

Developing Rural Tourism

Promoting Rural Tourism for Sustainable Development and Livelihood Generation

This brief sheds light upon the various aspects related to rural tourism and the great potential that India keeps for emerging as a rural tourism icon. After discussing the key factors responsible for the potential growth of rural tourism, the brief enlists various centrally sponsored schemes for supporting rural tourism in the country. In further section, a few organizations functioning across the country in this space have been introduced. The penultimate section discusses a couple of case studies of successful rural tourism projects. The final section analyses the key factors responsible for successful implementation of rural tourism projects.

A tourist's paradise, India is a magnum of diverse geography and cultures, offering 30 World Heritage sites, 25 bio-geographical zones and attractive beaches. The country saw the arrival of **1282 million domestic** and **22.57 million foreign tourists** in the year 2013-14. Tourism in India accounts for **6.8% of the GDP**, and is the third largest foreign exchange earner for the country with **USD 18.13 Billion**. It has been accorded a priority sector status in the 12th Five-year Plan.

In recent years, there has been an increased realization that the tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for Rural Development. With **69% population living in rural India**, and almost **6.5 million village units** spread across the country, India foresees itself as a strong platform for harnessing rural tourism. The **geographical diversity of India makes it a unique spot for harnessing rural tourism** which can include tourist sites like desert, mountains, plains, plateaus, islands and coasts in different regions. **2 biodiversity hotspots** of the total 34 in the world are located in India, namely, the Western Ghats and Himalayas, housing a large number of flora and fauna. India showcases a **variety of cultural patterns having different lifestyles, practices, art and craft, and festivals**. These can be incorporated and leveraged in the form of rural tourism. The country is also rich in heritage and offers **30 World Heritage sites**.

Factors such as increasing level of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture, improved accessibility, and environmental consciousness have shifted trends towards rural tourism. This will not only preserve the culture and heritage of the country, but will also generate employment in the villages since it can be leveraged to provide skill development in tourism related job roles such as that of guide, driver, cook, housekeeping and hospitality to the tourists. Ministry of Tourism specifies that any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, benefits the local community economically and socially, and enables interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism may include multiple facets such as farm tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. The country has seen successful rural tourism models in states such as Kerala's backwater, Karnataka's forest, and Tamil Nadu's temple.



Key Central Government Schemes for Promotion of Rural Tourism

The Government of India has taken various initiatives and introduced policies to grow rural tourism. This section takes a look at some key schemes and policy decisions.

1. Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development Component under PIDDC scheme – *Promoting Village Tourism*

The Ministry of Tourism has released a Rural Tourism Infrastructure Development Component, which is part of the Product Infrastructure Development for Destinations and Circuits (PIDDC) Scheme. **100 percent Central Assistance is provided in this scheme.** The objective of this scheme is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage in villages, that have core competence in art and craft, handloom, textiles, and natural environment. **Central Financial Assistance (CFA) up to Rs.50.00 Lakh for infrastructure development and up to Rs.20.00 Lakh for capacity building is provided.**

The activities permitted under this scheme are improvement of village surroundings and village connectivity within the panchayat limits (does not include major roads which connect the village), providing solid waste management and sewerage management, village illumination, tourism related activities such as procurement of equipments and tourist accommodation. The State government will identify the region suited for promotion of rural tourism, and is also responsible for seeking convergence of other schemes and allocations for broader development at the site to benefit local communities.

2. Swadesh Darshan – *Positioning Tourism as an Engine of Growth*

The Ministry of Tourism introduced Swadesh Darshan, a Central Sector scheme for Integrated Development of Theme-Based Tourist Circuits. A Tourist Circuit is a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of them are in the same town, village or city, while a tourist circuit with a consistent theme such as religion, culture, ethnicity and niche is known as Theme Based Tourist Circuit. These circuits would be identified by the Ministry of Tourism based on factors such as current tourist traffic, connectivity, potential and significance attached to sites and holistic tourist experience. **The allocated budget for the scheme is Rs.600.00 crore for 2015-16 and components eligible for financing are infrastructure development; capacity development, skill development and knowledge development; and online presence.**

3. Scheme for Organizing Fair, Festival and Tourism related events – *Domestic Promotion & Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH)*

Ministry of Tourism provides financial assistance to State Governments to organize fairs and festivals and tourism related events such as seminars, conclaves and conventions. These events are to be selected by the State Government based on the tourism potential. **Maximum financial assistance to be provided to each State Government during 1 financial year should not exceed Rs.50.00 lakh.**

4. Hunar Se Rozgar Tak (HSRT), Ministry of Tourism

Fully funded by Ministry of Tourism, **this programme offers courses in hospitality trades of food production, food and beverage service, housekeeping and bakery and patisserie.** Apart from that courses to bring up **tourist escorts, tourist facilitators, event facilitators, security guards, tour assistants, transfer assistants and office assistants** have also been set up. This programme is delivered by Institutes of Hotel Management, Food Craft Institutes and State Tourism Development Corporations amongst others. Over 2 lakh persons have been trained under the programme as of 31st March, 2015.

5. Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) – *Developing Human Capital*

This is a flagship **outcome-based skill training scheme** aimed at benefiting 24 lakh youth across the country. A monetary reward is provided to trainees on assessment and certification. The **National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)** will implement the scheme and involve the Sector Skill Councils to identify job roles for which training could be imparted through

the PMKVY. A budget of INR 1,500 crore has been allocated for the same which would also include awareness, mobilization and administrative expenses. NSDC supports vocational training institutes by providing funding up to 75% of the total project cost in case of for-profit entities and up to 85% of the total project cost in case of not-for-profit entities. Candidates who successfully complete the courses are given a **Skill Card**. The trainees are also entitled to a **monetary reward¹** upon successful completion of the assessment carried out by the assessment agencies (independent of the TP), which are appointed by the SSC. Training in Tourism and Hospitality is given under this scheme, where in the trainees are trained for job roles such as guide, driver, cook, housekeeping and hospitality to the locals.

Major Organisations Functional in India

Certain enterprises and non-governmental organizations have been working towards fostering rural tourism in the country. Many of these are functional across the country. **Grassroutes** is one such enterprise working in the rural tourism market, wherein they help in building the necessary infrastructure in a village from a tourist's point of view. The **overall cost of developing a village ranges from 5-10 lakhs**. The **Village Tourism Committee** is the **common link between Grassroutes and the tourists**. Grassroutes works closely with the tourism committee and the local NGO to conduct regular training programs for the villagers to function as guides, service providers, cooks, etc. and also to learn communications skills and quality processes. The local NGO monitors the tourists' village experience in the village and the interactions between the tourists and the villagers. Another such initiative is **Rural Tourism Network Enterprise (RTNE)**. RTNE works with a network of **Destination Management Companies (DMC)**. While RTNE provides the core, capital-intensive support service, the individual DMC focuses on managing relationships with accommodation providers. **The architecture of a DMC network allows delivery of services like hospitality training, rating and credit access to improve infrastructure and service levels at rural stays.**

A few more organizations in this domain, functional across the country are: **DHAN Foundation (National Award for Best NGO Promoting Tourism by Ministry of Tourism)**, **Blue Yonder**, **Travel Another India**, **Culture Aangan**, **Ecospiti**, **Baramati Agri Tourism**, **Village Ways** and **Eco Login**.

Case Studies

1. **Rural Tourism for Sansad Adarsh Gram:** The following case study exemplifies development of rural tourism in a village adopted to be developed into a model village.

Promoting Village Tourism in Kitam Manpur – Adopting a Market-driven Approach

Kitam Manpur, the Sansad Adarsh Gram in South District of Sikkim, adopted a **"family with family" model** of village tourism wherein tourist families stayed with the Sikkimese families. The market-driven approach was taken up in partnership with Youth Hostel Association (YHAI) of India. Based on the assurance of arrival of tourists from YHAI, training on homestays, nature guides and local hospitality was carried out by WWF-India, ECOSS and SIRD. The village panchayat played a prominent role in promoting this initiative, also ensuring equitable sharing of incomes among the various wards in the gram panchayat using a rotation based approach for hosting tourist families. The model included two nights stay for tourists in Kitam Manpur village where they were entertained by cultural shows, exciting visit to the Kitam Bird Sanctuary and Rangit river side walk. This was followed by a 2-day stay in Tingvong, which offered the tourists a spectacular view of the mountains and dense forests. Apart from this, the package also included trekking in the Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, joint cultural show and village walk.

¹ Under the National Skill Qualification Framework, the SSC is a certifying body for Diploma and Certificates awarded on attainment of Levels 1-6. Monetary rewards are dependent on the corresponding NSQF level attained by the successful trainee.

2. Community Tourism in White Desert: Following case study describes the rural tourism opportunities discovered in Rann of Kutch, as a concerted effort of Ministry of Tourism and United Nations Development Programme(2003-07).

Endogenous Tourism in Hodka, Rann of Kutch

Home to an ethnically diverse community, Hodka village is a unique cultural mosaic of cattle herders and traditional crafts persons. Sham-e-Sarhad, Hodka village resort, was an initiative by the Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP) in collaboration between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Owned and operated by the Village Tourism Committee of Hodka, the resort is run by local community members and offers an authentic yet incredible experience of the local culture, crafts and heritage. At Sham-e-Sarhad, sustainable visitor strategies based on art, craft, culture, natural heritage and environment care, have led to larger tourism yields, which in turn have contributed to the conservation of Hodka's unique ecology and its community. The beneficiaries have been the area's rural poor, women and unemployed youth. The formation of rural self help groups and local stakeholder participation has been a successful exercise in sustainable capacity building. By facilitating engaging experiences of rural life for the paying visitor, who is the direct income source for the local communities, Sham-e-Sarhad has helped improve the local people's quality of life, and created an opportunity for conscious eco travelers to experience a whole new perspective.

Success Factors

Rural Tourism projects have been carried out at several places across the country. However, only a handful of the projects have been successful and have resulted in increased tourist inflow as well as enhanced livelihood for the locals. The Impact and Evaluation Study of Rural Tourism Projects cited the low tourist flow to project areas and difficult access as the key factors for the **failure of almost 31% of the projects evaluated.**

Therefore, in order to develop a village as a tourist destination, first step should be to **identify the key strength of the village around which the theme of rural tourism can be developed.** These themes can include handicrafts, folk music, dance, puppet shows, theatre/street dramas, organic farming, herbal, yoga and meditation centers, eco zones within or around the village, and/or any unique feature (such as the Kila Raipur Rural Olympics, Punjab). Important key factors which drive growth of tourism, namely, **location, proximity to prominent tourist destinations, implementation and maintenance of hardware and software components** must be considered. Further, as a multi-sectoral activity, involving multiple service providers, rural tourism is an area where a **strong public-private partnership is of prime importance**, particularly given the number of schemes under ministries beyond tourism, for instance, rural development, culture, environment and tribal welfare, **convergence of schemes** must be considered for a holistic approach. **Participation of village panchayat** and **Rural Innovation Fund under NABARD** may also be leveraged.

Conclusion

Given the geographical and cultural diversity of India, the country has a plethora of opportunities to harness rural tourism. If implemented and promoted properly, rural tourism projects can become a driver of economic growth by generating employment for the youth. It keeps the potential of addressing issues such as poverty, empowerment of women and strengthening the economic status of the rural people.