



A Study on Catalyzing Rural Economic Development Through Agrotourism

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Introduction

Agrotourism means opening up farms to people from urban areas as well as from abroad, provide accommodation, food and make them experience farm life and rural scenarios. It can be accomplished by integrating farm environment and factors of commercial tourism. Mother Nature has several magic elements without brick walls interrupting them. People from urban areas have very limited access to nature's beauty and eternity. They are enveloped by walls around beginning from school education till their office roles. Agrotourism has enormous excitement factors in it and is highly adventurous. Urban tourists will have a greater market to trace back to their roots. Agrotourism falls beneath the wider theme of rural tourism.

Initially, tourism was considered as an activity performed during leisure time. But as time passed by, tourism has turned out to be a passion for many people. Many people aim to travel around the world and several professions such as travel blogging, photography and so on came into the scenario to enhance their passion towards travelling and tourism. This led to inculcating many innovative factors into tourism, one among this being agrotourism. It served as an innovative way to enrich the livelihood of farm owners by offering several unique provisions for eco-tourism, entertainment, hospitality, recreation, sales and education.

Agrotourism in India

In India, agrotourism is still in the initial stages of development. The official launch of the concept happened during May 1, 2004 at Baramati in Maharashtra. The Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) was established in 2004 to promote agrotourism in the state. This has been used as a platform by tourists to book reservations and provide guidance to tourists by directing them to respective centers after booking. Farmers of Maharashtra were trained under the Maharashtra State Agri tourism Vistar Yojana on how to conserve and enhance their environment, showcase the village culture, promote handicrafts, authentic foods, maintain hygiene, sell farm produce,

Benefits of Agrotourism

- Caters the educational needs of students as well as common people by providing them practical experience on all the theoretical concepts they have gone through in their text books.
- Offers recreational facilities to urban people by providing a visual treat to reduce their stress, work burden and help them maintain a stable work-life balance.



- Serves as an additional source of income to the farming community and reduces their sole dependency on agriculture for their survival.
- Enriches the livelihood of rural artisans by promoting local and authentic products.
- Helps in improvement of rural infrastructure through laying of roads, connectivity through railways, construction of hospitals and so on.
- Prevents movement of rural artists to urban areas in search of jobs which would provide regular income.
- Helps in women empowerment in rural areas by providing them employment and exhibit their innovations in farms to tourists.
- Assists in poverty alleviation and employment generation, preventing urbanization, improves contribution of rural areas to national economy, and increases per capita income.
- Paves way for cultural inheritance as rural areas stand as a place of cultural heritages.

Challenges in Agrotourism

As any other sectors of tourism, agrotourism also faces certain challenges in establishment. The major concern is related to health and safety of tourists as most of the rural areas in the country lack proper medical necessities and hospitals in the vicinity. Certain agriculture lands also have some of the air pollutants due to extensive use of pesticides, herbicides and pollens from certain dangerous weeds. The next challenge would be the lack of knowledge of the local people about the needs and necessities of the tourists as cultural barriers exist. Certain areas also lack network connectivity. Middlemen also exert a pressure on this type of tourism by increasing the prices of local products and influence the decisions made by the tourists.

Agrotourism in promoting rural economy

ATDC has conducted a survey on the tourist visits to the agro tourism centers and the results were 0.40 million, 0.53 million and 0.70 million in the years 2014, 2015 and 2016 respectively. It has also been found that the farm families in these centers have generated 35.79 million INR through agrotourism (Agri tourism, 2017). The values have been projected positively and are in increasing trend. It also promotes rural employment and increases the revenue generation at all levels.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi once said “the future of India lies in its villages”. In relevance with this statement, villages contribute on a higher scale to nation’s economy. Thus, integrating a successful sector called tourism with agriculture will always prove to be beneficial. Something new to see, do and buy will automatically promote a place as a tourist destination. Though it has certain negative aspects like seasonality, cultural gap, connectivity, middlemen issues, these can be solved by framing government policies relevant to this sector.



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