

Agro-tourism: An emerging area in Indian tourism industry

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Agro-tourism is a form of commercial enterprise which integrates agricultural production or processing with tourism to attract visitors onto a farm while offering activities like agricultural education, rural homestay, local cuisine, traditional games, and purchase of fresh or processed farm produce. This all together provide recreation to the tourists and generates supplementary income for the farmers, leading to their economic upliftment. Agro-tourism is not just about profitability but also about preserving cultural heritage, promoting farming among next generation and betterment of the village as a whole.

Keywords: Heritage, Indian economy, Local attraction, Rural livelihood

AGRICULTURE is the backbone of Indian economy. Economic Survey of India, 2023-24 reported agricultural and allied activities to hover around 18% of India's GDP. Nearly 46% of Indian population is directly dependent on agriculture and allied activities. It is desirable to add income generating activities in agriculture, of which one is agro-tourism. India proudly portrays the culture of 'Atithi Devo Bhavah'. There lies a great potential and economic significance of tourism in the rural heartlands of India. Therefore, it is a great idea to combine agriculture and tourism, the two major sectors of the Indian economy and leverage the best possible sustainable development in India. Justifiably, the idea of agro-tourism demands immediate attention of all the stakeholders.

India's potential towards agro-tourism

The tourism industry in India played a significant role in generating approximately 70.04 million jobs, constituting around 12.66% of total employment during the fiscal year 2021-22. Projections suggest that the travel and tourism sector will yield revenue of US\$ 23.72 billion by 2024, with an anticipated compound annual growth rate

Something for visitors to see	Something for visitors to do	Something for visitors to buy
• Standing crops • Cultural events like folk culture of the village (Garba of Gujarat, Ghoomar of Rajasthan, folk theatres of the states, etc.) • Organic and natural farming practices • Visit to a fishing pond	• Active participation in agricultural operations like harvesting, providing irrigation to crops, milking a cow, etc. • Traditional games like tug of war, top spinning, hide and seek, <i>gilli-danda</i>, etc. • Bullock or camel ride	• Freshly harvested farm produce • On farm processed products like moringa powder, rose water, edible oils, etc. • Rural crafts like embroidered clothes, crafted home decor materials, etc.

Basic principles of agro-tourism

(CAGR) of 9.62% from 2024 to 2028 (Indian Chamber of Commerce). This trajectory underscores the potential of agritourism to bolster India's GDP by augmenting tourism income through various offerings such as accommodations, activities, and local product sales. Notably, the current focus of the tourism sector is on promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly travel options. India's rural landscape, where approximately 69% of the population resides, with 62% reliant on agriculture for sustenance, presents a ripe opportunity for agri-tourism. This initiative stands to diversify farm income, empower

rural communities, and create job prospects in sectors like hospitality, food services, and local handicraft production.

National Policy Framework, while gradually integrating a



Tourist enjoying at agro-tourism centre

Table 1. Major agro-tourism centres in India

Agro-tourism centres	State	Visit for	Nearest airport, railway station and city
Baramati Agri Tourism Centre (Palshiwadi)	Maharashtra	India's pioneer commercial agro-tourism model; training institute for rural entrepreneurs; massive showcases of local agrarian life, indigenous tool museums, laterite-stone architectural builds, and crop cycles.	• Airport: Pune International Airport • Railway Station: Baramati Railway Station/ Pune Junction • Nearest city: Baramati/Pune
Kongthong Traveller's Nest (Cooperative Society)	Meghalaya	Indigenous agro-ecology and bamboo-hut craft; integrated forest-fringe farming (wild peppers, broomsticks, wild honey); immersion into the unique cultural whistled-name tradition (<i>Jingrwai lawbei</i>).	• Airport: Umroi Airport, Shillong/Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport, Guwahati • Railway Station: Guwahati Railway Station • Nearest city: Sohra (Cherrapunji)/Shillong
Anjaw District Kiwi and Cardamom Orchards	Arunachal Pradesh	High-altitude Eastern Himalayan agro-tourism; structural terraced cultivation of commercial Kiwi fruits and large cardamom plantations; interactions with ethnic Mishmi farming communities.	• Airport: Dibrugarh Airport/ Tezu Airport • Railway station: Tinsukia Junction • Nearest city: Hawaii/Tezu
Palampur Agricultural Farmstays (Kangra valley)	Himachal Pradesh	Sub-Himalayan organic step-farming; commercial tea gardens, experiential tea-plucking/processing workshops, apiculture setups, and mountain water-stream irrigation management.	• Airport: Gaggal Airport, Dharamshala • Railway station: Pathankot Junction/ Palampur narrow-gauge station • Nearest city: Palampur/ Dharamshala
Sahyadri Farms	Maharashtra	Integrated FPO models, advanced post-harvest cold chain infrastructures, technical agro-extension interactions and commercial grape and citrus orchards.	• Airport: Ozar Airport, Nashik • Railway Station: Nashik Road Railway Station • Nearest City: Nashik
Shashwat Nature Farm	Gujarat	Indigenous seed banking, Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF), vermicomposting tech, and specialized institutional field exposure setups.	• Airport: Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport, Ahmedabad • Railway station: Gandhinagar Capital Railway Station • Nearest city: Gandhinagar/ Ahmedabad
Hansali Organic Farm	Punjab	Bio-gas resource utilization, certified organic crop rotations, custom hiring center training, and ancestral grain processing.	• Airport: Chandigarh International Airport • Railway station: Fatehgarh Sahib Railway Station • Nearest city: Sirhind/Fatehgarh Sahib

Source: <https://nidhi.tourism.gov.in/home/showcasing?categoryCode=01&subcategory=FS>



GramYatra Agro-tourism, Bhavnagar, Gujarat

unified, comprehensive approach to agri-tourism, the Central Government is assimilating its advancement within wider tourism agendas. The Ministry of Tourism's National Strategy and Action Plan

for Tourism (2022) recognises the potential of rural tourism which encompasses agri-tourism. This strategy aims to improve infrastructure, marketing, and skill development in rural areas.

Scope of agro-tourism

Agro-tourism is a potential source of supplementary income for the rural communities by way of providing recreation to the urban tourists with opportunity to interact with rural population in nature-friendly manner all by using locally available resources, thus protecting the environment too.

Economic development:

- **Supplementary income:** It enables supplementary income for rural people who suffer financial losses caused by natural calamities like cyclone, floods, etc.
- **Employment:** It generates direct and indirect employment for rural people, particularly women and youth. It generates indirect employment through transport services connecting rural areas and urban areas.



Village food served at GramYaatra
Agro-tourism, Gujarat

Origin of agro-tourism in India

Shri Pandurang Taware, known as the "Father of Agritourism in India, founded the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) in 2005 in Baramati, Maharashtra, to counter rural financial distress and urban migration. By transforming a dry 28-acre plot in Palshiwadi into a model centre, Taware connected urban recreation seekers with immersive rural experiences like traditional farming, crafts, and local cuisine. Operating on an umbrella platform model, ATDC trains and supports local smallholders to replicate this system without heavy upfront marketing costs. This pioneering initiative has established over 600 agritourism centres across Maharashtra, securing steady supplementary income and localized employment for thousands of farming families, making agriculture both economically viable and sustainable.

- **Reduces migration to urban areas:** Availability of employment in village itself does reduce the rural to urban migration leading to sustainable cities.
- **Expands market:** Agro-tourism practitioners can directly sell their fresh farm produce to the tourists at remunerative prices. Also, they can get regular orders for fruits and vegetables from the nearby cities at better prices.
- **Agripreneurship:** Agro-tourism centres can setup a small-scaled processing units on farm to sell the value-added products to the tourists. For example, GramYaatra, one such centre in the Bhavnagar district of

Gujarat, has a processing unit where they prepare medicinal powder from drumsticks and amla (Indian gooseberry). These products are traded right there at remunerative prices. They also process and produce other items like groundnut oil from the groundnut kernels and ghee, butter, paneer, cheese and curd from milk and sell them at remunerative prices. Also, all these products are completely organic in nature, thus adding more to the price tag. This enhances the economic status of the villagers substantially.

Social development: Agro-tourism is a bridging activity

between rural and urban population. It increases the interface between the two. The urban tourists play a transformative role as in the villages.

- **Education:** Agro-tourists promote the idea of higher education among the rural youth and women in particular. Organising tours for school and college students will help them develop positive attitude towards the agriculture and agricultural entrepreneurship.
 - **Women empowerment:** Women run cooperatives and Self-Help Groups that can sell their products to the agro-tourism Centres. This will lead to women empowerment and more women entrepreneurs from rural areas.
 - **Responsible living:** Agro-tourism centres will inculcate among the agro-tourists the values of responsible and judicious use of natural resources, and sustainable way of life. The infrastructure and buildings can be let out on rent for organising social functions which convey the message of a harmonious community life hand in glove with nature and its resources.
- Environmental conservation:**
An agro-tourism enterprise is setup in a natural setting i.e. agricultural farm. It is in harmony with the indigenous flora and fauna.
- **Organic farming:** Many agro-tourism centres produce organic vegetables and crops to serve their hosts with breakfast, lunch



Agricultural activity at Agro-tourism centre

and dinner prepared from organic vegetables and fruits.

- **Biodiversity:** Agro-tourism centres promote growing non-conventional trees and crops and create awareness for trees and lesser-known plants.
- **Sustainable architecture:** Agro-tourism centres create facilities to accommodate its guests in structures built using locally available resources and promote sustainable living.

Challenges in agro-tourism

Lack of adequate capital, knowledge and training programmes, risk factor for starting a new enterprise, linguistic barriers for communicating with the visiting tourists, weak transportation and fragile road connectivity in rural areas are some of the major challenges in the sector. There are

few gaps like lack of a national policy on agro-tourism, lack of state-specific initiatives in all the states and digital illiteracy among rural people, hindering them in using social media for advertisement of agro-tourism centres.

Future thrust in agro-tourism

Agro-tourism needs immediate attention of the stakeholders, viz. farming community, rural youth, agricultural institutions, central and state governments and private players to overcome the existing challenges in the field. Government of India should formulate a legislation and define agro-tourism as a cooperative, company or an enterprise. District or state level training centres for capacity building in hospitality industry and human resource management shall be of much help.

SUMMARY

Agro-tourism is an upcoming field in the tourism industry. It serves as an opportunity for socio-economic development and environmental conservation. It plays a vital role in educating the public, especially the urban elite about agriculture and environment, creating rural employment, and sharing agricultural heritage. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited promotional knowledge, and lack of coordination between sectors hinder its growth. Despite these challenges, agro-tourism is one of the viable options to sustain and promote livelihood opportunities in the rural areas of the country.

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