

Rural Tourism in India: Scope and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Rural India is a personification of Indian culture. About 70% of Indian population resides in villages. Indian villages showcase true image of Indian custom and traditions which are diverse from one region to another spreading from mountainous region of north to the desert region of west stretching to the hot humid climate of south to the coastal region adjacent to Arabian sea. Tourism in such rural countryside presents live demonstration of Indian culture but also acts as an open gallery of Indian ancient historic past. Each region has its own costume, folk song, folk dances and religious ceremonies which are largely promoted by Tourism Deptt to boost national income and development of rural infrastructure. Beside infrastructure development there are few challenges also to cope with like environmental degradation, destruction of fragile Ecosystem, flora and fauna of the place, over carrying capacity, the emphasis should be laid on sustainable tourism with preservation of environment and cultural value and ethos of the places as well. The biggest challenge today is environmental pollution where heap of garbage left over by visitors which not only mars the beauty of the place but also brings havoc to native flora and fauna which goes on the brink of extinction, like in Uttarakhand and other mountainous tourist destinations where govt. banned plastic to make it plastic free places. Similarly there is dire need to preserve dwindling culture and tradition of the places which are struggling to thrive due to the negative impact of western culture brought by foreign tourists.

Keywords: kutch adventure Tourism, Agriculture tourism in Punjab, High-altitude Rural Tourism, Cultural Tourism in Rajasthan, Tribal tourism in North-East region.

About 70% of Indian population inhabits in Rural area. Gandhiji said “in Villages real India resides” Villages preserve long ages cultural heritage of our country. India is known for its diversity, this diversity is also seen in rural areas of different regions. Each region north mountainous to west desert to hot and humid south to the coastal region adjacent to the Arabian sea have their unique cultural heritage.

The term “Rural” is viewed differently from one country to another (Randell 1985, Robinson 1990) Ben & Roger define ‘Rural’ as the rural lands under agriculture, forest, and woodland as well as uncultivated tract in a natural or semi arid state’

In modern world when life becomes so hectic and complicated man's desire increases to spend few hours in pristine environment, far away from artificial life of cities. In this context Rural Tourism plays a pivotal role. Indian cultural heritage lure foreigners in great extent, promoting rural Tourism may become a huge source of earning foreign currency thus beneficial in rural development also thereby check exodus of rural population to urban area.

Marketing initiatives under Central government-

Govt. of India (Tourism department) left no stone unturned in their marketing regime in highlighting rural

India subbrand Dilli Haat, Mega craft melas in cities like Bhubneshwar, Aurangabad, India @60 road show in Singapore (indi media annual report 2009-10)

Giving the tourism sector a significant part the Govt. announced online visa facility for nationals of 76 countries, E-tourist visa the latest in the series of measures to ease visa regime and encourages foreign tourists to visit India launched on 27.11.2014 to 25.05.15- about 1,36,197 had been issued.

Revamping Hunar se Rozgar Tak scheme- revamp under the title “Badte Kadam” to allow all National skill Development agency, Govt approved Institutes, Industrial Units.

Prominent Rural Destinations of India:

- 1. Kutch Adventure tourism-** Once notorious for its marshland Kutch now emerge as famous adventurous destination offers forays into Gujratis great Runn of Kutch to visit Artisan villages as well as famous for its salt desert and wild donkeys sanctuary. Hudka village Resort where one can get lively experience of culture, art and craft of Kutch region, cuisine, stay in mud huts, and witness beauty of sunset at Shaam-E-Sharhad (sunset point at the border)
- 2. Agriculture Tourism in Punjab-Punjab offers panoramic beauty of vast land-** fields, spreading thousand of acres, truly have a capacity to allure large numbers of tourists, Punjab a land of brave warriors presents colorful culture in its festivals like Lohri, Baisakhi which are celebrated with gait and fervor showcase Punjab rural life vibrantly with all its hues.
To showcase Punjab Rural culture “Itmenaan lodges” punabiyat –in Rural Punjab, less than two hour journey from Amritsar, are four stylish Boutique cottages nestled into the field, traditionally built by local craftsmen, entirely out of mud. One can enjoy lively experience of farming activities (milking cows), tractors ride and of course cycling too.
- 3. High –altitude Rural Tourism-** Spiti valley in Himachal Pradesh, Leh and Ladakh villages
Lahaul –Spiti region: Rural life in Lahaul & spiti is quite similar to that of Leh and Ladakh. Villages in this region inhabited by Bhotias and Lahaulis tribe, largely depend on agriculture and craft. The difference between these two tribes Lahaulis follows Hindu Buddhism while Bhotias follows Tibetan Buddhism of Gelupa order. The main Festival Losas annually celebrated in the month of April, which is the main attraction of tourists. Yak safaris and Monasteries too remain popular among tourists. Kardand monastery, built in 12th century is an abode of 50 monks and exhibits several antique murals, old paintings, collection of Thankas (scroll paintings) manuscripts, well preserved frescos, extensive murals covers every wall showcase culture rich cultural heritage.
Leh-Ladakh region : Dars, Likir, Turtuk, and Merak in the Ladakh share similarities to that of rural life of Lahaul-Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh. Surrounded by barren landscape. Barley, peas and few vegetables, species of willow (called Drokchang in Ladakh) sown in the region. Ladakh is famous for its various festivals like Maro Nesjal festival held in August, Dasche festivals, Phyang festivals, all held in Monasteries. During Festivals monasteries are flooded with people dressed with traditional costumes and monasteries burst with dance and dramatic performances with beating drums, resound the whole valleys, accompanied with thumping steps of the masked lamas thrills hearts of viewers.
- 4. Eco-Rural Tourism:** Sunderban villages provide Eco –tourism adventure with its fragile Ecosystem, comes under UNESCO world heritage site, comprises 102 islands. Sunderban famous for its Royal Bengal Tiger habitat with wide variety of flora and fauna, village life there is challenging. Similarly Community based Eco-rural tourism in Maharashtra, providing livelihood to 12 villages of three states, started in 2005 by N.G.O named Grassroute, organise small group trip to experience such as Worli Art

workshop, writers retreat etc .where proximity with nature explore by watching fireflies in June and cultivation of paddy as such unique activities.

5. **Cultural Tourism in Rajasthan villages:** Rajasthan as name denote “land of rajas” provided exotic glimpse of rural tourism with its colourful culture and costumes. Pushkar fair held in Pushkar Town, 11 km away from Ajmer, is a showcase of rural culture and tradition of Rajasthan, held annually during the month of november. Tourists both international and domestic throng in large numbers, various cultural activities like folk dances, folk songs, kalbelia dance, camel safaries, bonfire camps on sand dunes are organised by RTDC give picturesque view of Rural rajasthan. On the other hand Rajasthan is known for its forts and havellies. Shekhawati region is known for their Havellies and fresco painting it is called an open art gallery. Nawalgarh and Mandawa reknowned for its wall paintings and Havellis. Folk dance, puppet show, Camel saffari, ornament , jewellery, costume and folk songs, truly portray Rajasthani art and cuture. ‘Palace on wheels’ make stay here during enrout golden triangle of Delhi ,Agra and Jaiselmer, so foreigners get a glance of this amazing site.
6. **Tribal Tourism, Greener pasture, sustainable tourism in North- East:** Famous as seven sisters states lies amidst the Garo, Khasi and Jantia hills offer wide range experience of simple tribal life, full of lush greenry sorrounding, vivid vareities of floora and fauna, tribal costume and folk dances and folk songs, art and craft of bamboo canes , handwoven draps are quite famous of the region, capable to mesmerise visitors across the world.

Rural tourism beside brings all round development of infrastructure of the place, with its also bring few adverse effects, upon which equal strees be given:

1. **Commodification of culture:** in order to make money, Rural tour organisers may simulate the cultural product and unhesitatingly commodified real culture to artificial one and play with the feelings of innocent travellers.
2. **Hostility of Native population:** sometime over carrying capacity of tourists develop hostile attitude toward visitors for eg: Excessive use of Resources consumption which prove inadequate for host population.
3. **Fear of loss of origiality of culture:** Socio-psychological impact on host population is inevitable when people of two diffefrent culture meet. Native people try to mimic visitors lifestyle, dressing sense and language, which may result in the extinction of native culture .

These are the few drawbacks but effort should be made toward preservation and sustainable development of place with proper guidance to native population.

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