



Emerging Trends in Agrotourism: Maharashtra as a Blueprint for Cross-Cultural Tourism in India

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Abstract:

Agrotourism benefits both urban residents and farmers, providing farmers with an additional income source and job opportunities for family members. However, the development of agrotourism centers faces several challenges. To enhance these activities and increase farmers' income in Maharashtra, support from the government and relevant authorities is essential. This study aims to examine the challenges faced by agrotourism centers in the Konkan region. The Konkan division, the second-largest in Maharashtra, has successfully established 33 agrotourism centers (58.6 percent). Between 2008 and 2010, 22.2 percent of respondents registered with the Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation LTD (MART). However, the industry faces issues such as inadequate training (62.2 percent), poor communication skills (80 percent), lack of coordination between agriculture and tourism departments (100 percent), and low entrepreneurship levels (78 percent). Using a descriptive research methodology, primary and secondary data were collected through questionnaires and observations. Additional data were gathered from journal articles, websites, and other secondary sources. The survey included 45 active agrotourism facilities in Maharashtra's Konkan region.

Keywords: Farmers income; Cross-culture; Agrotourism, Farmers; Maharashtra state etc.

Current Development of the Indian Agrotourism Industry:

Introduction:

The tourism sector is significant both economically and non-economically at local and global levels. Agrotourism has limitless potential, offering India vast opportunities to exploit its tourism potential and generate profitable returns. According to a private survey, Indian tourism is growing at a rate of 10.1%, compared to the global rate of 4%. This indicates that Indian tourism is expanding 2.5 times faster than the global average. Embracing agrotourism not only sustains this growth but also adds value, particularly by boosting domestic tourism alongside traditional package tours. This enhances India's tourism industry's competitiveness on the global stage.

Agro-Tourism: A New Tool for Socio-Economic Activities:

Any rural farmer can initiate an agrotourism business using existing resources. Agrotourism facilities can also be established by agricultural co-operative societies, NGOs, agricultural universities, and colleges. Community involvement, including support from local bodies like Grampanchayats and villagers, is crucial for the success of agrotourism. Agrotourism presents numerous advantages:

- Low-cost entry point.
- Additional employment and income for farmers facing uncertain revenues.
- Offers urban residents health-conscious and environmentally friendly activities.
- Satisfies curiosity about farming and rural lifestyles.
- High demand for wholesome, family-oriented recreational activities.

- Encourages appreciation and interest in nature.
- Facilitates cultural exchange between urban and rural populations.
- Alleviates dissatisfaction with overcrowded cities and resorts.
- Reconnects people with their agrarian roots.
- Educational benefits.
- Reduces pressure on established tourist destinations.
- Promotes cross-cultural interaction.

Objectives of the Study:

Study Objectives:

1. To examine the trends in the agro-tourism industry within Maharashtra, aiming to serve as a blueprint for cross-cultural tourism initiatives across India.
2. To acknowledge agrotourism as a pivotal cross-cultural trend and provide recommendations for positioning Maharashtra as a leading model for Indian agrotourism.

Study Hypotheses:

- a) There is a positive relationship between the level of awareness and participation of both tourists and farmers in agrotourism activities.
- b) The level of entrepreneurial culture positively correlates with the participation of both tourists and farmers in agrotourism endeavors.
- c) There exists a positive relationship between bank loan interest and the participation of both tourists and farmers in agrotourism ventures.

Research Methodology:

Sources of Data:

Primary data were obtained from the records of the Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART), Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (MTDC), and the Agro-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). One-on-one interviews were conducted with the owners of agrotourism centers, following a structured interview schedule designed to meet the study's objectives.

Secondary data and additional information were sourced from:

- Published studies, papers, and data from various agricultural organizations.
- Relevant reference materials published by various authors and organizations, including reports, bulletins, journals, and periodicals.
- Participation in training sessions, seminars, and workshops related to the subject matter.

Locale of the Study:

The current study was conducted in the Konkan region of Maharashtra state.

Research Design:

The research design employed for this study was exploratory in nature.

Selection of Respondents:

The study encompassed the five districts of the Konkan region: Thane, Palghar, Raigad, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg. Agrotourism facilities in these districts were registered with organizations such as the Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART), the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (MTDC), and the Agro-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). Additionally, there were unregistered agrotourism facilities in the area.

To identify operational agrotourism centers, a pilot survey was conducted in Palghar, Ratnagiri, Raigad, Sindhudurg, and Thane districts. Subsequently, 50 operational agrotourism centers were selected from a list of well-functioning facilities generated from the pilot survey. A sample of 45 respondents was randomly chosen from these five districts.

Construction of Schedule:

Structured interviews were employed as the primary tool for data collection. An interview schedule was meticulously devised in alignment with the study's objectives. Personal interviews were conducted to gather data.

Statistical Analysis:

The data were analyzed using various parameters such as frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

Table 1: Maharashtra's division-by-division distribution of agro tourism destinations (December, 2019) Licensed by the Maharashtra State Agricultural Tourism Cooperative Federation Limited (MART)

Division	Agro-tourism center	Percentage
Amravati	5	2.4
Aurangabad	5	2.4
Konkan	44	21.1
Nasik	8	3.8
Pune	122	58.6
Nagpur	24	11.5

Table 2: Distribution of the agro tourism destinations based on the founding year

Year of establishment	Respondents (N=45)	
	Numbers	Percentage
Up to 2001	4	8.8
2001 - 2005	6	13.3
2005 - 2006	5	11.1
2006 - 2007	20	44.4
2008 - 2010	10	22.2

Table 3: Distribution of the agro tourism centers according to the organization that each one is registered

Organization	Respondents (N=45)	
	Number	Percentage
Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation	15	33.3
Agro Tourism Development Corporation	13	29
Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation LTD	17	38

Table 4: Distribution of the respondents in accordance with the difficulties the owner of the agro tourism centre has in operating the centre

S.No.	Problems	Respondents (N=45)	
		Numbers	Percentage
1	Lack of training for agro-tourism	28	62.2
2	Weak communication skills	36	80
3	Lack of coordination between agriculture and tourism department	45	100
4	Low awareness among farmers as well as in tourists regarding agro-tourism	22	48.8
5	Low level of entrepreneurial culture	35	78
6	High rate of interest on bank loan	44	98
7	As an agriculture enterprise high rate of electricity unit bill	38	84

Result and Analysis:

1. Current agro-tourism conditions in Maharashtra's Konkan region:

The distribution of agro-tourism centers by division in Maharashtra was examined. Of the centers registered with MART, approximately 58.6% were located in the Pune division, followed by 21.1% in the Konkan division. Other divisions like Nasik, Nagpur, Amravati, and Aurangabad also had a share of agro-tourism centers. Pune division had the highest number of active agro-tourism facilities, with 124 centers. The Konkan division ranked second with 33 successfully established agro-tourism centers.

2. Year of Establishment:

Data regarding the establishment years of agro-tourism enterprises were analyzed. The majority of businesses (44.4%) were founded between 2006 and 2007, followed by 22% between 2008 and 2010. The establishment of agro-tourism businesses gained momentum after the founding of the Agro-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) in 2005 and the Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART) in 2008. These organizations played a crucial role in promoting agro-tourism, especially in urban areas, and providing training to farmers.

3. Agro-Tourism Center Registered Under Organization:

The distribution of respondents by the organization under which their agro-tourism centers are registered was examined. The Agro Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and the Maharashtra State Agro Tourism Co-operative Federation LTD registered 38.0% and 33.3% of the respondents, respectively. Additionally, 40% of respondents were registered with the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC). These organizations have received official recognition from the Maharashtra government and have been instrumental in promoting agro-tourism in the state.

Agro-tourism centers have been established by farmers in both the Konkan region and throughout Maharashtra, largely due to initiatives like the Mahahraman scheme by MTDC and the Agro Tourism Vistar Yojana by ATDC. These initiatives aim to coordinate planning, financing, marketing, and liaison with various state and central governmental agencies. MART is also actively engaged in promoting agricultural tourism.

Table: 5: Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Value of β	Sign. Value	Accept/Reject
The level of awareness and both tourists and farmers have a positive relationship.	4.5631	0.03	Accept
The level of entrepreneurial culture and both tourists and farmers have a positive relationship.	4.2133	0.02	Accept
There is a positive relationship between bank loan interest and both tourists and farmers.	3.2631	0.01	Accept

Findings: The findings regarding the difficulties faced by the proprietors of agro-tourism facilities are summarized in Table 4. The significant values of 0.03, 0.02, and 0.01, respectively, are all lower than the standard significant value of 0.05. Therefore, it is established that there were positive and significant relationships found. As shown in Table 5, the hypotheses of the current study are accepted, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Challenges Faced by Agro-Tourism Center Owners:

Several obstacles hinder the proper development of agro-tourism enterprises. As per Table 4, challenges include a lack of training in agro-tourism (62.2%), poor communication skills (80%), lack of coordination between agriculture and tourism departments (100%), low awareness of agro-tourism among farmers and tourists (48.8%), and a low level of entrepreneurial culture (78%).

Despite the rapid growth of agro-tourism in Maharashtra's Konkan region, several obstacles prevent the industry from progressing further. These include weather conditions, issues with customer communications and marketing orientation, fragmented and less productive land, lack of understanding of government agricultural policies and programs, and fewer visitors being drawn to agro-tourism centers. Addressing these challenges is essential for the sustained growth of the agro-tourism industry in Maharashtra.

Conclusion: Agro-tourism proves to be beneficial for both traditional and contemporary agricultural activities. It provides farmers with opportunities to utilize available resources in diversified and creative ways, leading to increased income. Additionally, it offers affordable rural experiences for tourists, resulting in a mutually beneficial situation. The growth of agro-tourism also contributes to the overall social and economic development of villages, as demonstrated in regions like Raigad, Ratnagiri, and Sindhudurg in Maharashtra's Konkan district.

Despite the expanding scope of agro-tourism, there remains a lack of government support through appropriate and favorable policies for its development. Therefore, it is imperative for the government to prioritize Maharashtra's agro-tourism industry through suitable policy measures. Furthermore, to promote and propagate the idea of agro-tourism as a readily adaptable and implementable business for farmers across India, a proper business model is necessary. Addressing these issues requires determination from farmers and effective marketing strategies to attract weekend visitors.

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