



RE-THINKING THE RURAL TOURISM OPPORTUNITY AND RURAL MARKETING-A CASE STUDY OF SOLAPUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Rural tourism might seem easily defined as travel to rural areas but research has shown that it is much more complex (Lane, 1993b). India lies in her villages, nearly 98 per cent of the total geographical area of India constitutes rural areas, in which 72 per cent of the total population (68 per cent according to 2011 census) live. Since independence most of the national policies have been focusing upon rural development. But issues like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, regional imbalances and environmental degradation through deforestation; health and sanitary factors in rural areas remain unsolved. Many of the planners blame commercial viability for this matter. At the same time these rural areas possess natural and socio-cultural resources, which are fantastic sources for tourism and recreation. Systematic tourism development in rural areas through public participation can contribute towards the socio-economic development of these areas.

The present study is based on secondary data. It was analyzed with the help of statistical techniques and geographical information system. The study reveals that Solapur district has number of rural tourist destinations such as religious (Gaudgaon Hydra and Bhuranpur in Akkalkot, Machnur in Mangalwedha, Kudal Sangam in South Solapur, Akluj in Malshiras, Aran in Mohoal, Vatambhare in Sanagole,) etc and historical and agro tourist centers. The data reveals that more than 90 per cent of tourists were visited these destinations. It is directly benefited to rural community. Therefore, it is necessary to rethink about rural tourism in view of rural marketing which has wide potential to generate employment, number of driving forces and it also helps to stop rural urban migration phenomena. The study suggests that to collect the in depth data about rural tourism and accordingly to frame and implement policies with allocation of budget to strengthen the rural tourism. Growth in rural tourism is difficult to quantify, because non availability of data in India as well as Maharashtra is the limitation of the present paper.

INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism might seem easily defined as travel to rural areas but research has shown that it is much more complex (Lane, 1993b). There are a variety of examples of the ways tourism is undertaken in rural areas, including: nature-based activities, festivals, heritage events, aboriginal-based attractions and events, agri-tourism, arts and crafts shows, community theatre and others. As Lane points out, rural tourism is a multi-faceted and complex activity which includes everything from farm-based tourism to educational travel, health tourism, 'ethnic' tourism and ecotourism (1993a).

Rural Tourism events have been found to increase business, income and employment and are seen to assist with social and economic development. Tourism can be an important source of jobs for rural communities. Tourism not only offers business opportunities to local residents, but it can also

enhance local quality of life. Tourism can also support local culture in rural areas by encouraging restoration of local and regional historic sites.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are as follows...

1. To collect information on rural tourism and to identify different types of rural tourism.
2. To provide an overview on driving forces and benefits of rural tourism.
3. To identify issues for future research and development for rural tourism.

METHODOLOGY APPLIED

Present paper is based on secondary data which has been collected from various government and non government agencies and it was analysed to focus the strength of rural tourism in our country and in our state.

DISCUSSION

Rural tourism can be defined as the country experience which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural cultural and/or natural environments. Consequently, rural tourism in its purest form should be located in rural areas. Functionally rural – built upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, tradition, societies and traditional practices. Rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small-scale. Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area.

TYPES OF RURAL TOURISM

Tourism is synthesized from mass and alternative tourism. Mass tourism is characterized by large numbers of people seeking culture holidays in popular resort destinations. Alternative tourism is sometimes referred to as special interest tourism or responsible tourism and it's usually taken to mean alternative forms of tourism which give emphasis on the contact and understanding of inhabitants' way of living and the local natural environment. The diversity of attractions included within rural tourism includes heritage tourism (sometimes referred to as cultural heritage tourism), nature-based tourism/ecotourism, agro-tourism, as well as partnership-based approaches, such as scenic byways and heritage areas. Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past.

A second major type of rural tourism activity is nature-based tourism/ecotourism (sometimes called recreation-based tourism), which refers to the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active (increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities.

A third major form of tourism is agro-tourism, which refers to, —the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including farmers' markets, —petting|| farms, roadside stands, and

—pick-your-own|| operations; engaging in overnight farm or ranch stays and other farm visits; and visiting agriculture-related festivals, museums, and other such attractions.

To Agree the Aims of Rural Tourism Development

Aims may include a wide range:

Job retention, creation and diversification;

The conservation of traditional buildings and habitats;

Community support;

Transport system support;

Agriculture / forestry support;

The development of a better quality of life for rural peoples;

The development of new roles for disadvantaged/ under-employed Groups;

Quality-of-life enhancement for visitors from urban areas, last in this list but a crucial aim in many respects.

Rural tourism strategists need to determine their aims before commencing development; those aims should be reviewed periodically.

Clearly, rural tourism, while still only a minority tourism market, is already making a valuable contribution to rural economies. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of jobs, contributions towards funding conservation, encouragement to the adoption of new working practices, and the injection of a new vitality into sometimes weakened economies. In total, tourism promises potential benefits to rural development.

BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURISM

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Job retention

Rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. It can also provide additional income for farmers, and, in some cases, for foresters and fisherman. Job retention is not as politically glamorous as job creation, but, by helping the viability of small communities, it is critical to the survival of marginal areas. Studies of rural Austria, Sweden and Ireland have documented the role of tourism in job retention.

Job creation

Job creation typically occurs in the hotel and catering trades, but can also take place in transport, retailing, and in information/heritage interpretation. Studies in Britain suggest that job creation varies by enterprise type. Farmhouse accommodation and bed-and-breakfast can create up to 23 jobs per £ 100 000 of tourism revenue. Job creation effects are less marked in hotels and caravan/campsites, yielding approximately six jobs per £ 100 000 of revenue.

New Business Opportunities

Tourism generates new opportunities for industry¹⁸. Even those rural businesses not directly involved in tourism can benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist

facilities where local foods can be used as part of the tourism offering in a locality¹⁹. Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complementary businesses such as service stations and new businesses are created to cater to tourist needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts/crafts.

Opportunities for Youth

The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited to the energies and enthusiasm of young people. Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct involvement in running tourism businesses, especially those within small community.

The Historic built environment

The historic built environment can benefit from rural tourism in two ways. Many historic properties now charge for admission in order to maintain their fabrics and surrounding gardens and parklands. Secondly, there are important buildings from the past which have become redundant.

How Best to Relate to Markets

Directly linked with the market information question comes the issue of how best to relate to markets. Major resorts and tour operators use sophisticated, expensive and sometimes wasteful methods to reach their customers. Rural tourism areas often -- but not always -- have weak and amateur links to their markets. There would be value in the publication of an evaluated good-practice guide looking at a range of successful areas and the techniques they have employed to relate to their markets. Special emphasis should be given to evaluating:

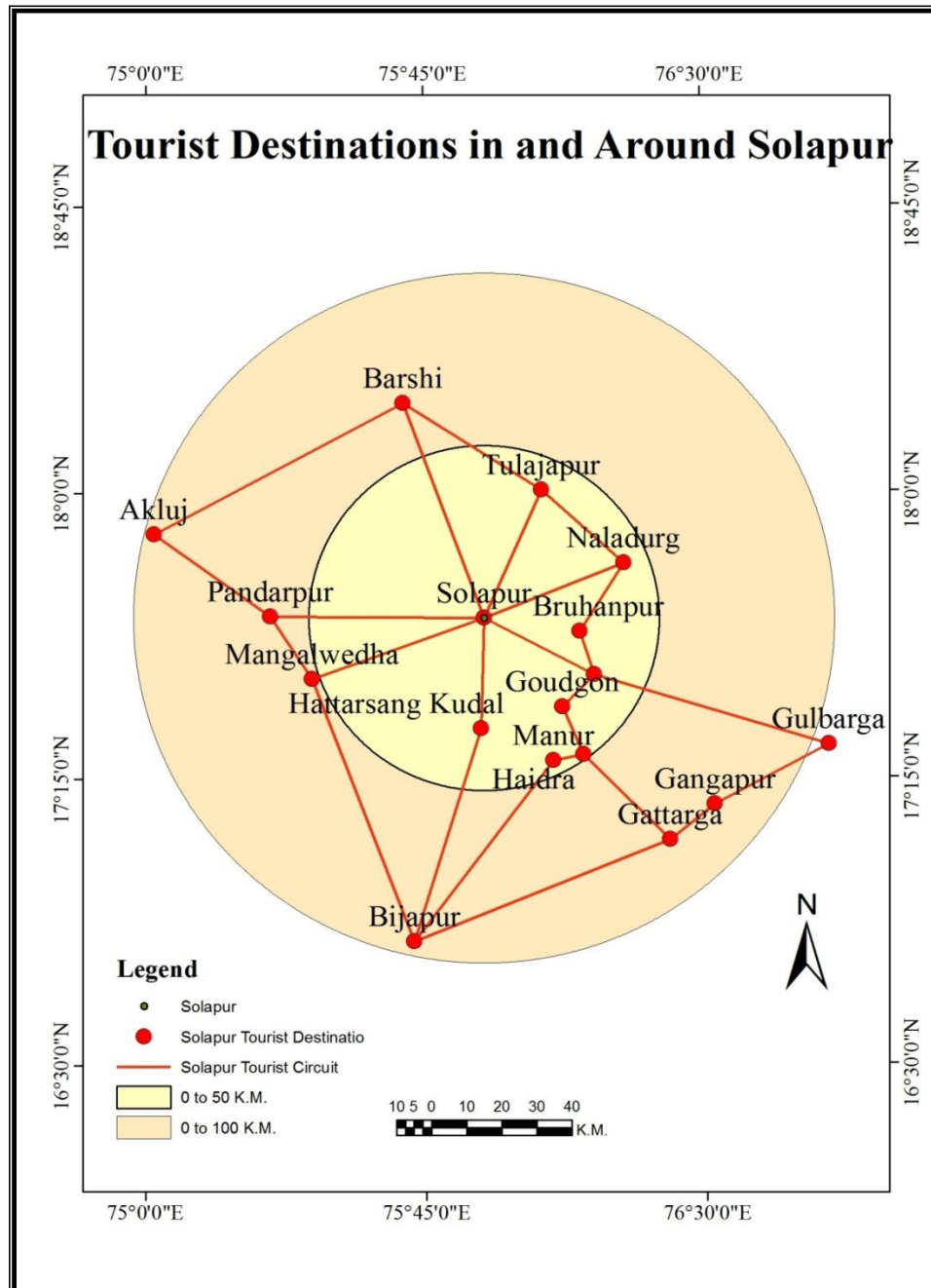
- Brochure/leaflet design and distribution;
- co-operative marketing ventures;
- product versus area promotion;
- repeat visit potential;
- direct mail;
- mailing list swaps/purchases;
- niche marketing;
- tour operator relationships;
- the use of telecommunications;
- evaluation techniques.

Solapur District: Unexplored Potential of Rural Tourism

Tourism has been identified as tool for the development and leading employment generator for the host destinations. Geographically our country had divided number of climatic divisions. Drought prone region always hampering for the economic development of the state and entire country. But most of the tourist destinations are located in such regions. Therefore tourism can be utilize for the removal of economic backwardness of regions. Solapur district is also one the drought prone district of the Maharashtra state, in the entire district Solapur Pandharpur, Akkalkot and Akluj are the existing tourist destinations are located along with this number of emerging and potential tourist destination are located.

Tuljapur is one of the SHAKTIPEETH (Goddess Ambhabhavani) lakhs of pilgrims not only from Maharashtra but also from Karnataka, Goa, Andhra Pradesh and Madha Pradesh regularly visit to seek darshan of Devi. Naldurg is another historical and eco tourist destination in this district. Karnataka state boundary is geographically very close to Solapur district. Bijapur and Gulbarga district of Karnataka is having number of tourist destination such as Golgmbhaz ,a world famous historical tourist destination

,KudalSangam a religious and eco tourist destinations are located in Bijapur district, Ganagapur a second incarnation of Lord Dattatraya, Bandenavaz a muslim religious place are located in Gulbarga district. The pilgrim tourist visiting these destinations are Multi-Cultured, multi-caste and multi-lingual community. (Smith,M.2009).



A Map is showing the different tourist destinations in and around Solapur. With the help of Buffering a destination is marked showing 50 and 100 km distance from Solapur city. These destinations cover Solapur, Osmanabad (Maharashtra) and Gulbarga, Bijapur (Karnataka) districts. It reveals through buffering that a maximum tourist destinations such as Akkalkot, Tuljapur, Mangalvede and Naldurg are

located within the range of 50 kms. From Solapur city. Tourist can easily access all these destinations along with some of potential tourist destination such as Burhanpur, H.Kudal Goudgaon, and Hydra. In second circle of buffer i. e. 100 kms. From Solapur city the existing tourist destinations are Pandharpur, Akluj (MS) Vijapur, Ganagapur and Gulbarga (KS).

CONCLUSION:

Tourism is not the panacea for all rural problems but it has number of positive attractions. It is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes. Rural Tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or manmade attractions, amenities and facilities, transportation, marketing and information systems. Rural tourism is very diverse and fragmented in terms of operational structures, activities, markets and operating environments.

Generally, rural tourism is an opportunity for rural development however; it may not be as great as some perceive and it may not be suitable for every location. For example, local tourism impact varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force qualifications, characteristics and seasonality issues. Therefore, the development of rural tourism offers potential solutions to many of the problems facing rural areas..Solapur district is having various types of tourist destinations only thing is that all respective authority should take a bold decision for the overall development of rural community. No doubt there is evidence to support the claim that, as a vehicle of economic growth and diversification, tourism can make an important contribution to rural incomes both at the level of the tourism operators and more widely in the local economy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Solapur district has existing and potential tourist destinations ,therefore it is recommended that a Multi Level Tourism Institute should be established in which various types of courses should be framed in which market oriented and quality human resource should be established.
2. Solapur is emerging as tourist hub so it is necessary to develop Information Centers at all the entry points of each tourist destinations.
3. To grab the attention of the tourists printed materials need to be prepared by considering the Unique Selling Proportion and basic rules of product mix and its promotion.
4. An elaborate and effective distribution system should be implemented to ensure distribution of brochures through information centers and internet.
5. To create awareness campaigns, advertisements may be designed and telecasted /broadcasted in different print/electronic media.
6. A strong Tie-Up with Travel Agencies and Tour Operators should be established, so that they can act as marketing agents for the tourist sites of the district.
7. The aspect of availability of wayside amenities along the roads connecting various tourist spots needs particular attention with the participation of the private players.
8. Representatives from travel agencies, tour operators reporters from Print and Electronic Media, travel writers, novelists, celebrities like people from T.V., or films world, player and sports personnel should be brought to these places by the District Administration of Solapur by conducting 'Familiarization Tours.
9. Directly engaged human resources. (Temple site, Hotels, Lodging ,Tour Operator, Travel Agencies etc.,)

10. Indirectly engaged human resources like employees or self-employed people of other informal and subsidiary sectors who are fully or partially dependent on tourism.(Auto-Rickshaws, Private Vehicles, Grocery Shops etc.,
11. Entire population, though may be not fully related, but contributing to the overall hospitality of the destination

Future Research and Development Programmes

- All successful industries devote resources to research and development. Rural tourism is still a relatively new area of business, and, therefore, much basic research is needed. That basic research is especially critical because of the highly competitive nature of the free enterprise tourism market. The countryside may have intrinsic advantages because of the growth of special
- Interest, independent holiday-making, but existing rural destinations and mass tourism enterprises are already researching how best to improve their marketing and their products to regain market share. The following are the important market research areas,
- Market Information, Benefit Assessment and Enhancement,
- Management, Control and Operational Issues

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