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Agro-Tourism: A Way For Sustainable Rural Development

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Abstract

Agro-tourism is a form of tourism which capitalizes on rural culture as a tourist attraction. It is similar to ecotourism except that its primary appeal is not the natural landscape but a cultural landscape. It is a growing niche sector which offers tourists an authentic experience embedded in local food and culture and combines "rural aesthetics" with agricultural production into a dynamic tourist package. It gives the travellers an opportunity to experience the environmental, cultural and agricultural activities, creating income for farmers. Agro-tourism offers an additional economic advantage to hundreds & thousands of agricultural enterprises while diversifying their production activities. The development of the agro-tourism business industry can help stabilize and make agriculture more lucrative and create employment opportunities both at the production and marketing stages. Indeed, the study followed some objectives to express its views on agro-tourism in Karnataka. Karnataka has a greater potential to develop agro-tourism, because of natural opulence and various types of agro-based products. Nearly 38 percent of population living in urban segment would like to enjoy rural life and it is a good opportunity to develop an agro-tourism business in Karnataka. Very significantly agriculture departments of the state government and agricultural universities should try to create awareness about it and also provide some creative ideas regarding agro-tourism. Government and other organizations should try to aid such firms for their income efficiency.

Key Words: Agro-tourism, cultural landscape, agro-tourism potentials, agro-tourism firms, rural life, rural culture, agripreneurs etc.

Introduction:

In today's era of liberalization and globalization travel and tourism is extensively recognized as an important civil industry worldwide which provides major potential for economic growth and development. For many developing countries it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange income and the number one export category, creating much needed employment and opportunities for development. In over 150 countries, tourism ranks among the top five export earners, and in over 60 countries it ranks first in export category. (India's 12th Five Year Plan Report, 2011). Tourism is indeed well recognized as a vital engine of growth in the various economies in the globe. It is termed as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. The world tourism organization has estimated that tourism industry is growing at the rate of 4 percent a year, whereas Indian tourism industry is growing at 10.1 percent which is 2.5 times more than the world tourism growth rate. Agro tourism is one such form of tourism which has recently emerged in the Indian Tourism Industry. It is a field with a potential to develop the rural India and is a way of sustainable tourism development and multi-activity in rural segments through which the visitor has an opportunity to experience the real enchanting and authentic contact with real life explore the know-how of the agricultural areas, agricultural operations, relish the traditional food, experience the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions. Moreover, this activity brings visitors closer to nature and rural activities in which they can participate, be entertained and feel the pleasure of touring. Various nations have transformed their economies by developing their agro-tourism potentials. Tourism has a significant capacity to generate large scale employment and thereby generating additional income sources to the skilled and unskilled people.

Objectives of the study:

Agro-tourism is a growing niche sector which offers tourists an authentic experience embedded in local food and culture and combines "rural aesthetics" with agricultural production into a dynamic tourist package. It gives the travellers an opportunity to experience the environmental, cultural and agricultural activities, creating income for farmers. Agro-tourism offers an additional economic advantage to hundreds & thousands of agricultural enterprises while diversifying their production activities. The development of the agro-tourism business industry can help stabilize and make agriculture more lucrative and create employment opportunities both at the production and marketing stages. Indeed, the study followed some objectives to express its views on agro-tourism in Karnataka. The objectives of this study highlights,

1. The Scope and cultural landscape of agro-tourism.
2. Brief scenario of agro-tourism in Karnataka.
3. Details of agro-tourism in Aneundi village of Koppal district, in Karnataka as a case study.
4. The problems and the suitable resolution techniques for success of agro-tourism
5. Issues and challenges of agro-tourism

Methodology:

1. Present study is based on the secondary information.
2. The data has been furnished from the 13th Plan Document of the Government of India and Karnataka Tourism Policy 2015-2020.
3. The study has adopted the exploratory approach.

Scope of agri-tourism:

Agro tourism as a multi-disciplinary area of study has a fairly developed literature covering many aspects of the subject matters. A number of terms are used to describe the concept of agro-tourism in the literature. These include agricultural tourism, Agri-Tourism, farm tourism, farm vacation tourism, wine tourism and Agri-entertainment. In general, these terms refer to small-scale farm enterprises and community events that showcase the activities and produce of rural families and the agricultural heritage of farming regions to the traveller. Agro tourism provides 'rural experiences' to travelers with the goal of creating livelihood and generating revenues for farmers and surrounding communities. Agro tourism as a unique tourism product ushers the visitor to farming rural areas, generally for educational and recreational purposes. This rural experience typically includes a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural areas in the countryside. Among the salient ingredients of these 'rural experiences' include open spaces, low level of urban and industrial development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience different varieties of agricultural, pastoral, and natural environments. Agro tourism as a distinctive field covers rural environment with its agricultural products, processing and packaging, agro based services, rural community and their culture and belief system. Agriculture in its modern sense is divided into two as urban agriculture and rural agriculture. Agro-tourism, however, is the launch of activities aiming at the economic and social development of rural regions in particular and country in general. The location of agro tourism broadly covers land areas not covered by industrial parks, cities, towns, urban areas and suburbs. Such locations are called country, countryside and hinterlands invariably. Agro tourism combines agricultural or rural settings and products within a tourism experience. The scope of agriculture encompasses through farming for human foods, beverages, fodder and fiber; livestock products; hunting, fishing and forestry. When it comes to agro tourism, the scope of the subject expands to include agro-based small-scale-industries located in the countryside, traditional services in agricultural areas including the culture, beliefs, and value systems in the same areas. Some striking general features of such geographical locations are remoteness, small scale production units, low density of human settlements and low degree of specialization. A number of agro tourism activities need only a small team of farm labors in order to be successful. For example, farm tours, farm stay with bed and breakfast, tractor or bullock cart rides, picking of apples, pineapples, grapes, mangoes and other horticulture items, farm zoos, and many other activities may be operated with little additional expenditure on labour (Taware 2009). In its purest sense, agro tourism refers to travel which combines rural settings with products of agricultural operations – all within a tourism experience that is paid for by visitors. Examples of these experiences include: visiting farmers' markets to purchase farm fresh products, taking part in orchard and floral garden tours, using farm bed and breakfast accommodation, and participating in harvest festivals. The full range of agro-tourism product and service development options can be categorized within three broad themes: Fixed attractions, vents and services. All require careful management and supporting development resources.

Cultural landscapes of agro-tourism:

On every continent farmers have developed a wealth of crop-plant species and varieties of livestock breeds. They have adapted plants and animals to meet the ever-changing breeding for new sites and climatic conditions, for different purposes, and to suit individual preferences. This has resulted in a suitable variety or breed for just about any terrain. Small-scale, diverse cultural landscapes emerged, hand-in-hand with the many distinct forms of management. In the last 150 years, this trend has been reversed: Throughout this time, diversity has been diminishing while specialized agriculture is dominated by monocultures and uniformity, but in this process, valuable genetic characteristics are lost, for example high fertility or robustness, disease or pest resistance. The most effective way to put a stop to the genetic erosion process is to keep old varieties and breeds in use.

However, farmers must be given incentives for in-situ conservation: agro-tourism is a way of doing so. An advantage of this approach is that rural areas are popular destinations for holidays and excursions, particularly cultural landscapes which still give a glimpse of how past generations lived and worked. Typical regional crops and local breeds become a particular attraction for tourists. This generates additional income for farmers and contributes to the conservation and development of the whole region.

Agro-tourism in Karnataka:

India exhibits diverse form of art and culture entrenched through a rich heritage, which makes India the most sought-after global tourist destination. India has a thriving tourism industry, which contributes over 6% to the national GDP and 8% of the total employment. Karnataka is one of the major tourist destinations in the country and there is a large scope and great potential to develop agro-tourism. Very significantly, agriculture is one of the vital components of the Indian economy, and it is also the primary occupation of Karnataka. As on 2017 about 14 percentage of GDP was from the agricultural sector only. Recently there has been a paradigm shift in Karnataka from pure-agriculture to agriculture-based-tourism. There are a number of agro-tourism destinations in the state which can act as a breakthrough to the conventional agriculture and tourism in the Karnataka state.

a. Agro-tourism firms in Karnataka:

Very significantly the South Zone of Karnataka state has become the hub of agro-tourism business activity by creating marginally sufficient income for firms. Many farmers in Karnataka especially those who have small-scale family-owned farm lands, have understood the necessity to supplement their insufficient agricultural income by finding innovative ways and means of generating income. Similarly, some small investors in the rural sectors in the region are exploring investment opportunities in areas where they can permanently settled down. They have vocational-specific vast experience in agriculture and allied activities. Big investors in tourism are also interested in diversifying their investment portfolios as well as their tourism products by investing in rural agricultural areas. As on 2015 Jan, 23 registered agro-tourism firms are functioning in South Karnataka (Kodagu, Hassan, Shivamogga, Chikamagalur and Canara zone). Hence, these are considered as significant agro tourism destinations in Karnataka state.

b. Importance of agro-tourism in Karnataka:

Agro-tourism has the significant potential to change the economic course of traditional agriculture upto a certain extent. The benefits of Agro-tourism are manifold. It would bring many direct and indirect benefits not only to the farmers and rural people but also to the tourists at their destinations. Hence, some of the vital benefits are as follows:

- It brings the major primary sector, agriculture, closer to the major service sector, tourism. This convergence is expected to create a win-win situation for both the sectors.
- It provides employment opportunities to the farmers, their family members and other local youths.
- It provides information about the rural handicrafts, languages, culture, tradition, dresses and life style.
- It provides supplementary income sources to the farmers.
- It enhances the required job skills.
- It helps in order to understand about the rural life and know about the agricultural activities to urban people.

c. Agro- tourism destinations in Karnataka:

Sl. No.	Name of the firm	Destination
1.	Coorg Jewel Home Stay	Sirimangala, Virajpet.
2.	MakkiThitta Home Stay	Hanbal Post, Sakleshpur
3.	Gundimane Home Stay -	Sagar-Shimoga.
4.	Kadama Kolli Home stay -	Virajpet, Karnataka
5.	BB Estate Hoe stay Plantation Stay	Kadagadalu, Madikeri,
6.	The Silver Oaks Horne Stay	onnampet, Virajpet,

7.	The Grand Oak Home Stay	Ponnampet, Virajpet.
8.	The Coffee Bean Home Stay	Chikmagalur.
9.	River View Farm Stay Harakere	Thirthahalli - Shimoga.
10.	Bananki Homestay - Devangi	Thirthahalli - Shimoga.
11.	Silverbook Estate - Homestay	Madikeri.
12.	The Coorg Nest Homestay	Gonikoppa, Virajpet.
13.	The Malnad Times - Plantations	Nelagahalli - Hassan.
14.	Farm Home Stay - Farm Stay	Madikeri,
15.	Hullimakki Home Stay -Coffee Plantation	Sakleshpur.
16.	Kolavara Heritage Homestay	Theerthahalli
17.	Cuppa Creek Homestay	Madikeri
18.	Coorg Hidecut Rural Homestay	Madhenad, Madikeri.
19.	Madikeri Misty Homestay	Madikeri,
20.	Coorg Shell Homestay - Madikeri	Madikeri
21.	Coorg Classic Home Stay	Madikeri
22.	Vindhyas Homestay	Madikeri
23.	Inchara Homestay - Mandagadde	Theerthahalli

Anegundi village in north karnataka – a case study :

Anegundi is a small, traditional village set in the background of an ancient cultural heritage site previously called Krishkindha, is a village in the Gangavathi taluk of Koppal district in North Karnataka across the Tungabhadra river from the Hampi World Heritage Site. Extended between 15° 40" North latitude and 76° 54" East longitude. It was linked with the first administrative centres of Vijayanagara which was an empire of the golden age of India, reaching its zenith during 1510-1542 A.D. It has a population of 3018, most of who live in small whitewashed houses with wooden pillars lining the street. The small cosmos like valleys created by boulder hills are full of paddy and banana fields which are fed by the canals constructed during the Vijayanagara period that still function. Anegundi, home of the Devarayas, is located right on the banks of river Tungabhadra, which flows to the south and to the east of the village. It is surrounded by granite hills on three sides and is bordered by river Tungabhadra on the other. The river curves many times flowing from the west to east. According to the ancient scripture of the Purana, this location is called scared land or Punya Bhoomi. Anegundi was also the cradle city of 'Kishkinda', the monkey kingdom mentioned in the Ramayana, and Hanuman's birth place. Sri Ranganatha, a form of 'lord Vishnu in his cosmic sleep' is the presiding deity of the village. This region is warm and dry it never really gets very cold. The 'tourist season' is from September to February. June is a windy month. In July one can expect colourful skies and a few showers. The monsoon really arrives in August when it rains mostly at night. September to December has cool weather. Mid January sees all round good weather and provides the best light for photographers.

• Interested Feature in Anegundi

An interesting feature of the village is its white washed houses and the labyrinth that takes you on a lovely intimate journey through it, giving an insight on the way of life in the village. These humble yet regal houses have beautifully carved wooden pillars, and line the main streets proudly. As they walk around, visitors can get a peek at the artisans of banana fibre, women grinding 'chutney' by rolling huge stones, others using lime hand prints for decorating doorways and doing coloured Rangoli in front of their houses. The coracles or bamboo basket boats are yet another attraction giving the visitor an incredible experience of the river full of boulders. The landscape made up of huge granite boulders, rice paddies and banana plantations have 'mantapas' scattered around them reminding one of a miniature painting, the

irrigation systems from the 14th century that irrigate and maintain the lush green agricultural landscape, the rides in the basket boat, coracles, a must that takes one on an enchanted journey. A walk around the village takes one on a mythical journey of the Kishkinda, which is full of stories and references. The visitors consist of those extending their tour of Hampi World Heritage Site, there are also religious pilgrim visitors attracted by the mythology of Kishkinda and outdoor-ecotourism including low-impact cycling tours.

- **Natural Heritage:**

The region has numerous monuments and this ancient beautiful landscape draws visitors from all around the world. The area is made up of granite boulders in varying tones of gray and ochre which glow pink at sunset. The geological base of this region is the 'Deccan Plateau' which is one of the most ancient and stable surfaces found anywhere on earth. It is estimated to be about four billion years old and believed to be one of the first places on earth to have solidified when the planet was still in a liquid state. A unique and astonishingly beautiful area of natural wilderness, the 'playground of the gods', is home to crocodile, leopard, great owl, sloth bear, langur, several species of turtles and nearly 300 varieties of birds. Many endangered species of flora are also found here. The vegetation is an example of "dry deciduous scrub jungle" indigenous to the Deccan plateau and is highly underrepresented in today's Indian National Parks Systems.

- **Art & Craft**

The non-traditional artisans of Aneundi are pioneers in new and innovative low-waste methods of banana fibre production. Products created by the banana fibre are widely accepted all over the world. The existing crafts in the region are Quilting Lambadi embroidery, Stone and Wood Carving, Black Pottery, Traditional masonry, Bamboo crafts new jewellery is being developed with beautiful tear drop like white and dyed seeds.

- **Local Culture Fairs and festivals:**

The annual fair during the month of April and the Aneundi Utsav in November are a must watch for visitors. An added attraction in the same period is Hampi Utsav. Fairs and festival and festivals are celebrated throughout the year. There is no communal difference during these celebrations. Both communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, participate actively during Mohram, Deepavali, the annual fair & the Utsav.

- **Folk traditions:**

The region has rich folk performing traditions which include Kolata, Hagalu Vesha - Burra Kathe, Rana Modi & Raja Modi, Bayalata, Kinnari Jogi, Devadasi, Deity Dance, Dasara Songs, Lambadi, Veshagare. Oral Traditions include Folk songs such as Suggi Padagalu, Sobane Padagalu, Gondali Aata, Malerayana Haad etc.

- **Cuisine:**

A range of sweet and savory rice preparations, sambars, sweets with coconut, sesame, millet rotti made on an open fire, a variety of non vegetarian spicy meats, various sweet and spicy chutneys, both dry and wet, Banana fritters, a range of health foods made of Ragi, a variety of locally baked breads, Jilebi, Baloosha etc. Popular breakfast: Mirchi and Oggarani, Holigi. Seasonal fruits like Targola, Papaya, Mango and dates are popular too.

Problems of the agro-tourism in karnataka:

Karnataka has a greater capacity for the development of the Agro-tourism centers due to the good natural and climatic conditions. Though there are some problems in the development process of agro tourism in Karnataka, major problems are as follows.

1. Lack of adequate capital to develop basic infrastructure for the agro-tourism.
2. Lack of perfect knowledge and sufficient awareness about the agro-tourism.
3. Weak communications and lack of commercial approach of the small and remote farmers.
4. Problems associated with ensuring hygiene and basic needs for urban visitors.
5. Majority of farmers have small size holdings, low quality land and little or no access to credit and irrigation.

Key techniques for success of agro-tourism:

1. Train the required staff with efficient skills.
2. Develop contacts with institutions like schools, college, NGOs, social clubs etc.
3. Promote a wide range of publicity of tourism centers through all possible medias.
4. Develop website and update it frequently from time-to-time to attract foreign tourists.
5. Develop different agro-tour packages for various types of tourists.

Issues and challenges of agro-tourism in karnataka:

It is found that careful analysis and observation of Karnataka's agro-tourism brings to light certain issues and challenges which need to be addressed immediately. The challenges are -