

VILLAGE TOURISM IN MODERN INDIA: BENEFITS & CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Tourism may be explained as a socio-economic activity which has enough competence to create large scale employment without compromising with the environment and the ecology of tourism destination. According to UNWTO, 'Rural Tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing'. Rural area has the features that are un-urban in its own way such as lower population density, exquisite landscape and most of the land usage is dominated by agriculture and forestry along with traditional social structure and lifestyle. It implies those conditions that are unmatched with urban areas. Budget being key element, there is a concern for travel transportation and accommodation. After that the tourist place must add 'value' or perception related to this tour. For instance, the origin of remarkable arts has often been in villages. Applique art work of Pipili gain prominence, recognition and significant tourism site due to the master artisans who create the artistic canopy for the Rath yatra every year at Jagannath Temple, Puri since 10th century. Likewise, Pochampalli village in Tamil Nadu is world famous for its IKAT products handwoven in both silk and cotton. Mana Village, located in Chamoli District is popularly known as the 'last Indian village' from the border of India and China' in the Himalayas. This identity is itself very exciting for many Indian travellers to visit here at least once, apart from its scenic views and mythological significance. The Uttarakhand Government interestingly calls it "Tourism Village." Furthermore, Mattur village in Karnataka takes pride in being purely Sanskrit speaking residents. When a particular village is able to provide that value, its pollution free environment, closeness to roots, rich culture and traditions provide that escapism and a much needed change from day to day life. When a person decides to become a tourist, different stakeholders become a part of his tourism experience. From State government to local Panchayat, from religious groups to travel operators, from tour guides to travel agencies, all these play an important role accomplishing objectives of tourism. When these stakeholders share a common vision of promotion of tourism in village gets fulfilled, which implies employment generation, economic upliftment. This paper attempts to study all key factors that makes village tourism attractive, challenges and opportunities faced. An attempt is also made to understand its advantages and disadvantages as a contributor to the Indian economy.

Keywords: Village Tourism, Economy, Value Addition.

Introduction

Tourism may be explained as a socio-economic activity which has enough competence to create large scale employment without compromising with the environment and the ecology of tourism destination. According to UNWTO, 'Rural Tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture,

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rural lifestyle / culture, angling and sightseeing'. Rural area has the features that are un-urban in its own way such as lower population density, exquisite landscape and most of the land usage is dominated by agriculture and forestry along with traditional social structure and lifestyle. It implies those conditions that are unmatched with urban areas. A person born and brought up in urban lifestyle may not necessarily be aware of rural lifestyle and its features. When they come across a brochure or a vlog or any visual representing village life which has all contrasting parameters than their existing life style, there is a sudden urge to experience it. If the destination is at overnight distance and budget, a quick tour may be planned on a weekend. However, this tour plan depends on various factors before final execution. Budget being key element, there is also a concern for travel transportation and accommodation. After all this is sorted there is also a question about 'value' or perception about supposed experience that will be gained after completion of this tour. This entirely depends on the tourist's preferences related to the kind of experience they are expecting. At this point, village tourism's attractiveness becomes crucial. For instance, the origin of remarkable arts has often been in villages. Applique art work of Pipili gain prominence, recognition and significant tourism site due to the master artisans who create the artistic canopy for the Rath yatra every year at Jagannath Temple, Puri since 10th century. Likewise, Pochampalli village in Tamil Nadu is world famous for its IKAT products handwoven in both silk and cotton. Mana Village, located in Chamoli District is popularly known as the 'last Indian village' from the border of India and China' in the Himalayas. This identity is itself very exciting for many Indian travellers to visit here at least once, apart from its scenic views and mythological significance. The Uttarakhand Government interestingly calls it "Tourism Village." Furthermore, Mattur village in Karnataka takes pride in being purely Sanskrit speaking residents. When a particular village is able to provide that value, its pollution free environment, closeness to roots, rich culture and traditions provide that escapism and a much needed change from day to day life. When a person decides to become a tourist, different stakeholders become a part of his tourism experience. From State government to local Panchayat, from religious groups to travel operators, from tour guides to travel agencies, all these play an important role accomplishing objectives of tourism. When these stakeholders share a common vision of promotion of tourism in village gets fulfilled, which implies employment generation, economic upliftment.

Literature Review

The driving forces for rural tourism are marketability, participatory, crisis mitigation and sustainability. Out of these, sustainability was the most linked force with the scientific production business of rural tourism businesses (Setiawan Priatmoko, Moaaz Kabil, Ali Akaak 2023). Rural tourism is identified for its non-urban regions providing a variety of attractions and creating awareness of the world. Socio- economic growth is an integral feature of rural development and a significant goal of rural tourism. (Mili, Nitashree ,2012). The four aspects in which sustainable tourism is designed are ecological sustainability, cultural sustainability, economic sustainability, and local sustainability. (Ahmed, Nawaz,2013). Village tourism managers of the destination can improve and complement which according to tourists is perceived lacking (Suhud, Allan, Woler 2021).

Benefits of Village Tourism

Village tourism is the driver of local economy. It enables jobs creation, makes local economy stronger, local infrastructure gets developed, reduces poverty and provide fair chance for entire village community to grow and prosper.

- **Recognition and Preservation of Local Products:** Village tourism opens up a new gateway to promote native products ranging from arts and handicrafts, fabrics, textiles, souvenirs, edible products, folklores, local architecture, and much more. This helps in increasing the revenue of the village residents thereby increasing their living standards.
- **Preservation of Heritage and Culture:** When people from diverse cultures and beliefs visit to a village, they get an opportunity to exchange the two cultures. This lays foundation of preserving the local practices specific to those areas and prevents it from getting lost in darkness of unknown. It supports in preservation of the history and heritage of those village people and provides a platform to stand high against increasing urbanization and modern world.
- **Experiencing the Authentic Village Life:** A backdrop of lush green landscapes, unorganised man-made streets, water reservoirs, natural and organic produce along with warmth of the village people away from noisy urban life serves a much refreshing and relaxing change to urban tourists.

- **Balancing the Urban Drift:** Helps slow urban drift as it gives a better economic future for families in rural areas. There has been a significant upsurge in migration of villagers to the urban areas leading to the rapid spread of urban slums. Most of the villages are left with elder generation with grey hair and fewer young men. The younger generation who was supposed to constitute themselves into agriculture, farming, trade, arts & crafts and taking ahead their cultural heritage is seen to migrate in metro cities in search of better pay and lifestyle. The possibility of economic prosperity of their village and communities has narrowed down.

Challenges of Village Tourism

A stable development of village tourism can be achieved by balancing of all stakeholders in tourism environment, namely- tourists, destination village, and host villagers. The common interaction of these three can be fruitfully constructive or destructive. It can help in generating employment and creating income, strengthening local culture and conserve the environment. On the contrary, it can lower the quality of villager's life and give a shock to environment status of villages. Therefore, village tourism must result in setting up of a balance among these stakeholders and preserve the natural environment.

Most of the times village areas are not prepared enough to host tourists. This can cause disturbance in the environment and affect directly to the villager communities. If it is poorly managed, it can result in overcrowding and damage to the natural environment.

- Tourists may exploit village people for simply a desired photograph or to have a dialogue.
- Villagers may get under paid by urban investor who takes away majority of the profit.
- In order to provide customers their regular comfort, food, drink and other necessary day to day products may be imported from outside and locally produced goods may not get consumed.
- Development of infrastructure may ruin the natural beauty of that terrain.
- Large number of visitors may exploit the natural resources and disturb the natural ecology.
- Villagers may shift from their traditional ventures to the tourism business which may eventually lead to the loss of essence in travelling to that place.
- The real value of the environment is far more significant than its tourist value. Through its short term mis-use, it may deprive the upcoming generations of the actual healthy environment.

Discussion

Infrastructure development of a rural destination is critical for its overall development and sustainability, but only to the extent that its natural habitat and uniqueness does not get disrupted. Village tourism has great future, as it provides natural elements of environment along with endemic local traditions, customs and food. Referring to India, every state has its unique heritage, culture, lifestyle, handicraft, traditions and foods. The village tourism may sustain its value and essence if it is kept under control and not opened for a mass market. There should be a separate strategy for different segments to make them successful. In order to attract all segments of tourists, trying to appeal everyone may lead into a huge error. It may lose its unique selling proposition. To be effective and keep long term sustainability, focus of all stakeholders may be on a particular segment at a time and let it flourish.

Conclusion

Villages are heaven to those who seek simplicity. Far away from the chaos of metropolitan lives, taking a leap from exhausting work load and close to mother nature's lap one can live life at its simplest. Tourists must not destroy the host environment and take away its future employment opportunities. The development of village tourism and activities are required to respect the nature, its spectrum and features. The interaction among the tourist, tourist village and host villagers must be harmonious and benefitting under any circumstance.

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