

Rural Tourism Development : Issues and Challenges in India

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Abstract

Tourism has become a growing industry in modern times all over the world. In India, rural tourism is of special attraction for tourists seeking peace and pleasure alike. Its promotion can earn a sizeable revenue and income for all-round development of the society and the country. It has a great potential for different segments of tourism like eco-tourism, farm tourism, religious tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism etc. But it faces a lot of problems which must be tackled on priority basis.

Keywords : Tourism, Promotion, segment, potential, cultural, etc.

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 around 70 percent of the population resides in 7 million villages. Across the world, the trends of industrialization and development have an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of urban lifestyles have to a 'counter-urbanisation' 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. Business, there are other factors which show shifting trend towards rural tourism like 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. India is a multi-dimensional country with a variety of tourist attractions and facilities. India's rich, religious and cultural past has created distinctive architectural styles, temple towns and famous monuments. The stunning beaches that cover India's vast coastline and mountains offer unique experience to rejuvenate. Tourism is one of the highest revenue earning sectors of India and rural tourism which has been neglected so far has vast potential in itself. Rural India has rich traditions of art, craft and culture along with the pollution free environment. Therefore, rural tourism has the capacity of attracting both foreign and domestic tourists. World Tourism Organisation (WTO) has recognized the importance of rural tourism

Objectives of the Study

Tourism is a very flourishing industry in India. The paper intends to highlight the importance of this smokeless industry in India's economic and regional development, the problems and prospects of tourism as potential industry.

Definition

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 which takes place in the countryside. It is a multi-faceted concept 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 predominately in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions.

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Concept

Tourism as non-traditional rural development strategies provide ample opportunities for entrepreneurship on the one hand and on the other locally developed small scale tourism can be less costly than other developmental strategies such as manufacturing. Rural areas are growing as the main tourist centres in the state of Himachal Pradesh because they have experienced a decline in traditional industries over the last few decades. To diversify their economics, rural economies have begun to adopt new economic strategies built on their natural and cultural resources. Hence, tourism has been considered as a vehicle of economic development and promoted as an effective source of income and employment in rural areas. These rural areas have a great potential to attract tourists who are in search of authentic natural and cultural resources. The promotion of tourism has been a pillar of the economy. The number of overseas visitors have shown an increase over the years.

Importance

Tourism in general is growing at an annual rate of 4 percent, nature travel which is also part of rural tourism is growing at a rate of 10 percent to 30 percent. There is evidence that in Europe, rural tourism has made important contributions to rural incomes both at the level of the individual farmer and more widely in the local community. While not necessarily substituting the agricultural income, it has delivered supplementary income and inter-sectoral linkages. The importance of tourism as a creator of job opportunities can be understood from the fact that in India every one million invested in tourism creates 50 jobs directly and around 100 jobs indirectly in comparison, to agriculture creates only 45 jobs and manufacturing 13 jobs. Moreover, tourism is the third largest foreign exchange earner after gems and jewellery and readymade garments.

Types

Rural India has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potential for different segments of tourism like eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, farm tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism and the like.

Farm Tourism

Farm based rural tourism is a non-seasonal tourism product and it must be promoted as such. Many attractions and activities have evolved as a result of the development of farm tourism. They are— farm visitor centres, farm museums and farm shops, self-guided farm trails, educational visits and demonstrations, nature studies and workshops on interesting or emerging agriculture topics. Farm store, exhibition of farm equipments, Roadside stand selling fresh farm products and craft items, processing of farm products and sale, a shady spot for visitors to rest like a big banyan tree, farm schools to teach a particular skill, collection of old farm machinery, miniature village, farm theme playground for children apart from the above, a number of different activities, including horse-riding, fishing and shooting, are widely available on farms. The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in farm tourism which widens the tourist base.

The Urban Population having roots in villages always has had the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Farm tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provide varieties of entertainment to the entire family. Tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in farm-based rural tourism, as it is away from urban areas and close to nature. Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and handicrafts. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban dwellers. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, processing units and farms where innovations tried will add attraction to the tourists. Farm based rural tourism would create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture science among urban school children. Treating guests is pleasure for the villagers than pain. The farmer entertains the guests while entertaining himself in the process. There is an increasing trend in the number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist spots. Hence, there is scope for the promotion of non-urban tourist spots in interior villages by establishing farm

based Rural Tourism Centres.

Review of Literature

A lot of literature all over the world have been published regarding tourism. Babu Satish A (1998) has written a book on 'tourism development in India (a case study)'. Sarangdharan, M (1995) has written a paper on the need for promotion of tourism in India. Jayapalan N (2001) has authored a book on 'introduction to tourism'. Kamre Krishna and Chand, M (2004) have attempted a treatise on 'Basic of tourism theory operation and practice'. Thus many scholars interested in the development of tourism have published books and papers related to tourism.

Agri Tourism

Agri Tourism is the practice of attracting visitors to an area used primarily for agricultural purposes, It could be described as Rural/Agricultural Environments to Farm Commodities Tourism Services – Agri Tourism. Agricultural Tourism is one alternative for improving the incomes and potential economic viability of small farms and rural communities. It will help to achieve income, employment and economic stability in rural communities in India. It would help boosting a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract urban tourists to their area thus providing opportunity for urban people to get back to the roots.

Agro-Tourism in India

Agro tourism is considered as the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry. The concept has been successfully implemented in states like Maharashtra, Kerala, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. It has become a new avenue for earning income for rural farmers. In Maharashtra, rural areas have formed an organization named Maharashtra State Agri and Rural Tourism (MART). There are about 150 Agri tourism centres in the state working without financial assistance of the government schemes. In Kerala, the government has played a key role in boosting rural and health tourism. Rajasthan is one of the preferred ventures to attract the foreign visitors. In Himachal Pradesh, the state government is motivating and promoting the rural people to create required facilities in rural areas for tourism purpose.

Eco Tourism

According to International Ecotourism Society, Ecotourism is responsible for travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people. Seven principles of Ecotourism are :

1. Avoids negative impacts that can damage or destroy the integrity or character of the natural environment.
2. Educates the traveller on the importance of conservation (natural resources, biodiversity).
3. Directs revenues to the conservation of natural areas and the management of protected areas.
4. Brings economic benefits to local communities and directs revenues to local people living adjacent to protected areas.
5. Emphasizes the need for planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry and seeks to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental 'carrying capacity'.
6. Retains a high percentage of revenue in the host country by stressing the use of Locality-owned facilities and services.
7. Increasingly relies on infrastructure that has been developed sensitively in harmony with the environment.
8. Minimising use of fossil fuels, conserving flora and fauna.

Rural Tourism : Government Initiatives

There are some areas identified by the government under Endogenous Tourism Project across the country. There are 22 tourist spots. These include Pochampalli in Andhra Pradesh Hooka in Gujarat, Naggar in Himachal Pradesh. Banavasi in Karnataka, Aranmula in Kerala, Pipli in Odisha, Lachen in Sikkim, Karaikudi in Tamil Nadu and Jageshwar and Mana in Uttarakhand. These village destinations are market based on rich traditions, crafts, accommodation, cuisine, hygiene and other basic amenities etc. their accessibility, environmental issues (pollution, eco fragility etc.), safety, law and order situation (for both local population as well as tourists), etc. The villages for the promotion of village tourism are identified by the District Tourism Advisory Committees. Some of the states have by their own initiatives begun

promoting rural tourism. For instance, the forest department of the Uttarakhand government has set up 'Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Livelihoods'. This centre aims at capacity building of local communities and promotion of rural tourism. The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) jointly with the Government of Himachal Pradesh is developing and preserving Heritage Village Pragpur. Recently the Konaseema Rural Tourism Project of Department of Tourism, Government of Andhra Pradesh (with 5 house boats) has bagged best national tourism project award.

Rural Tourism: Challenges

Lack of Natural resources

The major challenges are need to preserve the environment and natural resources, the need for education, proper understanding for both tourists and local people, and the need to generate a democratic movement which helps people at all levels to participate in tourism development. They need to focus on occupation training, handicraft promotion, and improvement of both the landscape and the basic infrastructure, to increase villagers' quality of life by creating a healthy environment. The cooperative system in rural tourism can be an effective approach in bringing positive impact in rural areas. Local people can monitor and control the negative impacts of tourism on their own society, if they have an equal stake and authority in management and development.

Lack of Trained Manpower

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 nature tourism, health tourism or agro tourism, everyone expects quality service at right time.

Legislation Problems

Tourism is a part of entertainment, so, all hotels, motels and cottages having license are paying high taxes to the government. But in rural tourism as rural people will also be involved, there should be a provision of tax holiday.

Insufficient Financial Support

Government has recently started promoting rural tourism. Central and state government should encourage rural tourism by providing financial support to start the project. It will create employment in rural areas and will also help in flow of fund from urban to rural. It can help in preventing the migration of people from rural area to urban areas. Sufficient financial support is required for essential developments like human resource, enforcement of rules and regulations, building of physical infrastructures, and land use management.

Lack of Communication Skills

Language and education is the basic hindrance in communication. The ability to communicate effectively is very essential. Much of success depends on our ability to give warm welcome to tourists. Villagers will have to understand the tourist's wants and needs. There should not be any communication gap between the guest and the host.

Lack of Proper Physical Infrastructures

Nearly half of the villages in the country do not have all weather roads. Just getting to some of these villages is very difficult task in northeast states, like Assam, landscape is very beautiful, but due to heavy rainfall, it is inaccessible for developing tourism especially during rainy season. For developing tourism in rural areas, not only all-weather roads but also safe drinking water, electricity, telephone, safety and security, etc. are needed.

Community Involvement

Since the rural people lack knowledge and skills, they may get the jobs of unskilled worker. The basic concept behind rural tourism is to emphasize on participation of rural people, but in practice local people are seldom involved in decision making, planning and implementing policies. Most of the rural people do not have much knowledge of tourism, and are misled by outside investors who hope to take most of the economic benefits from rural areas.

Illiteracy

Majority of the rural population is uneducated and illiterate. 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. For the development of rural tourism, rural people need to understand the urbanites.

Lack of Basic Education

Continuously through seven decades the rural literacy rate in India is below the average. According to 2011 census, while the urban literacy rate is 84.97 percent and total literacy rate is 74.04 percent, the rural literacy rate is still below the average. Therefore, lack of basic education in rural areas is a major hindrance in rural tourism.

Language Hindrance

There are 16 recognized languages and 850 dialects in India. Although Hindi is an official language, but in many parts of India people do not understand it. Either the rural people have to upgrade themselves to communicate with the tourists or they will not get much benefit from rural tourism. Along with this, villagers will have to understand Hindi, to interact with the Indian customers and English to communicate with the foreign customers.

Business Planning Skills

For any business, technical knowledge and skill is required to organize and maintain it. With the help of government or nongovernment organization, business plan could be prepared, but the villagers should participate in developing and implementing the project on rural tourism.

Trained Tourist Guide

The guide plays a very important role in attracting tourists. 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. Department of Tourism can select and train the guide and then provide the license

Conclusion

Rural Tourism is a new concept in the arena of tourism which can bring immense prosperity in the region. Rural Tourism can earn a lot by attracting people from far and wide seeking natural beauty, tranquility, regional heritage and for rural commodities.

The rural surroundings in India have ample scope for tourism with great employment opportunities, livelihood, revenue earning and prosperity of the inhabitants living in the countryside. The basic need is to preserve and develop the rural areas with its natural setting.

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