

## International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 7; Issue 9; September 2024; Page No. 796-802

Received: 03-07-2024  
Accepted: 04-08-2024

Indexed Journal  
Peer Reviewed Journal

### India's Agrotourism revolution: A comprehensive review of current trends

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i9k.1137>

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#### Abstract

Agrotourism, a unique form of tourism focusing on rural and agricultural experiences, has gained considerable attention in India over the past decade. According to the World Economic Forum, the Agrotourism market is expected to reach \$62.98 billion by 2027, an increase of 13.4 per cent from its current value of \$42.46 billion in 2019. The tourism sector is estimated to contribute over \$15.9 trillion to the country's economy in 2023, representing a 1% increase from the last year 2022. Agrotourism presents a distinctive opportunity to merge elements of tourism and agriculture, providing travellers, farmers, and communities with various financial, educational, and social advantages. It's crucial to address various challenges like insufficient funding, lack of stakeholder awareness, and inadequate infrastructure. Once these hurdles are overcome, agrotourism could emerge as a significant force in supporting sustainable tourism and revitalizing rural areas in India.

**Keywords:** Agrotourism, economic, policymakers, sustainable tourism

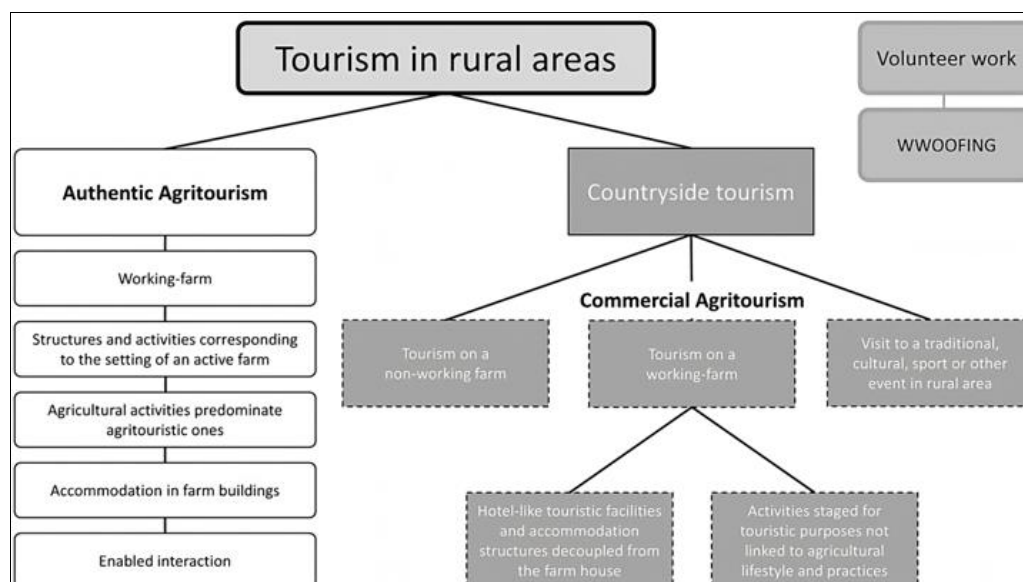
#### Introduction

A series of social, economic, and environmental changes worldwide since the second half of the 20th century have radically altered the planetary balance, resulting in climate change, pollution, and the loss of biological diversity <sup>[1]</sup>. With the growing gap between rich and poor countries, as well as a crisis in energy, manufacturing, and agriculture, it has become increasingly important to develop a concept of development that "meets the present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs" <sup>[2]</sup>. Rural and urban areas in India exhibit disparities. The rural areas are relatively undeveloped as compared to the urban areas. As a result, some planners started to consider spatial economic development as a whole from a balanced perspective <sup>[3]</sup>. India is often referred to as the "Land of Villages". The majority of the population, approximately 65%, lives in rural areas and only 35% in urban areas <sup>[4]</sup>. Agriculture is the predominant occupation in rural India. India's agriculture is not simply a business; it is the "true culture of the nation" <sup>[5]</sup>. Unfortunately, it has become unprofitable due to several factors, such as the unreliable monsoon, the fluctuating price of agro-products, insufficient technological knowledge, a lack of awareness about government regulations and rules, and some internal weaknesses of the agriculture sector itself <sup>[6]</sup>.

Therefore, agriculture is currently in decline, not in terms of food production, but rather as a desirable career. Because of the lack of income that farmers are receiving in some states, a lot of them are taking their own lives by suicide <sup>[7]</sup>. In the past few decades, rural communities have been faced with several challenges, including poor commodity prices, rising input costs, environmental pressures, and globalization, all of which have contributed to the decline of rural communities, resulting in economic, social, and ecological

decline in rural areas. In a situation like this, people are forced to settle down in nearby urban localities for a better income and a better way of life to survive. This has made urban areas more overburdened due to the increase in population [8].

A good way of preventing this chaos is by promoting tourism in rural areas of the nation to rejuvenate them and restore order. A situation in which villagers could get a sufficient number of alternative job opportunities would possibly reduce the tendency of locals to leave their native villages and thereby improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural areas <sup>[9]</sup>. Agrotourism is a sustainable way of promoting economic development in rural areas by combining agriculture and tourism <sup>[10]</sup>. Agriculture tourism can be an effective and profitable method of diversifying farm income and providing visitors with a genuine glimpse of life on a farm <sup>[11]</sup>. According to the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index 2024, India's rank is 39 out of 119 countries, which would be improved compared to the previous index of 51 in 2021 <sup>[12]</sup>. The agri-tourism market is currently valued at \$42.46 billion worldwide and is expected to reach \$62.98 billion by 2027 <sup>[13]</sup>. In India, the agricultural sector constitutes the backbone of the country's economy. About 75% of the population relies on agriculture directly or indirectly, and almost 18.3 % of the country's GDP is derived from agriculture. Meanwhile, the tourism sector is estimated to contribute over \$15.9 trillion to the country's economy in 2023 (about USD 215 billion), representing a 1% increase from last year 2022. A growth of 8.3 per cent is expected in the travel and tourism sector this year, with 35 million jobs being created <sup>[14]</sup>. It is a unique opportunity to experience the daily activities, common agricultural practices, and products of a working farm (Fig. 1).



**Fig 1:** Classification and features of tourism in rural areas (Streifeneder 2016, p. 259)

It has been termed an instrument for creating jobs, alleviating poverty, and promoting sustainable development. Adding additional income-producing activities to the existing agricultural sector will certainly increase agriculture's contribution to the national GDP. According to Business Economics (2021), it is estimated that the revenue generated by the tourism industry from Agrotourism is

growing at a rate of 20 percent per year, so Agrotourism is gaining popularity in the tourism industry <sup>[15]</sup>. This conceptual framework defines and categorizes Agrotourism and direct sales activities. By analyzing the degree to which Agrotourism activities are directly tied to agricultural activities, this framework organizes Agrotourism activities into core and peripheral activities <sup>[16]</sup>.



**Fig 2:** Conceptual Framework for Agrotourism Activities (Chase *et al.*, 2018)

### History and Concept of Agrotourism

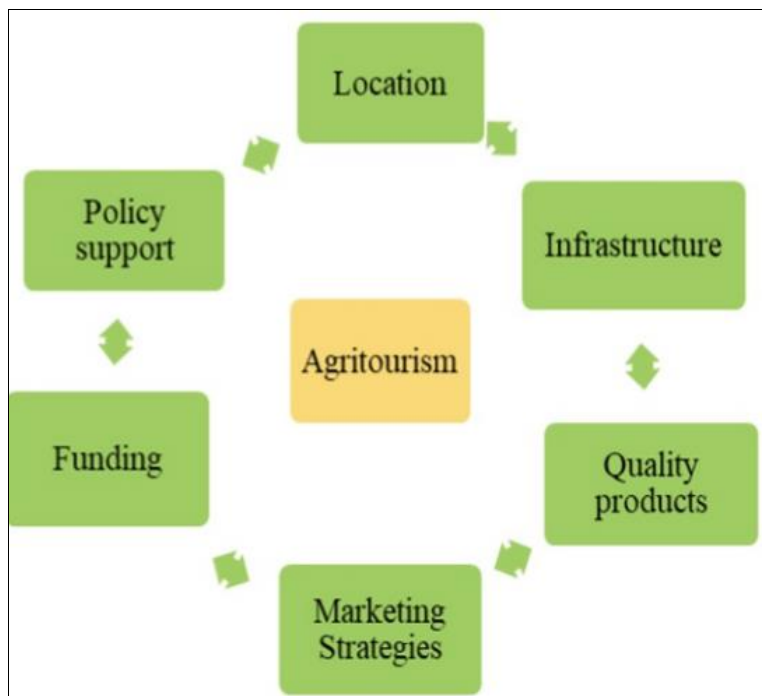
The term Agro-tourism is one of the most widely used terms in the tourism industry today, and it refers to any agriculturally based operation or activity that brings visitors to an agricultural or ranch setting. It has a wide range of definitions worldwide, and sometimes, it is explicitly used to describe farm stays, like in Italy. Typically, agro-tourism

includes an extensive range of activities, such as slopping pigs, picking fruit, feeding animals and staying at a bed and breakfast on a farm, shopping at a farm stand, navigating a corn maze, slopping hogs, navigating a corn maze, playing with animals and staying at a farm bed and breakfast. Further, agro-tourism is one of the forms of niche tourism, considered one of the fastest-growing industries in many

countries around the world <sup>[15]</sup>.

Agro-tourism has become an established business activity globally and in virtually all Indian states. This activity aims to provide tourists with a better understanding of rural life in a specific area through leisurely activities. An agro-tourism program has been established in the Baramati Agro Tourism Center under the guidance of Pandurang Taware, who, the

President of India, awarded the National Tourism Award for creating the most innovative tourism product. There are 218 affiliated farmers with Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), which operated agro-tourism centres in their respective villages in Maharashtra in 2014. It is a pioneer in the development and marketing of Agrotourism in India <sup>[16]</sup>.



**Fig 3:** Model for agrotourism transformation

#### Popular Agritourism destinations in India

1. Tea plantation regions: Assam, Darjeeling, Munnar, Nilgiris.
2. Coffee plantation regions: Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu.
3. Coconut plantation regions: Kerala, Tamil Nadu.
4. Cardamom plantation regions: Kerala, Karnataka, Darjeeling, Sikkim.

**Table 1:** Agri-tourism sites and their specializations.

States	Name of Village	Specialization
Andhra Pradesh	Village Etikoppaka, Distt. Vishakhapatnam	Wood Craft
Arunachal Pradesh	Village Deke, Distt. West Siang	Ethnic tribal culture
Bihar	Nepura Village, Distt. Nalanda, Gouripur village, Distt. Bhagalpur	Taser Silk weaving Tussahor Tusser
Gujarat	Dandi Village, Distt. Navsari	Mahatma Gandhi Heritage
Himachal Pradesh	Nagar, Distt. Kullu	Toppi and Shawl Weaving
Jammu & Kashmir	Village Agar Jitto, Distt. Udhampur	Culture & Craft
Karnataka	Coorg, Distt. Kodagu	Coffee Plantation
Kerala	Village Kalady, Distt. Ernakulam	Spices Village
Madhya Pradesh	Orchha, Distt. Tikamgarh	Historical & Adventure (River rafting)
Rajasthan	Samode Village, Distt. Jaipur Roopnagar village distt. Ajmer	Lac Work, Pepper painting, Gems stone painting Mega Food Park

#### Government initiatives and policies supporting Agrotourism

Tourism is widely recognized to need government involvement to spread all over the country <sup>[17]</sup>. Initially, government involvement in tourism could be described as an 'infrastructure and facility provider', primarily concerned with roads and utilities in tourism <sup>[18]</sup>. The coordination and involvement of the government in tourism planning is necessary since profit-motivated private sector

entrepreneurs are unlikely to develop tourism optimally <sup>[19]</sup>. In India, many states have taken the initiative to expand the agro-tourism. In Maharashtra, Agri Tourism Policy 2020 has been initiated, providing loans to agricultural practitioners who want to start startups in Agrotourism. [20] In Punjab, A farmhouse owner serves as both host and guide for tourists visiting the property. Punjab Tourism (formerly called the Punjab Heritage and Tourism Promotion Board) has established standards for cleanliness, hygiene, and

modern amenities for the comfort of visitors to farmhouses<sup>[21]</sup>. In Karnataka, farmers can get up to 75% of project costs funded by Karnataka Vikas Grameen Bank (KVGB) with a minimum of Rs.5 lakh @ 12.5% interest<sup>[22]</sup>. In Kerala, According to official statistics, tourism accounts for 10% of Kerala's GDP and contributes about 23.5% of its employment. So, the Kerala government has greatly aided the tourism industry in the southern state by allowing 5% of farmland to be used for tourism<sup>[23]</sup>. A scheme called "Har Gaon Ki Kahani" has recently been launched by the Himachal Pradesh government, as well as the "Home Stay Scheme", which has garnered a lot of attention from tourists to lesser-known and remote destinations within the state. Tourists can learn fascinating tales, folklore, and anecdotes about remote Himachal Pradesh villages under the "Har Gaon Ki Kahani" scheme<sup>[24]</sup>.

### Challenges and Constraints of Agro tourism

Despite Agrotourism's rapid growth, it cannot be seen as a solution to all issues faced by farms since it may not always produce a substantial increase in income. In order to remain competitive, farmers need to learn new skills and develop new capabilities to deal with the complex relationship between agriculture and tourism<sup>[25]</sup>. Several challenges were encountered in the process of proper management, among them the high costs of land development and initial investment, the lack of communication skills among staff, the inability to introduce other activities, and the lack of specific policies for promoting Agrotourism<sup>[26]</sup>. Quality of the service, the complexity of the service delivery, the infrastructure deficit, and the multi-level channel that was involved in the development of tourism at both the local and regional levels, the literacy rate, the lack of government assistance, and the lack of identification are some of the most significant problems farmers face when it comes to Agrotourism<sup>[27]</sup>. Developing basic infrastructure for agrotourism, lack of capital, lack of financial awareness, and lack of proper training have been the major obstacles to the growth of Agrotourism<sup>[28]</sup>.

### Socio-economic and Environmental Impacts of Agro tourism

In addition to exposing communities to tourists, Agrotourism can preserve natural, historical, and cultural resources. It allows locals to share their culture with tourists, build their self-esteem, and improve their quality of life through such exposure<sup>[29]</sup>. Moreover, such exposure may result in cultural changes, which, in turn, can help tourists appreciate, understand, and respect the value of local resources they regularly surround<sup>[30]</sup>. As an agro-tourism activity, agro-tourism has the potential to reduce gender bias in the same way that it gives both males and females equal opportunities to experience the benefits of agro-tourism<sup>[31]</sup>. Agricultural tourism offers employment opportunities to people of all ages and reduces unemployment. As a result, urbanization decreases, and migration is lessened due to a desire for better living and working conditions<sup>[32]</sup>. In addition to increasing an individual's income, agro-tourism also creates a continuous market for local products<sup>[33]</sup>. Additionally, some employers employ foreigners, particularly those from less developed countries, to reduce their human resources costs, as they accept lower salaries

than locals, resulting in fewer job opportunities for locals and increasing migration rates<sup>[34]</sup>. Furthermore, some employers hire foreign workers to reduce their human resources costs, especially those from less developed countries, as they accept lower salaries than locals. In turn, this has led to fewer jobs for locals, causing migration to increase<sup>[35]</sup>.

### Role of Digital Technologies and ICT for Sustainable Agrotourism

The development of technology and civilization generates new tourist desires, and agrotourism offers sustainable, affordable, comfortable, and relaxing solutions to humanity's needs. With the development of technology and society, new demands for tourists arise, and agrotourism is the correct response. While technology is seen as a crucial component for agrotourism growth, the findings suggest that challenges such as a lack of infrastructure, expenses, information, communication, technology literacy, awareness and education impede agrotourism growth. Farmers are interested in cultivating agrotourism, and their positive perceptions of the impact of digital technologies on their economic development and living conditions play an essential role in this<sup>[36]</sup>.

Using information and communications technologies for agrotourism, examine the advantages and challenges of implementing ICTs in agrotourism and ascertain any relationship between technology and agrotourism. As part of these initiatives, tourist information can be distributed, relevant information exchanged via SMS and Whatsapp platforms, profit can be gained, and farmers, customers, and suppliers can network globally to improve market activities. Technology is seen as a key factor in the growth of agrotourism. Despite this, several factors can prevent the effective use of ICT in the development and growth of agrotourism. In addition to high set-up costs, internet connectivity, digital literacy, cultural barriers, and lack of technical expertise, other factors influencing the process include the following. The research results indicate that technology usage is positively correlated with the development of agrotourism. The research findings suggest that agrotourism can be used to solve socio-economic challenges within society and generate revenue by amalgamating cutting-edge technology<sup>[37]</sup>.

### Opportunities of Agrotourism in India

Agrotourism is an essential source of additional income for farmers and rural communities. In addition to buffering the uncertainties in traditional agriculture, it also improves the rural economy. As a result of agrotourism, local economies in rural areas with limited development options can be regenerated economically<sup>[38]</sup>. Generating revenue, enhancing local economies, creating employment opportunities, and stimulating local business can improve the local economy. In addition to income enhancement, economic diversification, and seasonal fluctuations mitigation, agrotourism offers numerous opportunities<sup>[39]</sup>. As a result of agrotourism, rural areas have better infrastructure and services, contributing to rural development. There is a possibility of enhancing road connectivity, improving accommodations, and creating more jobs in the local economy through investments in



agritourism<sup>[40]</sup>.

Agricultural tourism offers a range of experiences, from hands-on activities to cultural immersions. Several festivals are held annually in the region, traditional cuisine is offered, and rural life can be admired. Through agrotourism, urban visitors can learn about agriculture, food production, and sustainability, promoting agricultural literacy and bridging rural-urban divides<sup>[41]</sup>. In rural communities, agrotourism enhances employment opportunities, stimulates innovation, and fosters entrepreneurship.

### The Future Prospect of Agrotourism in India

Through infrastructure investments, access to agritourism destinations will be improved, allowing visitors a more pleasant journey. In order to meet the needs of agritourism visitors, it is necessary to support the development of affordable and eco-friendly accommodations in rural areas. Incentives and subsidies can enhance sustainable tourism practices and stimulate growth. The provision of training programs for agritourism operators to improve their marketing skills, particularly in digital marketing and social media, will assist in attracting more visitors to the industry<sup>[42]</sup>. It is possible to increase visitors and visibility by creating attractive packages and participating in collaborative marketing efforts. Incentives and recognition can be provided to operators who meet specific criteria for sustainable agritourism practices through certification

programs.

In India, establishing clear and comprehensive regulations regarding agricultural tourism will facilitate the development of a responsible tourism environment by clarifying what activities are permissible, licensing requirements, and safety standards. Developing a single-window clearance system would reduce the administrative burden for agritourism operators by simplifying bureaucratic procedures. As an incentive, grant, or subsidy, agritourism can be promoted, infrastructure can be developed, marketing initiatives can be implemented, and sustainable practices can be encouraged. Training in farm management will improve the quality of agritourism products and services, enhancing the overall offering of agritourism destinations and their competitiveness.

### SWOT Analysis of Agrotourism in India

Most agrotourism tourists come from urban areas and travel with their families. A rural area shows respect for its customs and provides information about the places it intends to visit. Agriculture is not only a manufacturer of concrete goods; it can also produce intangible ones, including culture, education, food, landscapes and the environment. Therefore, It is necessary to conduct a SWOT analysis to determine the growth of agrotourism, which highlights the opportunities, weaknesses, strengths, and limitations. The SWOT analysis includes:

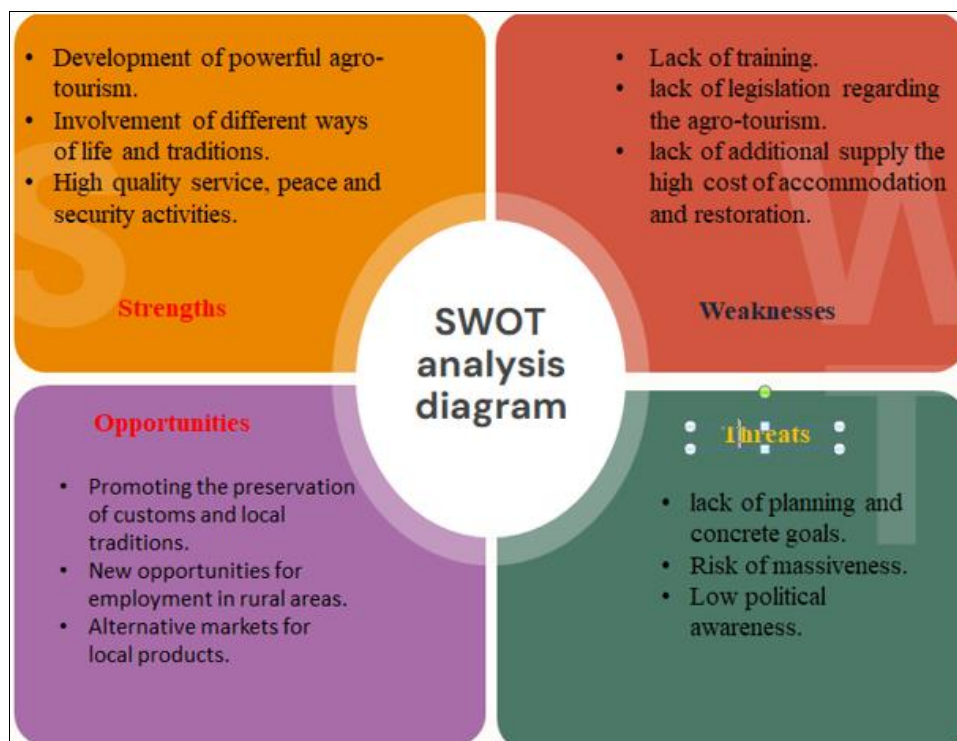


Fig 4: SWOT analysis of Agrotourism

### Conclusion

Agrotourism seems to be a possible way to sustain tourism growth in India and rehabilitate rural areas. It combined with tourism experiences to promote rural communities' natural beauty and culture while creating jobs, economic development, and environmental preservation. Visitors understand regional customs and practices more deeply by exploring India's diversified agricultural terrain. It serves as

an additional income stream for producers and improving livelihoods. Moreover, it can enhance local tax revenues and generate employment opportunities, boosting the economic prospects of farmers and nearby communities. Before agrotourism can effectively take root in India, addressing various challenges like insufficient funding, lack of stakeholder awareness, and inadequate infrastructure is crucial. Once these hurdles are overcome, agrotourism could

emerge as a significant force in supporting sustainable tourism and revitalizing rural areas in India.

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