



Potential and Challenges of Rural Tourism in Punjab

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ABSTRACT

Real India lives in villages. Almost 74% of the population lives in its 7 million villages. Rural areas are an integral part of the modern tourist experience. The recognition of rural tourism as an alternative to mainstream is a recent concept. 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. There is a large potential market for rural tourism especially for foreign tourists that need to be tapped strategically. Besides, there is a huge domestic tourism market with an estimated 240 million tourists. The World Tourism Organization notes that there is a clear trend in the growth of rural tourism. The World Travel and Tourism Council has rated India as one of the six fastest growing tourism economies in the World. Rural tourism is vital for sustainable rural development that exploits resources in rural areas and generates benefits to rural areas. Against this backdrop the present paper focuses on potential and strategies of rural tourism in Punjab for sustainable development.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Sustainable Development, World Tourism Organisation.

I. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most important revenue generating sectors for all countries besides its special feature as being an important job generator sector. It also serves as a catalyst for development. When development and growth issues are concerned, the tourism sector has achieved great importance just because, like no other sector, tourism is in a position that creates prosperity and economic development opportunities even for places which would not be considered and used as an economic resource. 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. 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.

In this context the state of Punjab has initiated towards the promotion of rural tourism for sustainable development. Against this backdrop the present paper is an attempt to highlight the potential and strategies of rural tourism for the sustainable development of Punjab. The paper is conceptual in nature mainly based on secondary sources of data. Besides Introduction in Section-I, the role of rural tourism for the sustainable development has been discussed in Section-II of the paper. Section-III deals with the scope, constraints and strategies of rural tourism in the context of Punjab. The conclusions along with scope for the further research has been incorporated in Section-IV.

II Rural Tourism for Sustainable Development

Tourism has become a major sector of economic activity worldwide, covering a broad range of enterprises, areas and stakeholders. It is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Tourism, thus, can go a long way in changing the fortunes of the country which is always reeling under the problem of unemployment and fiscal deficit. Foreign tourism along with domestic tourism may contribute to India in its mission of becoming a developed country by 2020 (Bhardwaj and Singh, 2010).

Rural tourism is currently the focus of attention throughout the world and is being recognized as an important instrument of growth for the rural economy. Rural tourism showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at locations. It is a multi-faceted and entails Agri-tourism, Cultural tourism, Nature tourism, Adventure tourism and Eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain unique features such as; it is experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, predominantly in natural environment, meshes with seasonality and local events and based on presentation of culture, heritage and traditions. Today, the importance of tourism and the necessity of conducting research on it because of significant economic, and social, and cultural roles that it can play is known for everyone. It has turned into one of the most important factors to create wealth, job, dynamism, moving people, and national assets (Moshabaki and Malek, 2004).

Rural tourism development has always been a valuable, growing economic strategy, and an advantage of low risks and costs and considering that resources are available, costs are low and plans are smaller compared to other tourism plans (projects). It helps to economic growth, create variety and stability in employment, dynamism in commerce and industries, creating opportunities to larger incomes in multiple activities, creating new markets for agricultural products and enhance a basis for the regional economy. One of the most important features of rural tourism economy is the motivation that the private sector has for investment in tourism because

it is small, varied and simple. It is a rather important field in rural development which can build up opportunities and facilities especially for employment and regional income and play a crucial role in reviving and rebuilding rural regions. The role and importance of tourism in the process of rural development had been proved in many countries.

The importance of rural tourism as a part of the overall tourism market depends on each country's recreation/tourism resources, infrastructure image, market access and the presence of other type of tourism products. Even if rural tourism may be minor in relation to the overall tourism market of many countries, its importance to the development of specific rural areas may be critical. Thus, the multiplier effect is often more impacting in rural areas where the entire rural lifestyle is located for a main attraction. Planners are using rural tourism, which also includes eco tourism and farm tourism to increase economic opportunities for the rural people. The motivation behind rural is to escape limitations and the urban routine life and the regulations opposite to the free will and voluntary entertainment. Rural tourism's greatest potential benefit is its ability to generate money which can translate in to numerous positive economic opportunities for locals and their communities. For local the first benefit of tourism development is jobs both within the tourism sector and outside of it. Tourism development means more income and profits for tourist related business. The economic multiplier model suggests that if local income from tourist expenditures is spent within local area, an increase in local income and jobs will follow (Indolia, 2012).

III Rural Tourism in Punjab

Punjab is a state in the northwest of the Republic of India, forming part of the larger Punjab region. The state is bordered by the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh to the east, Haryana to the south and southeast and Rajasthan to the southwest as well as the Pakistani province of Punjab to the west. It is also bounded to the north by Jammu and Kashmir. Tourism in Indian Punjab centres around the historic palaces, battle sites, and the great Sikh architecture of the state and the surrounding region. Examples include various sites of the Indus Valley Civilization, the ancient fort of Bathinda, the architectural monuments of Kapurthala, Patiala, and Chandigarh, the modern capital designed by Le Corbusier. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is one of the major tourist destinations of Punjab and indeed India, attracting more visitors than the Taj Mahal. Lonely Planet Bluelist 2008 has voted the Harmandir Sahib as one of the world's best spiritual sites. Moreover, there is a rapidly expanding array of international hotels in the holy city that can be booked for overnight stays. The Indian state of Punjab is known for its cuisine, culture and history. Some of the main cities in Punjab are Amritsar, Jalandhar, Lu-

dhiana and Patiala. Punjab's public transportation network provides excellent tourist transportation. Tourists to Punjab can enjoy culture, ancient civilization, spirituality and history. Punjab has a rich religious history incorporating Sikhism, Islam and Hinduism. The royal Punjabi palaces, historic battle sites, shrines, temples and examples of Sikh architecture are notable attractions. Punjabi cuisine includes a wide range of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian dishes. Due to the scope and depth of Punjab's history there are many places of interest. Tourism is a swiftly expanding sector in Punjab. Focusing on existing rich culture of the State, Punjab Government has decided to give a major fillip to tourism and promote rural tourism in the State. For the purpose, the Government has identified a cluster of four villages namely Katli, Bahadarpur, Tibba Tapparain and Ranjittpura Bas in Rupnagar district which would be developed with the entire infrastructure needed to provide a new experience to the tourists visiting the State.

In order to tap the potential, there is a dire need to focus on certain key issues such as participation of local government, efficient tourism promotion and development programs, co-operation between local government and entrepreneurs and community support for tourism development are essential for successful tourism in Punjab.

IV Conclusions

Rural tourism is in its nascent stage in India but it is bound to grow. The experience of many countries shows that rural tourism can be seen as an alternate source of livelihood and employment. The main problems with rural tourism are, of course, the same as with any rural development project. Strong village-level institutions, which can take up the execution once the project has been initiated, would go a long way in boosting rural tourism (Mukherjee, 2012, Yojna). Therefore, rural tourism has great potential and can earn high revenue in near future. The economic quality of a region is due its own resources to produce a gross income, which can provide high levels of consumption and accumulation in the region for a long time. The ecological quality of a regional development is the ability of the region to maintain its natural resource potential and high qualities of environment during a long period of time. In the light of present study, further research issues such as Public Private Partnership (PPP) in rural tourism, Entrepreneurship Development Programs etc. can be further areas of research in this context. Thus, tourism depends upon human, it has to respond to the needs of the tourists, needs of the local communities, be socio-economic and culturally well planned and environmentally sound. There is a vast scope of rural tourism in the state of Punjab. The government should develop efficient strategies to tap the potential by the involvement of local community by realising their benefits from rural tourism.

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