

Rural Tourism in India– A Model of Rural Culture & Heritage!

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to present an update on rural tourism growth & development in India. Rural tourism is growing in terms of number of visitors and the government of India focuses on it as an engine of growth. We believe that any rural tourism development plan needs to focus on sustainable development and take into account the priorities and needs of local people. This paper emphasizes the need for sustainable forms of tourism by outlining the possible socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of current forms of Rural Tourism. The paper first explores the meaning of terms such as Rural, Rurality and Rural Tourism. It focuses on the genesis and growth of rural tourism, rural tourism in India, impacts of rural tourism and the need for sustainable rural tourism.

Key Words: Socio-economic, Brundtland Report, Urbanization, UNDP, WTTC, FICCI.

Rural Tourism: History & Development

Defining rurality has taken much space in geographical and rural sociology texts but there is little consensus on what constitutes the phenomenon 'rural' (Robinson 1990; Ilbery 1997 in Thomson Learning). A simplistic definition of rurality can be those areas, which lie beyond major towns and cities and which are, therefore, rural, as opposed to urban, in character (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Lang (1994) suggests population density, size of settlement, land use and traditional social structures as main characteristics that help identify the area as rural. However there is no universal definition for 'rural' as national governments use country specific criteria. For example, rural in Australia is defined as parishes of less than 5000 people while in Denmark and Norway towns of fewer than 10,000 people are considered rural areas (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). In India, defining rural gets even more complicated as it is a state subject. However for a general understanding we could use the definition as illustrated in the Census of India (2001), rural location - is a location with a population of less than 10,000 persons. At the time of the Census, there were 638,000 villages in India.

What is Rural Tourism?

In a broad sense it can be defined as 'a state of mind, and technically, according to activities, destinations and other measurable, tangible characteristics' (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). Over time researchers have constantly added to understanding the activities that encompass rural tourism. The list includes interest in farms, nature, adventure, health, education, arts, and heritage (Bramwell and Lane in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003) and experiencing living history such as rural customs, folklore, local traditions, beliefs, and common heritage (Pedford in Jolliffe & MacDonald, 2003). 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) (Thomson Learning).

Geographic and Demographic Definitions

"A multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized areas. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural areas" (Department of Tourism, 1994: 3)

Sustainable Rural Tourism

The United Nation World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) notes that within the next 5-10 years the range of products on offers to tourists seeking the rural experience is to increase significantly. There is a clear trend in the growth of rural tourism with the increase in the numbers of tourists visiting these places (United Nation World Tourism Organisation, 1999). In the previous section we have seen the repercussions that these demands have and will make on fragile environments. These impacts for a long time have not been given its due recognition as rural tourism is often taken to be synonymous with alternative tourism and the notion that alternative tourism is embedded by sustainable practices. Sustainable development has been in existence and practiced since time immemorial. However the concept of sustainability as it is understood today was first defined in the Brundtland Report, 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development, as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Williams, 1998) Though the Brundtland report made no special reference to tourism, the role of tourism in the process of continuously misusing the Earth's resources has been analysed and the concept of sustainable tourism appeared (Ratz & Puczko, 1998). Various international conventions/ organisations (CBD, CSD, WTO-OMT, and WTTC) since then have highlighted the importance of sustainable tourism. Essentially, the basis of sustainable tourism development is recognition of the relationship that exists between the three components of the tourism-operating environment, the destination environment and the host community and how to find a balanced approach amongst the three (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997). It is this ideal balance that is sought by most planners. The need of the hour is to align rural tourism under the broad ambit of sustainable development. The reasons as explained by Lane (1994) "Visitors to the countryside are increasingly mobile and are able to penetrate more remote areas than just a few years ago. Advances in modes of transport have assisted this, coupled with the increasingly sophisticated marketing of new destinations. Outsiders who have little understanding of the people, culture and heritage of that area may manage rural tourism. While realizing a need to stimulate some rural economies, reliance on tourism may lead to an unbalanced economy". (Thomson Learning)

However, information on the principles of sustainable rural tourism still remains elusive. Efforts have been made by a few countries to answer this question; United Kingdom has published advisory booklets on the Development of Sustainable Rural Tourism and Working for the Countryside: A strategy for rural tourism in England (2001-2005), while India, Korea and others have incorporated this element into their national policies. As there is no clear direction on this subject, each country trying to mesh this ideology into its national policies.

Scheme of Rural Tourism: Government of India

Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages. Across the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of urban lifestyles have led to a "counter urbanization" syndrome. This has led to growing interest in the rural areas. At the same time this trend of urbanization has led to falling income levels, lesser job opportunities in the total areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas. Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to these problems. Besides, there are other factors which are shifting the trend towards rural tourism like increasing levels of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness. In the developed countries, this has resulted in a new style of tourism of visiting village settings to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. This concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism.

Under this Scheme, thrust will be to promote village tourism as the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions. Key geographic regions would be identified for development and promotion of Rural Tourism. The implementation would be done through a convergence committee headed by the district collector. Activities like improving the environment, hygiene, infrastructure etc. would be eligible for assistance. Apart from providing financial assistance the focus would be to tap the resources available under different schemes of department of rural development, state governments and other concerned departments of the govt. of India.

The form in which rural tourism is now taking shape can be traced to an International Conference and exhibition on rural tourism in India organised by federation of Indian chambers of commerce and Industry (FICCI) in

association with the Udaipur chambers of commerce and Industry in Udaipur (Rajasthan) in 2011. The basic concept of rural tourism was envisaged with benefit accruing to local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development and preservation of the environment and heritage. Early movers in adopting the concept of developing and promoting rural tourism have been Rajasthan and Kerala. The outcome of this workshop was a collaborative effort by the union ministries of tourism & culture, rural development, other nodal agencies and FICCI to plan a 10-year project to market and develop the concept of rural tourism in India. A survey commissioned to A. F Ferguson for the study for the above project estimated that every one million additional visitors to the country could translate into Rs 4300-cr of revenue for the industry. Besides, every one million of additional investment into the tourism sector has the potential of generating 47.5 jobs. And every direct job leads to the creation of another 11 indirect jobs 3. With the figures in hand the ministry of tourism (MoT) in its national tourism policy, 2002 announced that 'Village tourism will be promoted as the primary tourism product of India to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural areas'. Direct fallout of this was the endogenous tourism project between the United Nations development programme (UNDP) and the ministry of tourism in 2003. The project focus under the 'Sustainable Livelihood' thematic area will be "to initiate and build upon a number of community level initiatives to address issues of poverty, through group mobilisation around income-generation activities buttressed by skill endowment and credit/ resource support issues" (UNDP, 2003).

The 5 broad objectives of this initiative are:

1. To build capacity at the local level.
2. Experiment with location-specific models of community tourism enterprise.
3. Build strong community-private partnerships.
4. Support innovative and promising rural tourism initiatives.
5. Provide inputs to national and state tourism policy.

The project has identified 31 sites in 20 states and has allocated Rs 50 lakh per site for tourism development works. (Ministry of Tourism Government of India)

Table: 1 Rural Tourism Sites and their USPs

States	Sl. No.	Name of the Villages	USPs
Andhra Pradesh	1	Pochampalli, Distt. Nalgonda	Cotton & Silk Sarees
	2	Konaseema Village, Distt. East Godavari	Eco-tourism (Coastal Development)
	3	Puttaparthi, Distt. Anantapur	Culture (Spiritual life)
	4	Chinchinada, Distt. East Godavari	Eco-tourism (Coast development)
	5	Srikalahasti, Distt. Chittoor	Kalamkari work
	6	Village Etikoppaka, Distt. Vishakhapatnam	Wood Craft
	7	Village Dharmavaram, Anantapur	Handlooms & Craft
	8	Village Kuchipudi, Distt. Krishna	Culture & Dance form
	9	Village Nirmal, Dist. Adilabad	Paintings
	10	Village Cherial, Dist. Waranga	Scroll paintings
Arunachal Pradesh	1	Village Rengo, Distt. East Siang.	Culture and Bamboo Cane handicraft
	2	Ligu village, Distt. Upper Subansir	Culture
	3	Village Ego-Nikte, Distt. West Siang	Culture
	4	Village Nampong, Distt. Changlang	Culture
	5	Village Deke, Dist. West Siang	Ethnic tribal culture
Assam	1	Durgapur, Distt. Golaghat	Bamboo Craft and Cuisine
	2	Dehing-Patakai Kshetra, Distt. Tinsukia	Culture and Ecotourism
	3	Sualkuchi in Distt. Kamrup	Patta and Moga Silk weaving
	4	Village Asharikandi, Distt. Dhubri	Terracota Craft

Bihar		Nepura Village, Distt. Nalanda	Tusser Silk weaving
Chhattisgarh	1	Village Chitrakote, Distt. Bastar (I)	Site development of Chitrakote Water falls
	2	Site development of Chitrakote Water falls	Site development of Chitrakote Water falls
	3	Nagarnar, Distt. Bastar	Bell Metal/ Terracota
	4	Kondagaon, Distt. Bastar	Bell Metal/ Terracota
	5	Mana-Tuta, Distt. Raipur	Adventure Tourism
	6	Village Chilpi, Distt. Kabirdham	Silk weaving and Baiga tribe culture
	7	Village Odh, Distt. Raipur	Terracotta
Delhi	1	Kotla Mubarakpur	Historical
	2	Nangli, Razapur, Delhi	Historical
Gujarat	1	Heritage village at Tera	Heritage
	2	Village Hodka, Distt. Kachchh	Mirror work/ Embroidery
	3	Navagaon and Malegaon villages, Distt. Dang	Culture & Eco-tourism
	4	Nageshwar, Distt. Jamnagar	Mirror Work and Heritage
	5	Dandi Village, Distt. Navsari	Mahatma Gandhi Heritage
Haryana	1	Jyotisar, Distt. Kurukshetra	Dari weaving
Himachal Pradesh	1	Nagar, Distt. Kullu	Topi and Shawl weaving
	2	Paragpur, Distt. Kangra Valley	Himachal Heritage
	3	Village Baroh, Distt. Kangra	Gurukul Culture
Jammu & Kashmir	1	Village Drung, Distt. Baramula	Adventure
	2	Surinsar, Distt. Jammu	Adventure (Trekking)
	3	Gagangir, Distt. Srinagar	Adventure
	4	Village Pahalgam, Distt. Anantnag	Pilgrimage
	5	Village Jheri, Distt. Jammu	Adventure
	6	Village Akingaam, Distt. Anantnag	Culture (Folk Dance :Bhand Pathar)
	7	Village Vasaknag	Adventure
	8	Village Dori Degair	Culture
	9	Village Watlab, Distt. Baramula	Adventure (Water Sports)
	10	Village Agar Jitto, Distt. Udhampur	Culture & Craft
	11	Village Chahel & Sahakote, Distt. Baramula	Gaba Saji Craft
	12	Manasbal, Distt. Srinagar	Carpet weaving
	13	Village Rafiabad	Craft
	14	Village Nowgam	Culture
	15	Village Shar-Shalli	Culture
	16	Village Tegar Semor, Distt. Leh	Handloom & Craft
	17	Village Marwari karool, Distt. Doda	Pilgrimage
	19	Wader Wader Bala, Distt. Kupwara	Culture
	20	Village Bhawani (Mangla Mata), Distt. Rajouri	Culture

	21	Village Naranag, Distt.Gandherbal	Culture (craft)
	22	Village Hirpora, Distt Sophian	Adventure (Trekking)
	23	Village Dandmoh, Distt Baramulla	Kangri and basket making and carpet weaving
	24	Village Gohan, Distt Baramulla	Pilgrimage
	25	Village Litter, Dist Phulwama	Pilgrimage
	26	Village Khag, Dist Budgam	Adventure
Jharkhand	1	Amadubi	Art "Pyatkar" painting
	2	Deuridih, Distt. Saraikela Kharsawan	Chhau Dance
Karnataka	1	Kokkare Bellur, Distt.Bellur	Eco-tourism
	2	Attiveri Bird Sanctuary,Distt. Uttar Kannada	Eco-tourism
	3	Banavasi Distt., Uttar Kannada	Stone machinery, Wood Carving and Musical instruments
	4	Anegundi, Distt. Koppal	Banana Fibre Craft
	5	Coorg, Distt. Kodagu	Coffee Plantation
Kerala	1	Kumbalangi, Distt.Ernakulam	Ethnic Cuisine and traditional boat carpentry
	2	Arnamura, Distt.Pathanamthitta	Mural Paining
	3	Balrampur in Thiruvananthapuram Distt.	Weaving of traditional sarees
	4	Village Kalady, Distt.Ernakulam	Spices Village
	5	Village Anakkara, Distt.Idukki	Spice Village
	6	Village Clappana	Fishing
Madhya Pradesh	1	Chaugan, Distt. Mandla	Lantana Craft
	2	Pranpur, Distt.Ashoknagar	Chanderi Sarees
	3	Orchha, Distt.Tikamgarh	Historical and Adventure (River rafting)
	4	Amla, Distt. Ujjain	Historical
	5	Village Devpur, Distt. Vidisha	Spiritual heritage
	6	Seondha, Distt. Datia	Wood and stone craft
	7	Budhni, Distt. Sehore	Historical, Spiritual and Wood craft
Maharashtra	1	Sulibhanjan-Khultabad Distt. Aurangabad	Sufi tradition and Culture
	2	Morachi Chincholi	Farming
Manipur	1	Khongion, Distt. Thoubal	Manipur Dance
	2	Village Noney, Distt.Tamenglong	Manipur Dance
	3	Andro, Distt. East Imphal	Bamboo Craft
	4	Village Liyai, Distt Senapati	Ethnic culture
Meghalaya	1	Village lalong, Distt.Jaintia Hills	Adventure
	2	Village Sasatgre, Distt. West Garo Hills	Bamboo Craft
	3	Village Mawlynnong, Distt East Khasi Hills	Eco-tourism
Mizoram	1	Village Thenzawl, Dist Serchchip	Handloom weaving and ethnic culture
Nagaland	1	Mopunchupket, Distt.Mokokchung	Shawl weaving
	2	Avachekha, Distt. Zunheboto	Tribal Culture
	3	Changtongia, Distt.Mokokchung	Tribal Culture
	4	Leshumi, Distt. Phek	Tribal Culture and Adventure
	5	Thetsumi, Distt. Phek	Tribal Culture
	6	Kuki Dulong, Distt.Dimapur	Tribal Culture

	7	Longsa, Distt.Mokokchung	Tribal Culture
	8	Mitikhru, Distt. Phek	Art & Craft (Woodcraft), Handloom
	9	Chungli Yimti, DisttTuensang	Historical & Tribal Culture
	10	Village Longjam, Distt. Zunheboto	Craft /Handloom (Mekhala andShawls)/Culture
	11	Village Shena Old, Distt Zunheboto	Adventure (trekking and bird-watching)
	12	Village Longidang, Distt Wokha	Wood craft and carving
Orissa	1	Raghurajpur, Distt. Puri	Stone Craft and Pattachitra
	2	Pipli in Puri Distt.	Applique work
	3	Khiching, Distt. Mayurbhanj	Folk Music "Bhagabat Tongi Clorite Stone
	4	Barpali, Distt. Bargarh	Sambalpuri sarees
	5	Hirapur, Distt. Khurda	Historical
	6	Padmanavpur, Distt.Ganjam	Puppet Dance, Tiger Dance and Textile weaving
	7	Deuljhari, Distt. Angul,	Spiritual
	8	Gurukul of Konark Natya Mandap	Stone Craft and Gurukul
Puduchery	1	Village Alankuppam	Craft
Punjab	1	Boothgarh, Distt.Hoshiarpur	Glass Work
	2	Rajasansi, Distt. Amritsar	Carpet weaving
	3	Chamkaur, Sahib, Distt.Ropar	Spiritual
	4	Jainti Majri, Distt. Mohali	Woodcraft
	5	Village Chhat	Phulkari Embroidery
Rajasthan	1	Neemrana, Distt. Alwar	Historical
	2	Samode Village, Distt. Jaipur	Lac Work, Pepper painting, Gems stone painting
	3	Haldighati, Distt. Rajsamand,	Historical
Sikkim	1	Lachen , Dist North Distt.	Rugs and Carpet
	2	Chumbung, Distt. West Sikkim	Eco-tourism (Home stay)
	3	Tingchim, Distt. West Sikkim	Trekking, Bird watching and Butterflies.
	4	Maniram Bhanjgyang	Culture
	5	Village Rong	Culture
	6	Village Jaubari, Distt. South Sikkim	Adventure & Ecotourism
	7	Village Tumin, Distt. East	Culture
	8	Village Srijunga Martam, Distt. West	Culture
	9	Village Darap, Distt West Sikkim	Eco Tourism
	10	Village Pastenga Gaucharan, Distt East Sikkim	Culture and Ethnic Lifestyle
	11	Village Pendam Gadi Budang, Distt East Sikkim	Culture
Tamil Nadu	1	Kazhugumalai, Distt Thoothukudi	Spiritual and Pottery making
	2	Theerthamalai, Distt. Dharmapuri	Historical
	3	Karaikudi, Chettinadu, Distt. Sivaganga	Palm leave baskets, Gold Jewellery
	4	Devipattinam Navbhashnam in Ramnathpuram Distt.	Stone Carving
	5	Thirukurugudi, Distt. Tirunelveli	Historical
	6	Karaikudi, Chettinadu,Distt. Sivaganga	Palm leave baskets, Gold Jewellery
	7	Devipattinam Navbhashnam in Ramnathpuram Distt.	Stone Carving
	8	Thirukurugudi, Distt. Tirunelveli	Historical
	9	Thirupudaimaurthur,Distt.Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu	Historical

	10	Village Kombai., Distt. Theni	Spice
	11	Thadiyankudissai, Distt.Dindigul,	Spice Village
	12	Village Vedanamalli, Distt. Kancheepuram	Eco-tourism
Tripura	1	Kamlasagar, Distt. West Tripura	Historical
	2	Jampui Hills, Distt. North Tripura	Eco-tourism
	3	Durgabari, Distt. West Tripura	Tea Gardens
	4	Devipur, Distt. West Tripura	Farming
	5	Malayanagar, Distt. West Tripura	Tribal Culture and Eco-tourism
	6	Village Banabithi, Dist West Tripura	Eco-tourism and tea gardens
	7	Village Harijula, Dist South Tripura	Eco-tourism
	8	Village Kalapania, Distt Sonamara Sub Division	Religious
	9	Village Sarsima, Distt Belonia	Eco-tourism
	10	Village Bagbari, Distt. Sadar Sub Division	Eco - Tourism
Uttarakhand	1	Jageshwar, Distt. Almora	Spiritual
	2	Agora Village (Dodital) Distt. Uttarakashi	Eco-tourism
	3	Mottad and its satellite station, Distt Uttarakashi	Eco-tourism
	4	Chekhoni Bora, Distt.Champawat.	Adventure
	5	Koti, Indroli, Patyur, Distt. Dehradun	Eco-tourism
	7	Mana, Distt. Chamoli	Trekking Adventure
	8	Village Sari, Distt. Rudraprayag	Eco-tourism
	9	Village Adi Kailash, Distt. Nainital	Adventure
	10	Padmapuri,Distt. Nainital	Adventure
	11	Nanakmatta, Distt. U.S.Nagar	Spiritual
	12	Tryuginarayan, Distt. Rudraprayag	Spiritual and Adventure
Uttar Pradesh	1	Bhitar Gram, Distt. Rae Bareli.	Historical Culture
	2	Mukhrui, Distt. Mathura	Folk Dance
	3	Bhaguwala, Distt. Saharanpur	Ban Grass Craft
	4	Village Barara, Distt.Agra	Handicraft
West Bengal	1	Ballabhpur Danga, Distt.Birbhum	Folk Dance
	2	Sonada Village, Distt.Darjeeling	Heritage
	3	Mukutmonipur, Distt. Bankura	Sari weaving
	4	Village Antpur, Distt.Hoogly	Sari weaving
	5	Village Kamarpukur, Distt. Hoogly	Spiritual & Craft

Conclusions

Rural Tourism in India is now one of the niche tourism products which hold good potential to attract upmarket clients who would like to run away from hustle bustle of concrete city life and be in rural environment seeking mental peace. Rural home stays are designed to attract tourists who desire to learn more about the varied life styles and crafts of our many villages. This also creates jobs in villages and thus it brings a halt on the exodus from villages to major cities. This facilitates local talents service in tourism sector as stake holders. Rural Tourism thus fulfils Govt's. Objective of diversification of tourism products & create local employment in distant villages. It works out very well for our country and especially boosts tourism industry. Rural Holiday circuits which are now being focused are Hodka, Kachchh District, Gujarat, Kumbalanghi, Ernakulam District, Kerala, Aranmula, Pathanamthitta District, Kerala Karaikudi (Chettinad), Sivaganga District, Tamil Nadu Pochampalli, Nalgonda District, Andhra Pradesh, Banawasi, Uttar Kannada District, Karnataka, Pranpur, Ashok Nagar District, Madhya Pradesh, Naggar, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh

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