

# Agri Tourism - A Panacea for Rural Development

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## ABSTRACT

In India, Agri tourism is an emerging concept. The pressures of urban life and the alienation and distance from the natural environment often force city dwellers to escape from their lonely and monotonous city life. In such cases, they feel that the rural location is an ideal place to release stress and to re-engage in a simple lifestyle that provides rest and complete peace for a period of time. Not only that, but also such tourism is widely accepted because it can shape up the rural community by providing financial and social benefits. Although the concept is relatively new one and it has recently gained immense importance around the world.

India is a land of villages. A large section of India's population living in rural areas is still traditionally dependent on agriculture and allied activities. However, the income from agriculture is declining day by day and these villagers do not have enough alternative employment opportunities. Therefore, in order to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector, existing agricultural activities should be strengthened by providing additional income generating activities. Tourism will be a boon in this regard. Combining tourism with agriculture will help to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP and thereby facilitate economic development.

**Key words:** Rural tourism, Farm Tourism, Agri tourism

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To make clear the concept of 'Agri Tourism'
2. To give insight to the present Agri tourism scenario in India and Kerala
3. To understand the benefits and issues of Agri Tourism in India
4. To present Agri-tourism Promotion Strategies

## METHODOLOGY

The present paper is based on secondary data obtained from various literary sources, including various research papers, news articles and websites.

## INTRODUCTION

The term 'agro-tourism' is a new face of tourism, an agro-based business where tourists can enjoy and experience real rural life, enjoy local food and get acquainted with various agricultural occupations. Agriculture is considered as the backbone of Indian economy. About 90 million farmers in 6.25 lakh villages produce more than 200 metric tons of food grains. Beyond being a profession or a business,

agriculture is deeply rooted in Indian culture. However, the income from the agricultural sector is less than that of other sectors. The agricultural sector, which employs about 50% of the population, accounts only 17% of GDP. Therefore, adding additional income generating activities to existing agriculture will definitely increase the contribution of agriculture to the national GDP. More over Farmers are now eager to move away from the traditional and conservative patterns and experimenting with new methods to connect directly with consumers and to earn extra income. In order to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector, existing agricultural activities should be strengthened by providing additional income generating activities. Tourism will be a boon in this regard. Combining tourism with agriculture will help to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector to GDP and thereby facilitate economic development.

### MEANING AND DEFINITION OF AGRI-TOURISM

Agri-tourism is considered to be a combination of tourism and agriculture. In other words, a farm area operated with the help of a rural tourism unit can be considered as agri-tourism. Tourists can see and do the basic principles of agriculture in agri tourism and buy agricultural products too. At the same time, agricultural farms have a number of activities, including production, post-production and processing activities, which are linked to the tourism sector, which attracts visiting tourists to such ventures or activities. Agri-tourism activities have a dual purpose, one is to educate tourists about local farming practices, provide them with some recreation and the other is to provide a source of income for the host farmer. That is, the main focus is on increasing farm incomes while providing visitors with entertainment, recreation, and educational experiences. Agri-tourism activities may vary by place and time. City dwellers who visit farms love to stay at the farm house, engage in farming activities, enjoy a variety of rides such as animal rides, bullock cart rides, tractor rides, eat local food, and experience fresh fruits and vegetables on the farm. They strive to understand local art and culture.

The term “agritourism” is often used interchangeably with “agri-tourism,” “agro-tourism,” “farm tourism,” “agricultural tourism,” or “agritainment.” Regardless of the exact definition or terminology, any definition of agri tourism should include the following four factors:

- Agri Tourism combines the essential elements of tourism and agro-industry.
- Agri-tourism attracts the general public to visit agricultural areas.
- Agricultural tourism is designed to increase agricultural income.
- Agri Tourism offers visitors entertainment, recreation or educational experiences.

According to Sonnino (2004), “activities of hospitality performed by agricultural entrepreneurs and their family members that must remain connected and complementary to farming activities.”

Barbieri and Mshenga (2008), defines Agritourism “any practice developed on a working farm with the purpose of attracting visitors.”

Marques (2006 ), “a specific type of rural tourism in which the hosting house must be integrated into an agricultural estate, inhabited by the proprietor, allowing visitors to take part in agricultural or complementary activities on the property.”

McGehee , Kim, and Jennings (2007), “rural enterprises which incorporate both a working farm environment and a commercial tourism component.”

Sharpley (1997), “tourism products which are directly connected with the agrarian environment, agrarian products or agrarian stays.”

Cambridge Dictionary, “ the business of providing holidays for people on farms or in the countryside”. World Tourism Organization (1998) defines agri-tourism as “ involves accommodation being offered in the farmhouse or in a separate guesthouse, providing meals and organizing guests’ activities in the observation and participation in the farming operations.”

### SCOPE OF AGRITOURISM

- 1. Cheapest form of Tourism;** - The cost of food, lodging, entertainment and travel is very low in agri-tourism. This widens the tourism demand among low and middle income groups.
- 2. Curiosity about agricultural heritage and lifestyle;** - Urbanites with roots in rural areas are always curious to learn about food sources, plants, animals, raw materials, handicrafts, languages, culture, heritage, clothing and rural lifestyle. Agri-tourism revolves around farmers and villages and has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this population.
- 3. Strong demand for healthy and family-based recreational activities;** - Villages provide low-cost recreational opportunities for all ages, from children to the elderly, and the whole family. Village games, festivals, food, dress and natural beauty provide a variety of experiences for the whole members.
- 4. Health Awareness of Urban Dwellers and Finding Relief through Eco-Friendly Ways;** - The modern lifestyle has made life stressful and reduced the average life expectancy. Therefore, people are constantly on the lookout for environmentally friendly ways to make life more peaceful. Ayurveda, a nature friendly treatment, has strong roots in the villages. In addition, many villages are famous for their indigenous medical knowledge.
- 5. The desire for peace and tranquility;** - modern life is a product of diverse thinking and diverse activities. Each person strives to work harder in different directions in order to earn more money to enjoy modern conveniences. Therefore, peace is always his urgent need. Tourism is a way to find a peaceful place. Peace and tranquility are built into agri-tourism as it is close to nature away from urban areas.
- 6. Interest in the natural environment;** - The hustle and bustle of everyday life brings the city dwellers closer to nature. This is because the natural environment is always far removed from the hustle and bustle of life. Birds, animals, crops, mountains, lakes, and villages provide a completely different environment for city dwellers to forget about their busy city life.
- 7. Boredom with busy cities and resorts;** - Boredom with busy cities and resorts brings urbanites closer to the villages. Any opportunity to visit the villages and spend time with family is the dream of any city dweller.
- 8. Nostalgia for ancestors and villages;** - Villagers are migrating to cities in search of work and the comforts of modern life. So, today's urbanites are yesterday's villagers. In the hearts of the townspeople there is love and respect for their ancestors and villages. Therefore, visiting the villages satisfies their desire.
- 9. Rural Entertainment;** - The villages provide a variety of entertainment to the urban dwellers through festivals and handicrafts. Entertainment is always valued by the peasant lifestyle, dress, languages, culture and traditions. The farming environment around farmers, their processed foods, and organic food and attracts urban tourists. In addition, rural tourism offers bullock cart rides, camel rides, boating, fishing, herbal walks, village games and health (Ayurvedic) tourism.

**10. Educational value of Agri-Tourism;** – Agritourism is an educational tool with different implications in the field of education. Through this, students gain a better understanding of rural traditional culture, production and distribution of agricultural products, the importance of healthy food in people's lives, and environmental protection.

In addition, if Agri-tourism becomes a curriculum, children gets a better understanding to agricultural activities, a comprehensive understanding of the general functioning of agriculture, awareness of healthy eating and marketing of agricultural products. It also gives them the opportunity to establish an emotional and direct connection with nature. For teaching and higher education staff, the faculty will benefit from introducing eco-friendly agricultural products and teaching the theoretical and practical knowledge required for new agricultural technologies.

### **PROGRESS OF AGRITOURISM IN INDIA**

Agri tourism is a diversification strategy that provides supplementary and smooth income to Indian farmers. In addition, visitors to agricultural tourism bring money to other people in rural communities. Agricultural tourism can be seen as an important asset in rural economic development, but the success of agri-tourism as a tool of rural development depends on the unique geographical context of the rural community.

The concept of agri tourism was introduced in the 10th Five Year Plan as part of rural tourism, on which 103 projects were sanctioned and in the 12th Five Year Plan Rs.770 crore was allocated for this. Rajasthan and Kerala have achieved the early benefits of this initiative. Later, Maharashtra became the most advanced state in implementing agri-tourism in various districts. Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) was established in 2004. Initially, Agri Tourism was started as a pilot project in 2005 on 28 acres at Palshinwadi in Baramati Tehsil of Pune. Major activities include the operation of agri tourism centers, encouraging more farmers to take up agritourism, and conducting training and research programmes. Under the Maharashtra State Agritourism Vistar Yojana, ATDC launched training and skills development programs in 2007. Homestays between wheat fields and beautiful mountain views are popularized as one of the agricultural tourism models in the state of Uttarakhand. The Montana Homestay in Sikkim, the Spice Garden Tours in Kerala, and the Annual Flower Festival in Tamil Nadu are some of the attractions of the tourists as well. Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC) promotes agro-tourism to enjoy the natural environment and rural life at integrated horticulture farms, dairy, fishing, vegetable poly houses and tourist farm stays in guest houses. In India, agri-tourism is growing in states like Kerala, Karnataka, Punjab, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh; this marks the growth of another new industry in most of the agricultural states of India.

**Swadesh Darshan Scheme:** Recognizing the potential of rural tourism in the country, the Ministry of Tourism has launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme for the integrated development of theme based tourist circuits for the development of tourism infrastructure across the country. The Ministry of Tourism has identified the Rural Circuit as one of the 15 thematic circuits identified for development under this project. The objectives of the Swadesh Darshan project are to create employment opportunities through the active involvement of local communities, to promote community based development and to promote a pro-poor tourism approach. Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, 77 projects have been sanctioned of worth Rs. 6,035.70 crore (US\$ 863.60 million). In Union Budget 2020-21, the Government has allotted Rs. 1,200 crore (US\$ 171.70 million) for the development of tourist

circuits for Northeast. The Ministry has sanctioned 80.37 crore for the development of rural circuits under this Scheme and for the development of Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism in Kerala.

**PROGRESS OF AGRI TOURISM IN KERALA**

Agriculture has been a way of life in Kerala since ancient times. Even in this cyber age, the farming community still follows traditional farming methods. Kuttanad, the rice belt of Kerala, is a shining example of Kerala's agricultural traditions. Many tourist destinations in Kerala are inextricably linked with the unique crops grown there. A good example is Munnar, where tea gardens on its sloping hillsides are its Unique Selling Proposition (USP). The situation is similar in Wayanad, which is famous for spices and bamboo products. Wayanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam districts have a lot of potentialities for agri tourism, where the farming community plays a unique role in the community. If the uniqueness of a particular place is linked to agri tourism without disturbing the balance of nature, it will be beneficial to the local community and the state as a whole in terms of livelihood and income. Kerala’s important Agri tourism destinations and its specialties is shown in the below table No 1.

**Table No 1**

Farm tourism destinations in Kerala and its specialties			
	Destinations	Crops	Activities for Tourists
1	Idukki	Pepper, cardamom, other spices, rubber, coffee, coconut, vegetables	Organic farming Fam visits, purchase
2	Wayanad	Areca nut pepper vegetables tuber Crops, drumstick, papaya, paddy, Coffee, ginger, tea, cardamom	Farm tours and stay, being part in the process of plantation, feeding farm animals
3	Palakkad	Paddy coconut rubber pulses, areca nut, tapioca, ginger groundnut, sugarcane. Fruits like Mango, pomegranate, Medical Herbs Navara grain and bamboo	Visit to horticultural farm in Malampuzha, orange and vegetable farm in Nelliampathy integrated seed development farm Eruthempathy, central orchard, Pattamby, State seeds farm in Alathur, Kunathur, Kongad, Ananganadi and Muthumala, Navaraorganic farm near Chittur
4	Kuttanad	Paddy, vegetables	AUSP as it is one of the rare Ramsarsites below sea level
5	Kottayam	Rubber, pineapple	Plantation visits
6	Pathanamthitta	Vegetables, paddy, tapioca spices suchas pepper, cardamom, ginger, rubber	Three seed farms allowing access to vegetable seeds, paddy seeds etc. Livestock includes ducks, buffaloes, cows, Sheep, Fowls Pigs and goats. Two fish breeding centers promoting aqua tourism sells fingerlings of Labeo, Catla,

Source; onmanorama 09/07/2020

An agriculture dominated State, Kerala has great potential to develop agro-tourism on a large scale without further investment. About 350,000 lakh hectares of land under paddy cultivation can be converted into tourist attractions and the benefits of tourism can be passed on directly to farmers. As a step towards this, Kerala Tourism has launched Green Farms Kerala, a special venture aimed at preparing farms / plantations in the state to receive tourists.

**Kerala Agri-Tourism Network project;** In order to link agriculture with tourism a new project named Kerala Agri-Tourism Network project inaugurated by Tourism Minister of Kerala Sri. Muhammed Riyaz in September, 2021. The objective of this project is to find and develop 500 new tourism hubs in the rural areas in collaboration with the Local Government Department within 5 years.

### IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURE TOURISM

Agro-tourism is a form of tourism that exploits the rural culture as a tourist attraction. It is either tourism through agriculture, or the commercialization of agriculture through tourism. It is similar to ecotourism except that its primary attraction is not the natural landscape but the cultural landscape. It has the potential to create additional sources of income and employment for farmers. Agriculture and tourism can promote local development. It also helps to preserve diversity. In addition, the rural people themselves must realize that agro-biodiversity is valuable and deserving of protection. In agri tourism, education and technology courses are fully included to some extent. Tourism in agriculture will provide an opportunity for children who have no knowledge of farm animals or farm life to learn at least some of the agricultural culture.

### BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURE TOURISM TO FARMERS:

- As a result of agriculture tourism, farmers will have the opportunity to expand and improve their farming activities.
- Agricultural tourism provides an opportunity for farmers to share their experience of working on a farm with other individuals.
- Agricultural tourism will allow farmers to sell farm-grown vegetables or any other produce to tourists or visitors. This will be a source of income for the farmers again.
- Agri tourism helps to increase the employment opportunities among farmers. In this way seasonal unemployment can be reduced to some extent.
- Awareness about locally produced agricultural products will increase.
- As a result, people living in urban areas can understand the importance of agricultural land.
- The living conditions on the farm will increase, which will lead to increased opportunities for agricultural recreation.
- Improves managerial skills and entrepreneurial spirit among farmers.
- Farm businesses have the opportunity to survive for a long time.

### BENEFITS OF AGRICULTURE TOURISM FOR COMMUNITIES:

- It generates additional revenue for local communities as it provides services to visitors and tourists. Similarly, local businesses are expanding.



- Community facilities will be upgraded for tourists. Facilities like improved roads, irrigation facilities, bridges, drinking water and electricity will be improved.
- There will be progress in the conservation of landscape in rural areas as it is required to serve tourists.
- Local traditions of arts and crafts will be preserved as tourism will have the opportunity to create markets if it is developed.
- Agriculture tourism promotes cultural exchanges.
- Awareness of issues related to agriculture and the values to be pursued will increase.
- Local products and services that are part of agriculture can be promoted.
- It can strengthen the rural economy and generate income through employment.
- It is promoted in areas having high biodiversity and geographical diversity.

### **IMPORTANT PROBLEMS FACED BY AGRI-TOURISM**

- **Lack of publicity** - Agri tourism has less publicity than other tourism projects. This makes it difficult for travelers from far and wide to find such spots. Publicity plays a huge role in promoting agro-tourism. But giving publicity to a remote agri-tourism unit is difficult.
- **Lack of transport facilities** - Reaching remote agri-tourism units is the biggest challenge due to the lack of approach roads and poor transport facilities in rural areas.
- **Lack of accommodation** - Safe and clean accommodation is essential in agri-tourism. Urban and foreign tourists are looking for these minimum amenities. Regular fresh water supply and clean toilets are important. Lack of these poses a challenge to agro tourism.
- **Lack of Capacity building of the farmer** - The farmer should focus on the maintenance of facilities he is not aware of, hospitality and public relations.
- **Lack of tourist security** - Agri-tourism units are located in remote areas away from roads, medical facilities and telecommunications. Attacks by wildlife and thieves also adversely affect the growth of agro tourism.

### **AGRI-TOURISM PROMOTION STRATEGIES**

- Promotion of agro-tourism requires primarily the proper recognition of the agro-tourism industry. Products, pricing, location and advertising are considered.
- Ensure accommodation, transportation and security of the tourist.
- Implement government policies that support the agro-tourism industry.
- Take steps to develop education and capacity building to develop agri-business / entrepreneurial skills of farmers.
- Form a Farmers' Co-operative Society to implement agro-tourism.
- Ensure financial assistance to farmers to support agro-tourism industry.
- Train farmers to improve product and service quality.
- Provide training in proper marketing and risk management.
- Establish location specific successful agro tourism models.

## CONCLUSION

India, a land of natural abundance, is ideal for becoming an agri tourism destination. But agri tourism in India is still in its infancy stage, but once its full potential is utilized, it will benefit tourists and rural people alike. There is a lot that needs to be done in terms of setting standards for this venture. Although many agri tourism entrepreneurs have set up farms in the country, it needs to be standardized. Once a system is in place, the potential for developing agri tourism in other places is huge. In the future, other destinations could be brought to the agri tourism map in a similar way. Implementing agri tourism with a view to the future, given its impact on the economy and society, will pave the way for a better tomorrow. That is why Mahatma Gandhi emphasized that India lives in villages and that only through their rural development can India regain its glory and prosperity.

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