

EXAMINING THE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL TOURISM IN THE STATE OF MAHARASHTRA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Agritourism, the fusion of agriculture and tourism, has gained prominence as a unique travel experience offering rural settings and agricultural activities to tourists. This study focuses on the sustainable growth of agritourism, particularly in Maharashtra, India. **Objectives:** To investigate the scope of agri tourism and to study the potential of agritourism in domestic market. **Methodology:** Research design was descriptive in nature. The study was conducted in the cities of the state of Maharashtra: Pune, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Thane, Raigad, Pune, and Satara. 125 potential tourist were selected for the study. The samples were selected on the basis of convenience sampling technique. Tool used for collection of data was online questionnaire. Data was analyzed on the basis age, gender, educational qualification, annual income & place of residents of the respondents and statistical analysis was done on percentage basis. **Results:** It was found that 72% of the respondents were aware of the concept of agritourism. The interest level of the potential tourist in various activities of agritourism varied: 22.3% of the respondents were interested in tasting local food, learning local culture & tradition response percentage was 17.8%, for learning local cooking it was 17.5%, relaxation was 16%, farming experiences was 13.2%, and participation in local handicraft response percentage was 10.5%. **Conclusion:** The study concluded that agritourism holds significant potential in India, offering additional income opportunities for farmers and enhancing rural economies. Recommendations include the establishment of collaborative societies, government support, and strategic partnerships to promote and sustain agritourism development in Maharashtra and beyond.

Key Words: Agritourism, Sustainable, MTDC, Eco friendly, ATDC, Farmers Employment.

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of agritourism conceives from its multifaceted defines such as a unique travel experience that integrates both agriculture and tourism. It works on rural settings converting agricultural product and services to tourism experiences. From the past few decades, the upcoming concept of agritourism has covered the lime light in the world of tourism. It encouraged large number of business conferences, meetings, policy statements and textbooks. Versatile knowledge has been provided with respect to Agritourism in verbal as well as written form that one could

be thinking, there is nothing left to say on this theme however there is still too much to explore on agritourism from supply – demand side perspective.

Rural and Agritourism is an important part of the tourism industry in India. From walks in the greens of Shillong, to climbing mountains in Ladakh to eco-tourism in Kerala, many destinations rely on their rural and agritourism provision to bring in much needed revenue for the local economy (Lane,1994).

By involving people in various cultural, indigenous, and aesthetic activities in rural areas, rural tourism encourages visitors to spend quality time in a thoughtful manner. Urbanites periodically feel the need to escape their monotonous city existence due to the difficulties of city living as well as their separation from and tension caused by the natural environment. In this situation, it would appear that rural areas are the best place to relieve tension and offer a chance to rediscover a simpler way of life that, for a while, offers rest and complete quiet. These villagers and farmers will undoubtedly receive an adequate number of alternative job opportunities if rural India can be developed, revitalized, and promoted as tourism destinations. In this way, the socio-economic situation of rural India can also be improved. (Maetzold, 2002)

In this regard, it is important to comprehend a location's rural setting, inhabitants, social, political, and environmental history, as well as local attitudes, among other things. Many farmers in Maharashtra are receiving significant guidance and promotion for their agro-tourism projects thanks to the efforts of NGOs like Konkan Bhumi Krushi Paryatan Sanstha, MART (Maharashtra State Agro-tourism & Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Ltd.), and Agritourism Development Corporation (ATDC) (Agri Tourism India. (n.d.)). Maharashtra tourism development corporations (MTDC) are now paying attention to the necessity of promoting and developing agro-tourism as a result of the consistent efforts of all these NGOs. The impacts of tourist development on life, culture, and the environment are inevitable because agritourism is mostly produced in rural regions. It takes significant skill to control the flow of tourists without having unwanted effects.

Agriculture played a vital part in India's frugality since 9000 BCE. During the Indus Valley Civilization, the growers of that time grew rice, peas, sesame, and dates, achieving significant technological advancements including the plough. The system of agriculture practiced was downfall harvesting. The important ages of husbandry in India were the Vedic Period, Mauryan Empire, Chola Period, and British Period (Mulage, 2017). People in Indian townlets earned their livelihood through agriculture, beast husbandry, and crafts (Krishna & Kapila, 2009).

Agritourism was a subject that was being explored all over the world. Awareness, issues, and challenges in different

fields varied from one area to another. Depending on the scope and objectives of the study, researchers' focus also varied. Therefore, different definitions of agricultural tourism were provided for in the comprehensive literature. In many of these definitions, the concept of agricultural tourism was described, while others attempted to describe it in terms of how it was carried out. Some definitions merely described the basic elements of a business, few talked about its tourism aspect, and others focused on farmers' perspectives. (Mace, 2005 and Pittman, 2006) defined agritourism as "a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant, which merged tourism and agriculture by selling the experience of being on a farm, which generated supplemental income for the farmer". Whereas, Tew and Barbieri (2012) defined it as "visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operation for the purpose of appreciation, enjoyment, education, or recreational involvement with agricultural, natural or heritage resources". They further described it as "nearly any activity in which a visitor to the farm or other agricultural setting contemplated the farm landscape or participated in an agricultural process for recreation or leisure purposes".

According to Sznajder et al., (2009), agritourism serves various functions connected with revenue, employment, utilisation of available accommodation facilities, activation of rural areas, nature conservation, as well as rest, recreation and education. They have categorised these function into three groups; namely, Socio-psychological functions; Economic functions and Spatial and Environmental functions.

The demand of agritourism is multifaceted, as it includes both 'push' and 'pull' factors. Taware (2012), has listed ten aspects of agritourism concept with which he believes that agritourism has a great scope in the context of Indian tourism. The aspects which are listed by him were: Close to nature delineated the incentive among urban dwellers to seek nature-based tourism prospects. It also included, the desire for peace which is guaranteed by the tranquility proposed by rural landscapes. Attraction towards pro-health ways of living and organic substances was also a predetermination. It was also stated that the ability to be accommodated with families in a rural landscape is an advantage over solitary means of travel at comparatively lower costs. This innate attribute of agritourism of being relatively cheaper capacitates the ability to travel with the entire family which is also affected by the proposition that such tourist spots are bereft of mass crowd

and related factors. The study indicated that the educational value this form of travel is coupled by the curiosity among the people to explore the agrarian way of life. Within the prospect of rural tourism is the potential to revisit rural offerings that helps derive a first-hand experience of rural livelihood, which feeds into the nostalgia among the tourists.

Agritourism was considered the holiday idea of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, farming, or factory farm operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation (Sznajder et al. 2004).

The concept of agritourism envisaged involvement of the private sector, the farmers/agritourism service providers based on public-private partnership. The agritourism service providers act as both hosts and guides to the visiting tourists. The agritourism centers have clean, healthful environments with modern facilities for the comfort of visitors. Preference is given to farms that have agricultural land attached. The agritourism enterprise service provider is intended to provide home-cooked food, accommodation facilities, and show the traveler the agricultural practices such as gardening, harvesting, beekeeping, agriculture, etc., and introduce them to the village way of life through various community activities. The guests could enjoy the natural surroundings in fresh air. The traveler get an exposure to the local community life, which meant attending a council meeting, exposure to local songs, food, dances, art, and craft, etc. (Bramwell & Lane, 2003).

The village tour include visiting the local artisans like the carpenter, metalworker, etc. The guests experience festive occasions like weddings and local fairs. They could also participate in or witness village games like wrestling, gulidanda, kite flying, and have rides on bullock carts, tractors, etc. Experiences like jumping on the fodder and taking a tub in the driven well could be a unique feature for the people and children from urban areas. They could also see the important fairs and festivals being organized in these areas along with significant monuments, havelis, historical sites, etc.

Maharashtra has 328 agritourism centers across twenty-nine districts including Pune, Aurangabad, villages near Nagpur, and the tribal belt of Thane district (Maharashtra Tourism. (n.d.)) Since its inception, farmers across the State had

gained a 25% growth in their incomes. These agritourism centers recorded 4.7 lakhs, 5.3 lakhs, 7.9 lakhs tourists visiting in 2018, 2019, and 2020 respectively, which helped the farmers to generate additional revenue/income of Rs 55.79 crore. Besides, the agritourism initiative had helped create more than one hundred thousand jobs for women and youth in the rural areas. Several instances in the districts like Raigad, Pune, and Satara had proved that agritourism positively impacted farmers' lives and the whole village from a social and economic perspective. It was their effort to organize Study Tours of Agritourism enterprise practitioners from one part of the state to another to share best practices and adopt those practices.

The Department of Tourism provide booking engines for tourists to reserve accommodation in agro-tourism units. The department was aiming to organize agrotourism based tourism festivals, for example, Mango Festival (Ratnagiri), Orange Festival (Nagpur), Grape Festival (Nashik), Chickoo Festival (Dahanu). This was done to boost the destination as well as encourage the agro-tourism centers. India had great potential for domestic tourism. Domestic tourism is as old as Indian culture. National tourism had been growing steadily over a period of one decade based on available statistics.

The development of agricultural tourism is a very recent phenomenon compared to the development of agricultural tourism in foreign countries such as the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, and India. In particular, in the last five years, the development had taken place in the state of Maharashtra, so a systematic record of the growth and development of agricultural tourism is still in its early stages, or it could be called a development phase. In this area, there is a very small amount of systematically collected data. So, an effort was made to gather systematic information through this study.

Globally, agritourism showed growth. Hence, researchers liked to understand the Indian market. This research aimed to provide new knowledge on it, assessing the potential demand and supply and considering the role of agritourism as one of the tools for rural economic development in India. The researchers aimed at studying the farmers' willingness to operate agritourism businesses in the near future and the domestic consumers' attitudes towards this process of touristic service. The objectives of the study were:

- To investigate the scope of agritourism

- To study the potential of agritourism in domestic market

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The research aimed to investigate the potential and challenges of agritourism in Maharashtra, India. A descriptive research design was chosen to gather insights into the attitudes of potential tourists towards agritourism. This design allowed for the exploration of various factors influencing the development of agritourism in the region.

Locale: The study focused on Maharashtra, a state in western India known for its diverse agricultural practices and tourist destinations. Specific areas within Maharashtra, including Pune, Aurangabad, Nagpur, Thane, Raigad, Pune, and Satara were selected for data collection due to their significant agritourism activities.

Sampling Design: For investigate the potential of agritourism, a convenience sampling method was employed to collect data from 125 potential tourists through online questionnaires.

Tools and Techniques: An online questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was distributed to a sample of 125 respondents using Google Forms. The tool has been adopted from study of (Peesapati, 2020)

Data Analysis and Statistical Analysis: Data was analyzed on the basis age, gender, educational qualification, annual income & place of residents of the respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the collected data, including frequency and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Majority of the respondents were male (70%) and 29% female and only 1% preferred not to disclose their gender. The age bracket of the respondents was young professional with majority of the age were between 20 – 24 years old. Majority of the respondents were graduate; 82 % Most of the respondents were young adult. The income level of 80% of the respondents were upto Rs 5 Lakh per annum. Only 12 % respondents were from rural area, remaining 65 % from Urban Tier 1 city, 18% Urban Tier 2 city and 5-6 % from Urban Teir 3 city from Maharashtra. Following table gives the details of the demographic profile of the respondent

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondent

Variables		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	89	71.2
	Female	35	28
	Prefer not to say	01	0.8
Educational Qualification	Post Graduate	04	3.2
	Graduate	103	82.4
	Intermediate	16	12.8
	High School	02	1.6
Annual Income	Below 5 lakh	101	80.8
	5 lakh to 10 lakh	12	9.6
	10 lakh to 15 lakh	07	5.6
	Above 15 lakh	05	4.0
Place of Residence	Urban T 1 city	81	64.8
	Urban T 2 city	22	17.6
	Urban T 3 city	07	5.6
	Rural	15	12

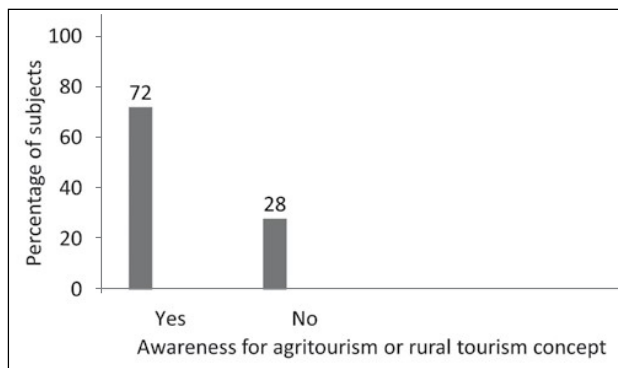


Figure 1: Awareness about Agritourism or Rural Tourism

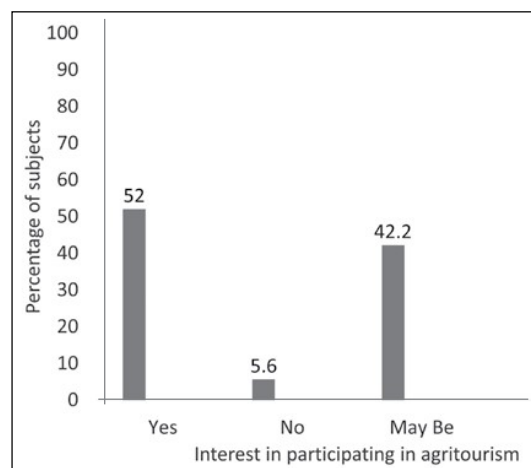


Figure 2: Interest in Participating in agritourism

While collecting data for the general problem regarding their understanding and interest in agritourism, it was found that 72% of the respondents were aware of the concept of agri tourism. However out of 125 respondents only 52% are actually interested in participating in agritourism activities. Another 42% why not very sure about their choice. Majority of the respondents (52.8%) were only interested in agritourism as a weekend activity whereas 40.8% of the respondents were interested in 2 to 7 days trip. Only 5.6% respondents were interested in longer vacation spent on agritourism. 64.8% of the respondents selected their friends as their travel companions while travelling to a agritourism destination. 21.6% & 10.4% respondents respectively preferred family & solo trip to agritourism destination.

While exploring people’s choice regarding agritourism activities, respondents had shown more or less similar kind of interest in farming (13.2%), relaxing (16%), learning local cooking (17.5%), learning local handicraft (10.5%), culture and tradition (17.8%), whereas, in tasting local food 22.3% respondents were interested. 34.4% respondent have said that they were interested to visit agritourism destination at least once in a year. 52.8% respondents were ready to participate in agritourism activities more often in a year.

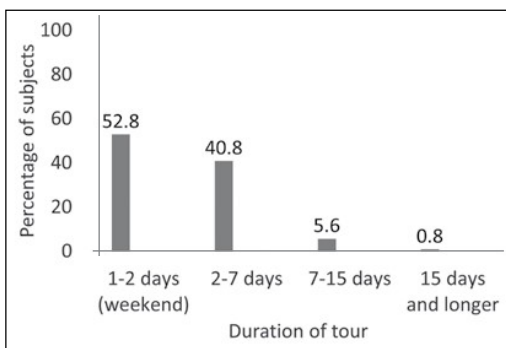


Figure 3: Duration of tour during agritourism destination

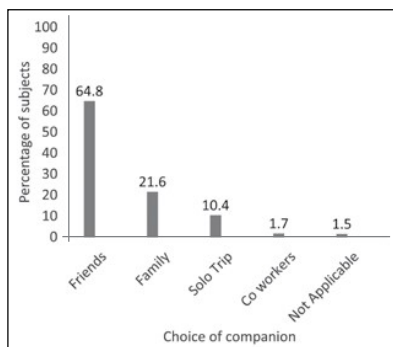


Figure 4: Choice of companion during Agritourism

Table 1: Preference of activities during agritourism

Activities	Percentage
Farming	13.2
Relaxing	16
Learning Local Cooking	17.5
Participating in manufacturing or local handicrafts or artefacts	10.5
Learning local culture and tradition	17.8
Tasting local food	22.3
Others	2.8

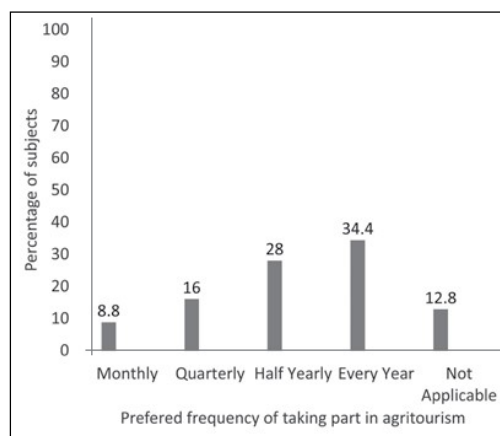


Figure 5: Preferred frequency of Agritourism

The study on the sustainable growth of agricultural tourism in Maharashtra addressed several key aspects pertaining to the opportunities, challenges, and strategies for fostering sustainable agritourism in the region. Maharashtra’s diverse agricultural practices, coupled with its rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes, presented significant opportunities for agritourism development. However, the sector faced various challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited awareness, seasonality, and competition from other tourist destinations. Additionally, environmental concerns such as water scarcity, soil degradation, and biodiversity loss posed threats to the long-term sustainability of agritourism.

To overcome these challenges and promote sustainable growth, the study advocated for a multifaceted approach. This included preserving traditional farming practices while incorporating modern technologies for efficiency, improving infrastructure to enhance accessibility and visitor experience, and implementing effective marketing and promotion strategies. Community involvement and

stakeholder collaboration were deemed crucial for decision-making, resource management, and ensuring the equitable distribution of benefits. Furthermore, the study underscored the importance of environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation in agritourism development, emphasizing the need for environmentally friendly practices and the safeguarding of indigenous knowledge systems. By integrating these strategies into policy frameworks and rural development plans, Maharashtra could realize the full potential of agricultural tourism while preserving its natural and cultural assets for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Agritourism has great potential in Indian request as every field was diversified by culture, tradition, climate, history, geography, and husbandry fashion. It could support farmers to induce fresh income as well as provide pastoral employment, through which one could hope migration from pastoral India could be controlled incompletely. Excursionists in India are also looking forward to taking part in agritourism as it provide different services. Farmers need to take all necessary measures and to be trained in all aspects of hospitality and tourism before they commence agritourism business. However, if the farmers do not take measures, the condition of the farmers will deteriorate and lead to heavy debts.

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