

A study on consumer awareness and preference of urban tourists in Nagpur towards Agritourism

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Abstract

Agritourism may be a new concept for people in Vidarbha region in eastern region of Maharashtra, but it is not new to the world. Even if we look at western belt of Maharashtra, we find the growing awareness and preference for awareness of agritourism. Considering the social aspect of agritourism and its great help to the farmers as a financial support, there is a need to create awareness for Agritourism in Vidarbha.

Consumer adoption as a well established concept has sequential steps from awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and final adoption for usage of the product or service. For consumers in Vidarbha, need is to find out the status of initial two steps i.e. awareness and interest. To find out this status, researcher has conducted a survey making the research boundaries specifically confined to Nagpur considering Nagpur as a representative cluster of cities in Vidarbha. Efforts are done to find out awareness and preference (interest) for agritourism for the sector of weekend tourists in Nagpur city

Key words: Agritourism, agrotourism, Vidarbha, consumer awareness, consumer preference, Nagpur, consumer adoption, tourism, Maharashtra

I. Introduction

Tourism is defined as a form of active recreation away from one's place of residence that is inspired by cognitive, recreational and sport needs and 'agri' is a Latin word which means field or farm (Sznajder et al, 2009, p4). Agri-tourism is specifically defined by Manhas as "travel which combines agricultural or rural settings with products of agricultural operations all within a tourism experience or a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers". He also calls it "innovative income generating activity for enterprising farmers" (Manhas P., 2012, p45). It is defined by Matezold as "It is a set of activities that occur when people link travel with products, services and experiences of agriculture" (Maetzold, 2002). Thus Agri-tourism is a specific type of tourism which is confined to the tourism activities in an agricultural field or farm. It may include activities such as visit to a farm, watch and get involved in farm activities, experience the livestock such as cattle and goats, bullock cart ride, spending a day or two amidst nature, eating food cooked by local farmers and labour, visiting rural market and other such allied activities which relate to an agriculture farm.

Urban population is growing day by day and rural population is also migrating to urban and suburban area for employment and earning livelihood. There is a major shift in population pattern of India in last 3 decades. Level of urbanization increased from 27.81% in 2001 Census to 31.16% in 2011 Census of India. When on one hand urban population is rising, it has stiff competition and continuous struggle for survival which leads to job stress and monotonous urban lifestyle. On the other hand the rural life has challenges of employment, poverty and losses in agricultural production. Stress is on both sides, urban as well as rural. Moreover the children of today's generation are cut from our basic culture which lies in villages. They are cut from nature and from the natural environment. They see vegetables either packed or sold in vegetable markets. They seldom have knowledge of how these vegetables and grains are actually produced in fields and what kind of difficulties the farmers face in cultivating crops. All urban citizens look out for weekend outings for getting a sort of recreation so that they can get recharged and move back to their workplaces on Monday.

In Maharashtra, the concept of Agri-tourism is not new. Awareness of this concept is growing in western belt of Maharashtra due to progressive thinking of farmers, better irrigation, cash rich crops and wider market demographics. "There are 357 Talukas in Maharashtra, and there is a potential to develop three-four centres per Taluka" according to Pandurang Taware, president and MD, Agri Tourism Development Corporation, Pune. He further states that, such units

allow the country's culture and environment to grow sustainably. It provides respect which is due to farmers, and tourists understand the situation. (Taware , 2012)

However this concept has not reached and accepted in Vidarbha to the extent it should have been. Agritourism could become a good support for additional and regular revenue to the local farmers and could also contribute to the social development through rural employment. In fact it is more a need for Vidarbha farmers than western Maharashtra farmers. If the venture of agritourism works successfully in Vidarbha, it could lead to economic stability to the rural population and reduce the social unrest to a greater extent.

II. Rationale of study

Farmers in India as general and Vidarbha as specific face problems on various fronts such as lack of irrigation, monsoon dependent farming, financial loss due to situation of repeated sowing, lack of funds resulting in to buying lower quality seeds and fertilizers which result in to low yield crops and further lead to inability of the farmer to repay the loans taken from local money lenders (which are basically borrowed for consumption purpose and not investment) and overall financial crisis. Major income opportunities for farmers are only twice a year, Kharif and Rabi harvesting. Thus Agritourism can prove as regular source of income to the farmer as well become a source of employment to the local labour of the village. Thus the researcher aims at developing an economically sustainable business model which should also appeal attractively to the urban weekenders (specifically considering the increasing demographics of urban regions and possibility of smart city venture in Nagpur). Thus research on agritourism gains economic, social as well as cultural importance and the addresses the very need of providing a sound non farming income support to the farmer. It is obvious that Nagpur as an emerging city and smart city, would attract more tourists and would grow demographically as well. This is a positive indicator for the growth of rural tourism initiatives around Nagpur city. This increasing momentum will have its impact on entire Vidarbha in near future.

III. Research Methodology

To study the stage of consumer adoption of urban tourists in Nagpur regarding agritourism services, empirical research was considered as the best tool of research. Primary data is collected by conducting a field survey of sample of 200 respondents across Nagpur city. To reduce the sample errors and to represent the variance, a sample frame was prepared with sample distribution as below:

Occupation wise sample distribution			Age wise Sample distribution		
Business	63	32%	Less than 35	81	41%
Govt service	26	13%	more than 35	119	60%
Housewife	24	12%			
Professionals	28	14%			
Pvt Service	31	16%			
students	28	14%			

Table 1

Sample of 200 is divided as approximately 30% business and associations and 70% individuals which are the further segmented. In age wise segmentation minimum age considered was 25 years and maximum age of respondents was 60 years.

Survey was conducted in Nagpur city using method of stratified random sampling. In first stage, strata were identified and within the strata, random sampling was done in the second stage. Simple methods of central tendency were used to analyse the data.

Data Analysis and interpretation

No of times people go for weekend outing in a year: 4.57 mean , 6 mode, Std. Deviation: 2.677

It can thus be considered that people go for weekend outings once in two months.

Preference of people for outing:

Amusement parks	43
Natural scenic places	69
Jungle safaris	92
Temples	75
Farm House	56
Nearby Hill stations	88

Table 2

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Since Nagpur is the "Tiger capital of India" with thick forest region around it, maximum people preferred Jungle safaris. Amusement parks were least preferred destinations.

Average amount paid for outings per person per day was Rs 777.50

72% people visit in groups of less than 20 people (mostly families), 25% with groups of 20 to 40 people (associations and organizations) and only 3% visit in groups of more than 40 people (larger associations and large companies).

Awareness level: How many respondents are aware about agritourism?

Aware	36	18%
Unaware	164	82%

Table 3

18% respondents were not aware about agritourism. In fact 86.5% people never visited agritourism.

Level of satisfaction from Agritourism (from those 27 who actually visited)

	2	7%
Satisfied	21	78%
Neutral	4	15%
Dissatisfied	0	0%
Highly dissatisfied	0	0%

Table 4

85% were satisfied out of which, highly satisfied were only 7%. Nobody was dissatisfied.

Interest level: 81% respondents would like to visit agritourism, while from those who previously visited, 89% would like to visit again.

Preference level: Out of those who wish to visit agritourism, only 52 (26%) would actually prefer it over other destinations

Yes	52	26%
Not sure	52	26%
No	58	29%

Table 5

29% do not wish to prefer it over other destinations.

Affordability: average amount which tourists would like pay for a day visit to agritourism per person is Rs 916.25, maximum people quoting Rs 1000/- (mode value) with standard deviation of Rs 271.82

Distance tourists are ready to travel to visit agritourism:

Less than 20 Km	19	9.5%
20 to 40 Km	92	46%
More than 40 km	89	44.5%

Table 6

It shows that distance does not matter much. In Fact, People prefer longer distances for weekends.

Way of getting information and booking, preferred by respondents:

Online / website	70
Through sales person	62
Over Phone	81

Table 7

People are comfortable booking online and over phone, too. However there were still notable number of respondents who would like to visit a sales person face to face before booking a agritourism visit.

Impact of Age on interest for visiting Agritourism

	less than 35 yrs	More than 35 Yrs	
No	36 (32.00) [0.50]	43 (47.00) [0.34]	79
Neutral	19 (24.70) [1.32]	42 (36.30) [0.90]	61
Yes	26 (24.30) [0.12]	34 (35.70) [0.08]	60
Column Totals	81	119	200 (Grand Total)

Table 8

The chi-square statistic is 3.2566. The p -value is .196261. The result is *not* significant at $p < .05$. Thus there is no significant impact of age on the preference of agritourism.

IV. Conclusion & Recommendations

Since Nagpur district is blessed with rich flora and fauna with deep forests and pilgrimage destinations, agritourism could be an added advantage and additional revenue for farmers in Nagpur district. Even we consider that the season for agritourism could be stretched over complete year, September to March are the seven months when farmers can expect good revenues from this venture. This study was done keeping in mind feasibility of agritourism as an addition mode of rural tourism in Nagpur district and farmers could benefit out of it.

Major issue in case acceptance of agritourism as a profitable venture is awareness of tourists. Tourists in Nagpur are mostly unaware (82%) about agritourism. Point to note is that out of the remaining 18% , 13.5 % have actually visited and 85% of those who visited are satisfied. Eventually nobody was found dissatisfied with the experience. 89% of those who visited once previously, are ready to visit again. Preference for agritourism above other destinations is only 26% but there could be many reasons to this. It may be because most of the respondents haven't visited and agritourism needs a different set of mind wherein tourists need to be actively involved in farm activities and be ready for a rustic experience. Agritourism may be slightly physically uncomfortable than other destinations due to its rural set up and lack of urban luxuries. In spite of this respondents are ready to pay Rs. 916.25 per person per day which a good sign. People are also ready to travel longer distance as they perceive weekend destinations to be far enough to get a feel of long drive.

Like any other services marketing, service providers of agritourism need to prepare and display physical evidences (5th P of services marketing). This can be done by documenting customer reviews, displaying photographs of their farms on social media and hoardings. Apart from this they should work on better customer service, effective communication and standardization of the process. Amenities such as tractor ride, bullock cart ride, village games, village food prepared on traditional stove using vegetables from the farm, fishery, water pond, etc should be provided to make the stay of the customers more enchanting and blissful. (Agritourism. in) There is nothing better and effective than word of mouth when it comes to marketing of services. These recommendations, if followed with a drive to increase awareness of citizens of Nagpur towards agritourism, can surely be a profitable and sustainable venture in near future.

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