

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India
Central Nodal Agency Rural Tourism and Rural Homestay
Case Study on Nationally Recognised Best Tourism Village, 2023
Village - Reiek, Mizoram, Gold Category

1. Village Details

The small hamlet sits at the base of the impressive Reiek Mountains, located 30 km west of Aizawl, making it a prominent tourist spot in Mizoram. Reiek's prominence in rural tourism began with the initiation of the annual Anthurium Festivals by the State government in 2006. This festival has evolved into one of the most celebrated events in Mizoram, drawing many visitors to Reiek and its nearby areas. The Tourism Department maintains a tourist resort at the foot of Reiek Mountain. Furthermore, Reiek serves as a central hub for eco-adventure tourism in Mizoram. The village showcases traditional Mizo huts, providing visitors with a glimpse into the proud history of the resilient highland community.

2. Challenge

Limited healthcare facilities, with only a sub-center and Primary Health Center, pose challenges in medical emergencies, requiring a 30 km journey to Aizawl. Despite economic gains from tourism, the benefits of tourism could be maximized by fostering entrepreneurship and local ventures like homestays, farm stays and responsible souvenir projects. The dependence on rainwater harvesting for water supply may be vulnerable to changing weather patterns, affecting sustainability.

3. Tourism Assets

Reiek village boasts rich tourism assets, centered around the majestic Reiek Mountain. Reiek and its nearby tourist sites attract 120,000 visitor yearly. Reiek Mountain offers breathtaking views, trekking opportunities, and caves with historical significance. Community-driven initiatives include eco-adventure tourism, a tourist resort, and a vibrant marketplace, fostering sustainable rural tourism.

4. Development Approach

I. Whole of Government Approach

In Reiek village, a whole-of-government approach drives tourism development. The State and Central Governments collaborate to build infrastructure like resorts, adventure parks, and convention centers. Government-supported programs empower locals, with the Reiek Tourism Board uniting village councils and NGOs. This partnership ensures a coordinated effort for sustainable tourism, benefitting the entire community.

II. Involvement of the Community in Business Development

Reiek Village is a fine example which shows that consistent and cooperative efforts of local community and government agencies is capable of bringing about a total change in the village scenario. As pointed out before, there was hardly any tourist footfall in Reiek prior to 2006, however, the scenario has completely changed now, Reiek has become the top tourist destinations in the State. It sets example for other villages within the State to emulate its success wherein many villages are now adopting and following their examples. The immense popularity of Reiek as a rural tourism destination encourages and motivates other villages and towns in Mizoram to emulate their development model. A clear example of this is that Ailawng village, a village located just before reaching Reiek, has taken up tourism development initiatives and has formed Ailawng Village Eco-Tourism Development Society (AVEDSOC) to promote eco-tourism sites in their village. Villages like Chawngtlai and Khawhai in Khawzawl District and others have also started initiatives to promote tourism. The concept of homestays in rural areas of Mizoram is also starting to take off with many villagers now opening their homes for visitors.

III. Private and Public Coordination and Multi-Stakeholder participation

The major stakeholders in the promotion of rural tourism at Reiek are the State Government, the Central Government, Tourism Service Providers, and the local communities. The State Government with the financial assistance of the Central Government has created many tourist infrastructures to promote and develop rural tourism at Reiek such as Reiek Tourist Resort, Adventure Theme Park, Convention Centre for MICE tourism, Typical Mizo Village, Outdoor Camp Site, Trekking Route, Amphitheatre, Viewing Galleries, Zip lines, Mountain Biking trail etc. Reiek is also the venue for the annual Anthurium Festival organized to promote tourism in the State. Events like Adventure Festival, Freedom Trek and others are held regularly to promote the destination. The destination has also been promoted in various social media platforms maintained by the State Tourism Department as well as in publicity brochures and leaflets. All these activities are undertaken with the support and cooperation of tourism service providers and local communities who take an active role in planning and organizing promotional events.

IV. Environmental Sustainability

The local community at Reiek has formed Reiek Tourism Development Board with members drawn from the Village Council, Young Mizo Association Reiek Branch and other NGOs within the village. The Board takes up issues relating to conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources of the village. It encourages the villagers to adopt and advocate sustainable practices through dissemination of information and conduct awareness programme such as cleanliness drive, beautification of the village, tree plantation drive, campaign against single use plastic etc. Reiek Peak is one of the most popular tourist spots in the State with hundreds of visitors during holidays and weekends. Reiek Tourism Board ensures that trash and garbage are not left behind by these visitors to maintain the pristine beauty of the place. The local

community also undertakes planting of local flowers and trees near the peak and conduct cleaning of the area once a week.

V. Social Inclusion

Young locals undergo training to offer services as guiding trekking, caving and operating adventure equipment like zip lines, high rope courses and obstacle courses. These individuals come together to form the Reiek Adventure Club, providing them with an additional source of income. The village has established a platform where women engage in entrepreneurial roles, managing homestays, eateries, vendors stalls, art and craft, pickle making etc. Women predominately oversee vendor markets within the village. The Women's Self-Help Group in Reiek actively promotes social and financial inclusion by providing training and encouraging entrepreneurship among village women.

Rural Tourism model at Reiek focus on social inclusion and equality providing opportunities for women and youths to undertake entrepreneurship jobs and gain financial independence. During the Anthurium festival 2012, samples were taken to know the fact of the economic profile of the village. The survey revealed that more than 74% of the businesses belong to the female workers.

Reiek also epitomizes the social and economic sustainability through the agricultural success story. The cultivation of Reiek turmeric has not only become a primary income source but has also fostered social inclusion. Almost every family in Reiek and its surrounding villages is involved in turmeric farming, transcending socio-economic barriers. The introduction of high-yield Reiek turmeric in 2004 catalyzed this shift, providing an attractive and lucrative opportunity for both poor and marginal farmers. Furthermore, government support, including incentives from the Department of Horticulture, has bolstered this endeavour. The cultivation of Reiek turmeric symbolizes a harmonious blend of tradition, innovation, and social cohesion in Mizoram's agricultural landscape.

4. Key Strategic Interventions to Develop Rural Tourism

I. Formation of Village Tourism Committee

The local community at Reiek has formed Reiek Tourism Development Board with members drawn from the Village Council, Young Mizo Association Reiek Branch and other NGOs within the village. The Board takes up issues relating to conservation and protection of natural and cultural resources of the village. It encourages the villagers to adopt and advocate sustainable practices through dissemination of information and conduct awareness program such as cleanliness drive, beautification of the village, tree plantation drive, campaign against single use plastic etc. Reiek Peak is one of the most popular tourist spots in the State with hundreds of visitors during holidays and weekends. Reiek Tourism Board ensures that trash and garbage are not left behind by these visitors to maintain the pristine beauty of the place. The local community also undertakes planting of local flowers and trees near the peak and conduct cleaning of the area once a week.

II. Developing Rural Homestays

Reiek village embraces rural homestays, providing an authentic Mizo experience. Local families open their homes to visitors, fostering cultural exchange. The Reiek Tourism Board supports this initiative, training villagers in hospitality. Homestays offer a unique glimpse into Mizo life, promoting community engagement and creating additional livelihood opportunities for residents.

III. Establishment of Community Hall in the village

Reiek village establishes two community halls, essential for social functions. These halls, supported by the Reiek Tourism Board, serve as community gathering spaces. They host events, fostering local camaraderie and showcasing Mizo culture. The halls contribute to the village's infrastructure, enhancing the overall experience for both residents and tourists.

5. Impact of Rural Tourism Development in Reiek

I. Economic Impact

The tiny village is located at the foothill of the mighty Reiek Mountain 30 kms to the west of Aizawl. Reiek is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the State of Mizoram. Reiek, as a driver for Rural Tourism started when the State Government started the annual Anthurium Festival here in 2006. This festival becomes one of the most popular festivals of the State attracting huge number of visitors to Reiek and its surrounding regions. There is a tourist resort maintained by Tourism Department at the base of Reiek Mountain. Reiek is also the main hub of Eco Adventure tourism in the State of Mizoram. Reiek has a typical Mizo village consisting of the distinctive traditional huts of the Mizos giving the visitors a peek into the glorious past of the valiant highlanders.

II. Development of local enterprises

Reiek village prioritizes the development of local enterprises, empowering residents economically. The Reiek Tourism Board collaborates with the State Government to establish vendor markets, providing a platform for local artisans and businesses. This initiative enhances livelihoods, encourages entrepreneurship, and creates a vibrant marketplace, contributing to the economic growth of the village.

III. Promotion and Conservation of cultural resource

The development of tourism and related activities in Reiek involves active participation from the local communities. The community members hold a positive perspective on tourism, allowing the government to use community-owned land and properties for tourism development without any charges. To oversee these efforts, the local communities have established the Reiek Tourism Board, comprising

members from the Village Council and various NGOs in the village. This Board takes on various responsibilities for tourism development, such as organizing awareness campaigns, cleanliness initiatives, beautification projects, tree plantation efforts, anti-single-use plastic campaigns, and the preservation of forests and cultural resources. It maintains constant collaboration with the State Government across all facets of tourism development and promotion, actively coordinating and organizing events with the State Government to boost tourism in the area.

6. Contribution to Sustainable Development Goals

- Empowerment of Reiek Tourism Board by the Government to ensure they play a more aggressive role in the conservation of natural and cultural resources.
- Conduct awareness programs and support a ban on single-use plastic.
- Organize workshops, seminars, and skill-building programs in association with the Government of Mizoram to combat the knowledge gap.
- Providing more platforms for local communities to earn additional sources of livelihood opportunities.

This development strategy will empower the local community to take an active role in the protection and conservation of their cultural and natural resources. Local communities are the backbone of sustainable and responsible tourism. It will encourage them to adopt environmentally friendly practices and educate visitors to emulate the same for example taking water bottles and refilling them instead of using single-use plastic bottles. Making local communities as the main stakeholder will automatically instill a sense of responsibility to protect and preserve their natural and cultural resources.

Local communities are deeply involved in promoting responsible and sustainable tourism. They've regularly conducted and taken part in cleanliness drives, and awareness campaigns and promoted a ban on single-use plastic.