Chapter 5

Urban and Rural Ecotourism in and Around Bolpur: A Study of Destination Marketing and Challenges – Ecotourism Practices in West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

Bolpur is a district town in Birbhum, West Bengal. This place is famous for Viswabharti in Shanti Niketan where a new school of thought was initiated by Rabindranath Tagore. Later on, the place became an epicenter for Bengali education and culture. Though the place has other noteworthy academic and cultural records, this place has immense scope for urban and rural ecotourism. With the blend of rural Bengal and its rich artistic and spiritual exuberance, Birbhum offers a lot. Now, as a mean of entrepreneurship and employment, ecotourism can provide the local people with new alternative scope and opportunities. This chapter is an attempt to revisit and reorganize destination Bolpur with a sustainable marketing orientation for ecotourism. Further attempt is also made to support industry leaders and tourism academicians interested to invest or study for business and commerce. Familiarization trip has been conducted along with a survey for the tourists to better understand their expectations and perceptions.

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INTRODUCTION

Travel & tourism are among the world’s fastest growing industries and are the major source of foreign exchange earnings for many developing countries. Tourism has emerged as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The increasing economic importance of tourism has captured the attention of most countries. Bolpur-Santiniketan is a municipality and headquarters of Bolpur subdivision in Birbhum District in the state of West Bengal, India. It is 145 km north of Kolkata and is best known for its proximity to Visva Bharati, the university set up by the Nobel laureate poet Rabindranath Tagore. Given its proximity to Santiniketan and Sriniketan, it is one of the seats of culture and education in West Bengal. About 150 years ago, Bolpur was a small village under supur porgana. Kalikapur a known place of Bolpur was the origin of the typical village in past. There were no rail lines, no developed roads. Paddy land were seen around the village. “Lalmati” (red soil) was found everywhere. Many villages named Sian, Dihipara, Khosakdampur, Paruldanga, Goalpara, Ballavpur, Bandhagara, Surul, Supur, Raipur were the boundary line around Bolpur.

East India company established the first railway line in 1859, when the Sahebganj loopline was extended beyond the river Ajay. Bolpur railway station was established in 1860. Along with this, court, police station, sub registry office, etc., were established in old Bolpur. Then people started residing here. Christian missionaries came; they founded a church that was known as Mission compound. Paddy storage house, stationary shops, grocery shops, garment shops etc. were on the east side near Bolpur railway station. About 19 husking machines were here at that time.

Maharshi Debendranath Tagore established a centre of religious mediation in Bolpur. Rabindranath Tagore established Visva Bharati Viswavidyalaya. These were the main reasons for the huge extension, development and popularity of Bolpur.

Provincial names proved the upcoming gradual development of Bolpur. Kachharipatti is just beside court house, Trishulapatti is the commercial paddy trading centre. Kalibaraoartyala was the service place for Bolpur set up by some initiative people. Netaji made a conference. Here Harisava stood against “Bramhopasana”. Every week these two conferences were held in Bolpur. Bijaykrishna Ghoswami, Shihnavi Shastri, Shasibhusan Basu like many wisemen gave religious advice. Beside this, prayer committee was set up. There are direct trains from Bolpur to Howrah, Gaya, Jalpaiguri, Guwahati, New Delhi and Kolkata.

Bus and private cars are available from Durgapur City Centre Bus Stop and soon from Santragachi Railway Station in Kolkata.

The district lies between 28° 32’ 30” and 24° 35’ 00” North latitude and 88° 01’ 40” and 87° 05’ 25” East longitude. The district’s immediate neighbours are Murshidabad in the east and northeast, Burdwan in the south and south-east and
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