



RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract

The paper analyze the role of rural tourism for the development of rural areas, The study analyzed how the different types of tourist product diversifications influence the development possibilities of studied rural areas in India. The government should sponsor private Sector to promote tourism in rural areas. For upgrading the rural tourism government requires to understand the rural location, demography, socio-culture, financial and political background of that area. How we can involve the rural citizens to improve their socio-economic condition. The objective of this paper is to present an update on rural tourism expansion & development in India. Rural tourism is rising in terms of number of visitors and the government of India should focus on it as an engine of growth.

Keywords: Rural tourism, socio-economic system, system stability, system resilience, system robustness, system integrity



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INTRODUCTION

Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. As per Ministry of Tourism statistics (2016), India have received 8.80 million foreign tourist with annual growth rate of 9.7% and earned 1, 54,146 crore rupees from travel and tourism segment. Its share in International Tourist Arrivals is 1.18% and rank in International Tourist Arrivals is 25th. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of Urban lifestyles have led to a “counter urbanization” Syndrome. This has led to growing interest in the rural areas. At the same time this trend of urbanization has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the total areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas. Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels

of Awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness. In the developed countries, this has resulted in a new style of tourism of visiting village settings to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. This concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism. Under this Scheme, thrust will be to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions. Key geographic regions would be identified for development and promotion of Rural Tourism. The implementation would be done through a Convergence Committee headed by the District Collector. Activities like improving the environment, hygiene, infrastructure etc. would be eligible for assistance. Apart from providing financial assistance the focus would be to tap the resources available under schemes of Deptt. of Rural Development, State Govts. and other concerned Departments of the Govt. of India.

The development of infrastructure in rural areas having potential for tourism is being supported under the existing scheme of destination development. The objective is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages, which have core competence in art & craft, handloom, and textiles as also an asset base in the natural environment. The intention is to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. Under this scheme, the thrust is to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions, thereby stopping the exodus from rural to urban areas. The Village Level Council (VLC) is the interactive forum for local community participation in work plan implementation, further supported by other community level institutions. For the visitor, whose expenditure creates revenue for host community service providers; rural tourism adds value through packaged programmes in art & craft imparted by skilled local artisans. Village entertainment groups unveil local history and culture, natural and oral treasures. The visitor thus comes face to face with India's rural traditions. So far, 153 rural tourism projects in 29 States/Union Territories have been sanctioned by the Ministry of Tourism including 36 rural sites where UNDP has supported for capacity building.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To collect information on rural tourism and to identify different types of rural tourism.

2. To provide an overview on driving forces and benefits of rural tourism.
3. To identify issues for future research and development for rural tourism.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Rural tourism is a multi-faced movement that takes place in surroundings. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural area.”

The definition of ‘rural’ in Cyprus is based upon a dichotomous (rural-urban) concept. The Statistical Service of Cyprus defines rural areas as „all areas outside urban agglomerations of the district towns covered by the Local Town Plans as defined by the Department of Town Planning’ (ESPON, 2003)..

Rural Tourism has a long history of expand themselves for leisure purposes. Thomas Cook, the pioneer of tour packages conducted its first excursions to country areas (Williams, Han & Qualls, 1998). However before the 19th century few people other than the upper class travelled. This trend changed by the mid-19th century. Invention of the railways, availability of free time, increase in disposable income and other technological advancements (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997) all contributed to luring the middle class to experience holidays once considered the domain of the elite. The motivation for these early tourists were either the urge to experience the popular images that they had been subjected to or in some industrialized regions, the working population (ex-migrants) visiting their rural roots in the countryside. Hungary is a classic example of the latter (Rátz and Puczko, 2002).

Over time researchers have continually added to understanding the activities that include rural tourism. The list includes interest in farms, nature, adventure, health, education, arts, and heritage and experiencing living history such as rural customs, folklore, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage.

Bansal and Gautam (2003) in their study described the role of heritage tourism in Himachal Pradesh. They stated that globally 37 per cent tourism was cultural motivated and growing at the rate of 15 per cent annually. They considered that Himachal Pradesh had large number of heritage sites with status of first heritage village of India. They also highlighted four types of heritage tourism products in Himachal Pradesh namely natural, manmade but not for tourists, manmade and built to attract visitors and lastly special events. The authors described that lack of resources, lack of expertise, lack of ready product, mutual lack of knowledge and minimal marketing were the main reasons affecting heritage tourism in Himachal Pradesh. They

suggested the introduction of entrance fees from tourists visiting heritage centers and separate heritage management board to preserve and promote the heritage sites.

WHAT IS RURAL TOURISM?

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. Rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments.

TYPES OF RURAL TOURISM

Tourism is synthesized from mass and alternative tourism.

Mass tourism is characterized by large numbers of people seeking culture holidays in popular resort destinations.

Alternative tourism is sometimes referred to as —special interest tourism or responsible tourism and it’s usually taken to mean alternative forms of tourism which give emphasis on the contact and understanding of inhabitants’ way of living and the local natural environment. The diversity of attractions included within rural tourism includes heritage tourism (sometimes referred to as cultural heritage tourism), nature-based tourism/ecotourism, agri tourism, as well as partnership-based approaches, such as scenic byways and heritage areas. Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past.

A second major type of rural tourism activity is nature-based tourism/ecotourism (sometimes called recreation-based tourism), which refers to the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active

(increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities.

A third major form of tourism is agritourism, which refers to, —the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation¹⁴. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including farmers' markets, —petting farms, roadside stands, and —pick-your-own operations; engaging in overnight farm or ranch stays and other farm visits; and visiting agriculture-related festivals, museums, and other such attractions¹⁵.

DRIVING FORCES IN RURAL TOURISM

These forces have been identified by many authors and can be summarized:

1. Tourism generating regions for rural tourism are highly developed and urbanized – the stresses of urban living and the remoteness from the natural environment has created a desire for escape from the monoculture of city living. Rural locations offer an idealized release from stress and the opportunity to re-engage with a simpler, quieter way of life that offers rest and relaxation.
2. Demand fuelled by media, over-familiarity and congestion with traditional tourist resorts and increased interest in alternative attractions – with its voracious appetite for content and the resultant over-exposure of many traditional tourist destinations, the media have sought out new and interesting tourism experiences for their lifestyle productions.
3. Increasing environmental awareness and interest in the relationship between humans and the environment. Green issues have raised the attractiveness of rural experiences as ecologically sustainable tourism.
4. Transport, communications, and the removal of political and economic barriers to travel have facilitated accessibility of rural areas.
5. Increasing numbers of Free Independent Travelers and world-wide long-haul travel – many more travelers are FIT than in the past due to the increased capacity, especially in long-haul transport modes. When combined with increasing discretionary incomes, greater awareness of the range of experiences on offer, and greater mobility through private transport, the accessibility and attractiveness of rural destinations has been dramatically improved.

6. A move toward short-break holidays - income and leisure time have changed so that shorter breaks with greater choice of leisure activities are sought. Changing work patterns have increased the popularity of shorter breaks that minimize the absence from work and the effect of absences on work flow and involvement.
7. Better-educated travelers have increased interest in outdoor recreation, eco-tourism and special interest tourism - individualism drives a need for unique experiences and rural tourism, because of its fragmented nature and diversity of offerings, can satisfy this need.
8. An increased interest in heritage can be satisfied through rural tourism as rural areas are often the repositories of remnant heritage.
9. Rural areas are perceived as healthier, offering fresher air, cleaner water and the opportunity for outdoor recreation. Rural areas offer fresh, and sometimes, specialty foods.

BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism, while still only a minority tourism market, is making a valuable contribution to rural economies. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of jobs, contributions towards funding conservation, encouragement to the adoption of new working practices, and the injection of a new vitality into sometimes weakened economies. Potentially rural tourism promises some of the following benefits to rural development:

Job retention

Rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. It can also provide additional income for farmers, and, in some cases, for foresters and fisherman. Job retention is not as politically glamorous as job creation, but, by helping the viability of small communities, it is critical to the survival of marginal areas. Studies of rural Austria, Sweden and Ireland have documented the role of tourism in job retention.

Job creation

Job creation typically occurs in the hotel and catering trades, but can also take place in transport, retailing, and in information/heritage interpretation.

New Business Opportunities

Tourism generates new opportunities for industry¹⁸. Even those rural businesses not directly involved in tourism can benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist facilities where local foods can be used as part of the tourism offering in a locality¹⁹. Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complementary businesses such as service stations and new businesses are created to cater to tourist needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts/crafts.

Opportunities for Youth

The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited to the energies and enthusiasm of young people. Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct involvement in running tourism businesses, especially those within small communities.

Retention

Visitor information services can be provided by existing outlets, such as shops, thus increasing income flows if payment is made for acting as information outlets. Services can also benefit by the additional customers which visitors provide. Finally, tourism's importance to national economies can strengthen the political case for subsidies to help retain services.

Community diversification

Community diversification *is* an important activity in many upland and climatically marginal regions. Forest regions have suffered serious socio-economic problems in recent years, partly because of the mechanization of tree felling and processing, and partly because of falling prices following reduced timber demand. Rural tourism can assist forestry by diversifying income sources for forest communities if the special qualities of the forest environment for recreational use are realized and developed.

Rural Tourism Enhances and Revitalizes Community Pride

Tourism encourages conformity to an ideal image of community which can result in growth of personal ties and community solidarity. Thus the basis for community solidarity shifts from shared cultural background to shared image. Amenities play a fundamental role in shaping a community's identity and pride and so the potential of tourism for improvements to facilities and amenities has positive implications for community pride, particularly rural museums as an important repository of rural culture.

Preservation of Rural Culture and Heritage

In rural tourism the 'sense of place' is a fundamental element in both the tourists' and host community's feelings of what makes the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage.

Increase arts and crafts sale

Arts and crafts have a special place in the cultural heritage of regions and nations. Many commentators have noted that tourism can assist arts and crafts, both by recognizing their importance, and by purchasing craft products. Income flows from these activities are well documented. Support between the arts and tourism can be a two-way process. Many communities now use arts and crafts festivals as a marketing mechanism to encourage visitors to come to their areas.

Environmental improvements

Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities. These help develop pride of place, important in retaining existing population and businesses, and in attracting new enterprises and families.

Key success factors

1. Making use of established national agencies, brands and quality standards.
2. Working with a few motivated enterprises to improve quality.
3. Actively targeting the group market.
4. A successful organizational model, based on a development agency with funding and a cooperative marketing agency.
5. Effective use of the internet.
6. Strong involvement of the local community in initiatives.
7. A visitor centre as a tangible focus for visitor and business services.
8. An emphasis on product development, backed by grants and training, leading to improved physical and service standards

WHAT MAKES RURAL TOURISM SUCCESSFUL?

Community involvement

For an area to become a rural tourism destination, not just a stop off point, structured networks and collaborative agreements between public and private sector actors are essential. Community involvement is a key part of the equation.

Proximity to a generating market or gateway

Rural tourism destinations must be easily accessible to potential visitors through reliable transportation systems.

Product Development (Tourism planning, infrastructure, and activities)

This should include sound tourism development planning, investment in tourism-related infrastructure, and a range of activities to satisfy the diverse tastes of visitors. Work to support rural tourism infrastructure development by providing technical assistance, facilitation and promotion, and economic impact analysis support.

A visitor center

Rural communities must have a welcoming center where visitors can seek information on local attractions, activities, and accommodations, and ask questions of people who are knowledgeable about the area.

Partnership Collaboration /Cultural Heritage Welcome Centers

Key to maximizing rural tourism marketing efforts is the need to create and leverage potential partnerships with cultural/heritage segments. It may help to provide value-added services for consumers, including providing directions and creating awareness for rural tourism locations and historical/cultural activities—successfully differentiating them from other destinations.

A quality brand and regional label

Brand identity may increase awareness of the destination among its identified target market segments. A brand is the way in which consumers perceive or distinguish a destination. To be effective, a brand should unify all of rural's functional (recreation and events) and emotional benefits (fun, culture and solitude) under one all-inclusive identity (image and positioning statement) to create an indelible impression in the mind of the consumer.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Generally, rural tourism is an opportunity for rural development however; it may not be as great as some perceive and it may not be suitable for every location. For example, local tourism impact varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force qualifications, characteristics and seasonality issues. Therefore, the development of rural tourism offers potential solutions to many of the problems facing rural areas. As a

result there has been an increasing dependence on and support for rural tourism in the hope of achieving the potential benefits.

The extent to which these benefits are realized remains the subject of much debate. Certainly, there is evidence to support the claim that, as a vehicle of economic growth and diversification, tourism can make an important contribution to rural incomes both at the level of the tourism operators and more widely in the local economy.

Rural Tourism events have been found to increase business, income and employment and are seen to assist with social and economic development. Tourism can be an important source of jobs for rural communities. Tourism not only offers business opportunities to local residents, but it can also enhance local quality of life. Tourism can also support local culture in rural areas by encouraging restoration of local and regional historic sites.

However, as a general rule, rural communities are challenged to take full advantage of the tourism industry due to lack of sufficient infrastructure to support year round visitors. Therefore, in a bid to exploit the cash injection that tourism provides, with minimal additional resources, many rural communities have opted to host tourism events on a yearly basis.

Conclusions

Rural areas in India have been traditionally faced with significant structural constraints but at the same time, certain features that have caused their isolation have contributed to their status as areas of natural beauty, unspoilt environment and rich cultural heritage. In these areas, rural tourism and related activities could be considered as the main axis of a rural development strategy that can protect the fragile socio-economic fabric in the short run, and create sustainable development in the long run. More specifically, its capacity to create strong interrelationships and synergies with food manufacture and agriculture promotes rural vitality and strengthens the production capacity at local level. Therefore, it is necessary the policy makers to take considerably into consideration rural tourism dynamics when designing rural development policy interventions.

Recommendations and Suggestions

1. Improvement of the surroundings of the village. This would include activities like landscaping, development of parks, fencing, compound wall etc.
2. Improvements to roads within the Panchayat limits. This shall not include any major road which connects the village.
3. Providing for improvement in solid waste management and sewerage management.

4. Construction of Wayside Amenities.
5. Procurement of equipments directly related to tourism, like Water Sports, Adventure Sports, Eco-friendly modes of transport for moving within the tourism zone.

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