



RURAL TOURISM – Features, Components and Key drivers for its Growth

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ABSTRACT

India's journey of rural tourism began with a hope of eradicating poverty for those living in the villages and also to showcase the unique lifestyle, art, craft, culture, heritage, etc. to the domestic and international travellers who want to experience 'the real India'. Staying in homes of villagers, tourists can learn various activities like cooking, fishing, angling, bird watching, clay modeling, making local handicrafts, go for village walks, or simply chill out in the serene surroundings. There are a fair number of home stay facilities that have come up across the country as a part of the initiatives to boost rural tourism. During the stay visitors get to interact with the local communities, learn about their life styles, customs and traditions and indulge in local cuisine.

Rural tourism helps in income generation and raising the living standards of the local population. In a country like India where approximately 70% of its population lives in villages, the concept of rural tourism certainly holds a lot of significance.

INTRODUCTION:

Rural tourism is a unique concept in the modern day tourism that focuses solely in participating in the rural life style. It can be termed as an alternate of agro tourism, a concept aimed in uplifting the rural areas inviting a higher inflow of tourists and nature freaks. Now-a-days, the concept of tourism is not restricted only within popular tourist destinations, but human minds with a hunger to explore more and something new have gladly embraced this off the track concept of tourism where they can interact directly with nature being in its lap. Moreover, present generation tourists are more inclined towards exploring virgin locales in remote areas of the country where nature itself is welcoming with its picturesque bounties.

Objectives of the paper

The objectives of the given paper are as follows

- 1) To understand basic definition of Rural Tourism and different aspects related to it.
- 2) To evaluate the basic features of Rural Tourism.
- 3) To identify the essential components of Rural Tourism.
- 4) To explain the activities involved in Rural Tourism.
- 5) To suggest the key drivers for the growth of Rural Tourism.

Definition of rural tourism

Rural tourism may be defined as tourist activities taking place in rural areas, generating a steady source of income to the rural people through the arrangement of specific holiday activities drawing attraction of tourists from far and near. The definition of rural tourism can be extended to eco-tourism and agro tourism, which are also fast gaining pace to uplift the livelihood of the rural people and to save our planet as well.

Several “green initiatives” to make our planet cleaner and greener has boosted eco-tourism mainly based on rural settlements encouraging the mass to adopt a greener pastime. The term Agro tourism or agricultural tourism is also quite relevant with rural tourism as this is also focused towards the betterment of the villagers.

Rural tourism often does not get the desired attention due to the roaring business of popular holiday planners and trip advisors, coming out with attractive travel deals every season in order to rope in more urban travelers. The importance of rural tourism cannot be ignored if viewed in a broader perspective that not only provides an alternate way of healthy tourism, but also contributes significantly to the growth of the tourism industry.

In spite of monopolization of the tourism market by big tour planners, there has been a significant growth in the rural tourism past one decade or so. Thanks to the spiraling fuel prices and the unprecedented global economic meltdown. Rising health and environment consciousness have further fuelled the growth of rural tourism driving the die hard tourists and adventure seekers to opt for this mode of tourism.

Features of Rural Tourism

1) Rural tourism – A way to encash nature:

Nature has always attracted man through its different forms and features, and rural tourism provides another unique gateway to explore nature. Tourism industry has been one of the main revenue earners in many countries, and with rural tourism getting impetus the governments are more optimistic about it. While primary sectors in developed economies are posting a poor show due to a staggering global economy, rural tourism can compensate for the low earnings appreciably.

Any ordinary village can be presented to the outsiders in a unique manner through this concept of rural tourism. A village by a seaside or riverbed can be turned into a site of attraction through proper development of infrastructure making it accessible to the tourists from far and near. Rural tourism is fast gathering momentum against the backdrop of this trend with many villages being developed into popular weekend getaways. Needless to mention rural tourism can provide the much needed financial boost to the rural people, beneficial for the country as a whole.

2) Showcasing nature and people through rural tourism:

Rural tourism provides a direct interaction with nature inviting the outsiders in active participation with local people and their culture. Exploitation of a rural tourist spot is incomplete without a direct interaction of tourists and localites. Understanding the lifestyle, customs and traditions of the rural people and enjoying their local cuisines and handicrafts completes the picture of rural tourism.

3) Proper infrastructure – The mainstay of rural tourism:

This form of tourism undoubtedly paves the way for the overall socio economic development of the rural areas contributing to the overall economic development of the country. Development of rural tourism primarily rests on a good infrastructure. An upcoming rural tourist destination should be easily accessible. Enjoying a vacation amidst natural serenity in not-so-far rural destinations has been the trend of the modern generation tourists.

Good communication facilities and upgraded basic amenities can magically turn a lesser known rural settlement into a popular tourist destination. Active government participation involving private landowners can bring up the infrastructure development necessary to boost rural tourism. Major developed countries in the world are now seriously considering tapping rural tourism in order to maintain a sustainable economic growth.

Aspects of Rural Tourism

1) Provides a healthy mode of tourism:

Urban dwellers sick of the daily hustle bustle of the city life full of noise and environmental pollution seek a respite from all these amidst the tranquil natural surroundings. Lush green rural areas devoid of all sorts of urban pollution along with the unique hospitality of the local people provide the much desired relief to the exhausted city dwellers rejuvenating their sick and tired body and souls.

2) Promotes Green Tourism:

Daily activities of urban life have caused enough damage to this planet upsetting the ecological balance, which has resulted in excessive greenhouse gas emission and global warming. Rural tourism promotes green tourism by adopting greener measures compelling the travelers enjoy their vacation in a greener and healthier manner. Rural tourism can make the best use of the renewable resources of energy and encourage the usage of bio-degradable materials.

3) Develops rural settlements:

Development of the rural sector has always been in the government's agenda which can be achieved rapidly through rural tourism. Increase in revenues through higher tourist inflow cause faster development of the rural settlements bringing the backward rural people into the mainstream.

4) Improves the livelihood of the rural people:

Rural tourism provides the opportunity of direct buying and selling of the products reducing other secondary costs. Infrastructure development, setting up of upgraded accommodations and retail stores associated with rural tourism, generates a steady income to the rural people apart from the income generated from farming. Cottage and other small scale industries get a boost through rural tourism. All these factors contribute greatly in improving the livelihood of the villagers.

5) Prevents mass migration to cities:

Last but not the least, growing rural tourism can prevent mass migration of rural youths to cities in search of employment. This has been the trend past few decades, which has seen the worst forms of urban pollution. Due to unplanned civic amenities overcrowding in cities generates more waste the disposal of which has been a rising concern. Local employment generation in the rural sector will prevent this overcrowding providing better means of living for everybody.

Essential components of rural tourism

Though promoting rural tourism has a far reaching impact in the economical growth of a country along with the boosting of tourism industry, there are certain components based on which this mode of tourism can be implemented in a full fledged manner. Rural tourism must be promoted without tampering its natural components in the name of infrastructure development. There are certain components that demand special attention to promote rural tourism.

1) Ancient villages with picturesque scenic beauty:

Ancient villages with a vast picturesque landscape present the ideal site for rural tourism. Gifted with natural bounties, these villages now have become most sought after destinations for free independent travelers and nature lovers. Tourists love to spend a few days amidst a serene natural ambience exploring **in and around the** particular place.

2) Standard local population of a rural settlement:

Villages or rural settlements targeted for rural tourism must be inhabited by a standard population. Too low population of a rural area cannot turn into a permanent site of attraction. Tourists from far and near would like to interact with the local people depending on them in various respects. Uninhabited locales may occasionally attract a few adventure freaks, but that will not serve the purpose of rural tourism.

3) Scope for natural exploration in and around the rural area:

Villages flanked by wild forests and hillocks offer a better scope for natural exploration much to the liking of a large number of tourists. Such settlements are hot spots where rural tourism can grow in leaps and bounds. Sighting rare species of flora and fauna adds to the excitement of holidaying. These spots can be ideal for hiking, trekking and angling much liked by the modern generation tourists.

4) Cultural heritage of the area:

Many rural areas have a rich cultural past which not only draws attraction of the travelers, but also of the academic minded people. People taking interest in bygone era flock in these areas digging out interesting facts of the past serving both the purposes of vacationing and intellectual enrichment.

5) Traditional local art and handicraft:

Traditional art and handicraft of rural areas is an added bonus that boosts rural tourism. Attractive local fabrics, artifacts and other natural products are demanded highly in the world market, which can change the economic scenario of a rural settlement.



6) Proper health and sanitation facilities:

Upgraded health and sanitation facility is a must to develop a rural settlement into a permanent tourist spot. This forms the basic infrastructure of rural tourism. Lack of basic amenities can mar the potential tourist market of a rural settlement. Tourists should feel at home being away from home.



7) Local sentiment:

Understanding the local sentiment is very important to promote rural tourism in a particular area. Though villagers carry a reputation of being hospitable but that may not be the case everywhere. Rural tourism is targeted towards development of the rural sector, and without local cooperation this may turn out to be an impossible mission. Picturesque rural areas dominated by certain tribal groups may be averse towards outsiders and may not allow tourism to flourish. Many tribes are not ready to accept the modern aspects of life and intentionally keep their doors closed to the outsiders.

Activities involved in Rural Tourism

With lush green landscapes presenting stunning features along with bright climatic conditions, rural tourism has lots to offer. Frankly speaking, no other tourism destination can offer such exciting outdoor activities than the rural destinations where the tourists have many options to choose from. Holidaying in a rural destination does not solely mean lazing indoors as nature with its bountiful attractions will compel you to indulge in various outdoor activities.

1) Walking:

Undertaking long strolls amidst nature is always rejuvenating. Country sides offer a pollution free environment with oxygen rich air. The lush greenery and the woods adorned with green foliage pump fresh oxygen into the atmosphere infusing a new life. Early morning walks along urban roadsides is certainly no match against a brisk rural stride.

2) Fishing:

This recreational activity can be carried out peacefully only in a rural setting without any disturbance. The fresh catch from the ponds satisfies the gastronomical desire of the urban tourist apart from the mental and physical pleasure. A nominal fee in exchange would give a financial support to the rural folk. The aquatic life gets recycled, the fish grow and get caught to be served at the table, and the wonderful thing is it all happens with a flow of money from the urban tourist to enrich the financial base of the rural folk.

3) Exploring farms:

This is a novel way of learning the tricks of farming and also exploring possibilities that lay latent. The potentials of alternate farming can be tapped and it would be a source of acquiring useful knowledge by the combined team of urban and rural folk.

4) Hiking:

Hiking along rural highlands is immensely beneficial for the physical and mental well being. Carry your hiking accessories and hire a guide. Help from the guide makes the adventure more feasible that takes a finite shape.

5) Nature trails:

Trailing along woods and forests is a breath taking experience. Hire a guide who can steer you forward through the green, pollution free setting directed at immense physical and mental pleasure. Spot of color radiated by bush flowers, the flash of hovering butterflies and concerted bird songs conjure up a wonderful environment bringing in perpetual physical and mental bliss.

6) Boating:

Boating brings in tons of mental and physical goodness to the urban tourist in exchange for a flow of money to the boat owner in the form of a riding fee. Exploring the flora and fauna of the water bodies through boating can be very exciting. It is advisable to have the owner in your hired boat so that he can serve you as a boating guide and may help you in case any distress befalls.

7) Swimming:

Swimming is a great recreational activity no doubt, but do check the depth and quality of water before exposing your skin directly to the rural water bodies. Well maintained ponds and pools will be a safer choice. Potential dangers from submerged rocks, aquatic fauna and flora may pose a threat to the swimmer. If the water body is absolutely hazard free and your swimming skills are alright there cannot be a better exercise than this.

Key drivers for rural tourism growth:

Human needs, likings and tastes change with time as human minds are always inclined towards exploration. Nature loving human beings are many in this planet, and it is this love for nature that has driven them to take refuge in her lap giving rise to rural tourism, an offbeat mode of tourism. Apart from the love for nature, other key drivers also contribute to the growth of rural tourism.

1) Necessity to boost economic growth of the country:

The sudden global economic meltdown has left the entire world in jitters. The prevailing staggering global economic scenario has driven many big and small economies to look for additional revenue generation through rural tourism. Tourism industry in many countries contributes significantly in the overall economic growth, and rural tourism presented in attractive packages has been able to generate handsome revenue past few years.

2) Stressful urban life:

Nature showcases herself in attractive forms and features. With rapid urbanization much of nature's purity and serenity is lost, and human beings are left confined in an abnormal rat race and excessive mental stress seriously affecting their body and mind. Rural areas have been able to preserve that priceless natural beauty and serenity even today; thanks to the less ambitious villagers and their easy going lifestyle, and city dwellers are now-a-days preferring these natural niches to unwind themselves.

3) Rising tendency of inexpensive short vacations:

Mounting air fares and fuel prices could not hold back the regular vacationers who have shifted their focus from expensive luxurious holiday packages to the less expensive holidaying options like rural tourism. The ultimate objective of holidaying is to enjoy variations, a much needed deviation from the monotonous lifestyle and modern day rural tourism packages have many attractions to offer.

4) Wide coverage by media:

Widespread coverage of upcoming rural tourist spots by the electronic and print media has been another key driver in the growth of rural tourism. Attractive advertisements posted by the tour planners providing detail information along with the customer reviews have attracted tourists in rural tourism.

5) Uncertain returns from agriculture and farming:

Uncertain climatic conditions are often affecting the agricultural output of a country, which has been a serious dampener in the path towards growth and development. One or two successive crop loss affects the lives of villagers leaving no other option for their survival. Rising trend of rural tourism has provided an alternative and steady source of income enabling them to withstand the hard days. Rural tourism has encouraged the agri-sector with farmers going for special harvest festivals in the harvest season showcasing their farm products, a specialty of a particular community.

6) Rising environment consciousness:

Modern day better educated travelers in the pursuit of green tourism or eco-tourism are opting for rural tourism in order to spend their vacations in a clean and green manner. Lots of environmental wastes are generated through tourism especially in the peak tourist season, which has been a matter of concern. Pristine snowcapped mountain ranges and the Antarctic region are also not spared from the litters of tourists. Rising environment consciousness has driven the better educated class towards rural tourism, which is rewarding and enriching in every aspect.

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