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Potential and possibilities of rural tourism in Darbhanga district, Bihar

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Abstract

Tourism in rural areas is a new activity that have great potential to develop economic and social benefits to the society. Especially in India, rural tourism is a new concept. Rural tourism is a form of nature-based tourism that covers the rural life as well as culture, art, and heritage at rural locations which result in favouring the local communities economically and socially. Tourism brings in large amount of income in a local economy in the form of payment for tourists by the necessities of goods and services. It also creates opportunities for employment in the tourism sector. In the developing countries with the growth of tourism, there is also a concern for the sustainable environment as people have become more and more cautious about exploiting their natural resources. The pressures of modern urban life are the very important factor for sustainable development of rural tourism. The aim of this paper is to evaluate potential, possibilities, opportunities, and sustainability of rural tourism in Darbhanga district which is located in the state of Bihar.

Keywords: Tourism, opportunity, rural tourism, rural development, sustainability

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an increased realization that the tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for rural development. With 69% population living in rural India, and almost 6.5 million village units spread across the country, India foresees itself as a strong platform for harnessing rural tourism. The geographical diversity of India makes it a unique spot for harnessing rural tourism which can include tourist sites like desert, mountains, plains, plateaus, islands and coasts in different regions. India showcases a variety of cultural patterns having different lifestyles, practices, art and craft, and festivals.

Rural tourism can be defined as the 'country experience' which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Factors such as increasing level of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture, improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness have shifted trends towards rural tourism. This will not only preserve the culture and heritage of the country, but will also generate employment in the villages since it can be leveraged to provide skill development in tourism related job roles such as that of guide, driver, cook, housekeeping and hospitality to the tourists. Ministry of Tourism specifies that any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, benefits the local community economically and socially, and enables interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism may include multiple facets such as farm tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. The country has seen successful rural tourism models in states such as Kerala's backwater, Karnataka's forest, and Tamilnadu's temple.

Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism. A major form of tourism is agri tourism, which refers to, the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agri business operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.

Tourism has been divided into two main categories 'mass' tourism and 'alternative' form of tourism. Mieczkowski (1995 as cited in Wearing 2001) opined that 'alternative tourism' and

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'mass tourism' are two ends of a spectrum. Various authors (Lane, 1994; Page and Getz, 1997; Swarbrooke 1996) [15] have proposed the characteristics of rural tourism as follows:

- It is located in a rural area which is functionally rural (with traditional societies, traditional culture, traditional lifestyle and practices).
- It offers a relaxing environment, open spaces, traditional village, and natural scenery.
- It provides opportunities for engaging in outdoor activities such as wildlife treks, fruit picking and hay rides.
- The scale of tourism is at local level, is locally controlled and benefits the local community.

The ministry of tourism has sanctioned the project in Bihar during FY 2017-18 - "Development of Bhitiharwa - Chandrahia -Turkaulia" amounting to Rs 44.65 crore. The ministry has also instituted a National Tourism Award in the category of 'Best Rural/Agri/Plantation Tourism Projects' to motivate the stakeholders in the tourism sector for implementing such projects. Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission (SPMRM) follows the vision of development of a cluster of villages that preserve and nurture the essence of rural community life with focus on equity and inclusiveness without compromising with facilities perceived to be essentially urban in nature, thus creating a cluster of "Rurban Villages".

Objectives of Study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To collect information on rural tourism and to identify different types of rural tourism.
- To provide an overview on driving forces and benefits of rural tourism.
- To find out the potential of rural tourism in Darbhanga district.

Approach and Scope of Study

This study draws on previous research available on websites and other documents. The research is not limited to only Darbhanga but also reviews rural tourism development in other places in India. The study focuses on types of tourism, driving forces in rural tourism, its benefits and what makes rural tourism successful. A wide range of benefits has been identified as potential outcomes associated with promoting the development of agri tourism from an agricultural industry perspective. There is not any rural tourism centre established in Darbhanga district while this district has great potential to flourish rural tourism. Rural tourism not only provides to visit and experiences of beautiful nature and

landscapes but it also presents the local art, culture etc. Highly skilled artisans are present in villages but they are not trained for the packaging and presentation which are very important for their empowerment.

Research Methodology

The present paper is based on majorly secondary data derived from various literature sources which includes various research papers, news articles, and websites. This study followed qualitative research design and the findings of the paper carry the effect of personal visit to rural tourism sites and discussions with entrepreneurs, villagers, tourists.

Research questions

What is rural tourism?

What are the factors responsible for the development of rural tourism?

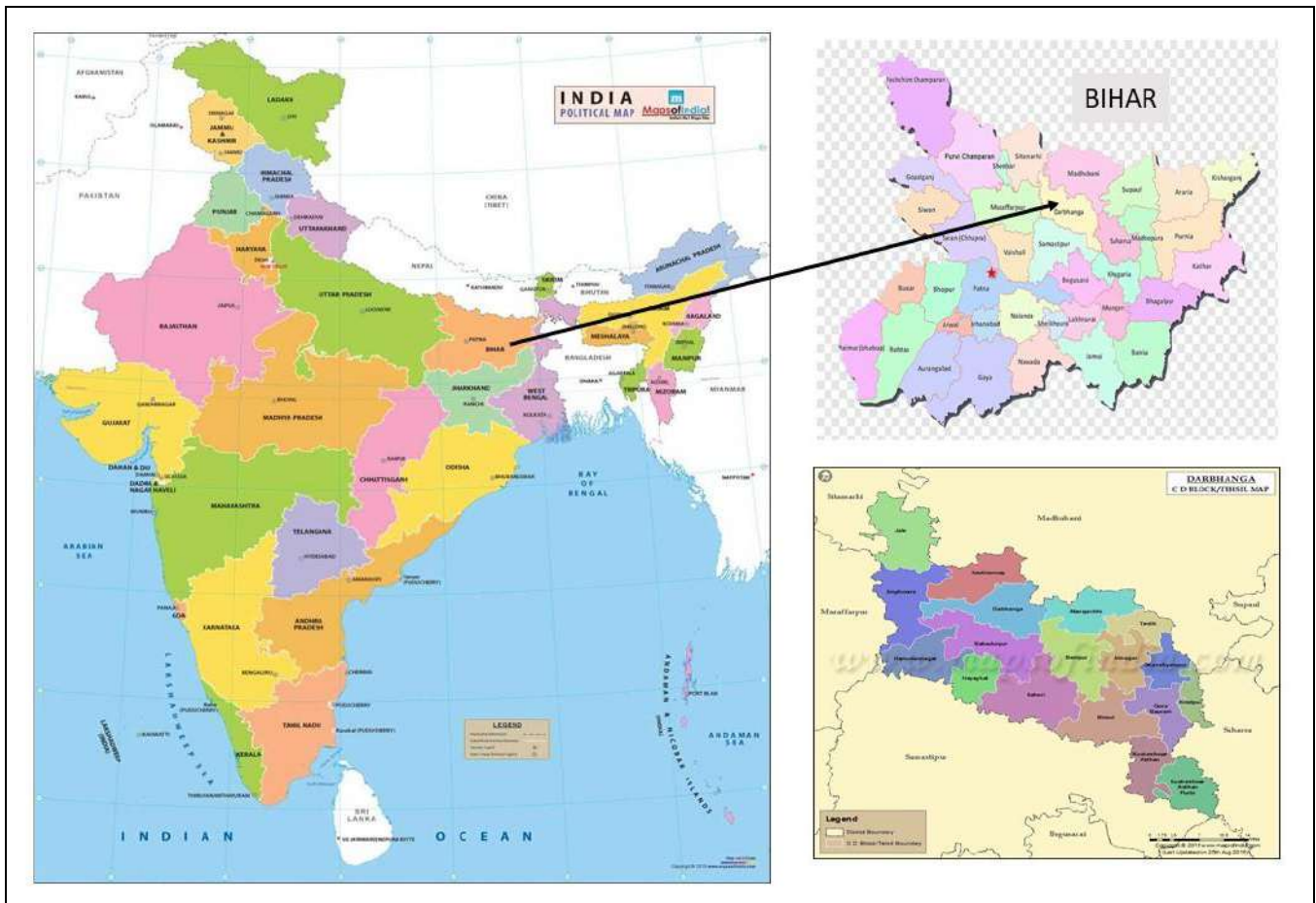
What are the challenges and opportunities?

Which important measure should be taken for the success of rural tourism and rural development?

District Highlights

The district forms a part of the north Bihar Plain and lies in the northern portion of the state of Bihar. It is bounded on the north by the district of Sitamarhi and Madhubani, on the south by the district of Samastipur, on the east by the districts of Saharsa and Supaul and on the west by the district of Muzaffarpur. There are 18 C.D. Blocks and three sub-divisions i.e. Darbhanga Sadar, Benipur and Biraoul in the district. Darbhanga is the only town in the district. There are altogether 1247 villages in the district. The district takes its name from its only town, Darbhanga - the district headquarters, which is said to have been founded by one Darbhangi Khan, about whom practically nothing is known. It is also held that the name Darbhanga has been derived from Dwar Banga or Dar-I-Banga meaning "the door to Bengal." This derivation does not appear to be very correct as the division between Bengal and Bihar has always been much further to the east. However, the linguistic and cultural affinity with Bengal may be said to commence from here.

Darbhangha is one of the important districts of North Bihar situated in the very heart of Mithilanchal which is the fertile, alluvial plains of North India. Darbhanga was an ancient city of Mithila, which is an ancient cultural region of North India lying between the lower range of the Himalayas and the Ganges river. The Nepal border cuts across the top fringe of this region. The Gandak and Kosi rivers are rough western and eastern boundaries of Mithila. Darbhanga has attained fame as the 'Makhana' producing district.



www.mapsofindia.com

The historical and cultural heritage of Darbhanga does establish this place on the tourism map. The fort, place and other numerous buildings and temples constructed by Maharaja Kameshwar Singh are known to be major tourism attractions in the city. The buildings of Lalit Narayan Mithila University and Kameshwar Singh Darbhanga Sanskrit University, famous temples e.g. Shyama Mandir, Madhweshwar Mandir, Manokamna Mandir etc are the centres of knowledge, wisdom and bhakti. Khankah Samarkandia, Jama Masjid, Mirja Khan Talab, Three Church, Gurudwara etc are the symbol of brotherhood and secularism. Kusheshwarsthan is a very important eco-tourism centre, where migratory birds used to come every year from different part of the country and other countries too.

The glorious past has wide impact on the progressive present of the district. Darbhanga has been the land of literature, culture, justice and philosophy for centuries. Maithili language, spoken in this region is supposed as sweetest language in the world. Researchers used to come at this place to study about this language. The town is noted for its trade in fish, mango and makhana. Among its educational institution are Chandradhari Mithila College, Medical College, Women’s College, Engineering School and various other institutions.

Tourist Places Located in Village Area of Darbhanga

Many tourist places in Darbhanga district situated in villages which has great potential for the development of rural tourism. It’s historical, cultural and religious characteristics can play vital role for the economic development of the villagers.

Ahilya Sthan

It is famous historical temple, situated about 3 Kms. South of Kamtaul Railway Station in Jale Block. This place is known as Ahalya gram. There is a well-known in the Ramayana about Ahilya. According to Ramayana when Lord Rama was his way to Janakpur his feet touched a stone and it turned into a woman who was non-else but Ahilya. Her husband Gautam Rishi cursed the Ahilya to fun into stone. The temple is dedicated to Ahilya, wife of Gautam Rishi. Large fairs are held every year on the occasion of Ramnavami in the Hindi month of Chaitra and Vivah Panchami in Margashirsha. There are various other temples and mosques in the village.

Brahmpur

The village is situated about 8 kms. Away from Kamtaul and 19 Kms. South east of Jogjara. The village is noted for the Gautam Kund and a temple of Gautam Rishi, which are located very close to it. According to the Pauranic tradition Lord Brahma appeared before Gautam Rishi at this place after the chastity of his wife, Lord Indra and Chandrama had violated Ahilya. The village derives its name from this occurrence. In regard to the Gautam Kund, it is believed that Lord Brahma himself created the tank by piercing the earth with seven arrows, so that Gautam might not have to travel a long distance for bathing in the Ganga. The village is a rail head in Jale block. The village has a Khadi Gramodyog centre and a Khadi store. It is the rail head for visitors to Ahilya sthan and Gautam sthan.

Chhaprar

The village is situated in Bahadurpur block, at a distance of about 10 Kms. from district headquarter. It has a temple of Lord Mahadeva on the bank of the Kamla river around which fairs are held on the occasion of Kartik and Maghi Purnima.

Dekulidham

The village falls in Biraal block and is noted for its large temple of Lord Shiva. Devotees congregate here every Sunday. A large annual fair is held on the occasion of Shivaratri.

Kusheshwar-asthan

It is an important religious place, situated about 16 Kms. east of Singhia and 22 Kms. northeast of Hasanpur Road railway station on the Samastipur, Khagaria Branch line of North Eastern Railway. It is noted for the temple of Lord Shiva known as Kusheshwarasthan. Pilgrims visit this place all the year round for worship. The origin of this temple is traced to the epic period. The water logged fourteen villages of Kuseshwarasthan block covering an area of 7019 acres and 75 decimals, due to their greater ecological, faunal, floral, geomorphological and natural importance has already been declared as Kuseshwarasthan Bird Sanctuary under Wild Life Protection Act 1972 (as amended upto 1991). The following table shows the names and status of some important migratory birds seen in Kusheshwarasthan Bird Sanctuary and their native countries.

Mahinam-Mahadeo-sthan: It is temple of Lord Shiva situated at a distance of about 5 Kms. from the Darbhanga-Biraal pucca road. Large annual fairs are held here on the occasion of Kartik and Maghi Purnima.

Makranda: Situated about 5 Kms. south of Manigachhi railway station, the village is known for its old temple called Baneshwarasthan.

Nawadah Durga-sthan: It is famous temple of Goddess Durga Located on the Majkora Nawadah Road. The place is visited by hundreds of devotees every day. The Dussehra festival is celebrated here with great enthusiasm.

Raghopur: The village is situated about 5 Kms. south of Sakri railway station. It is noted for its earthen mound, known as Sheosingh-garh, which is believed to cover the ruins of a building, built by Raja Shiva Singh.

Tourist Places Located in Town Area of Darbhanga

City area of Darbhanga has also very important tourist places which can be the supporting factor of rural tourism and rural development.

Shyama Temple

Shyama Temple is just one km west of Darbhanga Railway Station. It is situated in the picturesque and peerless Lalit Narayan Mithila University. In fact, it is private graveyard of Darbhanga Raj Royal family and temples have been built upon the graveyard of the ancestors of the Royal family. Shyama Temple is one of them. It was built in 1933. A huge statue of Goddess Kali is enshrined in this temple. This temple is famous not only for its but also for the faith that

people here get there in desire fulfilled if they worship with holy heart.

Sati Asthan

Sati Asthan is situated in the famous graveyard of Subhankarpur, which is about one km west of Darbhanga Maharaji bridge. Maharaj Rameshwar Singh who was also a great Tantrik used to visit here daily in mid night for his Tantra Sidhi. Late Pandit Harinandan Mishra father of Late Lalit Narayan Mishra, Ex, Railway Minister, Government of India, also held in this premises.

Manokamna Temple: Manokamna Temple is situated in the University Campus just beside Nargauna Palace. This temple has constructed with the Marble. This is the Lord Hanuman temple where a little but most beautiful statue of Hanuman. A lot of crowd came to visit this place every day.

Malechchhed Mardani Temple: Malechchhed Mardani temple is one km south west of Darbhanga Railway station. It is temple of the Goddess who destroy the faints. This temple is of utmost importance for Shakti people.

Kankali Temple: Kankali temple is two km north west of Darbhanga Railway station in the premises of Qila of Darbhanga Maharaj. This temple is of utmost importance for Shakti people.

Catholic Church: It was old type of Baungla Church established in 1891 where training was given to Christen Pandit. It is just situated one km north from the Darbhanga Railway Station. This building was demolished in the earthquake of 1897 and later on it was constructed. The pray was started in this building from 25 December 1991. The name of this church is Holy Rosary Church. A lot of crowds were assembled on every Friday. Here Christmas festival is organized between Dec 25-31 and Anand Mela is organized on October 7 every year. In the front of Church, a most attractive symbol of Isamashi is also situated.

Bhikha Salami Majar: It is situated at one km southeast from Darbhanga Railway station on the bank of Gangasagar pond. A fair is to be organized between 12th and 16th day during the Ramzan.

Masjid at Darbhanga Tower: It is situated at two km west from the Darbhanga Railway Station and just neat at Darbhanga Tower. It is the most attractive and religious place for the Islam religion. A crowd people are assembled on every Friday for pray their Namaj.

The Mazar of Makhdoom Baba: It is situated at two km northwest from Darbhanga Railway Station and just between the both universities. It is the very popular secularism place. Here daily people from Islam religion as well as Hindu religion assemble for offering their prayers.

Maharaja Laxmiswar Singh Museum: Maharaja Laxmiswar Singh Museum was established on 16th September 1977. It is situated just west south of Darbhanga Railway Station. This Museum can be visited every day except Monday. Royal family of Darbhanga is well known for its love and affection with art and culture. Prince Subheshwar Singh gifted the invaluable and immemorial

items and Durlabh Kalakritiya in order to establish this museum. The then District Magistrate of Darbhanga Shree Ramashankar Tiwari had also played an important role in the establishment of this museum. This unique museum is situated on the eastern bank of Mansarowar Lake.

Chandradhari Museum, Darbhanga: This museum was established on 7 December 1957 on the north bank of Mansarowar Lake. Late Chandradhari Singh of Ranti Dyordhi (Madhubani) donated all the artifact and other rare objects. It was shifted in double story building in 1974. There is no entry fee for visiting the Museum. It remains open for public on every day except Monday. On the basis of arrangement and materials of the Museum, it is divided into eleven Gallery.

Handicraft

Folk Arts: Mithila Paintings: It is characterized by the line drawings, which is to be filled in by bright colours and contrast or pattern. The painting on mud wall and verandas and were constantly changing or renewed depending on the celebrations, God, ceremonies and family events. Some of them are as follows:

1. The first mention of crafts similar to “Sujni” comes in the description of bedspreads and wall hanging. It is popular as Sujni.
2. It is the grass article, which made by the women of North Bihar particularly of the Darbhanga district. Sikki seems to grow anywhere in this area. It is tall and rush with a lovely golden shade and most attractive. The coiling technique, which is the oldest, used in Sikki. The common long grass is wired and stitched together with the sikki dyes in several shaded using a needle called Takua.
3. It is one of the arts of Darbhanga. The inlay continues to be done with different materials like metal, ivory, etc. and stage chips of woods in other grains or tints are used to get varied effects.
4. It is prepared with the primary colours of natural origin on paper and cloth. It is also used on the occasion of mythological and religious events.

What is rural tourism?

Rural tourism encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments (Ibid). Consequently, rural tourism in its purest form should be: (Lane B., 1994) ^[19]

- Located in rural areas.
- Functionally rural – built upon the rural world’s special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, traditional societies and traditional practices.
- Rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small-scale.
- Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be largely controlled locally and developed for the betterment of the area in long term.

Types of Rural Tourism

Tourism is synthesized from mass and alternative tourism. Mass tourism is characterized by large numbers of people

seeking culture holidays in popular resort destinations. Alternative tourism is sometimes referred to as special interest tourism or responsible tourism and it’s usually taken to mean alternative forms of tourism which give emphasis on the contact and understanding of inhabitants’ way of living and the local natural environment. Smith V., Eadington W., (1992) ^[14].

The diversity of attractions included within rural tourism includes heritage tourism (sometimes referred to as cultural heritage tourism), nature-based tourism/ecotourism, agri tourism, as well as partnership-based approaches, such as scenic byways and heritage areas. Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past. A second major type of rural tourism activity is nature-based tourism/eco-tourism (sometimes called recreation-based tourism), which refers to the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active (increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities.

A third major form of tourism is agri tourism, which refers to, the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agri business operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including farmers’ markets, petting farms, roadside stands, engaging in overnight farm, other farm visits; and visiting agriculture-related festivals, museums, and other such attractions.

Important Factors for the Development of Rural Tourism

These factors have been identified by many authors and can be summarized as: (Mackay, 1997; 117) ^[16]

Tourism generating regions for rural tourism are highly developed and urbanized –desire for escape from the monoculture of city living due to the stress of urban living and being away from the natural environment. Rural locations offer release from stress and the opportunity to re-engage with a simpler, peaceful way of life that offers rest and relaxation.

Increasing environmental awareness and interest in the relationship between humans and the environment. Green issues have raised the attractiveness of rural experiences as ecologically sustainable tourism. Transport, communications, and the removal of political and economic barriers to travel have facilitated accessibility of rural areas. The combination of increasing discretionary incomes, greater awareness of the range of experiences on offer, with greater mobility through private transport, the accessibility and attractiveness of rural destinations can improve.

A move toward short-break holidays - income and leisure time have changed so that shorter breaks with greater choice of leisure activities are sought. Changing work patterns have increased the popularity of shorter breaks that minimize the absence from work and the effect of absences on work flow and involvement.

Better-educated travellers have increased interest in outdoor recreation, eco-tourism and special interest tourism - individualism drives a need for unique experiences and rural tourism, because of its fragmented nature and diversity of

offerings, can satisfy this need. An increased interest in heritage can be satisfied through rural tourism as rural areas are often the repositories of remnant heritage.

Rural areas are perceived as healthier, offering fresh air, cleaner water and the opportunity for outdoor recreation. Rural areas offer fresh, and sometimes, specialty foods. An increasing desire for authentic experiences including interaction with local people - Rural tourism is real (Rewarding, Enriches the spirit, provides Adventure and Learning); authenticity is believed to be found in genuine country experiences and lifestyles.

Benefits of Rural Tourism

Rural tourism, while still only a minority tourism market, is making a valuable contribution to rural economies. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of jobs, contributions towards funding conservation, encouragement to the adoption of new working practices, and the injection of a new vitality into sometimes weakened economies. Potentially rural tourism promises some of the following benefits to rural development:

Job retention

Rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. It can also provide additional income for farmers, and, in some cases, for foresters and fisherman.

Job creation

Job creation typically occurs in the hotel and catering trades, but can also take place in transport, retailing, and in information/heritage interpretation. Studies in Britain suggest that job creation varies by enterprise type.

New Business Opportunities

Tourism generates new opportunities for industry (Oppermann, 1996) [6]. Even those rural businesses not directly involved in tourism can benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist facilities where local foods can be used as part of the tourism offering in a locality. Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complementary businesses such as service stations and new businesses are created to cater to tourist needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts/crafts (DOT, 1995b; ATSI, 1996).

Opportunities for Youth

The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited to the energies and enthusiasm of young people (DOT, 1995b). Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct involvement in running tourism businesses, especially those within small communities (ATSI, 1996).

Builds Community Pride

Rural tourism has a great potential to promote community diversification as local people can start leveraging their existing resources of economic and social benefit. Communities which have unique resource can earn their livelihood by promoting their skills thereby enhancing community pride.

Preservation of Rural Culture and Heritage

In rural tourism the sense of place is a fundamental element in both the tourists and host community's feelings of what makes the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage. (Macbeth, 1997; Prideaux *et al.*, 1997)

Increase arts and crafts sale

Arts and crafts have a special place in the cultural heritage of regions and nations. Many commentators have noted that tourism can assist arts and crafts, both by recognizing their importance, and by purchasing craft products. Income flows from these activities are well documented. Support between the arts and tourism can be a two-way process. Many communities now use arts and crafts festivals as a marketing mechanism to encourage visitors to come to their areas.

Landscape conservation

Landscape conservation has become an increasingly important form of heritage protection. Landscape is of crucial importance to rural tourism but, equally, visitor use is vital to the landscape conservation industry. Visitor use brings political benefits, can bring economic gains, and can provide jobs in maintaining and repairing traditional landscapes worn by recreational activities.

Environmental improvements

Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities. These help to develop pride of place, important in retaining existing population and businesses, and in attracting new enterprises and families.

The historic built environment

The historic built environment can benefit from rural tourism in two ways.

Many historic properties now charge for admission in order to maintain their fabrics and surrounding gardens and parklands. Secondly, there are important buildings from the past which have become redundant. Churches have lost their congregations, castles have lost their wars, farm buildings have become too small for modern equipment, railway stations have lost their trains, and canal warehouses no longer have barge traffic. The tourist industry can usually use these redundant buildings profitably and imaginatively: they can become attractions in their own right.

Success of Rural Tourism in India

Despite having strong intention to develop and promote rural tourism, evidence indicates that there was challenge in successful implementation of the scheme. As per the study conducted by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in the year 2012, only 41 sites exhibited successful implementation of rural tourism scheme. On the other hand, 33 sites were found "Average" and 33 sites were "Failure" (refer table 1).

Table 1: State wise performance of the rural tourism projects

State	No. of Projects covered	No. of Successful Projects	No. of Average Projects	No. of Unsuccessful Projects
Total	107	41	33	33
Andhra Pradesh	5	2	3	
Arunachal Pradesh	3	3		
Assam	4		3	1
Bihar	1		1	
Chattisgarh	5			5
Delhi	2	1	1	
Gujarat	4		2	2
Haryana	1		1	
Himachal Pradesh	3	1	2	
Jammu & Kashmir	8	7	1	
Karnataka	5	3	2	
Kerala	5	5		
Madhya Pradesh	4	1		3
Maharashtra	2	2		
Manipur	3	1		2
Meghalaya	2		1	1
Nagaland	5	3	2	
Odisha	7	1	1	5
Punjab	5	1	3	1
Rajasthan	3		1	2
Sikkim	1	1		
Tamil Nadu	8	4	2	2
Tripura	2	2		
Uttar Pradesh	3			3
Uttarakhand	11	3	5	3
West Bengal	5		2	3

Note: Ratings 4 & 5 are successful projects, 3 are average projects, and 1 & 2 are unsuccessful projects. Source: Report of Ministry of Tourism Government of India

There were many reasons identified for the failure of rural tourism projects in many sites and the one of the striking features was non-involvement of local communities and no interest shown by the local communities in the rural tourism projects.

Challenges & Opportunities in Rural Tourism

Rural markets are often characterized by rural population and majority of them still come under below poverty line. These villagers are less involved in showcasing their culture and heritages in front of the tourists visiting their places as they are not very much aware of the potentiality of rural tourism. Long distance from nearby towns, absence of proper mode of surface transportation, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate lodging, inconsistent electricity, telecommunication problem etc. cause difficulties to attract valued consumers (tourists) in many rural sites though those are very much promising in term of the availability of tourism resources.

What Makes Rural Tourism Successful?

Community involvement

For an area to become a rural tourism destination, not just a stop off point, structured networks and collaborative agreements between public and private sector actors are essential. Community involvement is a key part of the equation.

Proximity to a generating market or gateway

Rural tourism destinations must be easily accessible to potential visitors through reliable transportation systems.

Product Development (Tourism planning, infrastructure, and activities)

This should include sound tourism development planning, investment in tourism-related infrastructure, and a range of activities to satisfy the diverse tastes of visitors. Work to support rural tourism infrastructure development by providing technical assistance, facilitation and promotion, and economic impact analysis support.

A visitor center

Rural communities must have a welcoming center where visitors can seek information on local attractions, activities, and accommodations, and ask questions of people who are knowledgeable about the area.

Partnership Collaboration /Cultural Heritage Welcome Centres

Key to maximizing rural tourism marketing efforts is the need to create and leverage potential partnerships with cultural/heritage segments. It may help to provide value-added services for consumers, including providing directions and creating awareness for rural tourism locations and historical/cultural activities successfully differentiating them from other destinations.

A quality brand and regional label

Brand identity may increase awareness of the destination among its identified target market segments. A brand is the way in which consumers perceive or distinguish a destination. To be effective, a brand should unify all of rural functional (recreation and events) and emotional benefits (fun, culture and solitude) under one all-inclusive identity (image and positioning statement) to create an indelible impression in the mind of the consumer.

Funding

Identify creative ways to support rural tourism funding in an effort to maximize and leverage existing marketing efforts. The long-term sustainability of tourism rests on the ability of community leaders and tourism professionals to maximize its benefits and minimize its costs.

Central Government Schemes for Promotion of Rural Tourism

The Government of India has taken various initiatives and introduced policies to grow rural tourism. This section takes a look at some key schemes and policy decisions.

1. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development Component under PIDDC scheme – *Promoting Village Tourism*

The Ministry of Tourism has released a Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development Component, which is part of the Product Infrastructure Development for Destinations and Circuits (PIDDC) Scheme. 100 percent Central Assistance is provided in this scheme. The objective of this scheme is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage in villages, that have core competence in art and craft, handloom, textiles, and natural environment. Central Financial Assistance (CFA) up to Rs.50.00 Lakh for infrastructure development and up to Rs.20.00 Lakh for capacity building is provided.

The activities permitted under this scheme are improvement of village surroundings and village connectivity within the panchayat limits (does not include major roads which connect the village), providing solid waste management and sewerage management, village illumination, tourism related activities such as procurement of equipment's and tourist accommodation. The State government will identify the region suited for promotion of rural tourism, and is also responsible for seeking convergence of other schemes and allocations for broader development at the site to benefit local communities.

2. Swadesh Darshan – *Positioning Tourism as an Engine of Growth*

The Ministry of Tourism introduced Swadesh Darshan, a Central Sector scheme for Integrated Development of Theme-Based Tourist Circuits. A Tourist Circuit is a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of them are in the same town, village or city, while a tourist circuit with a consistent theme such as religion, culture, ethnicity and niche is known as Theme Based Tourist Circuit. These circuits would be identified by the Ministry of Tourism based on factors such as current tourist traffic, connectivity, potential and significance attached to sites and holistic tourist experience. The allocated budget for the scheme is Rs.600.00 crore for 2015-16 and components eligible for financing are infrastructure development; capacity development, skill development and knowledge development; and online presence.

3. Scheme for Organizing Fair, Festival and Tourism related events – Domestic Promotion & Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH)

Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance to State Governments to organize fairs and festivals and tourism related events such as seminars, conclaves and conventions. These events are to be selected by the State Government based on the tourism potential. Maximum financial assistance to be provided to each State Government during 1 financial year should not exceed Rs.50.00 lakh.

4. Hunar Se Rozgar Tak (HSRT), Ministry of Tourism

Fully funded by Ministry of Tourism, this programme offers courses in hospitality trades of food production, food and beverage service, housekeeping and bakery and patisserie. Apart from that courses to bring up tourist escorts, tourist facilitators, event facilitators, security guards, tour assistants, transfer assistants and office assistants have also been set up. This programme is delivered by Institutes of Hotel Management, Food Craft Institutes and State Tourism Development Corporations amongst others. Over 2 lakh persons have been trained under the programme as of 31st March, 2015.

5. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) – *Developing Human Capital*

This is a flagship outcome-based skill training scheme aimed at benefiting 24 lakh youth across the country. A monetary reward is provided to trainees on assessment and certification. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) will implement the scheme and involve the Sector Skill Councils to identify job roles for which training could be imparted through the PMKVY. A budget of INR 1,500 crore has been allocated for the same which would also include awareness, mobilization and administrative expenses. NSDC supports vocational training institutes by providing funding up to 75% of the total project cost in case of for-profit entities and up to 85% of the total project cost in case of not-for-profit entities. Candidates who successfully complete the courses are given a Skill Card. The trainees are also entitled to a monetary reward upon successful completion of the assessment carried out by the assessment agencies (independent of the TP), which are appointed by the SSC. Training in Tourism and Hospitality is given under this scheme, where in the trainees are trained for job roles such as guide, driver, cook, housekeeping and hospitality to the locals.

Major Organisations Functional in India

Certain enterprises and non-governmental organizations have been working towards fostering rural tourism in the country. Many of these are functional across the country. Grassroutes is one such enterprise working in the rural tourism market, wherein they help in building the necessary infrastructure in a village from a tourist's point of view. The overall cost of developing a village ranges from 5-10 lakhs. The Village Tourism Committee is the common link between Grassroutes and the tourists. Grassroutes works closely with the tourism committee and the local NGO to conduct regular training programs for the villagers to function as guides, service providers, cooks, etc. and also to learn communications skills and quality processes. The local NGO monitors the tourists' village experience in the village and the interactions between the tourists and the villagers.

Another such initiative is Rural Tourism Network Enterprise (RTNE). RTNE works with a network of Destination Management Companies (DMC). While RTNE provides the core, capital-intensive support service, the individual DMC focuses on managing relationships with accommodation providers. The architecture of a DMC network allows delivery of services like hospitality training, rating and credit access to improve infrastructure and service levels at rural stays.

A few more organizations in this domain, functional across the country are: DHAN Foundation (National Award for Best NGO Promoting Tourism by Ministry of Tourism), Blue Yonder, Travel Another India, Culture Aangan, Ecosite, Baramati Agri Tourism, Village Ways and Eco Login.

Success Factors

Rural Tourism projects have been carried out at several places across the country. However, only a handful of the projects have been successful and have resulted in increased tourist inflow as well as enhanced livelihood for the locals. The Impact and Evaluation Study of Rural Tourism Projects cited the low tourist flow to project areas and difficult access as the key factors for the failure of almost 31% of the projects evaluated.

Therefore, in order to develop a village as a tourist destination, first step should be to identify the key strength of the village around which the theme of rural tourism can be developed. These themes can include handicrafts, folk music, dance, theatre/street dramas, organic farming, herbal, yoga and meditation centres, eco zones within or around the village. Important key factors which drive growth of tourism, namely, location, proximity to prominent tourist destinations, implementation and maintenance of hardware and software components must be considered. Further, as a multi-sectoral activity, involving multiple service providers, rural tourism is an area where a strong public-private partnership is of prime importance, particularly given the number of schemes under ministries beyond tourism, for instance, rural development, culture, environment and tribal welfare, convergence of schemes must be considered for a holistic approach. Participation of village panchayat and Rural Innovation Fund under NABARD may also be leveraged.

Conclusion

Given the geographical and cultural diversity of India, the country has plenty of resources to harness rural tourism. If implemented and promoted properly, rural tourism projects can become a driver of economic growth by generating employment for the youth. It keeps the potential of addressing issues such as poverty, empowerment of women and strengthening the economic status of the rural people.

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