseas. In a nutshell the tourism sector as opined by most of the respondents that it creates livelihood options for not only the urban skilled folks but also for the rural less skilled folks.

4.9.2: Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the picturesque landscape of the state

Meghalaya also known as the *Abode of Clouds* is a pristine northeast state of India. Since the attainment of the statehood in 1972, successive Governments have ensured development of the tourism sector with appropriate framing of tourism policies, tourism infrastructure development in the tourist circuits and marketing and promoting the tourism resources at travel marts at national and international forums. Abundant tourism resources like mesmerising waterfalls, soothing meadows, and valleys, cascading clear water bodies, diverse flora and fauna, magnificent cliffs, gorges, and canyons, root bridges, sacred groves, gigantic rock formations and many more, makes the state a must visit destinations. Apart from the picturesque landscapes the soothing climate during the summers and the heavy rainfall during the monsoons does appeal to a lot of tourists. With the advent of alternative tourism forms like eco-tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, the rural areas of the state are getting real time impetus through the initiations of alternative tourism initiatives. As more rural areas in the state have started some form of tourism initiatives, more and more mesmerising landscape are being showcased and highlighted. The state's major unique selling proposition (USP) for the tourism enhancement would be the picturesque landscapes. However, at times as shared by the respondents, that due to heavy foot fall of the tourists in certain tourist destinations, the fragile eco-system does get negatively impacted and the charm of the destinations seems to be faded away. Hence some kind of control mechanism is

suggested by many, and the operations of tourism aspects should well within the carrying capacities of these places. The tourism development in the state should be carried with a sustainable approach, so that these pristine places are good to visit and good to stay.

4.9.3: Rural Tourism Scenario in Ri-Bhoi district

A few decades ago, tourism development of the state of Meghalaya was primarily centred in and around the East Khasi District, however at present times the expansion of tourism development has not spread equally in all the districts of the state. Ri- Bhoi district the gateway to the other districts of the state have been in the tourism circuits and a few destinations in the district is gaining popularity. The form of tourism is gaining momentum is rural tourism and the district with its four blocks and vast rural tourism resources can be a major rural tourism hotspot in the coming days. The star attraction of Ri-Bhoi district is the *Umiam Lake*, popularly known as *Barapani* and many Government and Private resorts have opened around the preview of the lake offering a lot of water sports activities and theses resorts have become a destination. However, in recent times, rural tourism initiatives in some of the villages has been developed and are witnessing a steady foot fall of the tourists primarily from the northeast itself. *Umden* a small village in the *Umling* block of Ri-Bhoi district is gaining popularity among the rural tourism circuits and primarily known as the Eri Silk village of Northeast of India, apart from showcasing the rich handloom products, this village also has a sacred grove with abundance variety of rich flora and fauna and monoliths. The village also has a homestay facility with lot of activities for tourists. Likewise other villages in the different blocks of the district have initiated rural tourism initiatives like the famous strawberry village named *Sohliya* in *Umsning* block. Tourism experts have viewed that in Ri-Bhoi district, since there are no major towns, except Nongpoh and Byrnihat, tourism initiatives will be rural centric and with vast unexplored natural resources, there is tremendous scope for development of alternative tourism like rural tourism in the villages of the district. As majority of the population of the study area are residing in the rural areas and primarily depended on agrarian and agrarian allied activities, hence rural tourism initiatives will give the rural folks additional income opportunity.

4.9.4: Challenges of Rural Tourism Development in Ri-Bhoi district.

The primary issues for development of rural tourism in the study area are many folds. The main challenge would be to change the mindset of the rural folks and be more tourism receptive. It has been observed that the general perception of the local population is not very tourism centric, barring the few local tourism stake holders. Government and private agencies involved in tourism planning and development has been taking keen interest in creating awareness about the benefits of alternative tourism forms and addressing the key aspects about the holistic development the rural tourism initiatives will bring to the local economy and the local community. Another hurdle for tourism development in the rural areas would be development of basic infrastructures so that tourism initiatives can be initiated. Government's role is vital in development of infrastructures in the rural circuits. Meagre development of tourism infrastructures would be incomplete without the development of the human resources for the ever demanding and competitive tourism sector. Tourism operational experts needs to impart quality training and monitor the development of the human resource, rather than developing and imparting capacity training programmes just to fill up the attendance rolls. To get a reasonable business, the rural tourism stakeholders in the tourism circuits needs to network with other tourism bodies to maintain a constant demand of visitors. The vital aspects for development of tourism would be the marketing and promotional aspects and for the local rural tourism stakeholders it will not be viable to invest heavily on tourism promotions, hence Government and other private agencies dealing in tourism promotions need to collaborate with the local stake holders so that minimum promotional activities could be carried out. Finally, tourism experts have also raised the concern that over development of tourism should be checked as it could bring negative impacts, the carrying capacity and sustainable model approached should always be on the priority list in development and expansion of tourism in the fragile eco-systems of the rural areas of the study area.

4.10: SWOT Analysis of Rural Tourism in Ri-Bhoi District

SWOT acronym stands for strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats. The SWOT method originally was a business analysis model, but today it is used in other aspects as well such as health, education, community upliftment, tourism etc. The prime objective of the SWOT analysis is to aid in strategizing for strengthening on the strengths, beating the weaknesses, building on the opportunities, and diminishing the

threats. The SWOT model has two conditions i.e., internal, and external factors. Strengths and weaknesses are categorised as Internal factors , whereas opportunities and threats are related to the external factors , [218].

4.10.1: Strengths

- Ri-Bhoi district has tremendous tourism resources endowments.
- Since main source of the district is agriculture and allied activities- Alternate tourism initiatives like rural tourism or village tourism can be developed easily.
- The district has a rich and vibrant tribal cultural fabric to appeal to tourists from India and overseas.
- The district already has some prominent tourist destinations; hence it will not be very difficult to channelize the tourist itineraries to the villages of the district for rural tourism development.
- The biggest advantage of the district is the locational and accessibility logistics- especially from Guwahati city of Assam, along the NH-40.
- Since tourism development is still in a nascent stage in the district, hence the rurality of the district will be an advantage for rural tourism initiatives.
- Since large scale traditional weekly markets are still practices in the blocks of the districts-these markets could be an added advantages for tourists and host engagement both in economic and socio-cultural aspects.

4.10.2: Weaknesses

- Rural tourism activities are very limited, hence regular tourists are not very attracted in travelling long distances for limited tourism engagements.
- For tourism operations, there seems to lack of skilled and trained manpower.
- Since rural tourism circuits are little far from main tourist centres, hence tourists with limited time may avoid from travelling to these places.
- Local government agencies efforts to initiate or to support the rural tourism development in the rural villages are very insignificant, hence the rural folks despite abundant tourism resources in their domain are not motivated to develop rural tourism initiatives.

- Accessibility to the remote rural tourism circuits is a concern due to absence of proper road and other facilities.
- In the villages, the rural tourism basic infrastructures and amenities are not adequate and up to a certain standard, hence regular tourists are not repeat guests, leaving a few explorer or drifter tourists.
- The local community at large are not very tourist centric except a few local stake holders involved in tourism operations, hence tourist is at times not very comfortable and have a negative perception at times based on some stray incidents.
- Marketing and promotions of these rural tourism circuits are hardly done at any levels by stakeholders, hence most of the tourists are unaware of these destinations.
- Tourists or visitors' information centres are not present in block levels so as to give inputs to tourists enquires etc. about the places of interest.

4.10.3: Opportunities

- Ri-Bhoi district has tremendous tourism resource endowments which is conducive for the development of alternate tourism forms like rural tourism, village tourism, farm tourism etc.
- Some of the areas of Ri-Bhoi district has picturesque landscapes, which were widely unexplored areas and has great prospect for rural tourism initiatives.
- Since majority of the local inhabitants are involved in agrarian and allied activities, tourism development in village fronts can generate a variety of employment opportunities whether direct or indirect for the rural folks.
- Rural tourism development can also foster community involvement and participation and thereby fostering community bonding.
- The rich cultural fabric and important festivals of the inhabitants of the district can be highlighted in tourist itineraries so as to improve the flow of tourists.

- Meaningful tourist host engagement through rural tourism initiatives creates compassion, tolerance, and greater understanding among people from different demographic profiles.
- The villages engaging in rural tourism, or any other alternate forms of tourism can be a great escape for short vacations to break the hectic urban mundane and can be centres of peace and tranquillity.
- Tourism stakeholders at village level can form alliance with major tourism industry stakeholders to attract tourist to these rural tourism circuits.
- Effective tourism development in the rural areas fosters local economic growth and upliftment of the rural communities.
- Not great amount of investment is required to develop rural tourism initiatives as it is on small scales, hence local community members with guidance and support from tourism stake holders can start rural tourism entrepreneurial endeavours.
- Rural educational camps could be packaged for the students of social work and allied branches, where a steady flow of students from various colleges and universities could be achieved.

4.10.4: Threats

- Due to quick economic gains from tourism endeavours, villagers may disengage in agrarian and allied activities.
- Due to excessive tourism development, the fragile eco-system may negatively impact and may result in environmental imbalance.
- Due to frequent host tourist engagement, demonstration effect may set in, resulting in local communities aping for modern culture and lifestyles.
- Rapid tourism development can lead to the commodification of local culture and traditions. In effort to cater to tourists, communities may alter or even abandon their authentic practices, eroding their cultural identity and heritage.
- Rural areas often have limited resources, such as water, energy and waste management facilities. A sudden influx of tourists can both additional strain on

these resources, potentially leading to scarcity, pollution and unsustainable practices.

- The benefits of rural tourism development may not always be equitably distributed among local residents. There is a risk that only a few individuals or businesses benefit from tourism leading to economic disparities and exploitation of the work force.
- As tourism grows, there might be increased demand for land and property for hotels, restaurants and other facilities. These can lead to the displacement of local residents, rising property prices and loss of land for agricultural or residential purposes.
- When tourists from different cultural backgrounds visit rural areas, there is potential for clashes between the tourist's expectation and the local way of life. This can lead to misunderstanding, conflicts and even social tensions.

Summary

This chapter gives a detail overview of the tourism scenario in the state of Meghalaya and also highlights the tremendous potential of rural tourism initiatives in the study area. The chapter also gives a brief zest of the geographical outline of the study area and how it is conducive for rural tourism development in the study area. The chapter also gives a detail outline of the respondents involved in the research. The study area involves the 4 C&RD blocks of Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. A total of 440 respondents responded from 110 villages of the district. The study also elaborates the tourist destinations in Ri-Bhoi districts and lastly in the chapter a Content Analysis and a SWOT Analysis was done on the tourism scenario of the state and prospects and issues of rural tourism development in Ri-Bhoi district.