

Agro-Tourism- An Opportunity to the Farmers**Shelake P.N.¹ and Vidhate U.A.²**

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SUMMARY.

Agro-tourism is a very latest concept and form of tourism in India. It gives an opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with real life. Promotion of Agro-tourism needs conceptual convergence with rural tourism, health tourism and adventure tourism. Agro-tourism in state of Maharashtra has witnessed the growth in the past years and helped additional income to the farmers. In order to develop Agro-tourism as a viable option or form of tourism it is important to have an advisory service in place to make it sustainable. Agro tourism is one such form of tourism which has recently emerged in Maharashtra. It is a field with potential to develop. Certainly as a newly developing field it has its own share of challenges and management issues to face. 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.

INTRODUCTION

Agri tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms. It gives an opportunity to the tourists to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with the rural life, taste the local genuine food and get familiar with the various farming tasks during the visit. Tourists can relax and revitalize in the pure natural environment. The urban life is becoming more hectic and complex. The corporate world has provided good employment avenues but along with this it has increased the stress level and the complexity. With the experience of Agri tourism the people can get relaxation. Because of the urbanization, many children as well as the adults do not have an idea about the rural life and the agriculture. Agri tourism provides them a chance to experience rural life and see the agricultural activities. Agri tourism includes opening up farms to tourists from urban areas and from abroad, and letting them to take experience of rural life. Apart from telling them about the various crops and how they are sown and harvested, agri tourism exposes tourists to traditional food, handicraft, culture, music and language. Tourists can get an experience of rural activities such as bullock cart rides, milking cows and goats and picking farm fresh fruits and vegetables etc.

Need and Importance of Agro-tourism in India:

It is said that agro-tourism is a better way to know about the traditional agricultural farming activities which brings us very close to mother-nature and it is also very essential thing for a sustainable living on this planet. Today, Indian cities are facing the problem of overcrowd and environment pollution. Now, it has become an assumed fact that agro-tourism can give us a relief from the hectic life of urban areas. That is why; agro-tourism, eco-tourism and rural tourism are emerging as key sectors of tourism business in India. Most of the studies have proved the due importance and need of agro tourism on the following basis:

- Agro-tourism is a sustainable form of tourism business.
- It provides an additional source of income for the farmers.
- It gives prestige to rural life and creates new jobs at local levels.
- It gives an opportunity to urban tourists to escape from hectic life of the city.
- It enhances the quality of life for local residence.
- It gives the tourists glimpse of village ambience, local cuisine, culture and art.
- It expects the active involvement from the tourist, rather than a passive spectator, so a bond between guest-host is strengthened.
- It is eco-friendly which is very essential in the present environmental scenario.
- It makes tourists familiar with the rural life and roots of early civilization.
- It has a vast scope in the present scenario of tourism business in India.

- It is less expensive gateway of tourism and the cost of accommodation, food, travel and recreation is very less in Agro-Tourism when compared to any other type of tourism.
- It widens the tourist base by widening the scope of tourism due to its cost effectiveness.
- It has a strong demand in the contemporary world scenario.
- It provides all opportunities to all age groups i.e. children, young, middle and old age, female, male, in total to the entire family at a cheaper cost.
- It makes tourists familiar with rural games, traditional dresses, festivals and food.
- It brings tourists close to the nature and provides variety of entertainment to them.
- It is a source of knowledge to get information about plants, animals, and raw materials like handicrafts, woods, rural lifestyle and their languages, culture, tradition.
- Agro-Tourism which generally revolves around farmers, villages and agriculture has the potential to satisfy the curiosity of this segment of population.

Basic Principles of Agri – Tourism:

Agri - Tourism should ensure the following three basic principles.

Have something for visitors to see - Animals, birds, farms and nature are few things which Agri-Tourism could offer to the tourist. Apart from these, culture, dress, festivals and rural games could create enough interest among visitors in Agri-Tourism.

Have something for visitors to do - Participating in agricultural operations, swimming, bullock cart riding, camel riding, buffalo riding, cooking and participating in the rural games are few activities to quote in which tourists can take part and enjoy.

Have something for visitors to buy - Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh agriculture products, processed foods are the few items which tourist can buy as memento for remembrance.

Classification of Tourism

Tourism can be classified into six distinct categories according to the purpose of travel. These are following as:

Recreational: Recreational or leisure tourism takes a person away from the humdrum of everyday life. In this case, people spend their leisure time at the hills, sea beaches, etc.

Cultural: Cultural tourism satisfies cultural and intellectual curiosity and involves visits to ancient monuments, places of historical or religious importance, etc.

Sports/Adventure: Trips have taken by people with a view to playing golf, skiing and hiking, fall within this category.

Health: Under this category, people travel for medical, treatment or visit places where there are curative possibilities, for example, hot springs, spa yoga, etc.

Convention Tourism: It is becoming an increasingly important component of travel. People travel within a country or overseas to attend conventions relating to their business, profession or interest.

Incentive Tourism: Holiday trips are offered as incentives by major companies to dealers and salesmen who achieve high targets in sales. This is a new and expanding phenomenon in tourism, these are in lieu of cash incentives or gifts, and today incentive tourism is a 3 billion dollar business in the USA dollar.

Strategy for the promotion of Agri-tourism concept is as follows:

Product - The product in Agri-tourism is seeing, believing and ultimately experiencing. This experience is unique and unmatched. The experience of climbing a tree, buffalo riding in the pond and enjoying the sugarcane juice in the field itself are unique and none of the million dollar tourist canters can create and offer such experiences.

Price- Following pricing strategies should be applied in promotion of Agri-tourism

a. Customer segment pricing – Domestic and foreign tourist could be priced differently as the capacity to pay is different. For a bullock cart riding, a foreign tourist can pay one dollar where as a domestic tourist can pay only one fourth.

b. Location pricing – Pricing in Agri-tourism depends upon location and importance. Agritourism which just offers agriculture and rural life as an attraction can charge normal pricing. Whereas Agri-tourism spots which are very close to established tourism centres like temple towns, hill stations, around big cities can go far little bit higher charging due to added value. As the pricing in established tourism places are high, it works out to be cheaper for tourist to stay and enjoy in Agri-tourism spots.

c. Time pricing – Agri-tourism units can charge higher in peak season i.e. November to January and change less during rest of the period. During rural festivals or at the time of important events Agri-tourism units can charge more, even though it is during off season.

Place – The place where tourists are accommodated also influences the pricing. If the tourists are accommodated in villages itself with the farmer, the charging can be less whereas accommodation in farms cost high. Because, exclusively for tourist purpose infrastructure is created in farm whereas existing facilities are used in farmers' house in village.

Promotion – Promotion of Agri-tourism and strategic alliance can takes place at three levels:

a. Alliance with airlines, tour operators and foreign embassies – This alliance brings foreign tourists and upper middle class urban tourists into Agri-tourism fold. It may not be possible for individual farmers to take up this task. Government can assist the Agri-tourism units through promotion and co-ordination activities through central and state tourism departments.

b. Alliance with hotel industry – Large number of domestic tourists can be attracted through alliance with hotel industry. The hotel industry can be used to promote the Agri-tourism concept.

c. Promotion by Agri-tourism units – Basically the promotion takes place through mouth to mouth and local publicity given by Agri-tourism units. As the absorption capacity of each unit is very less, direct marketing with little aggressive mode is enough for an Agri-tourism unit to survive. They can go for combined publicity on cost sharing basis and also publicise the Agritourism potential in other part of the country. But, promotion of this group approach needs initial government interventions. Positioning – Ultimately Agri-tourism concept has to be positioned in the minds of tourists as “Come, pluck a fruit, smell a flower, run in the fields, lie on the hay and be lost in rural India”.

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