

Exploring Rural Tourism Development Potential: A Youth Perspective from Bani Tehsil, Kathua District (Jammu and Kashmir)

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Abstract

Rural Tourism has considerable potential to utilise local resources, diversify rural livelihoods and create opportunities for local participation (Priyanka and Devarani ,2022). The present study examines youth perception of rural tourism potential, existing development conditions and willingness to participate in tourism activities in selected villages of Bani Tehsil, Kathua District, Jammu and Kashmir. The study adopts an exploratory-cum-descriptive research design. Seven villages are selected- Sarthal, Bani, Siara, Dhaggar, Gatti, Banjal & Chila— which are identified in the Jammu and Kashmir Draft Tourism Policy, 2020 for proposed tourism-related projects. Primary data were collected from 200 youth aged 15–29 years through an interview schedule containing closed-ended, open-ended and five-point Likert-scale questions. The findings reveal that 79% of respondents are aware of rural tourism. A majority perceive the study area as possessing natural beauty, picturesque landscapes and attraction point suitable for rural tourism (68%), while 62% consider it an ideal location for rural tourism. However, accommodation infrastructure is perceived as inadequate, with only 30% expressing a positive response. Regarding participation, 57% are willing to participate in tourism activities such as entrepreneurship and guiding, whereas only 31% are willing to provide homestay services. The socioeconomic profile further provides a basis for understanding the prevailing social and economic conditions of the local youth and for developing context-specific tourism planning and recommendations. The study indicates that the area possesses considerable perceived rural tourism potential, but infrastructure development and appropriate forms of youth participation are required to translate this potential into sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Youth perception, Tourism potential, Youth participation, Rural development, Bani Tehsil, Jammu and Kashmir.

1. Introduction

Rural areas possess diverse natural, cultural and socioeconomic resources that can provide a foundation for tourism development. Rural tourism has increasingly been considered an opportunity for diversifying rural livelihoods, generating employment, encouraging entrepreneurship and strengthening local economies. Unlike conventional tourism, rural tourism is closely associated with the characteristics of rural landscapes, local culture, community life and locally available resources(Saxena et al., 2007). Local communities are important stakeholders in rural tourism development because tourism activities take place within their social and economic environment (Priyanka and Devarani ,2022). In this context,

youth represent an important segment of the local population. Their awareness of tourism, perception of local resources and willingness to participate can provide useful insights into the possibilities and constraints of tourism development.

Bani Tehsil of Kathua District, Jammu and Kashmir, possesses a tourism-related resources. Several villages in the area have also been identified in the Jammu and Kashmir Draft Tourism Policy, 2020 for proposed tourism-related projects. This policy recognition provides a relevant starting point for examining the perceived potential of tourism in these rural areas(Padha,2013).

The present study therefore focuses on youths' opinion of rural tourism potential and development conditions and examines their willingness to participate in tourism activities. The socioeconomic profile of the respondents is also examined to understand the social and economic conditions within which rural tourism development would take place and to provide a contextual basis for tourism planning and recommendations.

Integrated Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The present study integrates the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model and Butler's dynamics Matrix (1974) community response framework to understand youth perceptions and participation in rural tourism. The socioeconomic characteristics of respondents and their perceptions of local tourism resources and development conditions provide the contextual foundation for understanding rural tourism potential. These attitudes may lead to different behavioural responses, as explained by Butler's (1974) dynamics Matrix framework (Monterrubio,2008) ranging from active support and participation to passive acceptance, disinterest or active opposition. CBT provides the development-oriented perspective by emphasising meaningful local participation, equitable distribution of benefits, community empowerment and sustainable use of local resources. Thus, the framework connects the local socioeconomic context and tourism resources with awareness and perceptions and ultimately community participation in rural tourism development. In the present study, this integrated perspective is used to interpret youth awareness of rural tourism, perceptions of resources and development conditions, and willingness to participate in tourism activities, while providing a basis for locally appropriate rural tourism planning.

2. Objectives of the Study The study seeks to:

1. To examine the socioeconomic conditions of the respondents as a contextual basis for rural tourism planning and recommendations.
2. To assess the awareness of youth regarding rural tourism.
3. To examine youth perception of rural tourism resources and development conditions in the study area.
4. To assess the willingness of youth to participate in rural tourism activities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study follows an exploratory-cum-descriptive research design. The exploratory component seeks to understand the perceived rural tourism potential and possible forms of youth participation, while the descriptive component presents the description of facts.

3.2 Selection of Study Villages

Seven villages— Sarthal, Dhaggar, Bani, Gatti, Siara, Banjal and Chila—were selected for the field survey. These villages are identified in the Jammu and Kashmir Draft Tourism Policy, 2020 for various

proposed tourism-related projects. Their identification in the policy provided a relevant basis for selecting them as field locations for examining rural tourism potential.

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling

The study focuses on youth aged 15–29 years, in accordance with the age definition specified in India's National Youth Policy, 2014. Since official village-level data concerning the youth population were not available, respondents meeting the specified age criterion were selected through purposive sampling. A total of 200 youth respondents were included in the study.

The sample represents a non-probability sample appropriate to the exploratory nature of the research and the practical conditions of field investigation.

3.4 Data Collection

Primary data were collected directly by the researcher through a field survey. An interview schedule was used as the principal instrument. The schedule included closed-ended, five-point Likert-scale questions. The Likert-scale statements were measured on a five-point scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative responses were analysed using frequencies and percentages. For the Likert-scale items, responses were examined across the five categories.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-Economic Profile and Implications for Rural Tourism Planning

The socioeconomic profile was examined to understand the prevailing social and economic conditions of the surveyed youth. Rather than treating these characteristics as direct determinants of tourism perception, they provide the contextual foundation for understanding the local population and formulating realistic tourism-development recommendations.

Table 1. Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage
Sex	Male	70
	Female	30
Age	15–19 years	23
	20–24 years	48
	25–29 years	29
Marital status	Married	34
	Unmarried	66
Employment status	Employed	36
	Unemployed	64
Educational qualification	Below Class 10	18
	Class 10	26
	Class 12	41

Variable	Category	Percentage
	Academic degree courses	12
	Professional degree courses	3
Monthly family income	Below ₹2,000	26
	₹2,000–₹10,000	42
	₹10,000–₹20,000	18
	₹20,000–₹30,000	8
	₹30,000–₹40,000	4
	₹40,000 and above	2
Family size	1 member	1
	2 members	4
	3 members	4
	4 members	34
	5 members	57
Landholding	No land	12
	Below 20 marla	24
	20 marla	31
	1–10 kanal	26
	10 kanal and above	7

The socioeconomic profile shows that the sample is predominantly young, with the largest proportion of respondents belonging to the 20–24 age group (48%), followed by 25–29 years (29%). Thus, the majority of the respondents are young adults who represent an important potential human resource for tourism-related employment and entrepreneurship.

The employment situation is particularly noteworthy, as 64% of respondents are unemployed. This provides an important socioeconomic context for tourism planning because rural tourism may potentially contribute to livelihood diversification and employment generation. The educational profile further shows that 41% of respondents have completed Class 12 and 26% have completed Class 10. This indicates considerable scope for skill-based and vocational training in tourism-related activities.

The income distribution indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents belong to comparatively lower-income households. This has implications for tourism planning because tourism enterprises requiring substantial initial investment may not be equally accessible to all households. Consequently, recommendations concerning entrepreneurship support, financial assistance and low-investment tourism activities need to take local economic conditions into account.

Landholding also varies considerably. While some respondents possess relatively larger landholdings, 12% have no land and 24% possess less than 20 marla. Rural tourism planning should therefore not depend exclusively on land-based tourism activities. Service-based activities such as guiding, food services,

hospitality, transportation and entrepreneurship may provide opportunities for youth with limited or no land.

The predominance of four- and five-member households, accounting for 91% of respondents, provides additional context for household-based tourism activities. This is particularly relevant when considering homestays, which require the involvement and accommodation capacity of individual households. Thus, the socioeconomic profile provides a baseline for tourism planning. It indicates the availability of a young human resource base, considerable unemployment, varied educational backgrounds, relatively modest household incomes and differences in land access. These conditions need to be considered while designing locally appropriate tourism-development strategies.

4.2 Awareness of Rural Tourism

Table 2. Awareness of Rural Tourism among Respondents

Response	Percentage
Yes	79
No	21
Total	100

The findings show that 79% of respondents are aware of rural tourism, while 21% are unaware. The considerably higher proportion of aware respondents indicates that rural tourism is already familiar to a large majority of the surveyed youth.

This level of awareness provides a favourable foundation for tourism planning because a population that is familiar with the concept is more likely to understand discussions concerning tourism opportunities and local participation. The finding is particularly relevant given the predominantly young composition of the sample and the relatively substantial proportion with secondary and higher-secondary education.

However, awareness does not automatically imply willingness to participate. This becomes evident when the awareness finding is compared with the participation results. While 79% are aware of rural tourism, only 57% express willingness to participate in tourism-related activities. Thus, the transition from awareness to active participation represents an important consideration for rural tourism development.

The 21% who remain unaware also indicate the need for continued awareness and sensitisation at the local level. Information dissemination should focus not only on the meaning of rural tourism but also on specific opportunities through which local youth can participate.

4.3 Perception of Rural Tourism Resources and Development Conditions

Table 3. Youth Perception of Rural Tourism Resources and Development Conditions

Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
7	4	21	42	26
8	4	26	41	21
9	25	7	54	5
10	43	17	27	3

Indicator				
Natural beauty, attraction points and picturesque landscapes provide conditions required for rural tourism				
Study area is a well-suited location for rural tourism				
Study area has good road accessibility				
Adequate accommodation infrastructure such as guesthouses, hotels is available				

4.3.1 Natural Beauty, Landscapes and Attraction Points

The first indicator received the most favourable response. 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the study area possesses natural beauty, picturesque landscapes and attraction points suitable for rural tourism. Only 11% expressed disagreement, while 21% remained neutral.

This finding indicates that the principal perceived strength of the study area lies in its resource base. The respondents generally recognise the rural landscape and existing attractions as having tourism value. This is particularly important for an exploratory study because it demonstrates that the potential for rural tourism is not perceived merely as an externally imposed development idea; rather, a substantial majority of surveyed youth recognise tourism-related qualities in their own surroundings.

However, the result represents perceived resource potential, not the actual level of tourism development. Resources need to be appropriately accessed, managed, interpreted and supported by facilities before they can become effective tourism products.

4.3.2 Suitability of the Study Area for Rural Tourism

A total of 62% of respondents considered the study area an ideal location for rural tourism, while 12% disagreed and 26% remained neutral.

The positive response confirms the favourable perception of the area's tourism potential. However, the lower percentage compared with the natural-resource indicator (68%) is noteworthy. It suggests that although respondents recognise the availability of tourism resources, some are less certain about the overall suitability of the area as a developed tourism destination.

This difference becomes clearer when the infrastructure indicators are considered. The findings indicate that respondents distinguish between having tourism resources and having the supporting conditions necessary for tourism development.

4.3.3 Road Connectivity and Accessibility

Road connectivity received 59% positive responses, while 34% of respondents expressed disagreement. Although more than half perceive accessibility positively, the relatively high negative response indicates that connectivity remains a concern for a substantial section of the respondents.

Accessibility is particularly important in a rural tourism context because attractions may be dispersed across different villages and rural locations. Poor accessibility can reduce the practical tourism value of otherwise attractive sites.

Thus, road connectivity can be regarded as a moderately favourable but incomplete development condition. Improvement of access to tourism sites would help connect the identified resource base with potential visitors.

4.3.4 Accommodation Infrastructure

Accommodation is clearly the weakest of the four indicators. Only 30% of respondents expressed a positive response, whereas 53% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The finding reveals a substantial perceived gap between the tourism resources of the study area and the facilities available to support visitors. The accommodation deficit is particularly relevant because tourism development requires not only attractions but also facilities that enable visitors to stay and consume tourism services locally.

The socioeconomic profile further provides useful context for planning a response to this gap. Since a considerable proportion of respondents belong to relatively low-income households, accommodation development may require institutional support, investment assistance and locally appropriate models rather than relying entirely on individual household investment.

4.4 Youth Participation in Rural Tourism

Table 4. Youth Willingness to Participate in Rural Tourism Activities

Participation Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)
Willing to participate in tourism activities such as guide, entrepreneurship etc.	57	43
Willing to provide homestay services	31	69

4.4.1 Willingness to Participate in Tourism Activities

The findings show that 57% of respondents are willing to participate in rural tourism activities such as entrepreneurship and guiding, whereas 43% are unwilling.

The willingness of more than half of the respondents represents a potentially useful human resource for rural tourism development. This finding is particularly relevant when viewed alongside the socioeconomic profile, in which 64% of respondents are unemployed. Tourism-related activities could potentially provide alternative livelihood and self-employment opportunities for youth.

The educational profile also provides a basis for developing different forms of tourism participation. Respondents with secondary and higher-secondary education could potentially be supported through practical training in guiding, hospitality, food services, digital promotion and entrepreneurship.

However, the 43% unwilling response indicates that participation cannot be assumed simply because tourism potential exists. Appropriate skills, incentives, financial support and information about specific opportunities may be required to convert general tourism awareness into active participation.

4.4.2 Willingness to Provide Homestay Services

The willingness to provide homestay services is considerably lower. Only 31% of respondents are willing to provide homestays, while 69% are unwilling.

This finding is particularly important because accommodation was simultaneously identified as the weakest tourism development condition, with only 30% positive responses. Thus, the study identifies both an accommodation gap and a limited willingness to provide homestays.

The socioeconomic context is relevant here. Homestays are household-based activities and depend upon available residential space, household resources and willingness to accommodate visitors. The predominance of four- and five-member households and the concentration of respondents in lower-income categories provide an important context for understanding why household accommodation may not be equally feasible or attractive to all families.

Therefore, the accommodation gap should not be addressed solely by assuming that local households will provide homestays. Alternative accommodation options and appropriate institutional and financial support may also be required.

4.5 Integrated Results and Discussion

The findings present a clear pattern regarding rural tourism potential in the study area. Awareness and perceived resource potential are relatively high, whereas supporting infrastructure and certain forms of participation are comparatively weak.

The awareness level of 79% indicates that rural tourism is already familiar to most surveyed youth. This provides a favourable social foundation for tourism development. Similarly, 68% recognise natural beauty, picturesque landscapes and attraction points, and 62% consider the study area an ideal location for rural tourism. These findings indicate that the resource potential of the area is positively perceived by the local youth.

However, this perceived potential is not matched by the same level of tourism-supporting infrastructure. Road connectivity receives 59% positive responses but also 34% negative responses, indicating a mixed assessment. More importantly, accommodation receives only 30% positive responses, with a majority expressing dissatisfaction.

The participation findings further reveal that the local youth are not uniformly willing to engage in every form of tourism. Although 57% are willing to participate in activities such as entrepreneurship and guiding, only 31% are willing to provide homestays. This demonstrates that the nature of participation matters.

The socioeconomic profile provides the foundation for interpreting these findings from a planning perspective. The large proportion of unemployed youth indicates potential relevance of tourism for livelihood diversification. The educational profile suggests scope for tourism-related skill development, while the income distribution indicates the importance of low-investment opportunities and institutional support. Differences in landholding demonstrate that tourism participation should include both land-based and service-based activities.

The findings therefore suggest a resource–infrastructure–participation gap. The resource base is perceived positively, but supporting infrastructure is comparatively weak and participation varies by activity. Rural tourism development in the study area would consequently require an integrated approach that connects local resources with infrastructure development, skill enhancement, entrepreneurship and appropriate forms of community participation.

5. Implications for Rural Tourism Planning

The findings have several implications for tourism planning in the study area.

First, the high recognition of natural and scenic resources suggests that tourism planning can build upon existing rural resources rather than depending entirely on the creation of new attractions.

Second, accommodation represents the most evident infrastructure gap. Planning should therefore consider appropriate accommodation facilities while maintaining the rural character of the destination.

Third, the mixed perception of road connectivity indicates the need for continued attention to accessibility and last-mile connectivity to tourism sites.

Fourth, the socioeconomic profile indicates that tourism planning should be sensitive to the economic conditions of local youth. Given the high proportion of unemployed respondents and the concentration of households in lower-income categories, employment-oriented and low-investment tourism opportunities may be particularly relevant.

Fifth, youth participation should be diversified. Since general participation is higher than willingness to provide homestays, opportunities should extend to guiding, entrepreneurship, food services, local transportation, cultural activities and other tourism-related services.

Finally, training and capacity building should correspond to the educational and socioeconomic characteristics of the local population. Such interventions can help convert awareness and willingness into practical participation.

Conclusion

The study examined youth perceptions of rural tourism potential, development conditions and participation in selected villages of Bani Tehsil. The findings indicate that the area has a favourable perceived foundation for rural tourism. A substantial majority of respondents are aware of rural tourism, while natural beauty, landscapes and local attractions are widely recognised as tourism resources.

At the same time, the study identifies important development constraints. Accommodation infrastructure is perceived as inadequate, while road connectivity receives a mixed assessment. Youth participation is also selective more than half are willing to participate in tourism activities, but a much smaller proportion is willing to provide homestay services.

The socioeconomic profile provides an important planning context. The predominance of young and unemployed respondents, varied educational backgrounds, relatively modest household incomes and differences in landholding indicate the need for tourism strategies that are employment-oriented, skill-based, economically accessible and locally appropriate.

Overall, the study suggests that Bani Tehsil possesses considerable perceived rural tourism potential, but this potential requires appropriate infrastructure, capacity building and diversified opportunities for local youth participation to be translated into meaningful rural tourism development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Improve tourism-supporting infrastructure**, particularly accommodation and accessibility to identified tourism sites.
2. **Develop youth-oriented skill programmes** in guiding, hospitality, food services, entrepreneurship and other tourism-related activities.
3. **Promote diversified participation opportunities** so that youth can participate through guiding, entrepreneurship, local services and cultural activities rather than relying only on homestays.
4. **Provide financial and institutional support** for suitable local tourism enterprises, particularly for households and young entrepreneurs with limited financial resources.

5. **Strengthen awareness programmes** for the 21% of respondents who are not currently aware of rural tourism and provide practical information about available tourism opportunities.
6. **Develop accommodation through locally appropriate models**, including homestays where households are willing and adequately supported, alongside other suitable accommodation facilities.
7. **Consider local socioeconomic conditions in tourism planning**. The age, employment, education, income and landholding characteristics of the local population should inform the selection of tourism activities and development interventions.
8. **Promote inclusive tourism planning** by creating opportunities for youth with different educational, economic and landholding backgrounds to participate in tourism development.

Limitation of the Study

The study is based on a non-probability sample of 200 youth from seven selected villages and therefore does not claim statistical generalisation to the entire youth population of Bani Tehsil. The findings primarily represent the perceptions and reported willingness of the surveyed respondents. The socioeconomic profile is used to understand the local social and economic context and to inform planning and recommendations; it is not interpreted as establishing causal relationships with tourism perceptions or participation.

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