EXPLORING RURAL INDIA : A NEW FACE OF INDIAN TOURISM

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ABSTRACT: *Across the world the trends of industrialization, globalization and development have resulted in an urbanized western centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of urban lifestyles have led to a "counter-urbanization" syndrome including aftereffects of stress, fast life and survival in an intense competitive environment. At the same time, the saturation of urbanization has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the areas leading to a syndrome amongst rural migrants. This has spurred a growing interest in reverting back to the old forms of living and dwelling in a spellbound experience to live a relaxed and a healthy lifestyle. So, a new concept of tourism of visiting village settings has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism. Rural Tourism while on one side can bring about significant improvements in incomes and living standards of rural folk, on the other side, it can bring about phenomenal success in economic growth. This paper explores the business opportunities and challenges associated with the development and management of rural tourism. It examines the various facets of rural tourism and how it can serve to be a winning game for both rural and urban communities.*

Keywords : *Rural tourism, Agri - tourism, Economic Development through rural tourism*

Objectives

To explore the business opportunities and challenges associated with the development and management of rural tourism.

To examine the various facets of rural tourism and

To study how it can serve to be a winning game for both rural and urban communities.

1.Introduction

Every country is involved in promoting tourism in a big way. Tourism has become a top priority of the economic agenda of all the countries. For example, in Malaysia, tourism is the top revenue generating sector. In India, tourism is slowly getting due focus taking into account the country's rich heritage and cultural tradition. Tourism is projected as an engine of economic growth and as an instrument for eliminating poverty, solving unemployment problem, opening up new fields of activity.

India's present economic reforms have given a big push to the tourism sector. The tourism sector is one of the major foreign exchange earners for the country. In 2007, 50 lakh tourists visited India, up from 44.5 lakh in 2006. Correspondingly, the foreign exchange earnings grew 33% to over $12 billion, compared to $9 billion in 2006.

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According to estimates, 40.6 crore domestic tourists have criss-crossed the length and breadth of the country in the past two years. This means that if the tourist expenditure circulates locally and the leakages are low, a significant improvement can be made in the income and living standards of the people of the region or locality. However, a developed region can often divert the benefits towards itself at the cost of the underdeveloped neighbouring regions. Such situations have been experienced in both international as well as domestic tourism. Further, intense competition can be there within a country between different regions, destinations or leisure spots and among the various suppliers of services.[4]

Rural India has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like eco tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, farm tourism, endogenous tourism, nature tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism and the like. In India the entire package of rural tourism is still at an infant stage. Adequate efforts have not been made so far to effectively market this concept abroad. Rural areas in Rajasthan and Kerala are attracting tourists on their own and Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have started attracting tourists. Worldwide, rural tourism which offers these niche segments is a growing concept. While tourism in general is growing at an annual rate of 4%, nature travel is increasing at an annual rate of between 10% and 30%, says the World Resources Institute.[3]

The World Tourism Organisation estimated that all nature-related forms of tourism accounted for about 20% of total international travel and nature tourism, in particular, generates 7% of global travel expenditure. Experts like Fillion found that 40-60% of such tourists are nature tourists and 20-40% are wildlife-related tourists. Figures may differ as it is difficult to record the exact number of tourist arrivals and the spots they are visiting. But the gross estimates of relevant agencies and experts are sufficient pointers to the fact that rural tourism is not only a growing concept, but a money spinner. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has identified India as the foremost tourist growth centre in the coming decade and has projected its growth at 9.7% per annum. India will emerge as the second largest creator of employment from tourism, next to China.[16] That such rural tourism can improve the income of rural folk is beyond doubt. The issue is of rural tourism on a sustainable basis. Different facets of nature lure tourists. It is, therefore, advisable that nature is maintained in its true form. But there are instances of deliberate exploitation of nature for minting money.

Different studies are done on identifying areas of rural tourism. The UNDP sponsored project is being implemented in different parts of the country through the participation of Central and state governments and NGOs. A recent study jointly undertaken by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), Rajasthan government and the credit rating agency Crisil has divided the state into eight tourist circuits. These circuits are: Jaipur-Tonk-Madhopur circuit, Shekhawati circuit, Mewar circuit, Hadoti circuit, desert

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circuit, Ajmer-Pushkar-Merta-Nagpur circuit, Mount Abu circuit and Vagad circuit. [16]

2.Definition of Rural Tourism

In the west, and other developed countries, they call it Farm Tourism, as it largely offers a 'back to nature' experience. Rural Tourism, the nomenclature India has adopted, goes far beyond the western concept. India, it has been aptly said, lives in its villages, and that is where a visitor can get the feel of the real India. The official booklet on the subject says it succinctly. "The rural heartland of India", it points out, "is home to an array of endowments, each distinctive, with lifestyle redolent of art, craft, and culture and natural heritage. Rural tourism thus connects the visitor from the frenetic present with the traditional assets of communities whose domain lies off the beaten track. It recognizes the role of women in civil society, the primacy of human development and the preservation of heritage". [1]

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, can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially 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; it is experiential, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local events, and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. In rural India, a diminishing global resource, provides us with an increasingly important environment for tourism. Rural tourism has been receiving the much-needed attention in the recent past due to the benefits it can give to rural areas in terms of alternative source of income, community development and nature preservation. The ways to provide enriched and unique cultural experiences can also benefit urban consumers. [3]

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3.Why Rural Tourism?

Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of urban lifestyles have led to a "counter-urbanization" 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 rural 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. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism, like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness. The saturation of urban areas has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the urban areas, leading to a syndrome amongst rural migrants. This has spurred a growing interest in reverting back to the old forms of living and dwelling in a spell bound experience to live a relaxed and a

healthy lifestyle. So, a new concept of tourism of visiting village settings has taken the shape of a formal kind of rural tourism. Rural tourism, while on one side can bring about significant improvements in incomes and living standards of rural folk, on the other side it can bring about phenomenal success in economic growth. 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. Rural India has much to offer to the world. Rural India has a great potential to attract foreign tourists. Rural tourism showcases the rural life in India, the art, culture and heritage, the nature and wild life and various other aspects of rural India. Rural India with its rich reservoir of traditions, arts and crafts can become the most desired tourist destination, if the concept of rural tourism is marketed well. Rich in traditions of arts, crafts and culture, rural India can emerge as an important tourist spot. New opportunities are being tapped to promote economic, adventure, rural, postage, wildlife and health, and medical tourism including herbal, across the globe. Amongst the people residing in developed countries there is a growing demand / desire to experience and understand traditional ways of life. Best example in support of this concept is Rajasthan. Despite the absence of any promotional activity for rural tourism, thousands of foreign tourists visit rural areas in Rajasthan, Gujarat and south India every year. This in itself is a proof of the viability of the concept of rural tourism. Upcoming replica of villages at Chokidhani in Jaipur, at Vaishali in Ahmedabad, even Chaupal at Ashok Hotel, New Delhi to create the necessary effect are also steps towards the same direction. For marginal farmers, farming alone cannot bring the necessary financial benefits. Attracting tourists to rural India could open a new earning stream and help promote village handicrafts, food and culture. Agri Tourism is another face of rural tourism- Old ways, new ideas.[2][5]

Agri-tourism is all about unraveling various facets of village life. This includes opening up farms to tourists from cities and abroad, and letting them spend some time in the lap of nature. Apart from telling them about the various crops and how they are sown and harvested, agri-tourism exposes tourists to authentic food, handicraft, dress, culture, music and language. Tourists get to indulge in rural activities such as bullock-cart rides, milking cows and goats and picking farm-fresh fruits and vegetables. The activities may vary from village to village, as a country as diverse as India has so many different experiences to offer. Agri-tourism activities can help generate more jobs in rural areas, and thus reduce large-scale migration from villages to cities. Setting up an agri-tourism farm doesn't cost the earth. It can be developed in a village where farmers are willing to showcase their culture and traditions. All one needs to set up is a decent boarding and lodging facility for tourists. It is important to have a clean place and hygienic food. The expenditure on travel, food and accommodation is low and so it is easy to scale up the number of tourists they can receive.[5][6]

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DARE/estimates	
Number of foreign tourists who visited India in 2007	50 lakh
Number of domestic tourists in 2007	40.6 crore
Total number of tourists in 2007	41.1 crore
Say, 10% of tourists are game for agri tourism	4.11 crore
Tariff from one tourist for a day	500 Rest
Example: each tourist stays for	2 days
Earning from each tourist	1,000 Rs
Estimated size of opportunity	4,100 Rs crore

Source:http://www.dare.co.in/opportunities/agriculture-rural/digging-gold-in-rural-india.htm

According to an estimate agri and rural tourism is worth Rs. 4,300 crores in the country and has a huge potential to grow, with the booming tourism industry crossing 4 million tourist arrivals per year.

DARE/money matters	
Number of foreign tourists who visited India in 2007	4
Size of one room	180 sq ft
Cost of constructing one room	400 Rs/sq ft
Cost of furnishing one room	300 Rs/sq ft
Total cost of one room	1,26,000 Rs
Total cost of four rooms	5,04,000 Rs
Earnings	
Say, 10 tourists visit the village for	104 days/year
104 days/year	500 Rs
Gross earnings	5,20,000 Rs
Expenses	
Monthly spend on food, electricity etc	15,000 Rs
Annual spend on food, electricity etc	1,80,000 Rs
Loan repayment of Rs 5 lakh	1,50,000 Rs
Total spend	3,30,000 Rs
Net Earnings per year	1,74,000 Rs

Source: http://www.dare.co.in/opportunities/agriculture-rural/ digging-gold-in-rural-india.htm

So, presuming that 10% of the total number of tourists may consider visiting various farms across the country during the year, the number would be close to 4.1 crores. Each person stays for about two days, and the tariff is Rs 500 per day. Thus the size of the opportunity is a whopping Rs 4100 crores! Agri-tourism is now growing in a big way. However, it may take some time before it starts to grab a major share of the revenue generated from tourism-related activities There is a huge scope of developing various pockets of agri-tourism in the country, as India is a country of extreme diversity. There is a saying in India that "with every 12 miles that one crosses, the water changes, the culture changes and the food habits change. So at every 12 miles there can be an agri-tourism project!" [6][8]

4.Major Challenges

The development of those rural areas must be sustainable and should be able to meet the needs of the present and future generations. Hence we must ensure that development of these rural areas maintains the economic, social, sociological sustainability. There are a number of tourist destinations in India, which have a great potential but have not yet been explored. The following issues are a matter of concern contributing to a great extent for pathetic situations in these areas, which of course pose major challenges[8][9][7]:

1. Poor Infrastructure
2. Lack of public and political will
3. Lack of social awareness
4. Late realization of the fact that tourism can also play a great role in development.
5. Political games
6. Illiteracy
7. Belief that only agriculture can help people
8. Though it has been more than 50 years since Independence it can still be found that it is a new country.
9. Ecological disturbance
10. Improper tourism marketing
11. Lack of planning
13. Instability of the Government.
14. Less allocation for tourism infrastructure and technological backwardness
15. Attitude of people due to unawareness
16. Absence of people participation
17. Absence of supporting industry, like food, transportation and textiles etc.

Nevertheless, when it comes to cities and leisure spots/heritage sites - particularly in the rural areas, marketing becomes a major problem. This is because the local bodies are either not aware about the developmental role of tourism or are constrained by their own politics or lack of funds. It must be noted that in the marketing of a destination (region, city or leisure spots) we should consider the following aspects:

1. Attractions - like promotion of rural tourism around a heritage site
2. Infrastructure (accommodation, cuisine, hygiene, clean water, basic amenities etc.)
3. Accessibility (roads, means of transportation)-Ideally, should not be too far from railhead or airport: 2-21/2 hr.
4. Carrying capacity of the destination,

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5. Environmental issues (Pollution, Eco-fragility, etc.)
6. Safety, law and order situation (for both the local population as well as tourists), etc.
7. Enhancement of rural tourism; could be a destination with a unique selling preposition for e.g.
8. Atithi Devo Bhava is more practised in rural India than anywhere else
9. An experience one cannot have anywhere in the world - equate with west
10. Actually living with people
11. Diversity of culture, language, food, craft
12. Exposure to heritage sites
13. Coming back to nature
14. Health - physical and mental both: yoga, exposure to local medicine or Indian system of medicine e.g. Ayurveda, Unani. Then there is yoga, various types of massages Tranquility - away from humdrum, stressless and strain free stay
15. Not necessarily, though promoting vegetarianism can also be a USP
16. Environment friendly
17. Freshness in food ingredients when procured locally - may be organically cultivated
18. Local crafts and cottage industry can provide unique shopping experience (inexpensive)
19. For investors also, promotion of rural tourism investment could bring in higher returns on comparatively low investments.

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5. Development Through Rural Tourism and the Role of Government

Tourism has thus become established as an economic activity. Marketing strategies concentrate on increasing the volume of tourists. This, at times, creates a host of unforeseen consequences. Thus, it is necessary that the objectives of tourism development in relation to a region, city or (a rural area) leisure spot be clearly stated. In fact, the developmental role of marketing has to be kept in mind while marketing regions, cities or leisure spots (a rural area). This developmental role is to be further strengthened by socially responsible marketing. For the communities to further benefit from rural tourism, it is essential that the government do some amount of formal planning and interventions. (Campbell1999) Though it is hailed as a tool for regional development, there is rarely a clear conception of rural tourism or its role in rural regions or local communities, which could lay down strategy or planning. (Butler et al., 1998).

For the development of rural India, government is promoting rural tourism. The tourism ministry has since launched a major rural tourism project, covering the whole country, in association with UNDP (United Nations Development Fund). Some fifty villages have already been chosen, where access and basic infrastructure like accommodation, food and guides are being provided. To quote again from the official booklet, "virtually every corner of rural India possesses a craft or traditional skill, preserved and passed on by the gurus to their pupils.....Patachitra painting and Gotipura dance in Raghurajpura, Ikat

style weaving in Pochampally, metal mirrors and Vaastu Vidya in Aranmula, the Chanderi weave in Pranpur, embroidery in Hodka ..... the list is endless". "For the visitor", it adds, "rural tourism will add value through packaged programmes in art and craft, imparted by skilled local artisans. And village entertainment groups will unveil local history, and cultural, natural and oral treasures." The important role of participatory and community based organizations like cooperatives / panchayats in promoting tourism is beginning to be recognized. As a result, concepts like "sustainable tourism", "peace through tourism", "poverty reduction through tourism", 'community tourism', etc., which can best be implemented through participatory institutions, are being popularized in a big way. [10][8]

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 regions. Key geographic regions need to be identified for development and promotion of Rural Tourism. The implementation is being done through a Convergence Committee headed by the District Collector. This convergence committee has been set up under the Collector to oversee the implementation of the project. The execution of the work is entrusted to any central govt./state govt. agency and the Government of India would release the funds directly to the implementing agency, as recommended by the state government. In fact, many states on their own initiative, have begun promoting rural tourism. For instance the forest department of the Uttaranchal government has set up 'Centre for Ecotourism and Sustainable Livelihoods'. This centre aims at capacity building of local communities and promotion of rural tourism. Activities like improving the environment, hygiene, infrastructure etc. are of course eligible for assistance. Apart from providing financial assistance the focus should also be to tap the resources available under different schemes of department of rural development, state governments and other concerned departments of the Government of India. [12][13]

A detailed plan for implementation of the project is being thought about. A maximum of Rs. 50 lakhs would also be sanctioned under various schemes. The following jobs get taken up under the Scheme –

I) Improvement of the surroundings of the village. This would include activities like landscaping, development of parks, fencing, compound wall etc.

ii) Improvements to roads within the Panchayat limits. This shall not include the major roads which connects the village.

iii) Illumination in the village.

iv) Providing for improvement in solid waste management and sewerage management.

v) Construction of Wayside Amenities.

vi) Procurement of equipments directly related to tourism, like Water Sports, Adventure Sports, Eco-friendly modes of transport for moving within the tourism zone.

vii) Refurbishment of the Monuments.

viii) Signages

"Rural tourism will add value through packaged programmes in art and craft, imparted by skilled local artisans. And village entertainment groups will unveil local history, and cultural, natural and oral treasures."

ix) Warm reception of the tourists

x) Other work/activities directly related to tourism

xi) Tourist Accommodation

6. Benefits

This country has more compelling reasons to aggressively promote rural tourism. One, is the immense potential for employment of rural youth, the other, is that it could check the rapid rural migration which is having an adverse effect on cities. Besides, rural tourism could not only revive pride in rural life-styles, but also help improve the quality of life in villages. This segment of tourism, though new to India and well established elsewhere, fits in with the government's avowed policy of improving the lot of the rural masses. Tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas. Tourism can be an important source of jobs for non-metro communities and offer business opportunities to local residents. It can enhance local quality of life, through tax collection and also support local culture, arts and crafts business of that particular region.[14][11] Tourism also supports rural areas by encouraging restoration of local and historical sites. Tourism, which is generally considered to be a relatively clean industry, may foster local conservation efforts and development through community involvements. The rural tourism helps in improving lives of rural people and maintaining the quality of environment. Rural tourism would lead to employment for people in these areas who would be required to work in restaurants, as tourist guides, for cultural performances and as salespersons for handicrafts manufactured by self-help groups and local artisans. It would also generate revenue for villages through levy of tourist fees and charges for parking of vehicles and renting of shops.[7][13] Rural tourism is seen as a means of alternative development strategy for economic and social regeneration of rural areas, as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth , increase viability of underdeveloped regions and improve the standards of living of local communities. (Brieddenhann and Wickens, 2004) In Panchayati Raj System, which is a three tier system, very clearly says that the each and every village must be capable of earning its livelihood and if each village would be capable of doing so the development will automatically come. These villages or rural areas will become self-dependent by providing livelihood to the residents and their future generations. The industry must come up with a plan to attract maximum number of domestic and international travelers by realizing the strengths of these projects and promoting the same in a decent manner. To help and encourage the rural people, government and the private companies together must provide sufficient funds and amenities, which can facilitate the development of the place. This is possible only if a strong political will, an efficient tourism development plan, plus a good and trustyworthy private and public partnership on the basis of BOT(build, operate and transfer)exists. 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 almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Rural tourism has

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been seen as a tool through which many developmental problems in rural areas can be addressed.[10][15] In less developed countries like sub-Saharan Africa afflicted by debilitating rural poverty, tourism is perceived to be one of the few feasible options for development. (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004).

7. Recommendations

It is highly imperative to make rural people understand and be aware about the benefits of tourism to get their support, because there is no way one can succeed in promoting a destination in rural areas without the support of local people. One needs to educate them about the benefits and help them to understand that there is a way to earn living beyond the agricultural practices. Keeping in mind that rural tourism mainly attracts foreign tourists , basic facilities should be provided in villages. Services like internet, land line telephones, neat and clean accommodation with proper electricity and water supply and well–connected modes of transportation should be made available. Promoting rural tourism would call in aspects of social marketing by promoting culture, festivals, fairs, folks, tradition and crafts. It is necessary to present rural India -the "Real India" in the most righteous manner, not to forget innocence and kind gestures which can really win hearts of people. Aggressive campaigning like "Rural India - Experience the Real India" must be promoted on all major Indian travel websites. Websites dedicated to rural culture, dance, festivals and other arts and crafts should be launched. It is important to take a few villages at a time - improve the basic infrastructure, do the needful and then go for more villages. In this way, one can learn from one's previous mistakes and do better.

8.Conclusion

India has a global edge in its potential to offer unique experiences, particularly linked to rural India, which has tremendous wealth in its rich traditions, lifestyle, culture and wisdom. Unfortunately, tourism in these areas is at a nascent stage and it can therefore absorb much of the necessary expansion in the tourism sector as a whole. Why cannot we enable a farmer to make money with an outdoor recreation sideline ? We need a plan for rural tourism's marketing. The Central Government's varied schemes on rural tourism, including activities such as improvement of infrastructure, need to be implemented in a big way. It is the revitalization of rural areas through tourism in India.

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