

TANTALIZING OF RURAL TOURISM IN TRIPURA

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ABSTRACT

Global economic restructuring has created a climate in which many local economies have to adjust, in order to maintain or enhance their socio-economic viability. As Butler et al. (1998) note economic and social forces operating at the global level are determining both the nature and form of the rural landscape and how we value and use it. These changes, coupled with new ideas and approaches to leisure and recreation time are encouraging tourism development in rural areas at an ever increasing pace (Williams 1998; Reid et al. 2004).

Rural tourism development in areas not traditionally considered tourism destinations per se occurs incrementally; either as a result of entrepreneurs developing businesses that attract visitors or as a result of visitors discovering the area and thereby generating a demand for tourism related activities to which local entrepreneurs responds. The development of tourism in a rural area is not simply a matter of matching tourist demands with local product supply but a matter of evaluating local suitability and acceptability.

KEYWORDS: *tourism, tourism development, Rural tourism, ecotourism, walking, climbing*

1.INTRODUCTION

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 and/or natural environments. Rural Tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or manmade attractions, amenities and facilities, transportation, marketing and information systems (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997)

Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism. A major form of tourism is agri-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. The basic concept of rural tourism is to benefit the 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 (Mishra,2001).

The development of a strong platform around the concept of Rural Tourism is definitely useful for a country like India, where more than 70% of the population resides in its villages. The real heart of the India is its Village where ancient traditional and ways of life continue unchanged today and Rural Tourism is one of the few activities which can bring rural development in these villages. 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.

Blessed with its immense natural beauty, luscious green hills, a wide variety of flora and fauna and a number of different communities residing in the rural areas, make the rural tourism in Tripura Tantalizing. The wealth of tourism resources endows Tripura with comparative advantage, over many other states has made it’s tremendous strength of tourism attractions. Yet for many reasons this advantage has not brought for the state the preeminent position that it deserves. So there is a felt need to assess the prospects of development

of rural tourism in the state. The present study aims to do the same. The study aims to assess the rural communities' perception regarding the prospects and challenges in development of rural tourism in the state since these rural communities are the main and direct stakeholders of the sector. The study also intends to find out feasible suggestive measures to improve the current situation in order to make Tripura a popular destination for rural tourism.

1.1.LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most popular issues is rural community development is the use of tourism as a tool for development (Lewis, et.al 1998). There is a good deal of information about rural tourism including economic analysis of tourism, its impacts, and its effect on people. R.N. Kaul (1985) points out that "one of the reasons for travel has been the desire to widen one's knowledge and understanding about other peoples, place, and countries and study their culture, customs, ways of life and heritage and satisfies ones curiosity about them.

Rural tourism is a subset of tourism that consists of ranging aspect such as farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. Any form of tourism that displays the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism (Kumar, 2008). Rural tourism is essentially an activity that takes place in the countryside. Rural tourism creates experiences for tourist who enjoys locations that are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in natural environment, and it meshes with seasonality and local events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. Rural tourism has become quite admired since the last few years.

According to Negi (1990) attractions in rural areas includes enjoyment of rural scenery, the desire for open space, quiet and peace of mind. Rural sports like hunting, fishing, ethnic attractions like folk life, custom, food, drinks, and festivals. Educational and historical attractions like castles, churches, temples etc. Respondents to an English Tourism Council research project on rural tourism described the concept of rural tourism as 'peace and quiet', 'slower pace of life', 'fresh air', 'non urbanized' and 'lots of space.' This research also stated that rural tourism could encompass 'gentle' countryside (farms, fields, and cows), 'rugged' countryside (moors, hills, and mountains), coastal areas and non-urbanized towns and villages. Vanhoe (1980) noticed, "Five most commonly occurring economic variables affecting tourism demand are income level, population, relative prices, and exchange rate and travel costs."

Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) argue the benefit of tourism results from an alternative development strategy for economic and social regeneration of rural areas, as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth, increased viability of underdeveloped regions and improve the standard of living of local communities. Hall and Jenkins (1998) suggest that the expansion of tourist flows in rural areas: To sustain and create local incomes, employment and growth, to contribute to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure, to encourage the development of other industrial sectors, to contribute to local resident amenities and services. Also important is to contribute to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources. Lane .B (1994) points

out that "rural tourism should be –located at rural areas. Functionally rural i.e. small scale enterprises, open space; natural contact, heritage, traditional, societal practices etc; rural in scale; traditional in character; take different forms representing the complex pattern of rural environment, tourists share in village life, and rural villages gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. Again, according to Chakraborty (2007), Tourism services can increase employment, but businesses may target skilled labour elsewhere rather than train local labour from amongst the poor. According to Singh (1994), the interest of tourism and heritage conservation is complementary and thus tourism and culture become partners in the developmental process.

2.OBJECTIVES

- Tantalizing aspects of Tourism in Tripura with reference to prospect and challenges of rural Tourism.
- To assess the problems are facing by Tripura to develop rural tourism.
- To give suggestive measures in order to make improvements in the present condition and thus contribute to the Tripura's rural tourism sector.

3. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Rural tourism as a component of overall tourism industry is fraught with immense potential in Tripura because of the hilly serenity and a predominantly pastoral setting in which the state is nestled. The economic development of Tripura and the process of Urbanisation that gained in momentum since the year 1998 has been continuing with a drive and vigour unmatched by any other state of the north-eastern region. For all the development and urbanization, however, Tripura continues to be dominated by its vast picturesque rural hinterland and lush hills cape. The greenery of the state's rural landscape dotted with paddy fields, natural lakes and serpentine rivers beckon any newcomer or tourist to Tripura. The hills cape, on the other hand, is dotted with traditional tribal households made of thatch and bamboo, elevated from the land to ward off dangerous wild animals and reptiles.

For hundreds of years the indigenous tribals, particularly 'Jhumias' (shifting cultivators) among them, have been making their typical forest habitats in this fashion which exists even today and marks a continuity in the state's cultural tradition and socio-economic life of the tribals in all its pristine purity. Besides satisfying one's aesthetic senses, tourists visiting the rural and hilly interiors of the state can have sight of Tripura's rich tradition of handloom and handicraft which outsell products from other states in the national and international market. Truly a commercial bonanza is within easy reach of tourists to rural backwaters of Tripura and the hilly interiors of the state. Any tourist can stay in tourist lodges in district and sub-divisional headquarters and have a close feel of the rural life and culture. Besides, the system of having paying guests in rural households is prevalent in Tripura now. Many a paying guest stays and works in the Mizo- dominated Jampui hills of North Tripura. What adds to the attraction of the hillscape in Jampui is the serene desolation of a tri-junction comprising borders of Tripura, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh and outlying areas close to Myanmar border. Even a low power binocular enables a tourist or visitor to have a look well inside Bangladesh and Myanmar. Apart from this, villages close to the archaeological sites of Pilak in South Tripura and Unokoti hills in North Tripura provide ideal space for lodging and food as paying

guests to tourists keen to enjoy the idyllic ambience of rural life in Tripura. Leaving aside these sites, eight of Tripura's seventeen subdivisions stand on the edge of the state's 856 km long border with Bangladesh and the quiet rural areas in the outlying areas of the sub-divisional towns close to the border coupled with steady glimpses of life within Bangladesh territory provide ideal opportunities for tourists keen to have a feel of life in rural and border areas. Tourists averse to staying in plush hotels can lodge close to the soil as paying guests in ordinary households.

So knowing the prospects and challenges in developing the rural tourism sector in Tripura can act as a base for the development in the actual scenario which gives the scope for the present study.

4.METHODOLOGY

The methodology has been outlined in relation to the objectives under study.

4.1.Study area

To study the prospects and challenges of rural tourism development in a village, it is important that the people of the village are aware of the term and the associated objects. Considering these three villages where government has taken initiatives in making them a site for rural tourism has been chosen for the present study. The villages namely Devipur, Kalapania, and Banabithi have been chosen for carrying out the study.

4.2.Sampling

The sample size is 70 i.e. besides visiting the area; a total number of 70 households in the selected study area have been interviewed for the purpose of research. The sampling method used here was random sampling method.

4.3.Study tools

The study is a descriptive one. It stands on the ground of available Primary and secondary data. Secondary data has been collected from the Tripura Tourism Development Corporation Ltd., and other government and non-government sources. For collection of primary data uncontrolled observation technique and survey method of data collection has been used. Primary data has been collected by visiting the sites and interviewing the identified interviewees. For the purpose of interview, structured questionnaire having both open and close ended questions has been prepared.

4.4.Data Analysis

The data received includes both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative data has been analyzed and explained using descriptive method. In case of collected quantitative data, data has been entered into the computer with the support of appropriate software and, keeping the objectives of the study in sight, structured data analysis has been done.

The study intends to discover the prospects of the area to come up as a successful tourist destination. The study considered some of the essential aspects that specify how fine or dire the present and continuing conditions are. The aspects include popularity of the site, chances of improvement in the condition of the site, facilities available at the site, challenges faced by the people in the identified area in taking part in the process of rural tourism, etc. The study also gives some suggestive measures to bring improvement in the present scenario.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

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 types 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 looked for a main attraction.

Rural tourism includes: -

1. Agri-Tourism: Tourism on the farms enables farmers to diversify their activities while enhancing the value of their products and property. Farm tourism also helps to reconcile farming interests and environmental protection through integrated land management in which farmers continue to play a key role.

Tourists who choose farm accommodation rather than other kinds of accommodation facilities look for genuine rural atmosphere where they can share intimacy of the household they live in, learn traditional crafts and skills with their hosts, make friends which is a quality, modern times have almost forgotten and above all enjoy home-made food and drinks. Some specific food labels can help consumers establish a local produce and can be used as a selling point to tourist who want to taste home grown quality food and drink.

2. Heritage and cultural Tourism in rural areas comes in a wide range of forms most of which are unique to an individual local and a valuable component of the rural tourism product. Heritage and cultural tourism includes temples, rural buildings but may be extended to local features of interest including war remnants, monuments to famous literary, artistic or scientific people, historic remains, archaeological sites, traditional parkland etc.
3. Eco Tourism: Many tourists visit rural areas for the purpose of bird and animal watching and learning about local flora and fauna.

Rural tourist destination as a product is definitely very fragile in ecological, social and cultural sense. Its development requires very specific approach that could help it remain sustainable in the long term.

5.1.Development of Underdeveloped Areas

The travel of visitors in Tripura forms the basis for development of tourism as a kind of state's export industry. It is a key to raise the level of economic activity through the sale of products and services to travellers. Away from the centres of mass production, each local area is known for some specimen of its craftsmanship which catches the fancy of the tourists. More the number of visitors, greater is the demand for sale of a variety of such articles. Correspondingly it increases the opportunities of employment in local areas. These advantages are of special interest to the relatively underdeveloped areas within the state.

The rural areas are largely populated by peasants practising subsistence type of agriculture. There is a general scarcity of alternate resources which can be utilised for productive economic activity in such types of areas. Such areas form pockets of various sizes widespread throughout the length and breadth of the state of Tripura.

A part of the amount of expenditure spent by the tourists during their stay is left as a direct source of income for the

local residents. The money paid by the visitors to business people turns into wages of workers used for their services.

The development of tourism provides at least seasonal employment to the young unemployed people and a side job to the women or the elderly persons. The craftsmanship gets revived. And even the articles looking just very ordinary arouse the interest of tourists. These are sold like hot cakes in the tourist markets, at a handsome premium.

Recreative tourism, thus, helps to filter down the growth of economy from state to local levels. The trend corrects the regional imbalances of development considerably in the long run.

The government of Tripura is well aware of this calculation of importance of tourism. It has been found that the government has taken as well as completed a number of projects in order to develop the tourism structure of the state. The projects namely Rural Tourism Project at Village Devipur (SW), Rural Tourism Project at Village Kalapania (SW), Rural Tourism Project at Village Banabithi (SW) and Rural Tourism Project at Village Banabithi (HW) in the financial year 2007-08 and 2009-10.

Thus, undoubtedly, the prospects of rural development and the efforts behind it are high. But there are few challenges that lie in the way of rural tourism development in the state which have been discussed below:

5.2.Unavailability of Accommodation Facilities

Almost all the people interviewed (95.71%) people complained that there are no acceptable accommodation facilities available near the tourist sites. The availability of the accommodation facility for the tourist gives hopes and scopes for further improved and sustainable tourist visits at the sites. On the other hand, only a small proportion of the localites (4.30%) people claimed that accommodation facilities are present for the tourists, though not at but, near the sites. But they further added that the facilities available are of poor quality and are not up to the mark for making the spots attractive and worth visiting. But the truth, accepted by all, is that there are no proper accommodation facilities available at the spot. This certainly is a negative remark. Availability of accommodation facilities has the full potential of encouraging tourist. So, there is an immediate need of development of accommodation facilities at the spots. These facilities may be developed by the locals of the area at their own residents. This will not only provide a clear picture of the area and its culture to the tourists but also give the locals a scope for some added income.

5.3. Unavailability of Transport Facilities

Proper transportation facilities have the capacity to bring more tourist spots with ease. Whereas, if the transportation facilities are not up to the mark the tourists may feel demotivated to visit the beauty of the spot. So, to make a tourist spot's popularity and income sustainable, good transportation facilities are vital. In this study, it has been found that the scenario of the transport system is not up to the mark. Only 10% of the people said that the transport facilities available are proper and steady. More than four-fifth of the people i.e. 85.71% of the people claimed that bus and other modes of transports are available within fixed time periods of the day. But a small portion of the population i.e. 4.29% of the people claimed that the transportation facilities available are improper. They said that transport facilities are most vulnerable at the early hours of morning and after sunset. So,

visibly, steps are to be taken for the improvement of the transport facilities to and fro the spots.

5.4.Sanitation facility for the tourists at the site

A good quality and sufficient quantity of water is extremely essential for keeping alive the tourist industry. The management of sanitation and the protection and provision of drinking water are formidable challenges in developing tourism in the rural areas of Tripura. Most of the people i.e. 91.43% of the people stated that sanitation facilities in the tourist spots are unavailable. Again, 8.57% people said that the sanitation facilities are though available but are poor. This indicates that there is a need of improvement in the sanitation facilities.

5.5. Loss of cultural identity

Because tourism involves movement of people to different geographical locations, and establishment of social relations between people who would otherwise not meet, cultural clashes take place as a result of differences in cultures, ethnic and religious groups, values and lifestyles, languages, and levels of prosperity. It has been found in the study that a significant number (42.86%) of people feel that the tourism results to loss of their cultural identity. These people justified their statement by adding that the various visitors with different cultural background come which influences the youths and triggers the tendency of westernization in them, coupled with tendency of committing criminal offense like stealing in order to meet these demands. But, again, a significant proportion (35.71%) said that the loss is moderate and an even smaller proportion of 10% people regarded the impact on loss of cultural identity as minor. So, taken together, almost all the people (88.57%) claimed that tourism results to loss of cultural identity.

The reason behind this feeling of loss of cultural identity can be an overexploitation of the social carrying capacity (limits of acceptable change in the social system inside or around the destination) and cultural carrying capacity (limits of acceptable change in the culture of the host population) of the local community.

Beside these, Tourists want souvenirs, arts, crafts, and cultural manifestations, and in the tourist destinations, craftsmen have responded to the growing demand, and have made changes in design of their products to bring them more in line with the new customers' tastes. While the interest shown by tourists also contributes to the sense of self-worth of the artists, and helps conserve a cultural tradition, but, cultural erosion has occurred due to the commoditisation of the cultural goods.

5.6.Environmental pollution

Environment remains a source of tourist attraction as long as it is not damaged beyond control. But it needs a greater care to protect all its components from the harmful effect of mass tourism. How sensitive is the tourist industry to all the adverse changes in environment, if it is not properly conserved, is a moot question. It is aptly described that tourism = nature's beauty + wild life + cultural attractions + ecology. All these are the components of one single and indivisible system. They need to be conserved in order to protect the very resource base of tourism from destruction.

Pertaining to the environmental pollution due to the arrival of the tourists, being an important indicator of sustainability of the sites, almost all the households i.e. 95.71% claimed that the spots get polluted because of the unacceptable tourist

activities and are not clean enough to be visually appealing to the people from the point of view of hygiene and cleanliness. They even said that there is an unavailability of man-power to look after the maintenance and cleanliness of the sites and said the few people having responsibility for this also don't do their work properly. On the other hand a small portion of the population interviewed i.e. 4.29% claimed that the spots are not polluted and apparently clean enough to be visited, though, they also accepted that things could be better as there is always a scope for betterment. But the question on sustainability persists. So, the need of the time is to keep the resources fit enough to be sustainable and accessible by the future generations.

Beside these, lack of marketing of the tourist sites is also another important problem that the rural areas encounter. This problem may, though, be overcome by proper marketing by the government as well as the communities but certainly needs attention.

6.CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIVE MEASURES

Tourism is highly labour intensive industry of a unique type. It provides different services needed as well as expected by the incoming tourists. The objective of rural tourism is to showcase rural life, their Art, culture and heritage at rural location and village. The intention is to benefit the local community economically and socially, as well as enable interaction between tourist and local population for a mutually in reaching experience.

Villages were off limits to most tourists due to language barrier but now the rural areas of Tripura provide efficient tour escort guides to break those barriers. But still there are a few challenges which are needed to be won over in order to develop the tourism industry in Tripura. These challenges include unavailability of proper transportation, accommodation, and sanitation facilities. Beside these, the rural population have been found to be having a feeling of loss of cultural identity as a result of tourist visits. Also environmental pollution has been found to be another vital factor which challenges the development of tourist activities in rural areas of Tripura. To overcome these challenges, the present study has cope up with certain suggestive measures that are discussed below:

1. Identification of the strengths of villages in particular fields like Handicrafts, Folk music, Dance, Puppet shows, Theatre/Street dramas, painting, etc. or villages which are completely into organic farming, herbal, yoga etc. coupled with marketing of these USPs of the villages will, expectantly, generate interest of the tourists on the spots.
2. Villagers and Paying guest landlords may be trained on ways to address tourists so as to generate a feeling of visiting more than once.
3. The government should ensure that paying guest accommodations as business model is encouraged so that landlords and farmers can develop necessary infrastructure to provide right lodging for tourists.
4. The government and non government bodies should focus on encouraging farmers and landlords to have separate zone within their farmland to educate the following kinds of people
 - a. Budding agricultural students
 - b. Tourists – Domestic and foreign

- c. Urban kids and families never exposed to hardships but willing to understand
5. The communities may expose the visiting tourists/ families to basic work in the village – from milking cows, cleaning of barns, entertain the rural population, pump water etc., as a means of marketing, to generate interest among the tourists
6. The government should involve village bodies like “Panchayat Pradhan” and others in planning for rural tourism in order to gain the support and cooperation of the communities.

In short, tourism plays an increasingly important role in the development of communities. The benefits of tourism include both tangible (e.g. job creation, state and local tax revenue, etc.) and less tangible (e.g. social structure, quality-of-life, etc.) community effects. In addition, tourism can, and often does, result in less desirable effects on the economic, social, and environmental fabrics of communities. These benefits and costs provide ample opportunity for creative public policy debate. But merely controlling the influx of tourists in isolation may fail to secure sustainable measures of conservation of environment in the absence of practising cooperative tourism with the participation of local communities.

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