

Rural Tourism in India

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades there has been a tremendous growth in Indian tourism. India has considerable potential in tourism which is known and appreciated around the globe. India has had a rich and ancient history which has left behind several monuments and sites along with numerous archaeological finds which are of interest to the world tourists. One important category of tourism in India is rural tourism.

Government of India explains Rural Tourism as “Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefitting 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 that 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 pre-dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition.”

Rural tourism is a recent offshoot of tourism sector that has grown up to be a potential business in its own space. Rural tourism is a form of nature based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favoring the local communities socially and economically. It is a very important tool towards rural development. With proper planning and implementation, rural tourism can prove to economically, culturally and socially strengthen the rural communities.

Tourist attractions and their influence on handicrafts are the main factors for attracting tourism and consequently it increasing occupation in rural areas. Indian handicrafts particularly, jewellery, carpets, leather goods, ivory and brass work are the main shopping items of foreign tourists. Tourism creates jobs, thus stimulating economic growth, and can improve the standard of living for those living in tourism-targeted area especially rural areas in India.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, National Tourism Policy, Positive and Negative Impact, Heritage, Culture

Introduction

Over the past few decades there has been a tremendous growth in Indian tourism. India has considerable potential in tourism which is known and appreciated around the globe. India has had a rich and ancient history which has left behind several monuments and sites along with numerous archaeological finds which are of interest to the world tourists. One important category of tourism in India is rural tourism. The Ministry of Tourism had launched the scheme for rural tourism with the intention to benefit the local community economically and socially. Although rural tourism is a new concept in India, it has within a short period of time been undertaken in several rural areas in the country, and has transformed the local communities.

Tourism may be considered as an organized, purposeful and definite lust to wander on the part of man. Thus, human mobility and tourism have close ties since time immemorial. According to the then World Tourism Organization i.e., International Union of Official Travel Organization (IUOTO), “a tourist is a person traveling for a period of 24 hours or more in a country other than that in which he usually resides”. The Century Dictionary defines “a tourist is one who travels for pleasure visiting a number of places to see the scenery sights etc”. Whereas, most of the social scientist propounds that, “A tourist is a person who spends money and visits another country for a period of not less than six months for legitimate, non immigrant and certain purpose such as sight-seeing, recreation, sports, health, study, pilgrimage, business, official duties, conferences, expeditions, mission, photography, shooting, film- shooting, family reasons and the like”.

In the modern age of science when distances are not measured in terms of kilometers but in hours, the length and breadth of the globe has been wonderfully reduced, industrialization and urbanization cultivated the opprobrium and monotony in the minds of humanity the need to understand one another has assumed great importance; “Tourism” says **Dr. Radhakrishan**, “*widens our horizons, promotes understanding, stimulates travel and fosters friendship*”. Moreover tourism educates our minds, innovates the isolation and egotism and provides the first-hand knowledge of different nations and the people.

Concept of rural tourism:

Different scholars defined Rural Tourism differently in different scholarly debates but they failed to arrive at any general agreement that could be universally accepted (Pearce 1989; Bramwell 1994; Seaton et al. 1994). Early researchers like Keller (1990), Greffe (1992) indicated that a

simple definition of rural tourism is inadequate for many purposes. H. Grolleau defined Rural Tourism as a concept that includes all sort of tourism activities taking place in rural areas. But a number of scholars have opposed it saying that ‘a trip with a carriage or a picnic or other activity carried out as same day excursion in a remote countryside cannot be considered as Rural Tourism.’

Aref et al. (2009) stated that rural tourism can reinvigorate the conventional concepts and views on tourism and it can bring a new dimension to the sustainable development concept. The term “Rural Tourism” is composed of two terms: ‘Rural’ and ‘Tourism’. The term ‘Rural’ is viewed differently from one country to another (Randall, 1985; Robinson, 1990).

Best & Rogers (1973) defined ‘Rural’ as ‘the rural lands under agriculture, forest and woodland, as well as wild uncultivated tracts in a natural or semi-natural state’. Whereas, ‘Tourism’ is acknowledged as an economic activity that is characterized by involvement of tourists who are facilitated by a set of tourist facilities. Cook (2007) stated that tourism should be assimilated into the environment and the local culture of an area. Most probably the simplest definition of Rural Tourism is that it is an activity that takes place in the countryside (Lane 1994, Reichel et al., 2000). But this definition does not include the complexity of the activity and the different forms and meanings those were developed at the different time in different countries (Bandyopadhyay, Kerstetter, 2003). Oppermann (1997), argued that rural tourism can be defined as ‘tourism in a nonurban territory where human activity is going on and primarily agriculture’. According to Negrusa (2007), the rural people offer such form of tourism along with small-scale accommodation units and ‘the implication of important components and customs of life’. Such form of tourism showcases rural life, promotes culture and heritages of rural locations and at the same time benefits the host community economically and socially. Rural Tourism is multifaceted and may entail different forms of tourism.’ There are a variety of terms such as farm tourism, agro-tourism, soft tourism, ecotourism etc. are used to describe tourism in rural areas’ (Beeton, 2006). Van der Ploeg (2000) suggested an integrated rural tourism model. Rural tourism and local economy both are interdependent and it is considered as a key strategy player for the regional development (Cawley & Gillmor, 2007; Saxena et al., 2007; Fleisher & Falenstein, 2000).

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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 that 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 pre-dominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and tradition.”

Tourism today has grown into a responsible global industry. The Rural tourism has great potentialities in attracting tourists of various interests as it is a mix of various tourism concepts. It provides everything in single package and works in non-urban setting with rural essence for the benefit of local community while preserving rural assets, values and heritage.

Major types of Rural Tourism in India:

- **Agricultural Tourism:** To explore more about the agricultural industry and how farmers work with crops.
- **Cultural Tourism:** To allow tourists to be immersed in local culture related activities, like rituals and festivals.
- **Nature Tourism:** Responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people.
- **Adventure Tourism:** Any constructive activity which tests the endurance of both a person and his equipment to its extreme limit is termed as Adventure.
- **Food Routes:** Where wanderlust meets the variety that persists in our cuisine. This tourism is all about food and knowing more about different staples of different places.
- **Community Eco-tourism:** Where tourism is for a purpose. It is a rather responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local people.
- **Ethno-tourism:** To expand the horizons to view different cultures. It is essentially to know more about various ethnic and cultural lifestyles and beliefs.

Increasing Interest in Rural Tourism:

- Rural tourism helps to garner knowledge on agriculture, farming, local governance, etc.
- Rural tourism helps to remove myths about rural lifestyle that may exist in urban minds like villages are unhygienic, rural life is unsafe, etc.

- Rural tourism will help a person to explore the vast diversity that breathe in the interiors of India.

National Tourism Policy:

National Tourism Policy was formulated in 1982 in a closed economy with stringent licensing procedures. The policy however did not recognize the role of private sector and due to its formulation in the closed economy, foreign investment in tourism sector was not encouraged. Further, the policy did not adequately address the domestic tourism. To lay emphasis on tourism and address the loopholes in the previous policy, Government of India formulated National Tourism Development Policy in 2002. The main objectives of the policy were:

- To position tourism as a major engine of economic growth;
- To harness the direct and multiplier effects for employment and poverty eradication in an environmentally sustainable manner.
- To focus on domestic tourism as a major driver of tourism growth.
- To position India as one of the global brand to reap off benefits from the global tourism trade and to promote the untapped potential of India as a destination.
- To create and develop integrated tourism circuits based on cultural and socio economic aspects along with States, private sector and other agencies.
- To recognize the importance of private sector and private investment in tourism industry, with Government acting as a catalyst to boost up tourism earnings.

Considering the recent developments and advancements in the tourism sector across the World, a new draft tourism policy has been formulated by Government of India, which is yet to be approved. Some of the salient features of the new draft tourism policy are:

- Focus of the policy on employment generation and community participation in tourism development.
- Stress on development of tourism in sustainable and responsible manner.
- An all-compassing policy involving linkages with various Ministries, Departments, States/UTs and stakeholders.
- The Policy enshrines the vision of developing and positioning India as a “MUST EXPERIENCE” and “MUST RE-VISIT” destination for global travellers, while encouraging Indians to explore their own country.

- Development and promotion of varied tourism products including the rich Culture and Heritage of the country, as well as niche products such as Medical & Wellness, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions (MICE), Adventure, Wildlife, etc.
- Development of core infrastructure (airways, railways, roadways, waterways, etc.) and Tourism Infrastructure.
- Developing quality human resources in the tourism and hospitality sectors across the spectrum of vocational to professional skills development and opportunity creation.
- Creating an enabling environment for investment in tourism and tourism-related infrastructure.
- Emphasis on technology enabled development in tourism.
- Focus on domestic tourism as a major driver of tourism growth.
- Focus on promotions in established source markets and potential markets, which are contributing significantly to global tourist traffic, with targeted and country specific campaigns.
- Emphasis on Tourism as the fulcrum of multisectoral activities and dovetailing of activities of the Ministry with important/flagship schemes of the Government of India.

The Draft Tourism Policy is fairly exhaustive. It has addressed all the important issues in tourism sector. The policy has also laid emphasis on the ‘repeat value’ of India-by incorporating “MUST RE-VISIT” destination for global travellers, Targeted and country specific campaign is expected to boost up Indian tourism as it is a welcome departure from “one-size fits all” approach. The draft policy has also recognized the role of State and UT and is expected to establish linkages between State/UT, various ministries/departments of Central Government and other concerned stakeholders. Cooperative federalism has been strongly encouraged by the policy. Tourism is one of the largest employment creators and generators in the country. Focus on employment generation and community participation will further enhance the possibility of creating employment in this particular sector.

Impact of Rural Tourism:

➤ Positive Impact

The most important impact of increasing rural tourism is the impact on economy. With increased number of tourists visiting the countryside, there will be a boost in the income level of the people

due to increased level of trade among the people. This will also generate jobs among the youths. The traditional handloom and handicrafts of any place is matter of pride for the local people. Through tourism, the visitor can have the benefit of directly buying the finished products from the local people. This in turn will have a positive impact on the overall economy.

Exchange of ideas with the tourists will create a new idea among the villagers. This entails increasing interest in education, preventive health care, modern gadgets, etc. That will help in universal literacy.

With more tourists visiting the villages, there will be improvement in the connectivity by means of roads, increase in public transports, etc. Villages which are close to sanctuaries and reserve parks can teach the idea of preserving the nature to their urban counterparts. Living by the side of nature for centuries, they will have more knowledge about how to preserve nature. Tourists may develop an interest in the local religion and traditional rituals that act as catalyst for social harmony.

➤ **Negative Impact:**

However, rural tourism may have certain negative impacts. To facilitate tourism, there would be an increase in the infrastructure development of the countryside. This may lead to concretization of rural area and may distort the natural beauty. Besides, influx of tourists may lead to exploitation of natural resources.

Tourism may have an adverse effect on the traditional livelihood of people. The village people may shift from agriculture and other traditional livelihoods to lucrative livelihoods related to tourism. This may, in turn have a negative impact on rural tourism.

Challenges in rural tourism

1. Illiterate Rural Population: Rural population is uneducated and illiterate so they are bounded by the traditional values and customs. Their culture, religion, superstition have a strong influence on their attitudes and behaviours. They follow a slow life style pattern and like to stick to their traditional jobs whether they are remunerative or not and are not interested to take up risk. But after globalization even the rural economy has been affected by the growth dynamism, the media is playing an important role in changing the mindset of the rural consumer.

2. Language Hindrance: Hindi, official language in India is not popular in many parts of the country. There are 16 recognized languages and 850 dialects in India. Either the rural people have to upgrade themselves to communicate with the tourists or they will not get much benefit

from the rural tourism. Villagers have to understand Hindi to interact with Indian Tourists and English to communicate with foreign tourists.

3) Damage to indigenous societies: Communities like tribal groups even don't like to mingle with other rural people.

4. Lack of communication skills: The ability to communicate effectively is very essential. Much of success will depend on your ability to give warm welcome to tourists. After seeing a historic site or buildings if tourists if a tourist generates some interest to know more and if there is no one to answer those questions, it will create negative impacts. Villagers have to understand the tourist wants and needs. There should not be any communication gap between the guest and the host.

5, Challenge to preserve environment and natural resources: It is imperative to use and preserve the earth natural resources wisely. Adequate measure should take to preserve the nature while preparing the tourism plan.

6,Lack of Business planning skills: For any business, technical knowledge and skill is required to organize and maintain it. With the help of government or nongovernmental organization, business plan could be prepared. Additionally Villagers should participate in developing and implementing the project on rural tourism, otherwise it will not give much benefit to the rural people. Advertisements and sales promotion will play a very important role in creating awareness and attracting the customers. It can also be promoted through print media, brochures, public relations etc.

7, Legislation problems: Tourism is a part of entertainment, so all hotels, motels and cottages must have license and should pay high taxes to the government. But in rural tourism as rural people will also be involved and there should be a provision of tax holiday.

8, Lack of trained Manpower/ Tourism education: People trained in hotel management would not like to go to the rural areas so it will have to depend on rural people who are required to be trained to cater to the needs of the tourists. To attract different types of tourist, whether it is a nature tourism, health tourism, agro tourism everyone expects quality service at right time.

9, Proper understanding between tourists and local people: Rural people should be prepared to accept the tourists who are coming from different culture.

10, Need to generate a democratic movement which helps people at all levels to participate in tourism development: Local people are seldom involved in decision making, planning and

implementation of policies. Otherwise local people get confused about what kind of tourism they want to establish in their own area.

11, Poor Infrastructure development in basic amenities: Nearly half of the villages in the country do not have all weather roads and majority of villages are located in different terrains like plains, hills, deserts, swaps, coastal region etc. The climate condition also varies from place to place to a great extent. Due to improper planning some villages are having multi road connection while some others deprived of single road connection. One cannot deny the fact that with proper infrastructure in place, rural tourism as also ecotourism certainly has the potential to generate large scale employment. In fact, the development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is definitely useful for a country like India.

12, Challenge to attract domestic tourists and foreign tourists: Unless the brand name or location name is not popular appropriate marketing techniques have to be used to make the destination popular.

13, Need for Trained Tourist Guide: The guide should have thorough knowledge about the place and he or she should be able to generate interest in the mind of tourist to visit the site. The guide can show album, video film, brochures to give knowledge about the place. The guide should be intelligent to handle different type of tourist and should have good communication skill and good rapport building attitude.

Suggestions for Rural Tourism in India A complete rural tourism package can be provided through initiation by the local government bodies of activities such as beautification campaigns, sponsorship of special events that tie in with local tourist attractions and participation of all businesses in the area.

- ❖ Good community leadership; Successful tourism promotion and development requires good leadership by open minded and enthusiastic persons from local village agent, community groups, the business community and Non government organisations.
- ❖ Support and participation of local government; The role of local government is especially important in the following areas; funding for tourism development and promotion, creating and maintenance of infrastructure necessary for tourism, zoning and maintenance of the community so that it looks clean and appealing to tourists and educational support for farmers.

- ❖ Sufficient funds for tourism development; Most of the rural communities depend on public funds that are very often insufficient to cover all the needs of the rural community; private funds are something that most often can't be reached since local people do not have sufficient incomes by themselves to invest; therefore it is very important to explore for other sources of funding and assistance.
- ❖ Strategic planning; Planning is fundamental for the efficient and effective use of village resources and funds, especially in rural areas that have few funds and resources. Good planning for tourism development and promotion can help develop and support local businesses connected to tourism.
- ❖ Planning for tourism development should be integrated into a community's overall economic strategy because of the interdependence of the community and key aspects of tourism development and promotion. Hence, planning for tourism requires the involvement of various stakeholders in the community.
- ❖ Coordination and cooperation between rural tourism entrepreneurs; Tourism requires different types of businesses to work together because, by its nature; tourism has knotted relations between different types of business such as shops, accommodation facilities, restaurants and tourist attractions. They may create different types of networks, both formal and informal. Tourism network allows for a standardized, yet high quality, business management, which small enterprises lack.
- ❖ Strategic planning and tactical decisions such as pricing, product differentiation and yield management can be handled much healthy by a qualified management. A tourism network can substantially improve small tourism business performance by transforming their sporadically scattered products into a one-stop-shop selling a wide variety of functionally interrelated tourism products.
- ❖ Information and technical backing for tourism development and promotion; Different types of information for tourism development and promotion are especially important to rural tourism development because small communities usually cannot afford to hire.

- ❖ It is observable that management and marketing of rural tourism often require a community effort because of the nature of tourism; the community as a whole and its image must be marketed, not just one attraction.

Conclusion

Rural tourism is a recent offshoot of tourism sector that has grown up to be a potential business in its own space. Rural tourism is a form of nature based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favoring the local communities socially and economically. It is a very important tool towards rural development. However the emphasis should not only be on economic development but also on positive cultural-economic changes. It is important to understand that our past is as important as our future. It cannot be denied that the challenges in this aspect are many but there are equally immeasurable opportunities. With proper planning and implementation, rural tourism can prove to economically, culturally and socially strengthen the rural communities.

Keeping all the above factors in mind, it can be said that rural tourism is not only about the economic development but a lot more and thus there is a need to re-evaluate all the aspects of rural tourism and redefine it. Tourist attractions and their influence on handicrafts are the main factors for attracting tourism and consequently it increasing occupation in rural areas. Indian handicrafts particularly, jewellery, carpets, leather goods, ivory and brass work are the main shopping items of foreign tourists. According to estimate nearly 40 per cent of the tourist expenditure on shopping is spent on these items. Tourism creates jobs, thus stimulating economic growth, and can improve the standard of living for those living in tourism-targeted area especially rural areas in India.

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