



AGRI MAGAZINE

(International E-Magazine for Agricultural Articles)

Volume: 02, Issue: 07 (July, 2025)

Available online at <http://www.agrimagazine.in>

© Agri Magazine, ISSN: 3048-8656

Rural Tourism in India: Unveiling the Hidden Heart of the Nation

*Vinayak Savalagi¹, Sumayya Mullal² and Preeti Y.H.³

¹Department of Agricultural Extension Education, College of Agriculture, University of Agricultural Sciences, Dharwad, Karnataka, India

²Department of Seed Science and Technology College of Agriculture, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bengaluru-560056, Karnataka, India

³Department of Agricultural Extension Education, College of Agriculture, University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bengaluru-560056, Karnataka, India

*Corresponding Author's email: vinrick030@gmail.com

India's villages are the soul of the nation—home to over 65% of its population and a treasure trove of culture, traditions, crafts, and natural beauty. Yet, despite their richness, rural regions remain economically fragile. Rural tourism emerges as a transformative solution, offering not only an immersive experience for travellers but also sustainable development opportunities for rural communities. Backed by government schemes and grassroots innovation, rural tourism is carving a niche for itself as a form of responsible, inclusive, and eco-friendly tourism, connecting curious travellers with authentic village life.

What Is Rural Tourism?

Rural tourism refers to travel experiences that allow tourists to engage with rural life, culture, and nature. Activities can include staying in homestays, participating in farming, attending local festivals, and learning traditional crafts. It helps in preserving cultural heritage while also creating livelihood opportunities for villagers. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism generates 10.3% of global GDP and employs 1 in 10 people worldwide (UNWTO, 2019). In India, rural tourism complements this growth by decentralizing tourism revenues and promoting inclusive growth.

Facts and Figures

India hosted 2,321.98 million domestic and 11 million foreign tourists in 2019–20. The tourism sector contributed US\$8.9 trillion to the global GDP (WTTC, 2019). The Ministry of Tourism has identified over 153 rural sites and 36 UNDP-supported destinations for rural tourism development. India ranked 34th out of 140 countries in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019 (World Economic Forum).

Benefits of Rural Tourism

Economic Empowerment: Villagers earn from homestays, food services, and craft sales.
Cultural Revival: Local art, dance, and music see renewed interest and support.
Environmental Conservation: Encourages sustainable practices and eco-tourism.
Reverse Migration: Opportunities in tourism reduce urban migration among youth.
Women Empowerment: Women often take leading roles in homestays and craft industries.

Eco-Tourism and Agro-Tourism

India's diverse geography supports eco-tourism in places like Kerala, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Karnataka. The Karnataka Eco-Tourism Development Board promotes conservation-linked travel, while agro-tourism connects tourists with organic farms and seasonal harvesting. Agadi Thota in Karnataka is a leading example, offering ethnic meals, bullock cart rides, and pottery experiences, blending rural hospitality with sustainability.

Success Stories

The Kishkinda Trust in Anegundi, Karnataka, is a UNDP-supported model that integrates heritage conservation with rural livelihoods. Locals were trained in hospitality and handicrafts, leading to over 100 home-based enterprises today.

Challenges to Rural Tourism

Despite its potential, rural tourism in India faces several obstacles: Lack of infrastructure (roads, internet, sanitation). Limited marketing and branding. Lack of trained guides and language barriers. Minimal private sector involvement. Efforts like skill development through PMKVY, financial support via Hunar Se Rozgar Tak, and eco-tourism boards have begun addressing these issues.

Research Insights

A study by Gupta and Singh (2015) revealed that 81% of respondents had heard of rural tourism. 79% were willing to experience it. 78.5% felt comfortable with simple rural living. Similarly, Verma and Jain (2018) highlighted the growing entrepreneurial scope of rural tourism, especially in culturally rich areas like Anegundi.

Conclusion

Rural tourism is more than a travel experience—it is a bridge between two Indias: one rich in resources, the other rich in curiosity. It presents a sustainable path to economic, cultural, and environmental revitalization. With proper planning, capacity building, and active community participation, rural tourism can reshape India's tourism map, shift economic dependencies, and usher in a new era of rural prosperity. As tourists, embracing rural tourism means not only discovering new places—but also supporting livelihoods and preserving heritage.

References

1. Gupta, S., & Singh, A. (2015). *Potential and Performance of Rural Tourism in India: Assessing Intra-State Variations*. International Journal of Research in Economics and Social Sciences, 5(2), 31–39.
2. Seal, S. (2016). *Rural Tourism Entrepreneurship as a Mechanism for Rural Development: A Case Study on Anegundi, Karnataka*. International Journal of Rural Development and Management Studies, 10(1), 13–21.
3. Verma, A., & Jain, A. (2018). *Rural Tourism in India: Issues, Challenges and Opportunities*. International Journal of Academic Research and Development, 3(1), 24–28.
4. World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2019). *International Tourism Highlights: 2019 Edition*. UNWTO Publications.
5. WTTC. (2019). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Report*. World Travel and Tourism Council.