

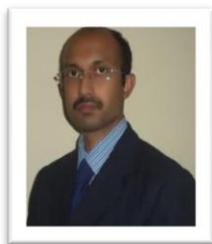
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Rural Tourism and Quality of Life in West Bengal, India: A Tourism Impact Study



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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore rural tourism potentials in West Bengal, which acts as an incentive to promote rural economy, socio-cultural changes, environmental change and life style of the people residing around the tourist sites. In a pilot survey conducted by the researchers, it has been observed that due to tourism development at this location lead to improvement in community amenities like communication, sanitations, transportation facilities and living standard for the people in general. This current study aims at assessing the impact of rural tourism policy on this destination in terms of growth of economy, employment prospect, livelihood and changes in life style of the local people.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Quality of Life, Tourism Development.

Introduction

Rural tourism is now considered to be one of the most important segments among various new forms of tourism which has been developed recently. Currently in India, it has been observed that tourist flow is very high particularly in Urban areas including the religious and historical destinations. As a result of that, most of the rural tourism destinations are remains unexplored to most of the tourists. This present study revealed that the rural locations mainly catch the eyes of the tourists due to its improved connectivity, publicity by the government, facilities of accommodation and transportation and its historical and cultural importance. As a result of this development, the tourist place can yield more revenue causing a great change in the local economy in terms of growth of handicraft industry, employment generation, life style of the local population, etc. The main objectives of developing rural tourism are not only to showcase the rural, art culture, handicraft but also to gain economic benefit out of it. Development of rural tourism will provide numerous positive benefits including community development, infrastructure development as well as socio economic benefits. Rural tourism brings about immense changes in the local economy in terms of growth of earnings, utilization of rural tourism resources like uses of Zamindars (land lords) house, handicraft, folk-lore, folk music and it also stop migration from rural to urban area as well. Rural tourism can provide opportunities particularly for rural youths by providing economic avenues through; opening up of small scale enterprises development aided by micro financial assistance which has significant potentialities to enhancement the rural livelihood within the destination area.

Review of Literature

According to Lane .B (1994) points out that "rural tourism should be –located at rural areas, functionally rural i.e. small scale enterprises, open space; natural contact, heritage, traditional, societal practices etc; rural in scale; traditional in character; take different forms representing the complex pattern of rural environment, tourists share in village life, and rural villages gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. As per Annual Report of Ramakrishna Mission and Pallimangal Kamarpukur: 2006-2007 tourism is more labor intensive than other sectors. According to Moglen, H (1983), the term really took off with literature discussing empowerment of marginalized peoples, such as women and the poor, and especially with regards to community development. For example, in 1983 the Women's Studies International Forum discussed empowerment of women in "Power and Empowerment." From then until now, the literature has increasingly been focused on these issues. According to Singh (1994), the interest of tourism and heritage conservation is complementary and

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thus tourism & culture become partners in the developmental process. The author characterizes empowerment as a person's freedom to do and achieve the desired goals Sen, A.K (1985). This framework of empowerment focuses on the individual. Other authors take a slightly more narrowed approach, taking into consideration the institutional, social or political structures rules and norms within which the actors make and pursue their choices. According to Gannon (1994) and Kieselbach and Long (1990) the development of tourism can help several of these problems through,

1. Economic growth, economic diversification and stabilization
2. Employment creation, as primary source of income but most importantly secondary source of income
3. Reduced out-migration and possibly re-population
4. Maintenance and improvement of public services
5. Infrastructural improvement

Hall and Jenkins (1998) suggest that the expansion of tourist flows in rural areas mainly provide benefit in terms of,

1. Sustaining and create local incomes, employment and growth.
2. Contributing to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure.
3. Encouraging the development of other industrial sectors.
4. Contributing to local resident amenities and services.
5. Contributing to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources.

Empowerment can look different at the individual level versus the community level, and it can look different in the state versus the market. Empowerment is also relational, for it occurs in relation to whom a person interacts with. Finally, the literature stresses that empowerment is extremely cultural specific, and this can be seen in the articles written by Malhotra and Mather (1997), Mason (2005) and Narayan (2005). Briedenhann & Wickens represents that the benefit of tourism is that it is seen as a means of alternative development strategy for economic & social regeneration of rural areas, as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth, increased viability of underdeveloped regions & improve the standard of living of local communities. Hall and Jenkins (1998) suggest that the expansion of tourist flows in rural areas: To sustain and create local incomes, employment and growth, to contribute to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure, to encourage the development of other industrial sectors, to contribute to local resident amenities and services. To contribute to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources. According to Chakraborty (2007), Tourism services can increase employment, but businesses may target skilled labor elsewhere rather than train local labor from amongst the poor.

In 2010, articles were published entitled "Power and empowerment: Fostering effective collaboration in meeting the needs of orphans and

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vulnerable children" Wallis A (2010) and "Women empowerment through the SHG approach" Augustine D (2010) that demonstrate just a few ways how empowerment is being discussed in the academic community. Ufomata (2000) further indicates evidence from Africa; a woman is defined by her marriage roles and the husbands, the neighborhood as well as in laws has an upper hand in decision making. DFID (2005) defines women's empowerment as "A process of transforming gender relations through groups or individuals developing awareness of women's subordination and building their capacity to challenge it". According to Kabeer, empowerment refers to "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (Kabeer, 1999: 473). An almost similar definition is given by Sen as the "expansion of capabilities of persons to lead the kinds of lives they value" (Sen, 1999: 18). In addition, Deshmukh-Ranadive (2003) argues that empowerment does not happen when incomes are generated and livelihoods enhanced, because this does not change the hierarchies and structures at household and family levels.

Authors like Narayan (2005) and Mason (2005) are quick to point out that empowerment is not a zero-sum game, but rather different types of power, such as power over, power to, power with, and power within. In "Empowerment in Practice from Analysis to Implementation" by Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland, they define empowerment as the process of enhancing an individual's capacity to make choices and then transforming those choices into the sought after outcome Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M., and Holland, J. (2007). All these authors viewed their definition of empowerment (women) in different context in relation to various organizations. The authors agreed that empowerment is multidimensional and it can be exercised on different levels with different domains (Alsop, R., Bertelsen, M., and Holland, J in 2006).

Similarly, in an article written in 2002 entitled "Empowerment and Poverty Reduction" by Narayan, the definition of empowerment is seen as increasing poor people's freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives Narayan, D (2007).

Objectives of the Study

1. To figure out an impact of tourism on residents quality of life in the state of West Bengal.
2. To discuss about possible policy prescriptions and recommendations on impacts of rural tourism on quality of life in the state of West Bengal.

Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. For the fulfillment of the basic objectives, data for the study were collected through field survey. Information about the profile of tourism industry includes – hotels, guest house, number of rooms, number of persons employed etc as well as the profile of the tourists were the main elements of the survey. The sources of secondary data collected were legal documents, official statistics, reports, publications including data from district information centre.

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The data for this present research has been collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be supplemented by the secondary data stated below:

1. Block office records
2. Census report 2011
3. Economic Records from Economic Review.
4. Report from small scale Industries

5. Report from tourism Department
6. District Statistical hand books.

One set of questionnaire has been distributed to identify expectation and perceived satisfaction among 200 tourists but 169 fully filled data has been considered for analysis. To analyze the collected data has been analyzed through percentage method.

Analysis and Discussion

Impacts	Parameters	Strongly Disagree (%)	Not Agree (%)	Moderate (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Total (in Percentage)
Impact on Economic Issue	Tourism Education and Create Employment	5	8	24	33	30	100
	Increase Income	6	9	20	28	37	100
	Govt. Subsidy	4	6	22	35	33	100
	Financial Support from PPP	3	10	26	31	30	100
	Providing Training	9	15	15	20	41	100
	Reduce Poverty	5	6	26	30	33	100
	Investment opportunity	4	6	15	25	50	100
	Increase Household expenditure	7	8	22	29	34	100
	Local businessman will be benefited	6	5	15	33	41	100
Impact on Socio Cultural Issue	Rich Culture	9	7	18	36	30	100
	Strict Law and Order	25	30	14	15	16	100
	Exchange of Culture	8	7	40	25	20	100
	Reduce Migration	20	34	16	17	13	100
	Increase self esteem of host and guest	8	11	18	26	37	100
	Recreational Facility	13	10	17	24	36	100
	Peace	9	8	14	29	40	100
Impact on Environmental Issue	Pollution level Increase	10	9	26	24	31	100
	Plantation	9	10	28	20	33	100
	Infrastructure for Health	9	10	14	29	38	100
	Use of Modern Technology	9	7	20	30	34	100
	Protection of local habitats	7	7	22	26	38	100

Source: As per Survey data

Findings of the Study

The Study Reveals that the following findings which are as follows

1. This study indicates that tourism education is very much essential to encourage people to engage in tourism entrepreneurial activities in the state.
2. The study depicts that most of the tourism activities in the state are mainly indigenous in characters which includes bird watching, fishing, visiting seasonal fairs & festivals etc. which sometimes discourage the tourist to go for repeat visit to the destination.
3. The data revealed that those tourists who are mainly coming from urban areas are trying to exploit the rural culture by degrading the local environment and surrounding.
4. In terms of employment potentialities the above study revealed that employment opportunity

through tourism business is very high due to good amount of approval of Govt. subsidy.

5. A greater demand for trained tourist guide was felt to provide proper information for the different rural tourism destinations of the state.
6. This study revealed that due lack of promotion and advertisement policy the tourist flow to this is not so encouraging irrespective of high rural tourism potential.
7. This study reveals that due to lack of uniformity of pricing system of tourism services causing inconvenience to the tourists to avail the various facilities at different destinations in the state.
8. This study indicates that price of the land and housing services are astronomically increasing due to development of tourism in this region.
9. It is observed that negative role played by the middle man create problems for the tourists in case of hotel booking, and booking of vehicles,

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- selling of handicrafts in different destinations particularly during the peak season.
10. It is observed that sanitation and hygiene condition are not up to the mark in different rural tourism destinations which needs urgent attention by the governments as well as NGOs.
 11. It is also observed that during observations of some festivals and fairs in different destinations in the state, the inflow of the people increases at a alarming rates. As a result, the transportation facilities at these destinations are not sufficient to meet the need of the people. As a result of this, within a very short span of time, the rickshaw puller and generator operator van numbers are increasing at an alarming rate causing chaotic traffic problem and noise pollutions to these destinations.
 12. The study revealed that a complete absence of trained licensed guides at most of the rural tourism destination causes inconvenience to mainly interstate and foreign tourist.
 13. This study shows that due to congested road and uncomfortable stay in different rural destinations, tourist inflow is less in lean season.
 14. People are engaged in different types of occupation in different rural tourism destinations. Some people earn money by selling tee or local cuisine, some sell different types of product such as, wooden products, handicrafts and terracotta product, selling goods made up of clay, Some people are engaged in preparing a high quality endogenous handmade Sarees like Baluchari, Swarnachari etc. which are very much popular in the state of West Bengal.

Recommendations

On the basis of the above findings, the following recommendations are given by the authors for the development of rural tourism vis - a - vis improvement in quality of life in the state of West Bengal:

1. Since the role of women are crucial role for the growth and development of rural tourism, the specific role of women should be identified and encouraged properly in all aspects to increase the socio-economic conditions of the women population of West Bengal.
2. Proper training should be provided to the women employee to increase their productivity and income earnings from the business and thereby increase the quality of life of women in the state.
3. Better financial assistance may be provided to the women with provision of subsidy facility resulted in more involvement of women in the workforce.
4. Provision of flexible working hours may be given to the women workforce for better quality of life as well as better productivity in the business concerned.
5. Government should provide better toilets, sanitations facilities, health services and education facilities for rural women populations so that the quality of life of the women will definitely improve in the state.

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6. Creation of job opportunities for women will not only improve their economic conditions but also improve their standard of living as well as quality of life.
7. The state government should provide adequate safety and security in the work place to improve and increase the involvement of women work force in the rural areas and thereby increase the quality of life.
8. Proper encouragement of women workforce by the government as well as NGOs in form of providing award and recognition will definitely improve the motivations of the women employee and thereby increase the quality of life of women in the state.
9. Formation of women cooperative society in different rural tourism destinations will not only improve their economic conditions but also improve their participations and thus improve their quality of lives.
10. Empowering the women work force in terms of better technology, use of social media, awareness promotion among women will not only helps in better productivity but also improve the quality of service through tourism in the state of West Bengal.

Conclusion

Tourism is always provides a better opportunity for Women everywhere and the state West Bengal is no exception to it. Being a labour intensive industry the scope of employment opportunity particularly for women are more. Because of its peculiar nature of the tourist product, the assistance of women is mostly needed in this field. Be in terms of preparing food, providing services, preparation and selling of souvenirs, women play a leading role in satisfying the tourism demand at different tourist places and in case of rural tourism destinations the role of women is imperative. Being women dominated state; West Bengal has many things to offer different kinds of tourists. The state is famous for showcasing its rural features as most of the tourists' places are located in rural areas. The state government in co-ordination with the central government is now taking drastic measures to include mainly the women workforce including the rural youth in different field not only to provide better employment opportunities to women and youth but also to improve the quality of life of the above including the local residents of rural areas. The state government is coming up with different innovative ideas like *Kanyashree*, *kanya mangal* etc. to attract more women and girls to come forward to participate in different activities like education, health care, study, job opportunity, agriculture production, handicraft selling and producing, tourism entrepreneurship etc. Improvement in better quality of life of women residents and rural youth will not only increase the socio-economic conditions of the women and youths but also contribute a lot in the productivity of labour work force and thereby improve the state's economic performance in terms of better GDP, employment opportunity and better standard of living for women and the rural youth.

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