

Unlocking the Potential: EXPLORING THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF AGRO-TOURISM

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INTRODUCTION :

In India, a large portion of the population depends on agriculture and related activities for their livelihood. This sector contributes to 18.30 per cent of India's GDP. Maharashtra and Kerala are states in India that are taking advantage of the potential of agritourism. In Maharashtra, the Agro-tourism Development Corporation promotes agritourism. Kerala has important agricultural areas like Kuttanad, Wayanad, Palakkad, and Idukki. The Government of Kerala has launched the 'Green Farm' project to encourage agro-tourism in the state. Nagaland and Sikkim are also successful states in promoting agritourism. Agritourism is a type of ecotourism where tourists visit farms, ranches, or other agricultural businesses for education or entertainment purposes. These vacations can include experiences like fishing, horseback riding, or touring a tea plantation. Some guests may even stay for several days and actively participate in farming activities and taking care of crops and livestock.

The term "green growth" is an emerging sector, just like Agritourism, which focuses on environmentally friendly practices, zero carbon emissions, natural and sustainable farming, and eco-tourism. It has become a crucial aspect for many rural areas. Various studies have shown that combining tourism with rural resources and traditional products can be a valuable way to revive rural areas. This International Conference on Agriculture Tourism aims to contribute to the development of Global Green Growth Villages through Agritourism. Agritourism is not a new concept. For decades, people have been working on farms in exchange for accommodation, such as volunteering on organic farms in Italy or staying at dude

ranches in the Rocky Mountains, also known as "Wwoofing" (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms). Besides enjoying the beautiful scenery and building relationships, Agritourism provides hands-on experience that deepens our understanding of global farming practices.

The global market for agritourism was valued at \$69.24 billion in 2019 and is projected to reach \$117.37 billion by 2027, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.42% during the forecast period.

AGRO-TURISUM

Agro tourism is a relatively new concept in the Indian tourism industry that takes place on farms. It offers visitors the chance to have a genuine and immersive experience of rural life, including tasting local and authentic food, and getting hands-on with various farming activities during their visit.



FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE OF AGRO-TURISUM:

To promote and encourage agro-tourism, entrepreneurs should focus on the following three basic principles:

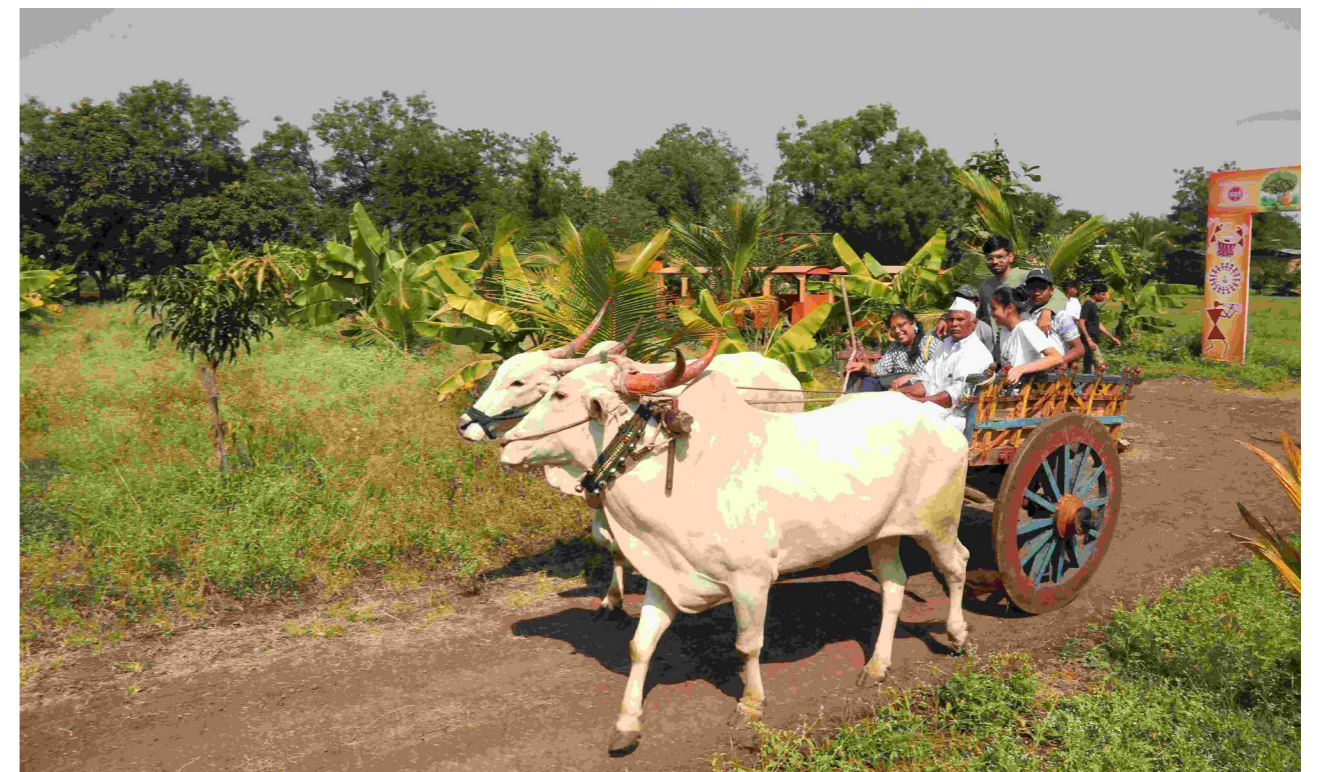
- 1. Visual Appeal:** Provide attractions such as animals, birds, farms, and natural scenery that are the highlights of agro-tourism. Emphasize the importance of traditional culture by showcasing traditional attire, festivals, and rural games, which create interest and enhance the agro-tourism experience.
- 2. Engaging Activities:** Offer activities that allow visitors to actively participate. This can include involvement in agricultural operations, activities like swimming, bullock cart riding, cooking demonstrations, and participation in rural games. These activities enable visitors to actively engage and enjoy the agro-tourism experience.
- 3. Souvenir Options:** Provide opportunities for visitors to purchase items related to the agro-tourism experience. This can include rural crafts, traditional dress materials, farm-fresh products, and processed foods. Offering such items allows visitors to take a piece of the experience home and serves as a reminder of their visit, potentially enticing them to return.

OBJECTIVES OF AGRO TOURISM AS FOLLOWS:

- 1. Development and Promotion:** To develop and promote interest in Agro Tourism among people, recognizing it as a potential avenue for diversifying and stabilizing rural economies.
- 2. Job Creation and Income Generation:** To create jobs and increase community income by providing a broader market base for local businesses, thus enhancing economic opportunities in rural areas.
- 3. Tourism Promotion:** To attract tourists to rural areas, thereby supporting the growth of small tourism industries and contributing to the overall development of rural communities.
- 4. Farmer Support and Training:** Through projects, training, and support provided by organizations like ATDC (Agro-tourism Development Corporation), farmers can benefit from the development of tourism and capitalize on the opportunities it brings.
- 5. Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Agro Tourism contributes to the preservation and promotion of traditional forms of art, music, and cultural practices in rural areas, allowing for the improvement of livelihoods and the appreciation of Indian agricultural traditions.
- 6. Cultural Exchange:** Agro Tourism provides urban Indians and foreign tourists with the opportunity to discover and appreciate Indian agricultural traditions, fostering cultural exchange and a deeper understanding of rural life.

KEY ELEMENTS ENHANCING AGRITOURISM SUCCESS:

- 1. Farmer:** In many cases, farmers in rural areas have limited education and exposure, but they possess a genuine and welcoming nature. They treat visitors as guests with wholehearted hospitality, devoid of commercial motives. For farmers, entertaining guests is a source of pleasure rather than a burden. Their non-exploitative approach creates a clean and welcoming atmosphere for tourism.
- 2. Village:** Rural villages, located away from urban centers, may lack modern amenities but are blessed with abundant natural resources. Nature has invested in these areas with water bodies, fields, forests, mountains, deserts, and islands. The community structure in villages tends to be more homogenous, and treating guests with warmth and hospitality is deeply ingrained in the local culture, creating a natural environment conducive to agritourism.
- 3. Agriculture:** The rich agricultural resources found in different regions bring diversity and curiosity to agritourism. Each field is unique, adding to the attraction for tourists. The cultivation methods and agricultural products are particularly appealing to urban populations. The indigenous knowledge held by rural communities is a valuable asset that adds novelty and curiosity for urban visitors. The combination of farmers, villages, and agriculture creates a wonderful setting that provides unlimited satisfaction to tourists, especially those from urban areas.



AGRO-TOURISM BUSINESS POTENTIAL IN MAHARASHTRA

Maharashtra is a big state in India, both in terms of size and population. It is located on the west coast of India and has a long coastline of 720 kilometers along the beautiful Konkan region. In Maharashtra, you can find hill stations and water reservoirs nestled in the Western Ghats and the Sahyadri mountain range. These areas have forests with different types of trees that stay green throughout the year or shed their leaves. Maharashtra has many tourist attractions that provide a natural environment suitable for agro-tourism centers.

In Maharashtra, there are numerous places that tourists love to visit, such as ancient temples, beaches, waterfalls, old forts and monuments, forests, and unique hill stations. The state also has a rich tradition of festivals, art, and culture. Many locations in Maharashtra have been identified as destinations for agro-tourism. In rural Maharashtra, you can witness various folk dances like Lavni, Dhangari Gaja, Povadas,

Koli dance, and Tamasha. The culture of Maharashtra is diverse and magnificent, giving the rural areas a unique identity

The Maharashtra State Agri and Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited, commonly known as MART, is a federation that brings together agriculturalists and their co-operatives. MART serves as the central organization for co-operatives involved in agriculture-based tourism in Maharashtra. It was established on 12th December 2008 in Baramati, Pune district of Maharashtra. MART plays a crucial role in supporting farmers to enhance their income by initiating tourism activities on their properties alongside their farming activities. The federation, in collaboration with NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), has implemented training and certification programs specifically designed for farmers. These programs aim to equip farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully engage in tourism-related ventures.



ATDC'S FUNCTION AND RESPONSIBILITY:

The Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) plays a vital role in promoting agricultural tourism as a means to generate income, employment, and economic stability in rural areas. ATDC plays a crucial role in enhancing a diverse range of activities, services, and facilities offered by farmers and rural communities to attract urban tourists, thereby providing an opportunity for urban dwellers to reconnect with their rural roots. ATDC's efforts contribute to the revitalization of rural economies and facilitate a meaningful exchange between urban and rural populations.

ATDC (Agriculture Technology Development Centre) is currently offering the following services to the farmers in Maharashtra.

ATDC, the Agriculture Tourism Development Corporation, offers a range of facilities and support to farmers in Maharashtra:

- 1. Conducting seminars and conferences:** ATDC organizes seminars and conferences focused on the agro tourism business, providing farmers with valuable insights and knowledge-sharing opportunities.
- 2. Lectures by successful farmers:** ATDC arranges lectures by successful national and international farmers who have excelled in the agro tourism business. These lectures serve as inspiration and learning experiences for farmers.
- 3. Sales and marketing support:** ATDC provides sales and marketing support to farmers, assisting them in promoting their agro tourism ventures and reaching a wider audience.
- 4. Study tours:** ATDC organizes study tours to both national and international agro tourism centers, allowing farmers to gain exposure and learn from best practices implemented in different regions.

5. Project report and business plan preparation: ATDC assists farmers in preparing project reports and business plans for their individual agriculture farms, enabling them to present a comprehensive and well-structured approach to potential investors or funding agencies.

6. Financial support facilitation: ATDC helps farmers in securing financial support from nationalized banks, institutes, and government agencies to develop agro and rural tourism facilities and infrastructure. This includes funding for accommodations, sanitation facilities, approach roads, and more.

7. Business training programs: ATDC conducts training programs specifically tailored to the agro tourism business, equipping farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully run their ventures.

8. Urban farm tours: ATDC coordinates and facilitates tours from urban areas to farms, providing urban visitors with the opportunity to experience and learn about agriculture firsthand

ADVANTAGES OF AGRO-TOURISM

- 1. Cost-effective:** Agro-tourism offers inexpensive options for food, accommodation, recreation, and travel, as it takes place in natural settings.
- 2. Connection to rural roots:** Urban populations, having ancestral ties to villages, develop an interest in agriculture and rural lifestyle, fostering curiosity and learning opportunities.
- 3. Family recreation:** Agro-tourism provides recreational activities suitable for all age groups, allowing families to participate in rural games, festivals, and culinary experiences together.
- 4. Stress relief:** Amidst the busy and stressful urban life, agro-tourism offers a peaceful escape, allowing visitors to unwind and reconnect with nature.
- 5. Authentic experience:** While suburban areas may attempt to recreate village atmospheres through resorts and farmhouses, agro-tourism provides an authentic and immersive rural experience.
- 6. Unique products and activities:** Agro-tourism showcases agricultural products such as fresh farm markets, organic food, and processed goods, while also offering activities like culinary tourism, rural games, and herbal walks.
- 7. Educational opportunities:** Agro-tourism creates awareness about rural life and agriculture among urban school children, provides hands-on training for college students, and serves as a valuable educational tool for agriculture and line department officers. It combines learning with recreation, making education enjoyable and effective.
- 8. Publicity:** Promoting remote agro-tourism units is challenging. Collective efforts from agro-tourism operators, organizations like ITDC and state tourism development corporations, NGOs, press, and tour operators can help with publicity. Utilizing information technology, such as interactive websites and a 24-hour toll-free helpline, can provide essential information to potential agri-tourists.
- 9. Transport:** The lack of approach roads and inadequate transportation facilities in rural areas make it difficult to reach remote agro-tourism units. Telecommunication connectivity is also lacking in many villages. The government should prioritize creating necessary infrastructure, including roads, transportation, and telecommunication facilities, in rural areas where agro-tourism units are established. Public-private partnerships can effectively contribute to these efforts.
- 10. Accommodation:** Providing safe and clean accommodation is crucial in agro-tourism. Urban and foreign tourists seek these minimum facilities. It is important to educate agri-tour operators about the importance of quality accommodation and provide incentives for their efforts. Ensuring regular clean water supply and well-maintained toilets is essential, while limiting modern facilities that may not be of interest to agri-tourists.
- 11. Networking:** Establishing a network of public and private stakeholders at the national and state levels is necessary to support agro-tourism operators in remote

areas. This network can provide policy support, infrastructure development, and publicity for agro-tourism units.

12. Capacity building of farmers:

Farmers need to be trained in maintaining facilities, hospitality, and public relations, as they may not be familiar with these aspects of the tourism industry.

13. Safety of tourists:

Agro-tourism units are often located in remote areas with limited infrastructure, medical facilities, and telecommunication services. Measures should be taken to ensure the safety of tourists, including support from the local population and provisions for emergency medical care.

14. Public-Private partnership:

Agripreneurs, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, NGOs, and agribusiness companies can collaborate with farmers and government agencies to develop agro-tourism ventures. Involving transporters and the hospitality industry can also bring mutual benefits to all parties involved.

CONCLUSION :

Agro-tourism has great potential for rural economies and offers a special chance for city people to connect with nature and rural lifestyles. It encourages sustainable farming practices, provides fun activities for people of all ages, and helps local communities by creating jobs and income. To make the most of agro-tourism's benefits, we need to focus on things like advertising, transportation, places to stay, connecting people, helping farmers, keeping tourists safe, and working together with private companies. By facing these challenges and making the most of the appealing features of rural places, agro-tourism can help both rural and urban areas develop better and create a stronger appreciation for agriculture and country life.

