

Agro Tourism: A new trend in Tourism

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Introduction

Agriculture is backbone of Indian economy. Tourism is now recognized as a major industry. Tourism not only brings the economic growth and development, but it also has socio-cultural and environmental development. "Agro-tourism" is one such form of tourism which is gaining popularity amongst the non-conventional tourists. Agro tourism is not just visiting a farm growing crops and vegetables; it is giving an opportunity to the tourist to interact with a culture. It provides tourist with an experience of being part of our rural culture. Observing and experiencing a lifestyle different from urban routine. It offers some meaning to the tourist at the destination along with a sense of pleasure away from routine activities. Agro -tourism which is based on agricultural activities with a subtle underline and touch of rural culture. One cannot easily imagine a farm being a reason to travel for a tourist. But the attraction can be created by adding value to the product.

In a progressive state like Maharashtra where farmers are ready to experiment, agro-tourism is spreading slowly but steadily. Most of the villages have scenic beauty due to availability of lakes, rivers, hills, mountains, paddy fields, fruit orchards. Rural community has the potential, resources and ability to exploit the growing tourism industry. Urban population is increasing day by day, today urban children's world is restricted in the closed door school, classes, cartoon programs on the television, video games, chocolates, soft drinks, spicy fast food, computer, internet, and so on, and they see Mother Nature only on television screen. Moreover out of people living in the cities 35 % do not have relatives in villages and 43% never visited or stayed in village.

Importance of Agro – Tourism:

Tourism is considered as a job creator with multiplier effects. Job creation in tourism is growing one and a half times half times faster than any other industrial sector. Tourism sector has potential to enlarge. Agriculture sector has the capacity to absorb expansion in tourism Sector. It brings major primary sector agriculture closer to major service sector tourism. This convergence is expected to create win-win situation for both the sectors.

Scope of Agro - Tourism

Agro-Tourism has great scope in the present context . The urban population always have the curiosity to learn about sources of food, plants, animals, raw materials like wood, handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and rural lifestyle. Tourism which revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the capacity to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population. Villages provide recreational opportunities to all age groups i.e. children young, middle and old age, male, female, in total to the whole family at a cheaper cost. Rural games, festivals, food, dress and the nature provides variety of entertainment to the entire family. The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is least in Agro-Tourism. This widens the tourist base. Present concept of travel and tourism is limited to urban and rich class which constitutes only a small portion of the population. However, the concept of Agro-Tourism takes travel and tourism to the larger population, widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.

Agro Tourism and Health consciousness

Busy urban population is leaning towards nature. Because, natural environment is always away from busy life. crops, mountains, water bodies, Birds, animals, villages provide totally different atmosphere to urban population in which they can forget their busy urban life. Villages provide variety of recreation to urbanites through festivals and

handicrafts. Villagers lifestyle, dress, languages, culture which always add value to the entertainment. Agricultural environment around farmers and the entire production process could create curiosity among urban taught. Places of agricultural importance like highest crop yielding farm, highest animal yielding farm, processing units, farms where innovations tried add attraction to the tourists. Agricultural products like farm gate fresh market, processed foods, organic food could lure the urban tourists. As result of this agro – atmosphere in the villages, there is scope to develop Agro – Tourism products like agro-shopping, culinary tourism, bed and breakfast, pick bullock cart riding, camel riding, boating, fishing, herbal walk, rural games and health tourism.

Modern life is a product of diversified thinking and diversified activities. Every individual attempts to work more, in different directions to earn more money to enjoy modern comforts. Hence, peace is always out of his system. Tourism is a means for searching peaceful location. Peace and tranquility are inbuilt in Agro-Tourism as it is away from urban areas and close to nature. Agro Tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture among urban school children. It provides a best alternative for school picnics which are urban based. It provides opportunity for hands on experience for urban college students in agriculture. It is a means for providing training to future farmers. It would be effectively used as educational and training tool to train agriculture and line department officers. This provides unique opportunity for education through recreation where learning is fun effective and easy. Seeing believes, doing is learning. Cities are growing at the cost of villages. Villagers are migrating to cities in search of jobs and to seek the comforts of modern life. Hence, yesterd's villagers are todays urbanites. Deep in the heart of urbanites lies the love and respect for their ancestors and villages. Hence, visit to villages satisfies their desire. Any opportunity to visit villages and spend time with family is dream of any urbanite. But, minimum decent facilities are always problem. Agro-Tourism attempts to overcome this problem.

In resorts and cities, overcrowded peace seekers disturb each other's peace. Hence, peace is

beyond cities and resorts. Even though efforts are made to create village atmosphere in the sub urban areas through resorts, farm houses, it looks like a distant replica of the original. Modern lifestyle is stressful it creates many health problems. Hence, people are in constant search of pro-nature means to make life more peaceful. Organic foods are in greater demand in urban areas. In total, health conscious urban population is looking towards pronature villages for solutions.

Challenges Faced by Ago tourism in India

• Lack of Transport Infrastructure:

In rural area road transport facilities are not sufficient.

• Lack of Energy Infrastructure:

In rural area electricity facilities are not sufficient.

• Lack of communication Infrastructure:

In rural area is not sufficient facilities of telecommunication & internet.

• Financial Problems of Farmers :

Due to high investment and low income Financial condition of Farmers is not so strong. so farmers can not invest in agro tourism.

• Unawareness about the Concept of Agro tourism

Agro tourism as a concept is not well promoted in all farmers" non agricultural people and unknown to maximum farmers in India.

•Educational Profile of Farmers and Lack of Orientation in Marketing and Customer Communications

Most of the farmers are very less educated, mostly undergraduates and do not know the manners of customer communications to promote and marketing of their farm.

• Lack of Government Support

These is lack of Government support for ago tourism in India in tourism policy of Maharashtra Government, there is a mention of rural tourism but no specific mention of Agro tourism. This discourages farmers from undertaking new ventures like agro tourism which are in their favor and source of income generation.

• Lack of Irrigation :

Agriculture in India is mostly monsoon dependent and not sufficient facilities of irrigation.

• Climatic Conditions :

Climatic condition is not supportive to Agro tourism throughout the year. During summer, there are no crops and the weather is hot and dry in most of the states. During rainy season, tourist may not be able to be ready to access the farms full of mud. Thus, Agro tourism is practically difficult to be operated for six months in a year.

• Less Cultivable Land and Fragmented Land

As per survey, 80% farmers have less than 1 hectare land and only 7% farmers in India have more than 2 hectare land. For agro tourism, a farmer should have bare minimum land of 2 hectares so that the farmer can have adequate crops to offer as a tourism product and sufficient land for tourists to rest and recreate.

Conclusion

However, there are many challenges ahead for the growth of agro tourism in India. Major challenges discussed are Lack of Transport Infrastructure, Lack of Energy Infrastructure, Lack of communication Infrastructure, Financial Problems of Farmers , Unawareness about the Concept of Agro tourism , in India, less education and less marketing orientation of farmers, less cultivable and fragmented land and lack of Government support. Agro tourism industry has a lot potential to develop the rural India. The issues like guest host relationship, sustainability, economic feasibility are important for any new tourism development at a destination. It is more so in the case of agro tourism as it has a direct impact on the host culture and rural community as a whole. There needs to be a proper business model to promote and propagate the concept of agro tourism as an easily adoptable and implementable venture for farmers in India. All challenges stated above can have solutions and agro tourism can be ventured in gradually step by step. All it depends on the will power of farmers and proper promotional strategies adopted to market the concept in weekend tourists.

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