
“Agri-Tourism as an Alternative Source of Earning Income for Farmers in the State of Maharashtra”

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Abstract

People have shown more interest in knowing how their foods are produced. They want to meet farmers and producers and talk with them about what goes into food production. For many people who visit farms, especially children, who make the visit marks the first time they see the source of their food, be it a dairy cow, an ear of corn growing in a field, or an apple they can pick right off a tree, farmers and businessmen use this interest to develop traffic at their products, as well as awareness of their products. This will provide additional income to those farmers who are economically weak. Research paper will see whether Agri-Tourism is beneficial Indian state of Maharashtra.

Agri-Tourism as it is pronounced, identify many agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to a farm or close to nature beauty. Agritourism includes various and variety of activities, including buying products directly from a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, picking fruit, feeding animals, or spending few days on a farm to relieve out stress, Agritourists can choose from a wide range of activities that include picking fruits and vegetables, riding horses, tasting honey, learning about wine and cheese making, or shopping in farm gift shops and farm stands for local and regional produce or hand – crafted gifts.

Agri-Tourism is a form of niche tourism that is considered a growth industry in many parts of the developed nation, including Australia, Canada, the United States, and the Philippines. Agri-Tourism is the latest concept in the Indian tourism industry, which normally occurs on farms and very close Mother Nature. It gives you the opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic attachment with the rural life, taste the local genuine food and get familiar with the various farming technique during the visit. It provides you the welcome escape from the daily hectic life or week schedule to a

peaceful rural environment. It gives the chance to relax and revitalize in the in the pure natural environment, surrounded by magnificent and natural setting and also provides a glimpse to see the real India and have the experience of the lifetime during the farm stay holidays.

Keywords: Agritourism, Rich tourism, rural tourism areas, Maharashtra.

Farm stay:

Well you must now be tired of visiting the hill stations in the first class Ac hotel rooms, and this time you might be looking for a change. And to offer you the holidays with the difference Agri-Tourism is definitely a good option. To get that very special experience of the rural ambiance and to enjoy the rural life, Indian tourism provides you the opportunity to stay right away in the farms houses along with the other villagers and experience the difference. Witness the unique lifestyle of the culture, which they resume till date. Converse with them and feel how warm hearted and simply they are. Along with them spend time playing the pleasing rural games such as trash cards and kho kho, kabadi. Then there are increasing bull fight and wrestling matches held on various occasions in the village. On the tour to the village what attract to you the most are the colorful costumes of the villagers. Women are seen wearing the Ghagra choli(skirt and top) or the saris. While are men are donned up in the traditional kurtas and turbans. Both men and women are usually seen wearing the various jewelry items.

Venturing into the agricultural farms:

Roam into the vast spreaded acres of the agricultural lands along with the group of villagers who can provide you the better insight of the village. As you roam into the fields, feel the smell of the Indian soul, which gives you the real flavor of India. Enchant with the farmers working hard in the fields. Take the view of the bulbs ploughing the fields. The wells, other water bodies, mountains and forests are the added attraction for the tourists.

Animal Rides:

Apart from all this, holidays on the farms provides you the complete entertainment. Ride on the bullock carts along with the villagers into the agricultural fields. See them carrying fodder for the animals into the buggies. You can even take the camel ride to explore the village and the surrounding areas.

Cow Milking:

Cow milking is real exciting activity, which can't be escaped. Practice the art of cow milking from the villagers. Feed the cows with fodder and chapatis. See how the rural women cook food on the chulas made of mud. Taste the authentic rural cuisine and drink fresh milk of cow.

Rural art and craft:

Villages are expecting in making the handicrafts, it is something which is passed on from their one generation to another. You can carry some of the items carry home as the momentum.

Village fairs and festivals:

You can also participate in the village seasonal harvest fair and festivals. Oman, Baishaki and Pongal are some of the village most famous harvest festivals. Then you can enjoy the traditional dance and music performed by the villages on such occasions. You are advised to respect the local tradition and please do not take out the photographs without permission as the villagers are quite conserve and orthodox.

Who can start Agri-tourism centres:

The individual farmer can start Agri-tourism who have minimum two hector land, farm house, and water resource and is interested to entertain the tourists. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural cooperatives institute, Non-Government organizations,

Agricultural Universities, and agricultural colleges may start centers in their operational areas with the help of villagers and farmers. Agri-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware with agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring.

Infrastructure:

- Accommodations facilities at same place or alliance with nearest hotels.
- Farmhouse, which has the rural look and feel comfortable along with all minimum required facilities.
- Rich resources in agriculture namely water and plants at the place.
- Cooking equipments for cooking food, if tourist shows some interest.
- Emergency medical care's with first aid box.
- The well or lake or swimming tank for fishing, swimming.
- Bullock cart, cattle shade, telephone facilities etc.
- Goat farm, Emu farm, sericulture farm, green house.

Facilities Provided:

- Offer authentic and real taste rural Indian/ Maharastrian cuisine or food for breakfast, lunch and dinner.
- Farmers should be given an offer to see and participate in the agricultural activities.
- Create an opportunity for tourist to participate in the rural games.
- Provide information to the tourists about the culture, dress, arts, and festivals rural traditions and also give possible demonstration of few arts.
- Offer bullock cart ride or horse ride, buffalo ride in the water, fishing facility in nearby ponds or nearest lake.

- Offers fruits, corns, groundnuts, sugarcane and other agro products as per availability.
- Show local birds, animals and waterfalls etc and provide them authentic information about them.
- Must provide safely to tourists with tie ups with different alliance hospitals.
- Arrange folk,dance programme, folk songs, bhajan, kirtan, lezim dance, dhangiri gaja nashik dhol.

Other Miscellaneous facilities:

- Offer pollution free environment to the tourists
- Try to generate create interest should the village culture for the future tourism business.
- Introduce the tourist with imminent persons of your village.
- Employ well-trained staff or funny local persons with good communication skill who can entertain the tourist.
- To have correct data or information about the railway and bus time table for the help of tourists, farmer can also provide other additional facilities to their requirements for the better satisfaction of tourists.

Benefits of Agri- Tourism Centres

- Agri-tourism has the potential to change the economic face of traditional agricultural and local farmers too that are facing economic crunch during drought seasons. The benefits of Agri-Tourism development are unlimited both to the government as well the local farmers. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits to the farmers and rural people.
- Employment opportunities to the farmers including farmer's family members and local youth as they won't migrate to other place for finding works as there well be an additional income source for the farmers during income fluctuations.

- Cultural infusion or transformation will take place between urban and rural peoples including social moral values and cultural values.
- Farmers can improve their standard of living by knowing different trends in urban peoples.
- Benefits to the urban peoples, they can understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities and feel close to Mother Nature.
- It supports the rural and agricultural development process.
- Help to expand the tourist areas in the country and reduce burden on the other traditional tourist centres. As it provides pollution and noise free sites for travel and tourism at rural back ground.
- The cost of food, accommodation, recreation and travel is minimum in Agri-tourism. Agri tourism can satisfy the curiosity of urban people about sources of food, plants, animals and industrial agro-raw materials.
- It provides information about the rural handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and lifestyle.
- A family type environment at tourist place is one of the important characteristics in the agri-tourism.
- Agri-tourism could create awareness about rural life and knowledge about agriculture.
- It also provides opportunity for education through experience of farming and knowledge about the rural life including entertainment. Agro-tourism is an instrument of urban-rural connectivity through the tours.

Need for Promotion of Agri-Tourism in Maharashtra:

Agri business is becoming less lucrative in the Maharashtra due to irregular monsoon.

Unsecured product prices:

Many farmers cannot afford it and have a problem of indebtedness. Due to the agricultural problems some farmers are committed to suicide in various districts of the

Maharashtra. More than 29,000 farmers committed suicide between 1997 -2005 in Maharashtra, the total number of farmers who have taken their own lives in Maharashtra since 1995 is closing in on 54,000 till 2012. Of these 33,752 have occurred in nine years since 2003, at an annual average of 3,750. The figure for 1995-2002 was 20,066 at an average of 2,508.

Official data show, no other state comes close to that total. Hence, there is needed to start any of allied agri-business to support their farming and create allied income source from farm. In order to encourage farmers to establish small and viable Agri business activity, such as Agri-Tourism. It offers several potential benefits to farm operators. It can help supplement income generation activity while providing an opportunity to more fully employ assets, including farm household members.

The Maharashtra has great potential of Agri-Tourism due to the beautiful natural site and basic infrastructure.

Agri-Tourism Resource Potential in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra is the third largest state of India, both in area and population. It is located on the west coast of India with a 720 Km long coastline along the green Konkani region. Nestled in the Western Ghats and the Sahyadri mountain range are several hill stations and water reservoirs with semi-evergreen and deciduous forests. There are many tourist centers in Maharashtra. Although, Maharashtra has a total 22368 thousand hectare area under the agriculture and 36122 thousands of livelivestock(cow, buffalos, goats etc). Principal crops include rice, jowar, bajra, wheat, pulses, turmeric, onions, cotton, and sugarcane several oil seeds including groundnut, sunflower, and soyabean. The state has huge areas, under fruit cultivation of which mangoes, bananas, grapes, and oranges etc.

Maharashtra is blessed with a rich and diversified cultural heritage. The state has several communities belonging to different religions, and a number of festivities color the culture of Maharashtra with the spirit of exuberance. Some of the popular festivals that are

celebrated in Maharashtra are Diwali, Ganesh Chaturthi, Gudhi Padwa, Dasara, NagPanchami, Gokul Astami, Narali Pournami, pola, Makar sankranti, Banganga festival and Holi etc.

More than 4.11 (43% of the total) core populations is living the urban areas of the Maharashtra, which can becomes a customers of the agro-tourist centre's are located in the rural areas. Other than nature and culture there is an enough road and rail connectivity in urban rural areas to travel in rural Maharashtra. Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourists attractions ranging from ancient cave temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forests and wildlife, unique hill stations, pilgrimage, centre's and a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture. About 25 more such locations have been identified in Maharashtra as rural agro-tourist destinations. Thus all the districts of Maharashtra have tourism potential. Some following notable factors are helpful to the agro-tourism in Maharashtra.

- Tourist's places already exist to support Agro-tourism.
- Good communication and transport facilities
- Green house cultivation of long stem cut flowers, vegetables, fruits.
- State has 13lakh hectare area under horticulture Maharashtra now is major horticulture state.
- Maharashtra is already established as one of the top tourist destinations in the world. Maharashtra is major producer of fruit, spices, medicinal and aromatic plant allowed under horticulture in India.
- There are an increasing number of tourists preferring non-urban tourist places.
- Maharashtra has diverse agricultural climatic condition, diverse crops, people, deserts, mountains, which provides scope of promotion of season, multi –location agro-tourism.
- Some of the popular folk dances in rural Maharashtra like Lavni, Dhangari Gaja, Povadas, Koli dance and Tamasha and Dindi are the religious folk dances.

Cultural of Maharashtra is very glorious with a great variety. It gives a unique identity to the rural Maharashtra.



Remembering Few Things to Have Success In Agro-Tourism:

Agri-tourism is one of the business activities. So farmers need commercial mind and marketing techniques for the success. For success in the Agri-tourism one should follow the following things.

- Give a wide publicity of your tourism center through local and regional news papers, television or sms through mobile and use all possible media to reach all possible audience.
- Develop regular contacts with the schools, colleges, NGOs, Clubs, unions, organizations etc.
- Train staff or family members to handle tourist at reception during hospitality.
- Understand about the customer's wants and their expectations and serve accordingly.
- Charge optimum rent and charges. Also provide some discount for the facilities or services on the commercial base.
- Get artificial surrounding by using local resources to entertain /serve tourist.
- To develop website or mobile application and provide update from time to time and attract foreign tourist.
- Take their valuable feedbacks and comments about eh services and suggestions to more development and modifications.
- Develop a good relationship with the tourist for future business and chain publicity.
- Develop various Agri-tour packages of for different type of tourist and expectations. Preserve address book abd comments of the visited tourists for future tourism business.
- Behave sincerely with the tourists and participate with them.

- Small farmers can develop their Agri-Tourism centers on the basis of cooperative society.

Policies for the Agri-Tourism in Maharashtra.

Promotion of Agri-Tourism involves some more important stakeholders namely. Ministry of Agriculture and rural development ministry of the state and central governments. To promote domestic tourism, thrust areas identified by the government of India are development and diversification, development of infrastructure, product development and diversification, development of eco-adventure sports, cultural presentations, providing inexpensive accommodation etc, the government also has realized the importance of Agri-Tourism. The Planning Commission of India had constituted a working group for the formulation of tenth five year plan on Tourism. It has accorded as high priority to tourism as an instrument of employment generation and poverty alleviation in rural and backward areas by developing the potential of Agri-Tourism to supplement farm incomes and heritage tourism to promote village development.

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