



# The Effect Of COVID-19 Lockdown On Indian Agro-Tourism Sector

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic has had strong impact on the tourism market across nation. As a result of the lockdown and the closing of borders, tourist traffic came to an abrupt halt: India draws millions of tourists every year as the 'AtithiDevoBhava'. In the current situation where Covid-19 was announced as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, the Government of India announced a complete lockdown of the nation that had a strong impact on the economy, mainly the tourism in general and agro-tourism in particular., which is unable to open even after the lockdown. Thus the unique role agro- tourism plays in providing opportunities outside big cities and preserving cultural and natural heritage are in focus. Agro- tourism, even if on a small-scale, has been tried and tested in India for decades, whether, agro tourism can get a big boost in this situation led the study to be undertaken. The secondary data was used as a methodology to analyse and the data collection was a mixed approach of literature review and data from various agro-tourism websites. The study findings have appeared with suggestions for mitigating the reduction of income. The article constitutes a contribution to the evolving literature on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of agro-tourism enterprises.

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19 pandemic, Agro-tourism, Opportunities in the pandemic

## INTRODUCTION:

Due to the fact that the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes the COVID-19 disease, is highly infectious and contagious the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on public health and global economies. Covid-19 is the biggest challenge that the global tourism sector has faced till date. The United Nations World Tourism Organization estimates a reduction of 58% to 78% in tourist traffic across the world.. Typically, the tourism sector is among the first to be affected, and the last to recover during a health crisis. Lockdown and self-isolation were the only way identified to control the spread of the virus and to break the chain the step taken by the world countries. The same thing happened in India, and was put on lockdown. The lockdown, in turn, had a drastic impact on the country's economy, as it stopped money circulation. The coronavirus has affected virtually the entire tourism sector as well as tourism-related industries in many countries. International, regional and local restrictions on travel immediately impacted national economies, including tourism systems, i.e., international travels, domestic tourism, agro-tourism one-day visits and sectors as diverse as air transport, cruises, public transport, accommodation, cafes and restaurants, conventions and other business tourism events, festivals or sporting events. For India, the thrust on agro-tourism in the wake of UNWTO's policy is significant as it has emerged as the one of the biggest employers and as a lifeline, offering the rural unskilled youth a chance to earn a living without having to migrate in cities. The new form of tourism that will emerge post-COVID-19 will stress on seeking experiences. In this perspective, agro-tourism can play a major role in providing unique natural, cultural, and social experiences to travellers in the serene and clean setting of villages. Recent scholarly literature has stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a positive effect on rural tourism due to the increase of tourists seeking for a safe/low-risk destination in scarcely populated areas (Seraphin & Dosquet, 2020; Vaishar & Štastná, 2020). Promoting agro-tourism in India has dual benefits – it will give tourists an opportunity to experience and explore the rich heritage of rural India, and on the other hand it'll allow people living in rural India to make a living through tourism. Small farmers across India are increasingly turning to agritourism to diversify their economic activities but the niche business, just like the entire tourism sector, has not been spared the devastating impact of the COVID-19 crisis. As Albert Einstein said, "In the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity, whether COVID-19 may facilitate the emergence of new destinations that are lesser known and visited. With COVID-19, people's mindset is changing. People are preferring to go to less congested places, and they are willing to take road trips than get on crowded flights and hence, this in turn might provide a big boost to the rural economy.

However, to date, no study has empirically examined the impacts of COVID-19 on India's agritourism economy or its immediate countermeasures. Only a few studies qualitatively explored the challenges India's agricultural economy faced under the COVID-19.

A future study can be carried out on the development of models that would help the industry overcome any kind of pandemic situations.

## **AGRO-TOURISM: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:**

Agritourism began to develop in the 1990s due to an increased demand for soft tourism, in the case of which tourists preferred inexpensive holidays close to nature. Since the beginning of the 20th century, farmers across the nation have expanded the recreation opportunities offered by them to include accommodation services. In the beginning, agritourism was viewed as an additional, peripheral activity conducted on agricultural farms; however, it quickly gained popularity and became one of the forms of rural tourism. At present, agritourism plays many important roles in the agricultural industry, benefiting local tourism organisers and entire local communities. Thus, the development of agro-tourism contributes to the multifunctional development of rural areas and fits into the concept of sustainable development of agriculture and tourism.

The development of agritourism depends on innovative solutions introduced in this area. Innovation in agritourism is both creating a tourist product from scratch and a professional marketing environment for the natural and cultural values existing in a given area. These activities are part of the concept of sustainable innovation. A special type of innovative solution is that created on the initiative and with the involvement of entire local communities and many local and non-local level entities whose task is to cooperate and create agritourism products, create a network of specialist farms providing tourist services (e.g., care farms), creating tourist clusters or theme villages. Women are of particular importance in rural areas, as they are often the creators of innovative solutions. The role and importance of women in running agritourism services is significant.

## **SCOPE OF AGRO-TOURISM IN INDIA IN POST COVID-ERA**

With COVID-19 and the push towards exploring unvisited territory, top-class infrastructure might not be needed to woo travelers to go to the villages as their new destination. If there are decent roadways to reach the location and ample accommodation in the villages, tourists may not care about other facilities. The Indian village experience is not really that easily accessible. There are many things to be improved like the roads, sanitation, drinking water, food, electricity, and healthcare, etc. There are many villages in India that are very isolated and not easily accessible. And under difficult weather conditions, it becomes worse. To promote agro-tourism, the first thing that is needed is for the roads to reach even the remotest parts of India. Each of the villages may need to have a guest house (with very basic

facilities), tented camps, or a homestay to host the guests. Tourists can even stay with the indigenous families from the village and experience firsthand how the villagers go about their daily lives. Basic needs like drinking water, hospitals/clinics, transportation, etc. must be taken care of. The villagers also need to be trained on how to welcome guests and first aid. And if 'Agro-Tourism' becomes an affordable and convenient reality in the Post-COVID era, there are a bunch of benefits that will follow suit.

From the villagers' perspective: Tourism can generate employment opportunities for the villagers, who can then earn a decent livelihood without having to migrate elsewhere. With an additional revenue stream like this, the villagers can improve their standard of living and take care of their families. From the tourists' perspective too they will be able to see the real India, which is otherwise rare. There's also a feel-good factor; tourists would feel better spending their money in supporting the less privileged. It's a win-win situation which will help in growing the country's economy and at the same time, it will bring a change in the lives of the rural population.

### METHODOLOGY

This paper used a mixed approach of review of literature and secondary data related agro-tourism and hospitality sectors of India. The research included documentary analysis of numerous government and global sites and ministry of tourism website WTO, WHO global pages offered details about how the worst pandemic outbreak scenario could be. The study focused on understanding the worst of India's pandemic situation, and how it affects the country's agro-tourism and hospitality industry .

### COVID 19: A PLAN FOR TOURISM TO SURVIVE REVIVE & THRIVE:

COVID-19 may facilitate the emergence of new destinations that are lesser known For the tourism sector in India, it is no longer going to be business-as-usual The pandemic offers us an opportunity to hit and reset the button to make the tourism sector a sustainable engine for economic growth and development'

The pandemic has forced most of the people to stay indoors over these past few months, and that has kindled a desire to travel among all. People want to head out of the house and go somewhere even in the midst of pandemic, once the lockdown constraints are not there While people are embroiled in this dilemma, one thing is for sure, mindset is changing. With this, a new set of destinations may emerge which are less-known and less-visited. If this trend continues, sooner than later people will step into a world where travel will be democratized and reach the remotest of areas. Much like the entire tourism sector, agritourism has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Tourists fear the prevailing pandemic; they are reacting and changing their tourist travel plans in the current holiday period. However, it can be observed that the tourists in India are currently increasingly often choosing the offer of agritourism farms as short trips are enjoying considerable interest. Therefore, it can be concluded that agri-breaks—i.e., short getaways to the country to relax in the nature, for example weekends on agritourism farms—might be a new travelling trend this year

As of January 30th, 2020, corona virus struck India and the cases are growing day by day. Day one started with one case and the latest trend is India reported over 22 million cases of the coronavirus (COVID-19) as of May 9, 2021, with more than 18 million recoveries and about 246 thousand fatalities. After a relatively controlled first wave, the country had been reporting record numbers of new infections and deaths since April 2021 as it experiences the second wave increasing day after day by more than 10000 cases. For the tourism sector in India, it is no longer going to be business-as-usual and we will need to redefine, refocus and change the game plan going forward. It is essential to measure the impact of Covid-19 and prepare a cogent strategy involving both the government and the industry stakeholders, which can be categorized into three phases: Survive (short-term), revive (medium-term) and thrive (long-term).

## RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION:

For tourism industry in general and agro-tourism in particular on the demand side, India has a robust domestic market which could soften the impact on this sector as compared with nations that rely largely on international tourists. India receives 11 million foreign tourists, which is small compared to its size and relative potential. Dubai receives well over 16 million tourists. At least 24 million Indian tourists travel abroad each year and spend an estimated \$25 billion. We must incentivize domestic travel to retain these high-spending tourists, which should not be difficult given the international travel restrictions in place. Critical to the success of this would be to allay the anxieties of tourists by ensuring that robust protocols for safety and hygiene are in place. Consumer preferences and tourism policies the world over are expected to evolve towards achieving greater sustainability and community orientation.

The Covid-19 has given suggestions on the impact of global change on the agro-tourism sector, which in turn becomes the task of learning how to begin sustainable tourism transformation social distancing should be strictly enforced, travel entry restrictions should be applied, frequent health monitoring to be conducted to ensure safety. The tourists travelling post Covid- situations would be more aware on environmental health and wellbeing, therefore, adventure tour destinations would be able to capture the sustainability-oriented travelers and practice sustainable tourism. Social distancing will be a norm post Covid-19 which insists the food service sectors to reinvent itself. When compared a street food

vendor with restaurant business, the later has to import many considerations as the earlier has transparency. Keeping social distancing in mind, the restaurants have to maintain minimum distance between tables, they no longer can follow maximum place utilization. This would result in low turnover of guests and the restaurant has to work on bringing down the guest and staff ratio. Live kitchens or an open kitchen in the restaurants would help in building trust among the consumers. Fumigation is something that is done in all the restaurants periodically, likewise, proper sanitization has to be invested. The sanitization to involve using hospital grade disinfectants to achieve higher level of sanitization standards. The food industry has to setup new standard operating procedures (SOP) from social distancing to cashless transactions The SOPs would include, providing masks, gloves and other protective gears for the food handlers, usage of menu cards has to be replaced by placing orders over apps and even the bills generated in the apps which would result in cashless transaction. . In regards to take away services, extensive hand washing and higher level of sanitization has to be followed as it would help in reducing the risk of spread of virus by touching the food. The study recommends live kitchens, frequent sanitization, standard operating procedures from social distancing to cashless transactions, protective gears for food handlers, etc. in food service sectors, training for digital literacy among the family members The pandemic offers us an opportunity to hit the reset the button to make the agro- tourism sector a sustainable engine for economic growth and development. All these reorientation needs enhancement of digital knowledge among the less educated folk also. The Centre must provide businesses with institutional access to working capital and enable liquidity through a deferment of loan repayments. Beyond the immediate pain of the pandemic, we should not miss the chance to make full use of the crisis.

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