

**IDENTIFYING THE POTENTIAL OF AGRI-TOURISM IN INDIA:
OVERRIDING CHALLENGES AND RECOMMEND STRATEGIES**

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ABSTRACT

Agri-tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. Agri-tourism is a form of agricultural multi-functionality it gives you the opportunity to experience the real alluring and authentic contact with the village life, taste the local veritable food and get familiar with the many farming tasks during the visit. It provides you the welcome break free from the daily busy and hectic life in the peaceful village environment. It gives you the chance to relax and reinvigorate in the pure natural environment, surrounded by splendid setting. It gives you the chance to see the real India and have the experience on the farm stay holidays. Many Indian farmers especially from Pune and Maharashtra currently involved in or are considering the use of agri-tourism as a mode of diversifying their farm operations. How they will achieve this is the challenge. The overall potential for agri-tourism can only be achieved if strategies to address and overcome their challenges are developed and implemented. This paper is an attempt to identifying the potential of agri-tourism in India by highlights major challenges in this issue with some useful recommendations.

Keywords: Agri-tourism, Employment, Rural development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian population has increased five times than that existed at the time of independence, but the land area is not change even the agricultural land got decease, currently only one fourth of the land is available for per person as compared to the time of independence. Agriculture business is becoming more and more costly and many farmers cannot afford it. In addition to this the gradual decrease in fertility of land that is

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giving marginally diminishing yields. So to overcome this continuously increasing gap farmers must think of an alternative business of any type to support their overall income from land, or else they shall be forced to live out a life of below poverty line with lots of scarcity of resources. In order to work in this direction some farmers must be encouraged to start small and viable business like Agri-Tourism units on the farm in their villages.

- Around 70 to 80 % of Indian Population lives in rural area.
- By realizing their problems and needs we felt that, there is still many things that can be done for these people.
- ATDC has been contributing its efforts for the overall upliftment of the farmers in rural areas.
- The youth population in rural specially the school dropouts, educational backward and rural women constitute more than 50% of our rural population. Until and unless we do some welfare activities for this section of the community overall social upliftment of the nation remains uncompleted. The women in village can be good host as well as provide help in preparing taste rural rustic food for the Agri Tourism guests.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore the status of Agri-tourism in India.
- To identify factors are necessary for Agri-tourism development
- To study the Challenges and Recommended strategies of Agri-tourism industry

III. SECONDARY LITERATURE

Agri tourism is no new in the field of research many researches has well stated the term as Barbieri and Mshenga (2008) define Agritourism as “any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors.”McGehee, Kim, and Jennings (2007) explain Agritourism as “rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component.”

Marques (2006): “a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property.”

Sonnino (2004) “activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities .”

Sharpley and Sharpley (1997) “tourism products which are directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays.” World Tourism Organization (1998) involves accommodation being offered in the farmhouse or in a separate guesthouse, providing meals and organizing guests’ activities in the observation and participation in the farming operations.

Azimi Hamzah and others (2012)in the article ‘Socio-economic impact potential of agro tourism activities on Desa Wawasan Nelayan community living in Peninsular Malaysia’ discuss about the potential socio-economic benefits that can be offered by the agro-tourism activities to progressive fishing

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communities in Malaysia. It enhances the understanding the probable potentialities to bring socio economic changes due to agro tourism.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Paper is invades the conceptualization of the development of Agri-tourism in India. Role of Government Institutions likes Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), and others in the development of the concept of agri-tourism. Exploratory research design is used as a tool to study the concept, to get an in-depth knowledge of challenges and scope of the Agri-tourism. Secondary data has been used from variety of sources as, government official Sites, books, journal, publications and internet.

4.1 What Is Agri-Tourism and Why Agri-Tourism?

Agri-tourism is a business conducted by a farmer for the enjoyment and knowledge of the people, to promote the products of the land and generate additional income from farms. It provides rural experiences to urban population and economic alternatives to farmers. Agri-tourism includes activities such as roadside stands, farm tours, bed-breakfast, and cattle drives. It can provide economically feasible ways to care for natural resources, natural habitats, natural scenic areas and special places.

4.2 Development of Agri-tourism is Desirable

- It is a sustainable form of tourism.
- Where there is limited scope of extra earnings for family depending on agriculture, agro-tourism could serves as additional source of income for the farmers.
- It gives prestige to rural life, creates jobs at local levels.
- It gives opportunity to urban tourist to escape from his busy and hectic routine and allows him to go back to his roots.
- It can enhance the quality of life for local residence.
- It gives the tourists glimpse of village ambience, local cuisine, culture and art.
- It expects the active involvement from the tourist, rather than a passive spectator, so a bond between guest-host is strengthened.

ATDC has always been putting its efforts as per the changing needs of the section of the social fabric; and shall continue to do the same. Some facts which provide the outcome of the effort are as follows:

We saw in last 4 years more than 500 farmers trained under ATDC Agri Tourism training program and 52 farmers from near by villages of Maharashtra have started their own agri-tourism activity on their farms to enhance the agriculture income to quote the examples: “Mr.Sunil Bhosale from village called Jogawadi, which is 40 kms from Baramati in Pune district have 13 acres of agriculture farm. His annual income from the same is Rs 60 thousand. However ever since he started Agri Tourism activities at his own farm, his income from agri-tourism has been Rs 45,000 in only six months.” Means there is a 50% hike in the annual income.

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V. SCOPE OF AGRITOURISM

Agri-tourism has vast scope in the present context for the following reasons:

- **Less expensive gateway** - The cost of accommodation, food, travel and recreation is very less in Agri-Tourism compare to any other type of tourism . Present concept tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes very small proportion of the population. However, the concept of agri-tourism takes travel and tourism to the larger population, this widens the tourist base by widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.
- **Have strong demand for wholesome family oriented activities** - Villages provide amusement opportunities to all age groups i.e. children, young, middle and old age, female, male, in total to the entire family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, traditional dresses, festivals, food and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the whole family.
- **Curiosity about the farming and farmer lifestyle** - Almost all urban population having roots in villages, so they always have had the curiosity to learn or at least see about sources of plants, plants, animals, raw materials like handicrafts, woods. Rural lifestyle and their languages, culture, tradition,. Agri-Tourism which generally revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.
- **Finding solace with nature friendly means** - Present urban lifestyle has made life stressful and brings average life span comedown. Hence, people are in continuous search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Indigenous medical knowledge of villagers are must be respected. Ayurveda which is a pro-nature medical approach have its roots in villages.. Organic foods are in higher demand in urban areas and foreign countries. In totality, our health conscious urban population can look towards pro nature villages for solutions.
- **Desire for peace and Interest in natural environment** - Busy and hectic urban life is an outcome of diversified activities and diversified thinking. Today every individual attempts to work more and hard, in different directions to earn more money and enjoy lavish life comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. They can look towards agri-tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in Agri-Tourism as it is away from urban areas and close to nature. Crops, birds, animals, mountains, water bodies, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy and hectic urban life.
- **Disillusionment with resorts and illusionment with farm** - In the late 90's people use to visit resorts to get an peaceful and green environment but now the crowded peace seekers disturb each other's peace. Hence, peace is beyond cities and resorts. Hence, visit to villages satisfies their desire. This is also expressed through the hatred of urbanites to flat culture and love for farmhouses located in the outskirts of cities. Any opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family is dream of any urbanite. But, minimum decent facilities are always problem. Agri-Tourism attempts to overcome this problem.

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- **Educational value of Agri-Tourism** – As we all know Indian economy is an agricultural driven economy. Agri-Tourism creates awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban children. It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. It is a means for providing training to future farmers. This provides unique opportunity for education where learning is fun effective and easy. “Seeing is believing, doing is learning”. This experience based concept is the USP of Agri- Tourism.
- **Recreation of Villages** - Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Villagers lifestyle, dress, languages, culture / traditions which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Agricultural products like farm gate fresh market, processed foods, organic food could lure the urban tourists. As result of this agri – atmosphere in the villages, there is scope to develop Agri – Tourism products like culinary tourism, agri-shopping, pick and own your tree or plot, bed and breakfast, pick and pay, camel riding, bullock cart riding, boating, fishing, herbal walk, rural games and health (ayurvedic) tourism.

Table1: Agri- Tourism benefits

Agri- Tourism benefits	
1. An inexpensive gateway	6. Interest in natural environment
2. Curiosity about the farming industry and lifestyle	7. Disillusionment with over crowded resorts and cities
3. Strong demand for wholesome family oriented recreational activities	8. Health consciousness of urban population.
4. Finding solace with nature friendly means -	9. Rural recreation
5. Desire for peace	10. Educational value of Agri-Tourism

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VI. CHALLENGES TO THE AGRI-TOURISM INDUSTRY

Agri-tourism is although a boom for the development of our rural society but if it can positively handled the following challenges in its path as stated below.

- Quality of the service
- Complexity in the delivery of the service
- Infrastructural deficiency
- Multi level channel involved this tourism development at local and regional level.
- Literacy rate of the farmers and farm owners
- Government Support and Identification:

VII. AGRI-TOURISM RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

Indian farmer need to cater the concept of this agri tourism as diversifying their operation. Explaining the determinant of Agri tourism is a creative strategy for their betterment, however it will not be an easy road map to follow by the farmers or farm owners. A well defined strategy has to be implemented for the development of agri- tourism at national and state level.

The following sections identify these overriding challenges and recommend strategies to address them.

VIII. Suggested Strategies to the Indian Agri tourism Industry.

- Proper Recognition of Agri-tourism Industry.
- Government supported policy structure of Agri-tourism
- Education of the farmer and farm owner for the development of the Entrepreneurial skill in their work operations.
- Proper Financing Solution for its Enhancement.
- Liability and Risk Management Programs.
- Product and Service Quality Improvement: In terms of the Product quality enhancement as well as the delivery of the service has to be elevated up to the standards.
- A Public Private Strategic Partnership Development Model has to be created
- Proper Marketing and Promotional Assistance has to be Provided

IX. CONCLUSION

- Agri-tourism is a supportive system to the agricultural activities in India. It is an Innovative practices which can be utilized by the famer and farm owners to harvest this opportunity, through a diversified approach.

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- It will be beneficial Model for both farmer and the tourist, as farmers have and extra edge for earning and employments where as the tourist gets an privilege to relive a smooth, clam and rejuvenating atmosphere and culture of our agricultural heritage.
- Although is a long way on go as the development and acknowledgement of the Agri-tourisms is potential seen and cultivated by only Maharashtra government and its supporting agencies.
- Rest on the nation is yet to understand its worth and move ahead on it.
- Is it the best platform for the socio economic development of the rural areas? Thus the government has to provided a full fledge policy support system for the rooting and strengthen of the Agri-tourism in India.

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