



Rural Tourism: A Prominent Niche for Indian Tourism

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Abstract

Rural India has much to offer to the world rich in tradition of arts, crafts, and culture. Rural India can emerge as important rural tourist destination. Those who have a craze for knowledge about traditional ways of living ,arts and crafts can possibly be attracted to visit the country life of India, if the concept of rural tourism is promoted strategically .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 defiantly useful for a country like India, where 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside the stress of urban lifestyle have led to a "counter-urbanization" syndrome. Rural tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to problem like falling income level and lesser job opportunities. Besides, there are other factor which is shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing level of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility and environmental consciousness.

The government, of late, has realized what the rural India can offer to the world. The tenth five year plan has identified tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The union ministry of tourism in collaboration with UNDP has launched the endogenous tourism projects linked to the existing rural tourism scheme of the government. The UNDP has committed \$ 2.5 million for the projects. UNDP will help in areas of capacity building, involvement of NGOs, local communities and artisans forge strong community-private and public sector partnership. The government also decided to develop necessary infrastructure for facilitating rural tourism.

The researchers, realizing the above facts and abundant opportunities in this field, is submitting this research paper which would certainly be an asset for the planners and practitioners.

Key words: Rural Tourism Planning

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PAPER/ARTICLE INFO

RECEIVED ON: 13/12/2013
ACCEPTED ON: 15/06/2014

Reference to this paper
should be made as follows:

Neha Sharma, Amar Kumar
Tiwari (2014) "Rural
Tourism: A Prominent
Niche for Indian Tourism"
Int. J. of Trade and Commerce-
IJTC, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.
172-181

1. INTRODUCTION

Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, there by benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourist and the local for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essential 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 preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. Rajesh k. Aithal, assistant professor of at Indian institute of management, lucknow, has another definition. "Rural tourism is a form of tourism in which the guests get to enjoy the unique culture of village life through participation in events, or experiencing the local cuisine, or buying ethnic goods, and in the process also improve the welfare of the local people."

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 defiantly useful for a country like India, where 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside the stress of urban lifestyle have led to a "counter-urbanization" syndrome. Rural tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to problem like falling income level and lesser job opportunities. Besides, there are other factor which is shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing level 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 visiting village setting to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle .This concepts has taken the shape of formal kind of rural tourism . Under this scheme, 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 region. Key geographic regions are identified for development and promotion of rural tourism. The implementation is done through a convergence committee headed by the district collector. Activities like improving the environment, hygiene, infrastructure etc. are covered for assistance. Apart from financial assistance, the focus is to tap the resources available under different schemes of department of rural development, state government and other concerned departments of the government of India.

Rural India has much to offer to the world. Rich in tradition of arts, crafts and culture, rural India can emerge as important tourist spots. Those in the developed world who have a craze for knowledge about traditional ways of life, arts and crafts will be attracted to visit rural India if the concept of rural tourism is marketed well.

It is not that the concepts are not workable. In absence of any promotional activity for rural tourism, thousand of foreign tourists visit rural areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat and south India every year. This it is the proof of viability of the concept of rural tourism.

The government, of late, has realized what the rural India can offer to the world. The tenth five year plan has identified tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihoods. The union ministry of tourism in collaboration with UNDP has launched the endogenous tourism projects linked to the existing rural tourism scheme of the

government. The UNDP has committed \$ 2.5 million for the projects. UNDP will help in areas of capacity building, involvement of NGOs, local communities and artisans forge strong community-private and public sector partnership. The government also decided to develop necessary infrastructure for facilitating rural tourism.

So far the government has identified 31 villages across the country as tourist spots. These are – Pochampalli in Nalgonda district and Srikalahasti in Chittoor district in Andhra Pradesh, Durgapur in Golaghat district and Sualkuchi in Kamrup district in Assam, Nepura in Nalanda district in Bihar, Chitakote and Nagarnar in Baster district in Chhatisgarh, Hodka in Kachchh district in Gujarat, Jyotisar in Kurukshetra district in Haryana, Nagger in Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh, Banavasi in Uttara Kannada district in Karnataka, Aranmula in Pathanamthitta district and Kumbalangi in Kochi district in Kerala, Chaugan in Mandla district and Pranpur in Ashok Nagar district in Madhya Pradesh, Sulibhanja-Khultabad in Aurangabad district in Maharashtra, Pipili and Raghurajpur in Puri district Orissa, Rajasansi in Amritsar district in Punjab, Neemrana in Alwar district, Samode in Jaipur district and Haldighati in Rajasamand district in Rajasthan, Lichen in north district in Sikkim, Karaikudi in Sivaganga district and Kazhugumalai in Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu, Kamlasagar in West Tripura district in Tripura, Bhaguwala in Saharanpur district in Uttar Pradesh, Jageshwar in Almora district and Mana in Chamoli district in Uttarakhand, Ballabhpur Danga in Birbhum district and Mukutamanipur in Bankura district.

The former president of Eco Tourism Society of India, Mandeep Singh Soin, a group of tourism professional and environmentalists formed with the ministry of tourism's says the concept can be confusing. "Rural tourism is understood differently in different parts of the world," he notes. "Ecotourism and rural tourism are the same only in a sense. They are cousins really. Rural tourism may not necessarily be the protector and enhancer of conservation. It is much more community-oriented. Ecotourism is more holistic; all responsible tourism actions come into play." The difference is the best illuminated by a couple of examples. As part of its 2002 plan, the government partnered with *United Nation Development Program* (UNDP) for endogenous tourism projects. Some 30 rural sites were selected in 20 states to develop as destination for rural tourism. The UNDP pumped in an initial US\$ 2.5 million. The government asked the states and union territories to submit proposals. Those that were selected were entitled to assistance up to US\$ 100,000.

One of the projects success stories is Hodka village in Gujarat. A village tourism committee owns and operates the Shaam-e-Sarhad ("Sunset at the border") village resorts. The accommodations are simple. Tourists can stay in tents or traditional mud huts, known as bhungas. All have attached bathroom, western toilets and showers. The resorts can accommodate up to 30 people. Staying in tents cost around US\$ 40 a night, while the bhungas are more expensive, around US\$ 60 a night. Among the attractions; interaction with other artisan communities; wildlife including flamingos, pelicans, foxes and leopards; and nearby archaeological sites of Indus valley civilization. In January 2008, there was even a Pashu Mela- a Cattle Fair. All this activity has had to be organized, packaged and sold.

Far away from Hodka, in the northeastern of Meghalaya, is Mawlynnong. Neither the UNDP nor the government of India has been involved with this ecotourism efforts success. Rather, a

community effort has made it the poster child of rural tourism in India. In 2003, *Discover India* (a magazine published by Media Trans Asia along with the Union Ministry of Tourism) anointed it the cleanest village in Asia. It has retained its charms. "Mawlynnong's reputation for cleanliness has even earned it a place on the state's tourism map" according to a report by the BBC. "Hundreds of visitors from all over India now visit the village throughout the year. Mawlynnong also attracts tourists from the around the world.

Both Mawlynnong and Hodka demonstrate a key prerequisite for the success of any rural tourism project: community involvement. "going by our experience in setting up community-owned companies in the rural sector, the outcome depends on a number of factors, and host communities should be encouraged to play a pivotal role in the development of rural tourism," says William Bissell, Managing Director of Fabindia is a novel experiment in which rural artisans-the suppliers to this private retail platform-are shareholder in the company. (See "the Poor as Stakeholders: Can Inclusive Capitalism, thrive in India?")

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Tourism in India is a buzz word, so developing day by day. Rural tourism in India is not in priority. Rural tourism gives a sense of noble cause. It is a one form of sustainable tourism. When any state or region in India develops rural tourism, it always beneficiary to rural area in term of rural productivity, employment, health, rural environment and culture community involvement and a path for admiring traditional beliefs and values to modern time.

Very few studies have been done in India to garb the potential of Indian tourism, so researchers want to examine the level of rural tourism in India.

In this way the present exercise attempts to attain the following objective during the cause of research. The objectives of the study are:-

- 1-Development of the rural areas infrastructure, etc
- 2- Enhancement in the standard of living of the people in rural areas.
- 3- Job opportunities to the rural population.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Type of Research Design: In initial stage exploratory research has been conducted to obtain a primary understanding about the prospects and problems of rural tourism in India. After this, descriptive research has been conducted.

Information Needs: Maximum data have been collect through form primary sources by the means of survey and the survey conducted through personal interview. On the other hand, secondary data have been collected through different journal, various government sources such as reports, records and research organizations related to this study.

Questionnaire Development: To collect primary data from the respondents through the direct interview method a set of structured questionnaire set that's containing open ended and close ended questions.

Sample Size: Here at first, 150 respondents are selected randomly on the basis of convenience and then collected the information from then through personal in-depth interview methods. So, the total sample size is 150 (given in table 1)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Age(years)	Number of respondents	Percentage
20-29	48	32.0
30-40	55	36.3
Above 40	45	30.8
Sex		
Male	130	88.8
Female	20	13.8
Occupation		
Business men	71	46.8
Service man	34	22.9
Professionals	17	11.5
Other	28	18.8
Income(Rupees)		
<20,000	40	27.0
20,000-30,000	50	33.0
>30,000	55	40.0
Education		
Undergraduate	22	14.9
Graduate	75	49.0
Post graduate	46	31.0
Others	8	5.0
Marital status		
Married	109	73.0
Unmarried	42	27.0

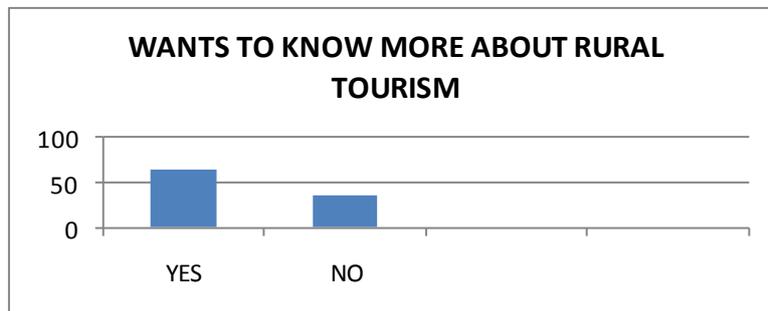
4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Most of the respondents wanted to spend holidays in their place(s) of interest; it may be scenic beach, historical sites, hills station, lakes. The researchers want to conduct survey because they want to get a real insight into the very mechanism of rural tourism along with the fact whether the respondents have an idea of rural tourism or not.

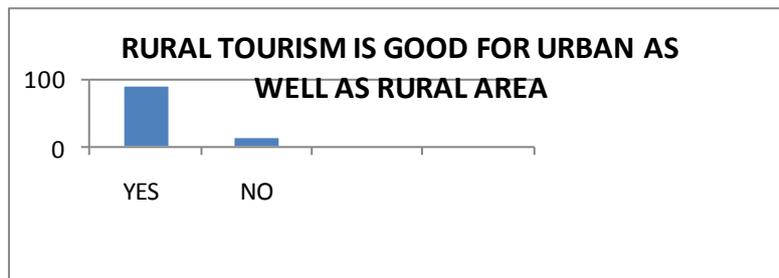
Only 25% of the respondents are known with the less term rural tourism. About 65% of the respondents are keen to learn about the rural tourism. Around 87% of the respondents said that rural tourism will be beneficial for both urban and rural society.



Only 25% respondents have an idea about rural tourism but do not have much knowledge.



65 % of respondents wants know more about rural tourism.



87 % of respondents think that rural tourism provides lots of opportunities to urban as well as rural area.

Study has been conducted to understand the preferences and taste of tourists. Whether there is a potential customer for rural tourism and the main features that will attract tourist for rural tourism.

5. CONCLUSION

Individual actors in economically disadvantaged towns and rural areas of India usually remain disengaged from joint actions and any activities that require them to deal with authorities and other local stakeholders. Their disengagement and reactive social behavior links to low or diminished levels of local social capital and high levels of social distrust (Czapinski, 2007; Mihaylova, 2004). Further, the level of social capital can be associated with the intensity of social

interaction within a locality. Hence, if tourism development planning intensifies interaction among different stakeholders, it is linked to local social capital and therefore local levels of social distrust (Mihaylova). However, the research still does not provide clarification of whether enhancing the interaction and development of local relationships during the tourism project affect the actors' involvement in local affairs in the long term. This case study also does not examine whether the development of social relationships and empowerment were built beyond the tourism development planning process, and a more powerful research tool must be applied. The study does illustrate, however, that tourism planning projects should be designed in order to facilitate interactive processes through debate and connect individual and group actors with local authorities. The author also raises the question of the potential impact of local tourism development processes on local democratic cultures in India. This work should be understood as an invitation to the necessary series of studies focused on similar problems over a longer time period.

Completing the consolidation of local democratic cultures in India is furthered by increasing engagement in local affairs and implies that citizens will to participate is necessary. Despite the intensive research dedicated to community social capital, there remains little understanding of how to generate social capital and how exactly it relates to community action. The author proposes that one way to enhance the development of social relationships within a locality and facilitate community action is to realize the principle of connecting local stakeholders along with the realization of tangible goals of projects organized within a tourism development framework.

Units operating at the local level, such as organizations or local governments, have access to a range of instruments to influence the direction and fashion in which they realize local development. Therefore they have the means to empower local actors by securing their meaningful inclusion in decision-making. At the same time the units should stress the need for collaboration and need for transparent decision processes that further facilitate democratic culture. Local processes such as tourism development social capital in order to involve crucial local partners and facilitate the development of a relationship among them.

One important finding from the present study was the fact that decisions about participation in the planning process were often dependent upon the availability of information and also the quality of available information and also the quality of available information, from which arise the expectation about project outcomes. Increased understanding of the role of tourism in a locality would also encourage actors to engage in decision making. In addition, social benefits from participation, such as group acceptance or the opportunity to express one's opinion shall be regarded as important motivators for actors to become involved in planning. If local governance institutions are to genuinely facilitate collaborative planning for tourism development, they must aim to improve access to information about the impacts of proposed projects. Information shapes local perception of tourism development and its influence on local dynamics.

Obviously, as an alternative to the maddening mass tourism, rural tourism seems to have a certain appeal for those concerned with development and conservation of under-privileged areas. The global market for rural tourism (both domestic and international) has grown significantly, with a gradual shift in worldwide travel patterns and preferences. If the rural regions are to take advantage of tourism development, efforts must be focused on developing long-term plans and

policies necessary for successful implementation. Key elements of such policies include sustainability criteria, diversity, institutional reforms, gender equity, local, regional, and global economic integration, local financial incentives, and peace and security. Because the concept of rural tourism tends to be used haphazardly, a clear definition must be developed and a set of criteria and indicators applied to the evaluation of potential destinations. The international community should cooperate to develop such criteria and indicators. Furthermore, the potential for a system of site designation must also be explored. This will set the stage for increased compliance and adherence to criteria and indicators by rural tour operators, establish monitoring mechanisms, and offer the destinations a platform for raising their profiles at the international level.

Tourism planning projects create local spaces for interaction and develop trusting relationships. Although relationships are more likely to develop and to evolve if interaction involves shared emotions and sentiment (Sobel, 2002), the study showed that motivations to interact originated in securing perceived benefits from economic development and avoiding threats to the social and natural environment. These benefits motivate actors to pursue local interactions as they develop new relationships. Coordinating organizations often share knowledge, and provide advice and guidelines to other actors, and thus allowing them to benefit from their organization's resources. Shared values and interest in the locality's overall wellbeing emerge from the intensified interaction among actors and are facilitated by the development of trust. This may result in collectiveness and the emergence of community action (Wilkinson, 1991) and with cooperative local authorities more positive attitudes emerge. The local government becomes a community interests. Therefore tourism development projects in post-communist localities should be regarded as local opportunities to link different stakeholder together and hence they should be understood as opportunity to enhance community action.

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