

Rural Tourism: Emerging Trends & Possibilities In Indian Context Amid COVID 19

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Abstract

Rural tourism is an emerging concept in India with a diversity of tourist attractions and facilities. Many tourists prefer rural tourism destinations as their first choice during COVID 19, as it has excellent opportunities for historical and cultural resources. This paper mainly focuses on the benefits, importance, and challenges of Rural Tourism in the Indian Context. In addition, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the recent trend of Rural Tourism during the current pandemic period. The basic concept of rural tourism was predicted with profit ensuing to the local community through commercial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and preservation of natural resources, and infrastructure development. The potential for rural tourism to be a major force in rural economic development is yet to be realized to the fullest extent. As a result, this paper emphasizes the concept and potential of rural tourism in India. This study is descriptive and based on secondary data from various sources like books, articles, research papers, newspapers, rural tourism websites etc. Based on the concepts, recommendations are provided and future research/industrial directions are discussed.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, COVID 19, India, Pandemic, Potential.

1. Introduction

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization “Tourism entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors.” (IRTS 2008, 2.9). Tourism may be for work pleasure or other varied reasons. It is to be noted that the World Tourism Organization defines tourism in a more general way as people “traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure and not less than 24 hours, business and other purposes. (World Tourism Organization. 1995)

1.1. Current Scenario of Tourism

International Scenario

We see that the year 2021 saw a 4% increase in 2021, 15 million more international tourists compared to 2020. However, international arrivals were still 72% below pre-pandemic year of 2019.

We see that travel restrictions, slow virus containment, low consumer confidence due to the pandemic are the reasons for the decrease in international travel.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, has produced a new report that uses UNWTO statistics to estimate the disastrous impact of the coronavirus pandemic on worldwide tourism. It predicts that up to 120 million tourism employments might be jeopardized, with economic harm expected to top \$1 trillion in 2020 alone.

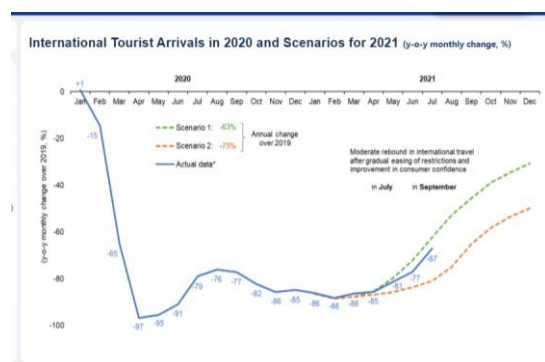


Figure 1 : International Tourist Arrivals in 2021 and Scenarios for 2021.

Source:

<https://www.unwto.org/international-tourism-and-covid-19>

1.2. Current Scenario in Indian Tourism

The Indian tourism industry has emerged as the largest service industry in India. Tourism in India has significant potential considering its myriad of landscapes, great heritage and culture, varied flora and fauna. The government of India has also realized the country's potential and undertaken several steps to make India a tourism hub.

As per the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), in FY21, the Indian hotel industry has taken a hit of >Rs. 1.30 lakh crore (US\$ 17.81 billion) in revenue due to impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 2 : Foreign Tourists Arriving in India (million)

Source: <https://www.ibef.org/industry/tourism-hospitality-india.aspx>

1.3. Understanding of Rural Tourism

According to Thomson Learning (1997) rural tourism may be defined as active participation of travelers in rural activities. The key parameters that define rural tourism are: 'it is located in rural areas, functionally rural; based on small-scale and traditional activities and enterprises (rural in scale), relies on the traditional qualities of the countryside, develops slowly under the control of local people and is non-uniform (reflecting the complexity of the rural environment).

Aref et al. (2009) stated that rural tourism can reinvigorate the conventional concepts and views on tourism and it can bring a new dimension to the sustainable development concept.

Rural tourism is an up-and-coming sector which is becoming extremely important in the growth of India. This is something that has been recognized by the government of India and it has taken various steps to promote the same. This rise in demand of rural tourism may be credited to various factors such as increase in disposable income as well as increase in interest within the urban population to remove themselves from the noise of the metro cities.

There are various positives that come with rural tourism but it is important to acknowledge the drawbacks that come with rural tourism. It is also important to discuss

what steps may be taken in order to overcome these drawbacks in order for us to grow.

Table 1: Definitions of Rural Tourism

Rural Tourism Definitions

RESEARCHER	DEFINITION
Bramwell & Lane, 1994 <i>quoted in</i> Su, 2011, 1438.	Education, arts and heritage taking place in countryside not only farm-based but also multi-faceted activities.
Pedford, 1996 <i>quoted in</i> Su, 2011, 1438.	The concept includes rural custom and folklore, local people's traditions, values, beliefs and common heritage
McKercher & Robbins, 1998, 173.	Operated on a small and regional scale that lie outside the mainstream of tourism.
Reichel <i>et al.</i> , 2000, 451.	Rural tourism is based on features of rurality and sustainability with small scale enterprises in rural areas.
MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003, 308.	Refers to a distinct rural community with its own traditions, heritage, arts, lifestyles, places, and values as preserved between generations.
Sharpley & Roberts, 2004, 122.	Rural tourism can be both a complement to mass tourism in most countries that have warm climates and also a pioneering initiative in a place where tourism is low.
Negrusa <i>et al.</i> , 2007, 1.	A form of tourism provided by local people in rural area, with a small-scale accommodation, rural activities and customs of life.

Source: : <https://tourismteacher.com/rural-tourism/#24-negative-impacts-of-rural-tourism>

1.4. Importance of Rural Tourism

- Provides a source of new, alternative or supplementary income and employment in rural areas.
- Rural tourism spurs infrastructure development in rural areas.
- Help to reduce gender and other social power
- Encourage collective community
- Reinvigorate local culture.
- Preserved local traditions for future generations
- Unpolluted soil, water and air provide for an amazing experience

2. Literature Review

According to Reichel et al.(2000), Rural Tourism is based on features of rurality and sustainability with small scale enterprises in rural areas.

Rural tourism, while still only a minority tourism market, is making a valuable contribution to rural economies (L.G & Chandrashekara, 2014).

Rural Tourism is being admired all over the world because such form of tourism can shape up rural society both by economic and social terms. It brings both monetary and social benefits to the rural people. It alleviates poverty by creating alternative sources of earning (Singh et al, 2016).

Rural tourism comes with important benefits for the region such as effects on the local economy, lessening of migration of local population from villages into urban areas, betterment of local infrastructure making it sustainable and rural economy diversification (Shukhla, 2020).

According to Kastenholz et al. (2013), Rural tourism is suggested as an “alternative” solution for peripheral development, because it contributes to the decrease of sub employment in the rural sector, the increase of the family income and consequently to the socio-economic support and reformation of the local rural communities.

Rural tourism in India has a bright future, as it preserves not only natural beauty but also local traditions, customs, and foods. Direct interaction with locals can be a unique selling point for tourists (Jha, 2021).

Muzigiti and Schmidt, (2015) noted that in rural India, where 75 percent of the population lives, financial inclusion is critical to promoting sustainable development. Singh (2022) in their study projected that promotion of rural tourism is extremely important as it provides for a source of constant income to the people residing in rural areas.

Environmental management, local involvement, sound legislation, sustainable marketing, and realistic planning are crucial for development of rural tourism (L.G & Chandrasekhar, 2014). According to Halder,(2021) the major barriers in the rural tourism sector are a deficit of trained manpower, insufficient financial support, lacking of local involvement, lacking of entrepreneurial skills. It is important for the government to play

an active role for the development of rural tourism in India.

3. Research Methodology

This research is a descriptive and is based on majorly secondary data collected from different Published research articles, book chapters, websites, reports, tourism policies, articles, journals and magazines. The researcher also used the information and facts already available as base in order to analyze, explore and evaluate the problem at hand critically to figure out conclusion.

4. Rural Tourism in India

In a country like India where more than 70% of the population resides in its 7 million villages the development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is extremely important. Tourism growth can be harnessed as a strategy of rural development. It can be seen that the Ministry of Tourism has laid a great deal of emphasis on development of such rural tourism which helps boast culture, handloom, heritage, etc Rural tourism is envisioned to preserve the culture of rural India as well as to create job opportunities.

Table 2 : Rural Tourism Destinations in India

Table :1
List of Commissioned Rural Tourism Sites of Ministry of Tourism

Sr No	Name of Rural Site	District	State	USP of site
1	Pochampalli	Nalgonda	Andhra Pradesh	Cotton & Silk Sarees
2	Konaseema	East Godavari	Andhra Pradesh	Eco-tourism (Coastal Development)
3	Puttaparthi	Ananthpur	Andhra Pradesh	Culture (Spiritual life)
4	Chinchinada	East Godavari	Andhra Pradesh	Eco-tourism (Coast development)
5	Rengo	East Siang	Arunachal Pradesh	Culture and Bamboo Cane handicraft
6	Ligu	Upper Subansiri	Arunachal Pradesh	Culture
7	Ego-Nikte	West Siang	Arunachal Pradesh	Culture
8	Dehing-Patakai Kshetra	Tinsukia	Assam	Culture and Eco-tourism
9	Heritage village at Tera	Kachch	Gujarat	Heritage
10	Hodka	Kachchh	Gujarat	Mirror work/ Embroidery
11	Navagaon and Malegaon	Dang	Gujarat	Culture & Eco-tourism
12	Nagar	Kullu	Himachal Pradesh	Topi and Shawl weaving
13	Paragpur	Kangra Valley	Himachal Pradesh	Himachal Heritage
14	Baroh	Kangra	Himachal Pradesh	Gurukul Culture
15	Akingaam	Anantnag	Jammu & Kashmir	Culture (Folk Dance :Bhand Pathar)
16	Kokkare Bellur	Bellur	Karnataka	Eco-tourism
17	Attiveri Bird Sanctuary	Uttar Kannada	Karnataka	Eco-tourism
18	Banavasi	Uttar Kannada	Karnataka	Stone machinery, Wood Carving and Musical instruments
19	Anegundi	Koppal	Karnataka	Banana Fibre Craft
20	Chaugan	Mandla	Madhya Pradesh	Lantana Craft
21	Pranpur	Ashoknagar	Madhya Pradesh	Chanderi Sarees
22	Orchha	Tikamgarh	Madhya Pradesh	Historical and Adventure (River rafting)
23	Seondha	Datia	Madhya Pradesh	Wood and stone craft
24	Budhni	Sehore	Madhya Pradesh	Historical, Spiritual and Wood craft
25	Morachi Chincholi	Pune	Maharashtra	Sufi tradition and Culture
26	Mopunchuket	Mokokchung	Nagaland	Shawl weaving
27	Avachekha	Zunheboto	Nagaland	Tribal Culture
28	Changtongia	Mokokchung	Nagaland	Tribal Culture
29	Leshumi	Phek	Nagaland	Tribal Culture and Adventure
30	Thetsumi	Phek	Nagaland	Tribal Culture
31	Longsa	Mokokchung	Nagaland	Tribal Culture
32	Mitikhru	Phek	Nagaland	Art & Craft (Woodcraft), Handloom
33	Chungli Yimti	Tuensang	Nagaland	Historical & Tribal Culture

Source :-(Ministry of Tourism Annual Reports 2011-12, retrieved from L.G & Chandrashekara, 2014 research paper)

4.1. Challenges faced by rural tourism

The growth of rural tourism could lead to a lot of new economic activities, increased demands, market competition and more crime at times. With the arrival of rural tourism, areas will not be

the same as local communities 'problems and benefits, when creating a rural tourism strategy. Rural tourism growth could at times lead to a great deal of new economic development, higher demands, volatile competition and more crime. When rural tourism comes, the areas will not be

the same as the challenges and benefits of local communities until a rural tourism strategy is established. It doesn't respect other conventional work. The biggest challenge in the rural areas is that the majority are interested in agriculture, while some of them are craftsmen, but not one of their traditional enterprises is the remunerative ones. The bulk of these are not done due to some taboos and literacy. In rural areas, large families have low incomes and deprivation. As the revenue in the village is very low, where they have any hope of earning. Rural migration in India is now a big problem.

5. Discussion

5.1 Rural tourism in Current Pandemic Period

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought to focus the many vulnerabilities of the travel and tourism industry, in turn highlighting the correlation between rural tourism and sustainability. The shift in travel behavior towards rural tourism has created new opportunity for tourism stakeholders to rethink development in a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient.

By emphasizing rural tourism and sustainable development, the industry can help ensure a fairer distribution of the benefits from tourism, including job creation, the protection of natural resources, infrastructure development and the empowerment of local communities. This in turn will allow rural areas to become more accessible and provide a higher quality of life for local communities and the overall destination.

5.2 Reasons why Rural Tourism is Trending

This rise in demand of rural tourism may be credited to various factors such as increase in disposable income as well as increase in interest within the urban population to remove themselves from the noise of the metro cities as well as change in consumer trend.

1. New concerns

Health and safety measures as well as cancellation policies seem to have become a main concern due to the pandemic and rural tourism

helps travelers have more control over their travel.

2. Choosing locations that are closer

We see many travelers prefer to travel to destinations that they might be able to reach using their personal vehicles so as to avoid public transportation as well as to adhere to the travel restrictions that have been imposed due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Another factor is the increase in impromptu trips taken by travelers.

3. More responsible and conscious choices

We see that consumers are more conscious towards sustainability and authenticity. Travelers are giving more importance to creating a positive impact on local communities. These are important factors that drive tourists to rural areas.

4. Low population

Keeping in mind their safety tourists tend to pick locations that are less crowded so as to avoid interaction with other people. Rural areas have lower population density compared to the cities so tourists go there for a safer escape.

5. Need for a getaway

This can be attributed to revenge tourism. In spite of the restriction the feeling of fatigue caused due to the pandemic encourages travelers to go to more rural areas.

6. Suggestions & Recommendations

6.1. Steps to promote rural tourism in India

- Identify USP's/strengths of villages in each state - Handicrafts, Folk music, Dance, Puppet shows, Street dramas, Madhubani art, communities which are entirely into organic farming, yoga and meditation centers
- Highlight education wonders like "Anand's IIT mission" in Bihar. Identify such Indian achievements across states
- Document history of such chosen areas for visitors/tourists to go through them

- Develop infrastructure in all of these villages
- Get essentials properly - from cleanliness, water, road and appropriate shelter
- Encourage NGO's, Private players to have a prominent role in development and management of such clusters of communities.
- Expose visiting tourists/ families to basic work in the village – from milking cows, cleaning of barns, entertain the rural population, pump water etc.
- Encourage and involve visiting families and tourists to work in the farm and earn based on effort and time put in to understand what a farmer goes through to earn whatever he earns.

7. Conclusion

From the above discussion rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in non-urban areas.

The most important purpose of rural tourism is economic and social development of the rural areas. Rural India has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like eco-tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, adventure tourism etc

However development of rural tourism in India is still at its infant stage. There are various constraints for the growth of rural tourism in India. With a proper marketing plan rural tourism could bring lots of benefit to our society. It could be a sustainable revenue generating project for rural development. It can help inflow to resources from urban to the rural economy. The government should promote rural tourism to ensure sustainable economic development and positive social change.

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2. Swadesh Darshan – Positioning Tourism as an Engine of Growth
3. Scheme for Organizing Fair, Festival and Tourism related events – Domestic Promotion & Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH)
4. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) – Developing Human Capital

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