

A Study on the Marketing Strategies of Agritourism Centers in India

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Abstract

This research explores the current marketing strategies for Agri-tourism in India. Agri Tourism is the latest concept in the Indian Tourism industry. Agriculture is something common to all the citizens of India and everyone has its root in some village of India. It's a hidden wish of very citizen to explore back the roots where he belongs and Agri tourism is a perfect way to explore those real enchanting life of an Indian. The study is a modest attempt to explore the different marketing strategies employed by the Indian tourism industry especially with reference to Agritourism and also to find out the possible way forward to market Agritourism to the end users.

Results show Indian farms use fewer marketing methods as compared to other forms of tourism. The government has just started showing interest in developing Agri Tourism under the banner of Indian Tourism.

Keywords: Agri Tourism, Promotion, Marketing Strategies, Farms

Introduction

Tourism today forms a major part of any countries economy and day by day the opportunities are increasing with relation to a mutual relationship between the guest and the host. Tourism is one area where the potential in terms of employment opportunities are very high and hence most of the developing countries are considering Tourism as a catalyst for their economic development. The tourism industry is a vast industry made up of business and organizations that provide goods and services to meet the distinctive needs of tourists. These businesses and organization are related to virtually all areas of the economy making tourism a very huge industry.

After the recent terror attacks on different states and cities in India, the whole scenario of Tourism has changed and made people look for alternative forms of Tourism. In recent decades tourism has developed so much that it had crossed all boundaries and resulted in various forms which were never thought to be recognized as a form of Tourism. One such form which is slowly and steadily expanding specially in India is 'Agriculture- Tourism'. As per the recent census reports and due to globalization and modernization of our society as well as changing of generations we are getting reduced in terms of the Agricultural land holdings which has resulted in low land holders. The average size of operational holding has been steadily declining in the country in successive census. The average operated size of holding which was 1.23 ha.in 2005-06, has declined to 1.15ha. in 2010-11 at all India level. (*Agriculture Census report 2014*). Pressure from industrialization and globalization along with the rising cost of inputs are forcing the farmers to look for alternate source of income. Worldwide scenario states that, farmers across the globe are recognizing the need and desire to diversify their farm products and services to supplement their agriculture income. But all these are possible only when their exist a proper strategy in terms of marketing the new and innovative as well as upcoming concept of Agritourism.

MARKETING STRATEGY

In order to ensure the promotion of any kind of nature based tourism or tourism related to any kind of activities we need to have a very good marketing strategy. A proper strategy will always ensure customer retention and will help to bring the customers back. Various forms of Tourism are slowly and steadily becoming more popular like the Wine tourism and Agro tourism as a whole. India

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is a much diversified country with different culture and language being spoken in different parts. If anyone really wants to understand the traditional flavor of the Indian Culture, then a tourist has to explore the rural India and experience the pristine beauty of nature along with the local traditions and the food.

Here are some rural destinations in India (*derived from <http://breezearoundtheorbis.blogspot.com>*) that are waiting to be explored.

1. Puttur, (Andhra Pradesh). Visit to this village is a treat for any nature lover who also wants to enjoy the typical traditional cultures of India. One can, not only enjoy nature but also the experience of staying in a traditional home is by itself an experience. Weaving of silk saris is an added advantage for the visitors along with the temples that surround the whole village.
2. Anegundi, (Karnataka). This village in Karnataka dates back to the time of Ramayana and believed to be the kingdom of the monkey kings as referred to in Ramayana as Kishkintha. The place is believed to be even older than Hampi and is famous for its temples and scenic beauty which are yet to be explored.
3. Shyam Gaon, Jorhat, (Assam). This small village located in Assam is famous for its Khamyang Tribals, who are typical followers of Buddhism. One can experience the rustic cultural life of the tribals and enjoy their way of life.
4. Pipli, (Odisha). The village of Pipli is located in the Puri district of the state Orissa and is very famous for its typical artistic rendition of Applique. The art form involves making decorative motifs by using variety of cut clothes stitched to perfection.
5. Lachen, (Sikkim) located in the remote north eastern belt of India is famous for its pristine beauty and unexplored natural landscape. One can experience the simple village life and the local food which are very typical to the place. Enjoy Lachen Gommpa and the surrounding hills while trekking.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kline, C., D. Cardenas, Y.F. Leung, and S. Sanders (2007) in their paper “*Sustainable Farm Tourism: Understanding and Managing Environmental Impacts of Visitor Activities.*” highlighted the change in mind set of

farmers wherein they shifted from just crop development to direct selling to the customers through creation of an overall experience for the consumers. Geisler, M (2008) in their paper “Agricultural Marketing Resource Center” stated in order to successfully interact with the public, an agri-tourism enterprise requires refined interpersonal relations skills as well as professional written and oral communication skills. Every individual agricultural operator need not necessarily get involved in Agri-tourism as his best choice since the operators of the business must understand that not all businesses are suitable for the entry of visitors due to convenience of location, parking availability, employee availability, increased regulations that must be followed, and time commitment involved.

Brown, D. M. and R. J. Reeder (2007) in their report “*Farm-Based Recreation: A Statistical Profile.*” stated that very little information is available for the farmers on how normal Agriculture can be converted into a niche tourism product. So far it seems that rarely any information is available which shows how a farm can actually start an Agri tourism and what would be the concepts which needs to be considered. Vijay Kumhar (2009) in the report ‘Agro-Tourism: A Cash Crop for Farmers in Maharashtra (India)’ discusses about the new product and development of Agri Tourism. Also he compares traditional and agro tourism. A paper contributed by Pandurang Taware and published by Confederation of Indian Industry titled ‘*Basic Principles of Agri - Tourism Situation talks of Agro tourism by region, elements, scope, of agro tourism.*’

RURAL TOURISM IN INDIA

With the start of the scheme of destination development the Indian government’s aim was to portray the rural India to a tourist. The objective is not only to show the flavors of rural India to people but also indirectly help the development in the quality and standard of living in rural India. This type of schemes shall definitely help the farmers to showcase their handicrafts. It is worth saying here that till date the rural India has got so much talent and many parts of India is still untapped and this kind of schemes in coming days is really going to encourage and keep those arts and talents alive. From the point of the visitors they get a real chance to experience their roots and the real traditional cultures of India. The money spend by the visitors could be used for various developments in these areas which shall ultimately open up more avenues for the farmers to have alternate source of income.

Normally under these schemes, the Village Level Council acts as the interactive forum for implementation of different projects.

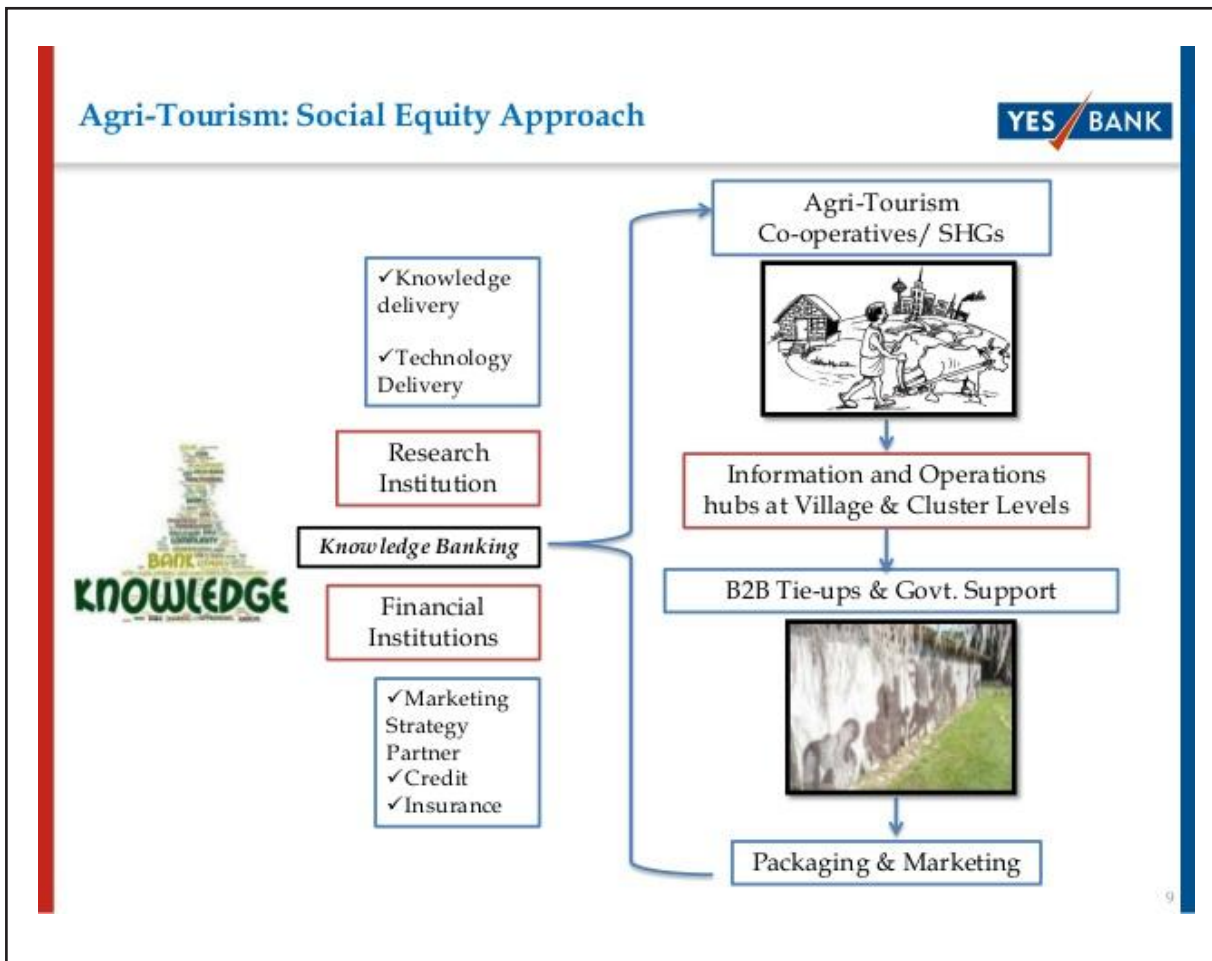
MARKETING INITIATIVES IN INDIA

Explore rural India; an initiative by the Government of India is now a part of the much recognized brand “Incredible India”. The objective is to make India a destination throughout the year, by attracting visitors to experience the diverse culture of India and enjoy the rural hospitality along with the showcasing of the hidden talents in the form of art and craft. Community participation was increased through artisan’s participation in the following places like Dilli Haat, Mega Craft Mela, India @60 roadshow in Singapore, Volco Ocean Race in Cochin. The Artisans are also given a chance to participate directly in these forums to show case their talent live , which indirectly helps the whole country to benefit from more visit to the rural destinations.

Edge of India - a network of rural communities was developed through a programme funded by the scottish government and implemented by partners in India and Scotland. The whole project is based on co-operative principals developed by Robert Owen at Scotland’s New Lanark. The main goal of the project is to provide sustainable livelihoods for all those who make up the Edge of India tourism cooperatives. These type of co-operatives should be encouraged more so that all the villages can be a part of it and collectively promote Agri Tourism to the visitors.

The important features are as follows:

- It is network of rural communities in remote parts of India.
- It offers homestays in villages “ off the beaten track” with extraordinary cultural and natural heritage.
- Opportunity for tourism enterprise through a cooperative destination management led by a team of local coordinators across the destination clusters and enabling rural communities to realize the economic value of their tourism assets.



Source: GIDR-IFPRI -Opportunities for Agri Tourism: Policies Challenges and Opportunities, Tushar Pandey, Yes Bank.

AGRI-TOURISM IN THE UNITED STATES

Carpio, C. E, M. K. Wohlgenant, and T. Boonsaeng. (2008) in the paper “The Demand for Agritourism in the United States.” Stated in 2006, estimates of the U.S. farm income generated from agri-tourism ranged from \$800 million per year for small scale operations to \$3 billion per year for large scale operations . Burrows, R., A. Fennell, M. Redlin, and L. Verschoor. (2007) in the paper “Agri-Cultural Tourism: Linking the Arts and Humanities with Agricultural Direct Marketers and Specialty Producers.” discusses about the partnering of Agricultural enterprises with nearby or regional artists to create an attraction for the visitors. Burrows, R., A. Fennell, M. Redlin, and L. Verschoor. (2007) further stated Agri-tourism might play a more important role in the future as a source of farm income and as a way for rural communities to diversify and stimulate their economies . It is also being observed that throughout US most the travelers vist internet as the first source of information to decide about any kind of travel arrangements and as such most of the Agri tourism operators has their own website to showcase their products and service to the visitors. As per the University of California most of the people makes their travel arrangement through internet only and hence its is a major way of marketing the Agri tourism product.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper focuses on the top Agri tourism destinations in India, and tries to compare the strategies being implemented so far in India as compared to the strategies outside India for the same kind of product. The research method adopted is the case study method for which secondary data is used. Secondary data is collected from the books and Internet.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

It is being observed that most of the destinations in India having Agritourism is largely dependent on various websites which portrays Agritourism as different packages or gateway destinations. The government has just started taking initiative in promoting Agritourism but still a long course away. Now the tour operators approved

by the Ministry are again limited and may not be enough to explore the full potential of Indian Agritourism market. Even when someone browses through the Indian Tourism Catalog, it was found that ultimately the state wide information melts down to other forms of tourism and Agritourism is not given any special importance for the same. Other websites like Eco India talks very briefly on Agri Tourism and stresses more on eco tours, including National parks and Sanctuaries and not necessarily on Agritourism attractions. “To develop the economy of the state, it is necessary to keep evolving and experimenting with new models. This is one such initiative from our end. We hope to bring back the tourist inflow that we have lost to our neighbouring state Uttarakhand,” said a CII official.

The idea is to promote rural tourism and attract visitors to come and see the countryside, handicrafts, taste traditional food and enjoy folk music.

CONCLUSION

Agritourism business needs lot of community involvement in order to succeed. Word-of-mouth review is very important for the success of the business. An easy to use website is an absolute necessity. Local residents can work with one another and government agency representatives to begin to revive their agricultural economy. Collaboration with local business could be a very powerful marketing tool. Identification of the various features and benefits is very important for proper marketing. It is worth saying follow the fours P’ Product, Price, Promotion and Placement. Identifying ones major features and benefits is very important. An example.

Features	Customers Benefit
Remote Location	Rest & Relaxation, Free from city bustle, Clean air, Unspoiled natural beauty
Nearby Location	Minutes from town, Family day trip, U-pick farm
Farm stand	Our vegetable are the freshest, reminiscent of childhood
Small facility	Intimate setting, Exclusive gateway, Garden cottage fantasy
Moderate pricing	Affordable, Won’t hurt the family budget

Source: Holly George & Ellie Rilla, Marketing Strategy for Agritourism operations.

For the Agri tourism to succeed, it is imperative that the tourists must have:

1. Something to see: Animals, birds, farms, culture of the village, dress and festivals.
2. Something to do: Participating in agricultural operations, riding camel, buffalo, cooking and participating in the rural games i.e. gillidanda, gotti (marble etc.).
3. Something to buy: Rural crafts, dress materials, farm gate fresh processed food are few items.

The success of Agritourism projects relies on tourism's taking its place and fitting in alongside on ongoing village activities and carrying out their forms of rural development apart from tourism, and the Ministry of Tourism needs to be aware of this and encouraged to co-operate with other Government Departments in order to achieve this.

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