

# Rural Tourism As An Engine For Socio-Economic Reactivation: Camajuaní Case In The Central Zone Of Cuba

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## Abstract

Agriculture is one of the most important activities of the primary sector of each country, being the most important resource available to man for subsistence. Tourism is identified as one of the solutions to boost the economy based on society. The objective of the research is to determine the potential for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism in the municipality of Camajuaní in the province of Villa Clara in Cuba. The justification is based on the need to identify resources and attractions for the practice of tourism modalities in the municipality, which reveal the potential of the region and contribute to local development. Qualitative methods were used through the application of a group of techniques such as documentary analysis, group discussion and analysis of weaknesses, threats, strengths, and opportunities (SWOT). The results showed that the territory has unexploited natural attractions and great potential for rural tourism and agrotourism. No products were identified in the area that represent direct competition for these modalities and there is political and social will to combine the sectors of Agriculture and Tourism. It was concluded that rural tourism and agrotourism represent a new alternative to reactivate the economy of rural territories and to generate added value to agricultural work. The analyzed territory is an ideal space for these activities, given the potential it presents.

**Keywords:** agriculture, rural tourism, agrotourism, tourism resource.

## Introduction

The cultivation of soils, planting and harvesting of crops, the development of livestock and other derived activities such as manufacturing, are part of the wide range of activities that make up agricultural activity and who are often marginalized at the social level. Paradoxically,

agricultural activity is part of the economic base of many countries (Boucher, 2000; Barkauskas et al, 2015).

Historically, agriculture has been an economically and socially active engine for the development and evolution of civilization on a global scale, likewise, it represents the human

capacity to adapt nature to meet their needs (Ávila, 2005; Pérez, 2021).

According to the criterion of (Hernández, 2009) it is stated that in recent years the agricultural activity has experienced a certain decrease and a reduction in investments. He attributes this situation to various aspects that occur in rural areas, such as job insecurity in the agricultural sector, the existence of few employment opportunities, the generation of significant migratory flows from the countryside to the cities and the deterioration of the infrastructure for provision of basic services. Life in rural areas is hard and, in some cases, precarious. Low wages, unemployment, absence of basic services such as electricity, healthy water supply and for irrigation of crops, low access to technological communications services, inadequate and in some cases absence of public aid, are the causes of the migration of people from the countryside to the cities (Martínez, 2017; Garofalo, 2018; Fernández et al, 2019). The situation raised above implies a redesign of agricultural development policies, which advocates the multifunctionality of the territories (Pérez, 2010; Castro, 2012).

It is necessary to move from simple policies based on food production, to others in which new functions are introduced, such as the defense of landscape values or the enhancement of endogenous resources (Camaioni et al, 2013; Granberg et al, 2015). New organizational structures at the local and participatory level also gain prominence with this initiative (Cazorla-Montero et al., 2005; Cebrián, 2003; García et al, 2020). In the context referred to above, tourism is identified as one of the solutions to mitigate the structural problems that affect rural areas, it acts as a complement to the traditional economy of rural areas (agriculture, livestock, fishing, mining, other activities) for its ability to boost the socioeconomic development of a territory, manifested in the generation of sources of employment and income, in the improvement of natural spaces and in the attraction of investment processes (Zarazúa & Gómez-Carreto, 2013; Nieto & Vicuña, 2015).

The rural tourism modality in the municipality of Camajuaní has not been fully exploited. This

stems from inadequate tourism management that stems from the centralization of management, protected by economic and circumstantial reasons that generate obstacles and slow down its development. This implies that on some occasions local initiatives are ignored, except for those carried out by the private sector which, although it has become dizzyingly dynamic, in the last decade has suffered from strategic and methodological thinking, which results in non-compliance of the established regulations, motivated by the poor management of resources and the non-application of good tourism practices (Arbelo, 2020; Mokliuk et al., 2022; Sembiring et al., 2022).

In general, Cuba's experience in managing rural areas for tourism purposes does not respond to a specific model. In this regard, there has been no national policy in this direction (Cardoso, et al, 2019; Hernández, 2020). Most of the tourist activities that take place in the rural areas of the country are structured around programmed excursions that are aimed at diversifying the offers, where agriculture-tourism interaction is not taken advantage of, nor are the best international practices incorporated (Ramírez et al, 2018; Romeu & González, 2019). The justification of the research is based on the need to identify the resources and rural and natural attractions, as well as others complementary to the practice of rural tourism and agrotourism in the Camajuaní municipality, so that it reveals the potentialities of the territory to diversify the modalities tourism, with the aim of contributing to local development.

The research is pertinent since it aims to respond to two fundamental problems, the development of agriculture in the country and the localities and the expansion of the tourist offer with results that could serve as a guide to other areas of Cuba, which is endorsed from of the needs of the global demand to travel to rural areas as healthy spaces, optimal for health, in response to the tourism trend imposed by Covid-19. (Thomé-Ortiz, 2020; Ballarin, 2020; Korstanje, 2020). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has predicted that rural tourism is one of the tourism modalities with the greatest chance of recovery, by naturally

enabling compliance with biosafety protocols (World Tourism Organization [WTO], 2020).

The relevance of the research lies not only because of its positive economic effects, but also social and environmental ones. The tourist modalities that are intended to be promoted in the territory not only involve service providers, but also the entire rural community, since it encompasses improvements in education, health and road infrastructure, communications, use of technology, employment, and better income from the improvement of the family economy. The objective of the research is to determine the potentialities for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism in the municipality of Camajuaní, Villa Clara, Cuba.

## Materials and methods

The study was carried out in the areas of the municipality of Camajuaní, located northeast of the province of Villa Clara in Cuba. The foundation of the municipality was the consequence of the establishment of a railway station in 1864, establishing itself as an important center for the cultivation and industrialization of sugar cane, as well as the plantation of tobacco and its commercialization. It is the fifth municipality with the largest territorial extension and the fourth in terms of population in the province.

Plains predominate in the territory, with some residual heights interspersed with valleys and a landscape eroded by the effects of wind and rain. Its main water resource is the Camajuaní river basin, a tributary of the Sagua la Chica, both of which provide the water that determines the fertility of its valleys. The main agricultural activities that are carried out are the production and industrialization of sugar cane and tobacco, the latter product stands out internationally for its excellent quality. In the 1990s, the boom in the rum industry and sausages for export began. The production of high-quality footwear, which is marketed throughout the country, also stands out. To contribute to the achievement of the proposed research objective, a descriptive and explanatory study aimed at the analysis and description of the current situation of the municipality of

Camajuaní, with to identify the potential for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism (Fragas, 2012).

The deductive method, observation and field work were applied, which allowed starting from a premise to analyze the problem and reach precise conclusions on the subject studied. This allowed unstructured interviews to be carried out with social actors, consultation with specialists about tourism and the formation of discussion groups with actors related to rural tourism (Hernández et al, 2010). The documentary analysis technique and the SWOT analysis were applied. Some institutions of the territory participated in the discussion groups, such as: Ministry of Tourism (MINTUR), Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI), Flora and Fauna, Provincial Directorate of Physical Planning and Travel Agencies, for the identification and evaluation of conceptual aspects, methodological and practical experiences related to research.

## Results and discussion

### Rural tourism. Concepts and criteria

Some authors point out that rural tourism is a productive alternative based on the ability to generate value by taking advantage of the natural conditions in rural areas. Rural tourism is the way to show nature, culture, gastronomy, routes, and accommodation in rural areas (Fuentes, 2009; Acevedo et al, 2016; Betancourt & Rugh, 2020).

According to the definition set forth by the World Labor Organization, rural tourism is conceptualized as the set of activities that take place in a natural environment, whose premise is contact with nature, with local society and its traditions. Within the modalities, adventure tourism, ecological tourism, agrotourism, ranch tourism and cultural rural tourism can be pointed out, among other initiatives (Secretaría de Turismo [SECTUR], 2007; Kobrich & Dirven, 2007).

Agrotourism can be understood as the use of arts and manufacturing derived from agricultural work, to derive an economic result capable of reactivating socio-economic relations in rural

areas (Maxime, 2018). It includes the activities carried out in a rural establishment in production and that offers the visitor the participation or observation of the cultural activities of the productive estates, derived manufacturing, food alternatives, participation in the elaboration of manufactured products, lodging and complementary activities such as horseback riding, walks, photographic safaris, among others (Ivars & Josep, 2000; Vogel et al, 2004; Maldonado, 2005). Rural tourism supposes a complementary income to the agricultural activity, which translates into an increase in income and an improvement in the quality of life (Pérez et al, 2012).

The viability of rural tourism and agrotourism depends on the help and promotion of the socioeconomic development of the localities. Also, to the use of underutilized capacities in agricultural operations and the promotion of service agriculture, where in addition to carrying out activities of production, transformation and marketing of agricultural products, attention is paid to tourism demand, as well as to the preservation of cultural and heritage values, since in this way a mutual benefit is perceived for the tourism and agriculture sectors (Gavrila-Paven, 2015; Cejas, 2020). From this, it is considered that rural tourism is part of the tertiary sector or service sector, in which there is a valuable opportunity to contribute to the economic development and growth of communities through the combination of cultural, social, natural factors, among others (Nieto & Vicuña, 2015).

### **News of the agricultural and tourism sector in Cuba**

The province of Villa Clara is one of the Cuban territories that has seen the most growth in tourism in the last 30 years, especially with the development of the northern keys, which constitutes one of the main tourist destinations of the region, to contribute to the increase in the flow of visitors to the province (García & Quintero, 2018; Salinas et al, 2019).

One of the municipalities in the province with the greatest growth prospects in the coming years is Camajuaní, which has excellent conditions for the

development of rural tourism and agrotourism activities. This is based on the natural, landscape attractions and deep-rooted agricultural traditions in a typically rural landscape (Hernández et al, 2021). In general, the rural tourism modality does not require large extensions of land, and this offers the possibility that small or medium-sized farms in the region can choose to implement the tourist service as an alternative to add income to rural society. of the region (Morillo, 2010). Even though the rural areas of Camajuaní have natural resources that are attractive for developing tourism and agrotourism, there are no studies on the subject that provide knowledge on scientific and methodological bases, that generate knowledge for the environmental use of the potentialities that owns the territory (Rodríguez et al, 2020; Velazquez, 2017).

In accordance with the above, some authors refer to a group of modalities that can be applied in the municipality of Camajuaní, in their case alternative and soft tourism, green tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, town tourism, among other modalities and initiatives, can be promoted in the territory (Calderón, 2008; Valentim et al, 2013). The agricultural sector is a strategic sector considered to be of national security, in which the Cuban State has focused its attention through measures and actions that favor its growth. According to data from the National Office of Statistics and Information (National Office of Statistics and Information [ONEI], 2021) the total area of the country is 10,988.4 thousand hectares, approximately 11 million. The agricultural area is just over 6.6 million hectares, of which only around 3 million are cultivated, around 1 million idle hectares and 3.3 of forest areas. Figure 1 shows the distribution of Cuba's agricultural area in millions of hectares.

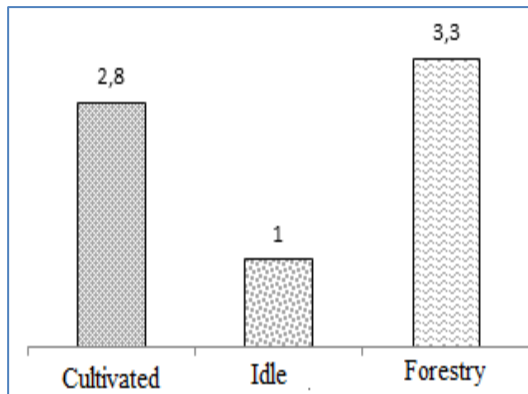


Figure 1. Distribution of the agricultural area of Cuba in millions of hectares

Source. Own elaboration based on (ONEI, 2021)

The data analyzed above show that the country has used 45.5% of its arable land. The agricultural sector suffered more than 330 million dollars in losses between April and December 2020, due, among other factors, to the crisis caused by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the intensification of the financial and commercial embargo of United States imposed on the country for more than 60 years (World Food Program [WFP], 2021). International tourism in January 2020 already registered a decrease of 19.6% compared to the year 2019 in which it fell by 9.3%. This was influenced by the loss of export markets for medical services to Brazil, Bolivia and Ecuador, and a reduction in remittances. The country has operated for more than six months with 50% of the fuel in drought conditions, with contracted agricultural production (Gil, 2020). All this situation has marked the decrease that the Cuban tourism sector has had in terms of the arrival of visitors in the last five years, especially in 2020 and 2021, a situation that can be seen graphically in Figure 2.

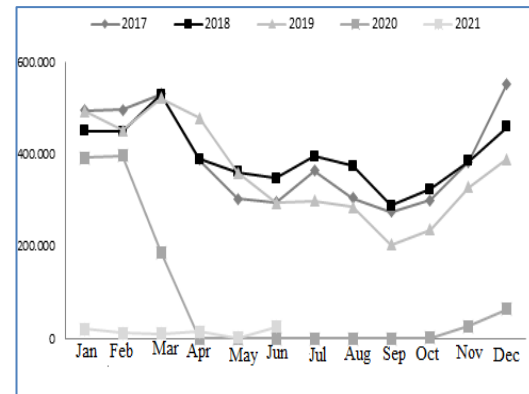


Figure 2. Arrival of visitors by months in the period 2017-2021

Source. Own elaboration based on ONEI (2021)

### Case study of the municipality of Camajuaní Potential for rural tourism and agrotourism

Base studies were carried out for the diagnosis of the scenario that would allow defining the inventory of tourism resources of the municipality, to assess the real potential existing in the study area. For this, unstructured interviews were carried out with residents, producers, peasants in the area with years of experience and local guides, on specific aspects such as the main economic-productive activities and places of interest.

The study carried out allowed us to verify the existence of a variety of natural and historical-cultural resources, as well as the tourist infrastructure, which do not take full advantage of their capacities. It was determined that those with the greatest potential for agrotourism and rural tourism activities are the following:

Visit and tour of the Martian Forest, which consists of a wooded area created by residents with timber species. The main activities to be developed are the observation of the flora, knowledge of history, planting of fruit and timber trees, tasting of natural and artisanal drinks, as well as horseback riding.

Visit to the Posa Redonda, which consists of a shallow pond with a freshwater stream and a dense natural forest where you can see species of flora and fauna with the presence of endemism.

Horseback riding in volanta and cart, camping, native gastronomy, observation of flora and fauna, soft hiking, planting of fruit and timber trees, as well as country bathing in healthy and crystalline petticoats.

Visit to the Trinidad farm, which has an area of 4 hectares in which plantations of banana, peach, mango, guava, yam and sweet potato are located, among various agricultural products. The possibility of camping in the Ramón Águila caney and carrying out agricultural work of planting, harvesting root vegetables, fruits, and grains.

Visit to the El yam farm, which has an area of 5.4 hectares, where you can visit tobacco plantations and various crops such as mango, guava, yam and sweet potato, among other agricultural productions. Carrying out agricultural activities of planting and harvesting root vegetables, fruits, grains, and vegetables, as well as tobacco manufacturing.

Visit to the La Jutía farm with an area of 0.8 hectares, where you can find yam plantations and various crops such as mango, tobacco, guava, Carica papaya and rice, among other crops. The performance of agricultural work, milking of cattle, as well as grazing of rams and goats.

Tours of the La Carreta farm, which has an area of 2.6 hectares, where you can find plantations of fruit and timber trees. Stay and lodging in traditional bohíos conditioned for the attention of tourism, tasting of native gastronomy. Carrying out agricultural work of planting and harvesting root vegetables, fruits, grains, and vegetables. Cattle milking. Country rest, leisure, and recreation.

Visit to the La Margarita farm, which has an area of 2.6 hectares, where there are plantations of fruit and timber trees, pastures and fodder for horse and cattle breeding. Agricultural work of planting and harvesting root vegetables, fruits, grains, and vegetables. Participation in milking techniques, horseback riding, horse breeding and care.

Tours to the Camajuaní River, which is a tributary of the Sagua la Chica River, which is an important hydrographic basin characterized by its fertility and agroecological capacity. Observation of

endemic species of flora and fauna, reforestation with fruit and timber trees on the banks of the river, swimming, lunch, rest, and fishing.

Tours of the Sagua la Chica river that rises in the Escambray mountains and flows into Juan Francisco beach. It is the second most important river in the province. The observation of endemic and migratory species of birds, flora and fauna, reforestation with fruit and timber trees on the banks of the river, bathing, lunch, rest, and fishing are offered.

Visit to the Lomas de Santa Fe that has hills and small hills with heights less than 300 meters above sea level. It offers soft and hard hiking activities, horseback riding, photography, camping, hunting and native gastronomic tasting.

There are other resources of tourist interest that complement rural activities, such as the Hermanos Vidal Museum, Combate monument, festival of the Santísima Cruz de Mayo, municipal band, Caringa de Carmita group, repentismo, traditional peasant music, Camajuaní and Vueltas parrandas, factory twisted tobacco Eliope Paz and the tradition of shoemakers.

In the area you can see a great wealth of flora and fauna, endemism of some species. A story full of interesting events such as the creation of the first printing press. There is also a rich cultural tradition of parrandas and floats. The geographical location of the municipality offers the opportunity to be in the tourist circuit of the province of Villa Clara, in the route of both the tourists who travel from Santa Clara to the North Keys, as well as those who are staying in hotels in the area. and go on excursions to the provincial capital.

Currently in the area there is no development of the rural tourism modality, even though there are potentialities. The closest thing on this topic is the possibility of enjoying nature tourism with lodging at the La Cañada hotel, which is basically aimed at the national market. In the interviews carried out, there was concern about the lack of tourist exploitation in the area, especially in the form of rural tourism and agrotourism. The general opinion on the subject is positive.

Coincidentally, the area has an unexploited natural attraction, and they would be willing to manage it to promote agrotourism in the territory. The interviewees considered that the introduction of a productive form associated with tourism can bring benefits to agricultural producers, their families, the rest of the inhabitants and the economy of the locality in general.

No products were identified in the area that represent direct competition for rural tourism, which is positive, since it allows the maximum exploitation of this modality, as well as all the existing resources in the region.

To carry out the SWOT analysis, the weaknesses, threats, opportunities, and strengths for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism in the area were considered. The investigation and especially the field work allowed to know about the existence of a group of weaknesses that affect the development of agrotourism in the municipality of Camajuaní such as, the centralization of tourism management by the State does not favor the takeoff of initiatives for the promotion of tourism by the private sector at the local level. The lack of financing limits the creation of new tourism capacities and modalities in the rural sector. Deficient tourist infrastructure to support the development of the activity. Poor culture and knowledge of tourism management in rural communities. The most specialized services are in urban settlements and mainly in the municipal capital. The natural potentialities are not adequately exploited in the interest of rural tourism and agrotourism.

Related to the examination of the threats, it was possible to know that there is instability in the

behavior and preferences of the clients. Legal limitations on the exploitation of rural areas. Existence of significant migratory flows from the countryside to the cities, which affects the availability of endogenous workforce to develop agrotourism. Insufficient articulation of local governments with rural tourism development plans in the region studied. However, the research revealed a group of strengths associated with the agricultural potential of the region, related to the existence of natural resources and attractions that allow the linking of nature, adventure, rural tourism and agrotourism tourism modalities (Baromey, 2008). All settlements that make up the territory have road access. The region is characterized by having a warm, safe, and hospitable environment. Existence of human potential trained in topics such as agricultural biodiversity, adequate production technologies and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The analysis of the opportunities allowed us to know that there is a trend in the international tourism market oriented towards the enjoyment of rural spaces, the exchange with the communities and their lifestyle. Existence of interest on the part of the country's management to take advantage of local potential for the development of tourism activity linked to agriculture. The proximity of the municipality to other places and tourist destinations of interest such as the keys of the province of Villa Clara and the lack of direct competitors for the agrotourism modality in the territory. Table 1 shows the matrix of impacts between the external and internal factors that converge in the territory, based on the analysis of the SWOT matrix.

Table 1. SWOT Matrix

			EXTERNAL FACTORS								Total
			OPPORTUNITIES				THREATS				
			1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
INTERNATIONAL FACTORS	STRENGTHS	1	3	3	3	2	0	0	2	0	13
		2	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	5
		3	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	7
		4	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
		—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	<b>Total</b>	—	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>

### Value Legend

0: No impact; 1: Low impact; 2: medium impact;  
3: High Impact

Source. Own elaboration

The analysis of the SWOT matrix allowed us to appreciate that the Camajuaní municipality is in the quadrant with the highest results, where strengths and opportunities concur, which makes it possible to verify the need to promote the agricultural development of the territory to stimulate rural tourism and agritourism, based on taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the environment.

The main strength detected was the agricultural potential of the region with the presence of natural resources and attractions that allow the linking of the modalities of nature tourism, adventure, rural tourism and agrotourism. What is supported by the inventory of land suitable for the development of agriculture, the agricultural tradition accumulated in the area, the existence of a sustainable agricultural practice (Baromey, 2008), the preservation of fruit trees and sustainable techniques, the conservation of the rural way of life and the customs of the Cuban peasantry, all of this as a facilitator of the displacement of tourist flows.

Among the main opportunities, the trend of the international market oriented to the enjoyment of natural spaces in the rural area, the exchange with the communities and their lifestyle, as well as the interest of the Country's management to take advantage of the local potentialities in interest in the development of tourism and agriculture. The greatest weakness of the territory is related to the state centralization of tourism activity and the lack of financing for local tourism entrepreneurship. The main threats focus on the migratory flows that are taking place from the countryside to the cities and the insufficient

articulation of local governments with territorial development plans.

Among the most significant strengths, we can mention the favorable conditions that the municipality of Camajuaní possesses, to combine agricultural activities and manufacturing, with the different modalities of tourism in the interest of growth for two strategic sectors of the Cuban economy, agriculture, and tourism. turismo, a la vez que ofrezca una mejor experiencia a los visitantes.

### Conclusion

- The investigation allowed verifying that the municipality of Camajuaní has potentialities for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism, as an alternative to generate economic income and stimulate the regulation of the migratory flow towards the cities, which can be translated into an increase in agricultural production and the improvement of rural society in the region.
- The agricultural tradition, the variety of natural resources that the territory possesses, the presence of historical-cultural attractions and the integration of the natural, landscape and intangible heritage, make the municipality of Camajuaní a rural space that must be revalued and invigorated from the tourist perspective, given its existing potentialities for the development of rural tourism and agrotourism.
- The possibility of generating added value from the agricultural work carried out in the rural territory represents an alternative for economic reactivation that is necessary for the social development of rural areas, through the different modalities of rural tourism and the agritourism.

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