

AGRO TOURISM: EXPLORING NEW AVENUES IN RURAL INDIA

Article Id: AL201903

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India being a land of agriculture, gifted with diverse panoramictopography and ecological landscape across the country, thus supporting the livelihood of more than 50 per cent of the farming community. Agro 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. Such form of tourism has created tremendous impact on the local economy and socio-cultural scenario of the concern area on one hand and carries a potential scope for the rural residents on the other hand. It can provide several advantages: income, employment, use accommodation, activities, natural resource conservation, recreation and education. But the main problem for many countries is the low level of farm income. Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas aimed for enhancing higher standards of living for rural communities especially through increased income for people who work in agriculture.

The term agro-tourism emerged in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms that are related to tourism. Agro tourism philosophy aims to increase farmers' incomes and the quality of life of rural society. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines rural tourism as tourism that gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of the countryside and as far as possible, allows them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people (Aref and Gill, 2009). According to the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), it is tourism that takes place in the countryside (Reichel *et al.*, 2000). The Government of India (GoI) defines rural tourism as any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism

experience. Thus, rural tourism can be defined as tourism in country side which is intrinsically related to ecotourism, cultural tourism and agro tourism. Agro tourism educates people and society about agriculture and contributes to the local economy; it reduces the level of urbanization as people work and earn more from agro tourism; it promotes local products and create added value through direct marketing and stimulates economic activities in order to increase benefits in societies where the agro tourism is developed. Researcher Rilla clearly describes the reasons for the development of agro-tourism as: educate deliberately by maintaining links between sectors interested in the local society and visitors; the positive impact on improving the health of visitors; creating relaxation; it constitutes an adventure; it determines enjoying natural food; it could be a unique experience and it is a form of leisure tourism.

As it is well known fact that, urban population is increasing day by day in India, today the urban people's world is restricted in the closed door flats, offices, clubs, television, video games, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on. They can see nature only on television or screen of the computers. More over some people living in the cities do not have relatives in villages and they never visited or stayed in village. These people want to enjoy rural life but there is problem of such type of facilities. Hence, it is opportunity to the farmers for the development of the agro-tourism centres and it serves him and create additional income source.

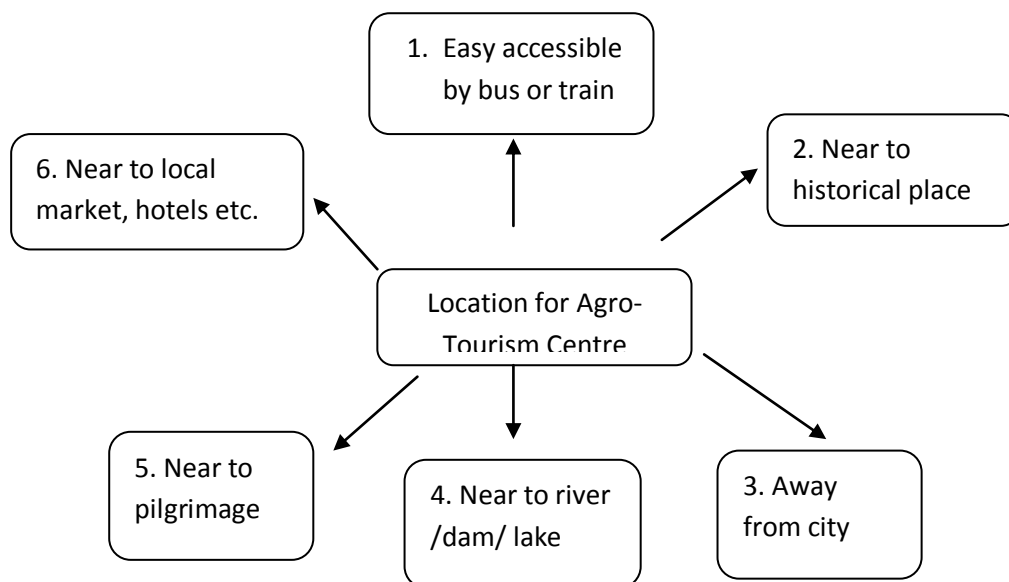


Fig1. Ideal location for Agro-tourism centres

There are three main forms of rural tourism which bring benefits both for tourists and for the local community

Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas (Fennell, 1999).



Fig a. Farm Stay Houses



Fig b. Animal Ride



Fig c. Dairy Tourism



Fig d. catering exotic foods



Fig d. Art and Craft



Fig e. Recreation in Sunflower field

Cultural tourism covers all aspects of travel where visitors can learn about another area's history and way of life. Thus, cultural factors in the context of tourism include the entertainment, food, drink, hospitality, architecture, manufactured and hand-crafted products of a destination, and all other characteristics of a destination's way of life (McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990).

Agriculture tourism is an enterprise which combines elements of agriculture and tourism. Example, retail markets, petting zoos, fee-fishing, festivals and fairs, tours, agriculture related museums, agriculture related festivals and fairs (Bruch *et al.*, 2005). William *et al.* (2001) define agricultural tourism as a combination of natural settings and products of agricultural operations combined within a tourism experience. It includes providing tourists with opportunities to experience a broad spectrum of agriculturally based products and services ranging from fruit stand shopping to winery, from farm based bed and breakfast accommodation to tourist participation in cattle drives. According to Lamb (2008), agrotourism, farm tourism or agricultural tourism is the process of attracting visitors and travellers to agricultural areas, generally for educational and recreational purposes.

Benefits of Agro-Tourism Centers

Agro-Tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agriculture. The benefits of agro-tourism development are manifold. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people. Some of the benefits are following:-

- Employment opportunities to the farmers including farm family members and youth.
- Additional income source for the farmers to protect against income fluctuation.
- Cultural transformation between urban and rural people including social moral values.
- Farmers can improve their standard of living due to the contacts with urban people.
- Benefits to the urban people, they can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities.
- It supports and further promotes rural and agricultural development process.
- Help to the reduce burden on the other traditional tourist centres and attracts tourists.
- Agri tourism has the capacity to create a win win situation for both the farmers as well as the tourists.
- Employment generation through allied activities like Emu, organic and dairy farming.

Some barriers in Agro-tourism

1. **Language Problem:** Language problem in the locality have been found to be one of the barriers in the enhancement of the tourism potential. People are found to be lacking proper fluency in Hindi, English or even local dialect, for interaction with the tourists.

2. **Insufficient Financial Support:** Proper financial support can enhance the tourism potential of the region, which would help the folks to preserve the local culture, traditions, heritage, art forms etc. that showcases the uniqueness of the place in the proper manner.
3. **Communication Problem:** There should be proper transport and communication facility i.e. better road connectivity, mobile and telephone network for better commutation and convenience of the tourists.
4. **Lack of Trained tourist guide:** The whole tourism concept is very indigenous in the rural areas. Though initiative attempt have been taken by the local youths, yet the professionalism is lacking. They are lacking proper training to project in the manner from tourism perspective.
5. **Lack of business planning skill:** Some regions have great potential as an upcoming agro tourist spot. But, in order to bring it to a greater platform, sound business planning has to be made. The region needs proper enhancement of its beauty and resources skillfully to bring itself to light.

Socio-economic impacts of Agro-tourism

1. **Employment to youth:** Rural tourism contributes positively to the increase in employment and income levels of the youths.
2. **Boost to the Handloom and Cottage industry:** Traditional attires, especially of women are found to a delightful attraction for incoming tourist both domestic and outsiders. People, often found to be interested in purchasing the garments, which is helping in gearing up the production of local handloom products.
3. **Preservation of natural resources:** Tourism in local areas helps in preserving the rural eco system, since it forms the base to the tourism sector, also a part of the development funds are use in creating social forests and preserving existing forest.
4. **Exchange of revenue:** Employment avenues created by tourism demands help in earning domestic income.
5. **Exposure to their religion:** Tourism avenues have a given a due introduction to this almost hidden but old culture. Tourist interaction has provided the proper exposure to the world outside.

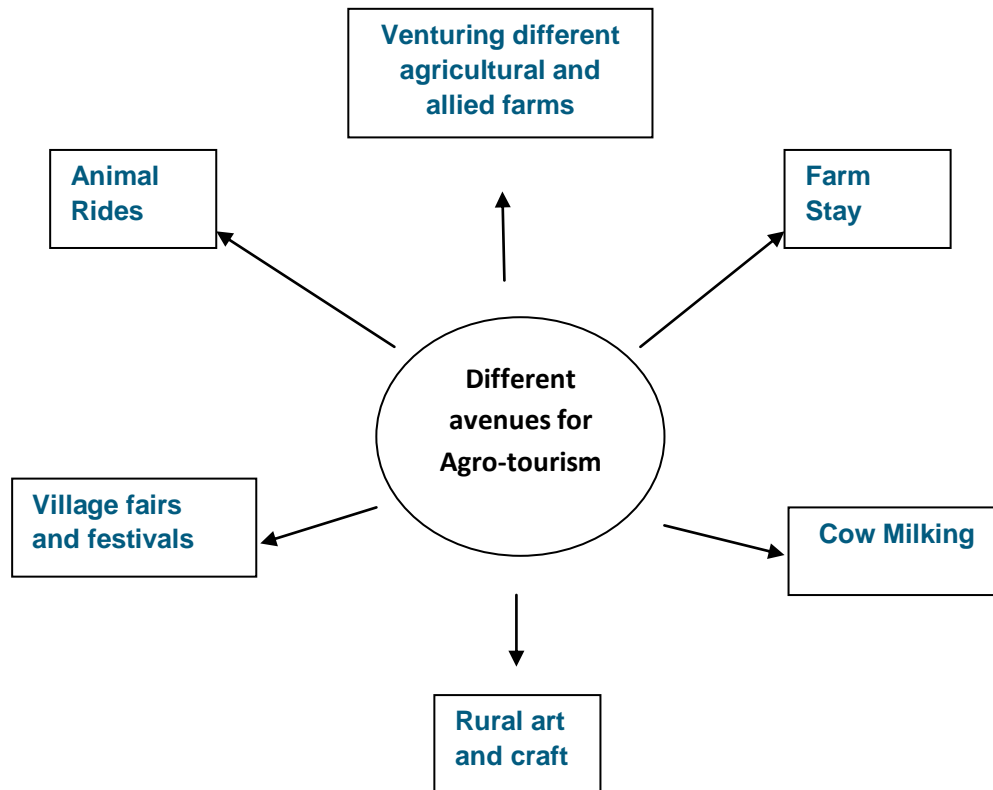


Fig 2. Different avenues for Agro-tourism

Key Strategy for Success of Agro-Tourism

Agro-Tourism is a one of the business activities. So, farmers must have commercialmindset and some marketing techniques for the success. For the better success in the agro-tourism farmers should follow the following things;

- Give a wide publicity of your tourism centre by newspapers, television etc. Use all possible advertisement means.
- Develop contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, clubs, unions, organizations etc.
- Train your staff or family members for reception and hospitality of the agro tourists.
- Understand about the customers wants and their expectations and serve them accordingly.
- Charge optimum rent and charges for the facilities/services on the commercialbase.
- Do the artificially use local resources for the entertainment / service to tourists.
- Develop your website and update time to time for attract foreign tourist.
- Take their feedback and comments about the service and suggestions to more development and modification.
- Develop a good rapport with the tourist for future business and chain publicity.

- Develop different agro-tour packages of for different type of tourist and their expectations.
- Maintain an address book and comments of the visited tourists for future tourismbusiness and reference.
- Small farmers can develop their agro-tourism centres on the basis of cooperativesociety.

Conclusion and Policy Implication

India basically being a rural economy, rural tourism and agri tourism significantly contributes to the GDP of any country and is a crucial tool for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. Indian tourism industry is growing at the rate of 10 %, which is two and a half times more than the growth rate at global level. In India of late the unique tourism arteries that have gained momentum are health tourism (medical tourism), religious tourism, sports tourism, educational tourism etc. Agri tourism is now an additional artery of the tourism sector in India. Though at present it is in nascent stage, with proper government incubation it can gain flight. There by introducing agro tourism concept all over India not only the present growth rate can be sustained but it is also a value addition and can accelerate further growth.

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