Rural Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir: Opportunities and Challenges with Special Reference to Kashmir

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Abstract

Rural tourism a recent offshoot of tourism sector has been identified as a viable theme for sustainable development throughout the world. Rural tourism related activities are widely regarded as key-tools for rural development, especially in developing countries. The development of a strong platform around the concept of rural tourism is definitely useful for a country like India where almost 74 percent of the population resides in its 7 million villages. The state of Jammu and Kashmir comprises of almost 72 percent rural population and its economy is based on agriculture, horticulture, handicraft, handloom, sericulture forests and hydro power projects. Jammu and Kashmir has a great potential for the development of rural tourism because of its several distinguished tourism attractions ranging from beautiful hill stations, scenery, horticultural products, the architectural masterpieces, fairs, festivals, art, crafts, culture, forest, wildlife etc. This purpose of this study is to examine the role of government in rural tourism development of Jammu and Kashmir and also attempts to analyze various opportunities and challenges for rural tourism development in the area of study. The outcome of research work will be beneficial to the stakeholders of tourism industry as well as the policy makers in planning effectively the road map for rural tourism development and promotion in Jammu and Kashmir

Keywords: rural tourism, development, challenges, opportunities

1. Introduction

The term rural tourism has varying connotations across the globe. It is well defined and development concept in European countries such as U.K., Hungary, Finland, Greece and other developed nations. Unfortunately, this concept has not been taken up seriously in the developing nations so far like India. Rural tourism is a multi-faced activity that takes place in an environment outside heavily urbanized area. It is an industry sector characterized by small scale tourism business, set in areas where land use is dominated by agricultural pursuits, forestry or natural area.” (Dept. of Tourism, 1994) Since the rural attraction supply has increased at an even higher growth rate in different developing as well as developed nations. The scheme of rural tourism in India was started in 2002-03 with the objective of highlighting rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages which have core competence in art, craft, handloom, textiles and natural environment. The intention is to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as to enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. Rural tourism is a
form of alternative tourism. In fact it is relatively a new development against mass tourism (Chand and Kumar 2006). Given the expected growth of tourism there is a great optimism for rural tourism. Rural tourism has been neglected in India for a variety of factors including lack of infrastructure, civic amenities, lack of publicity, and peoples’ awareness and accessibility to tourist locations. As a result, tourists from the home country and overseas countries prefer to visit urban tourist sites.

2. Review of Literature

According to Lewis, James B. (1998) et.al one of the most popular issues in rural community development is the use of tourism as a tool for development. There is a good deal of information about rural tourism including economic analysis of tourism, its impacts, and its effect on people. R.N. Kaul (1985) points out that “one of the reasons for travel has been the desire to widen one’s knowledge and understanding about other peoples, place, and countries and study their culture, customs, ways of life and heritage and satisfies ones curiosity about them. Rajeev Kumar (2008) rural tourism is a subset of tourism that consists of ranging aspect such as farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. According to Negi (1990) attractions in rural areas includes enjoyment of rural scenery, the desire for open space, quiet and peace of mind. Rural sports like hunting, fishing, ethnic attractions like folk life, custom, food, drinks, and festivals. Educational and historical attractions like castles, churches, temples etc. Vanhoe (1980) noticed, “Five most commonly occurring economic variables affecting tourism demand are income level, population, relative prices, and exchange rate and travel costs.” Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) argue the benefit of tourism results from an alternative development strategy for economic and social regeneration of rural areas, as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth, increased viability of underdeveloped regions and improve the standard of living of local communities. Hall and Jenkins (1998) suggest that the expansion of tourist flows in rural areas: To sustain and create local incomes, employment and growth, to contribute to the costs of providing economic and social infrastructure, to encourage the development of other industrial sectors, to contribute to local resident amenities and services. Also important is to contribute to the conservation of environmental and cultural resources. Lane .B (1994) points out that “rural tourism should be located at rural areas. Functionally rural i.e. small scale enterprises, open space; natural contact, heritage, traditional, societal practices etc. rural in scale; traditional in character; take different forms representing the complex pattern of rural environment, tourists share in village life, and rural villages gain economic and other benefits from tourist activities. According to the Annual Report of Ramakrishna Mission and Pallimangal Kamarpukur, 2006-2007, tourism is more labor intensive than other sectors. According to Chakraborty (2007), Tourism services can increase employment, but businesses may target skilled labor elsewhere rather than train local labor from amongst the poor. According to Singh (1994), the interest of tourism and heritage conservation is complementary and thus tourism and culture become partners in the developmental process. As Telfer (2002) suggested, growing numbers of city-dwellers are getting away from it all in the countryside. One of the advantages of rural tourism is that it is based on local; initiatives, local management, has local spin-offs, is rooted in local scenery and it taps into local culture. Benefits of rural tourism have been expressed as
employment growth and broadening a region’s economic base, there is repopulation, social improvement, and revitalization of local crafts (Sharpley, 2000)

3. Scope of the Study
The government of Jammu and Kashmir has recently recognized the importance of rural tourism in economic development of the rural areas in the state. This purpose of this study is to examine the role of government in rural tourism development of Jammu and Kashmir and also attempts to analyze various opportunities and challenges for rural tourism development in the area of study. The outcome of research work will be beneficial to the stakeholders of tourism industry as well as the policy makers in planning effectively the road map for rural tourism development and promotion in Jammu and Kashmir

4. Objectives of the Study
The main objectives of the study are
2. To analyze various opportunities and challenges of rural tourism development in Kashmir
3. To suggest recommendations for promotion and development of rural tourism in Jammu and Kashmir.

5. Research Methodology
A qualitative design was used due to the nature of data which was basically descriptive in nature. Among other aspects, the researcher assessed attitude, perception and knowledge, all of which are qualitative in nature. The data for this study was collected through a closed ended structured questionnaire survey due to the fact that many people in these rural areas have low level of education. The study area had eight rural tourism destinations recently developed by government and the units of analysis chosen include local residents at these rural tourism projects. The quantitative responses were measured on a Likert scale with (1=strongly disagree, 3=neutral and 5=strongly agree). Initially a total of 90 respondents were determined as sample size on the basis of a convenience sample method. However, only 82 participated in the final survey (91.11% response rate). Eight Respondents could not participate due to various reasons beyond the control of the researchers. This secondary data for the study was collected from published articles, government reports and websites. The paper presents descriptive and statistical analysis of only 82 respondents who gave useful information by applying various relative statistical tools, such as mean, standard deviations, Coefficient of variation and ANNOVA

6. Rural Tourism in Jammu and Kashmir
Breathtaking in its natural splendor grand in its wild denizens & rich in its cultural heritage, J&K as a destination has a huge potential for rural tourism. The economy of Jammu and Kashmir is mainly dependent on farming and animal husbandry and is famous for some small-scale and cottage industries including carpet weaving, silks, handicrafts, copper and silverware etc. Realizing the huge potential of rural tourism in Jammu and Kashmir, the ministry of tourism, Government of India recently started the scheme to promote various rural tourism projects in coordination with Directorate of Tourism J & K Govt. Jammu and Kashmir had the maximum number of successful projects as per the rural tourism project Scheme of India and a few examples of projects where components have been properly and successfully implemented are

1. **Jheri village**
   Jheri is a small village in Jammu district, famous for Baba Jitto Shrine. An annual fair is held in the name of Baba Jitu, a simple and honest farmer who preferred to kill himself rather than accept the demands of the local landlord related to field and crops. He killed himself in the village of Jhiri, 14 km from Jammu. A legend has grown around Baba and his followers who congregate at Jhiri on the appointed day from every corner of North India.

2. **Village Surinsar**
   Surinsar village famous for its Surinsar Lake is approximately 24 km from Jammu. This lake is a beautiful and peaceful site to watch. According to one Hindu mythology the origination of the lake is related to the legendary warrior from Mahabharata, Arjuna. It is believed that Arjuna shot an arrow into Mansar land and arrow pierced the earth and came out through a place where Surinsar Lake is situated.

4. **Village Akingaam**
   The village of Akingaam is located at a distance of 4 km from Acchabal in the District of Anantnag. According to legends the Pandits of Akingaam took to Bhand Pather on the express order of a goddess, Devi who placed a fiddle (swarnai) in the hands of one of their ancestors. Akingaam home of the community of Bhands, the traditional folk performers of Kashmir.

4. **Village Drung**
   Drung is one of the Villages in Baramulla District of Jammu & Kashmir State. Drung is 18.5 km distance from its District Main City Baramulla and 46 km distance from the Main City Srinagar of J&K.

5. **Village Gagangir**
   A small village east of Srinagar called Gagangir, which is near the larger town of Sumbal in the heart of the Kashmir Himalayas. The village is situated in a valley with 4000-6000 meter peaks surrounding it, it's similar to Yosemite valley but on a much grander scale.

6. **Village Pahalgam**
   This world famous hill station is 45 Kms from the district Head Quarter at Anantnag and located on the banks of river Lidder at an altitude of 7200 ft. from sea level. Pahalgam serves as base camp for the famous Amarnath Ji Yatra. The Pahalgam Valley presents glamorous look due to its pine forests, snow clad mountains, healthy climate and vast meadows and pastures.
Table 1: Main Rural Tourism Projects in J&K and their USPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Name Of The Village</th>
<th>U.S.P</th>
<th>Overall Status</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J&amp;K</td>
<td>Village Jheri, District Jammu</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>The project needs to be advertised to generate interest among tourists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surinsar, District Jammu</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>The project needs to be advertised to generate interest among tourists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Akingaam, District Anantnag</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Completion of work and proper marketing of the project is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Drung, District Baramula</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>Completion of work and proper marketing of the project is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gagangir, District Srinagar</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>The project needs to be advertised to generate interest among tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Pahalgam, District Anantnag</td>
<td>Pilgrimage</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>The project needs to be advertised to generate interest among tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Vasaknag, District Anantnag</td>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>Completion of work and proper marketing of the project is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Village Dori Degai, District Jammu</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Moderately Successful</td>
<td>The project needs to be advertised to generate interest among tourists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Tourism

7. Opportunities for Rural Tourism Development in Jammu & Kashmir

The trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach across the world. Along with this, the stresses of urban life styles have led to a counter urbanization syndrome. This has led to growing interest in rural areas. On the other hand, the growing trend of urbanization has led to falling of income levels, lesser job opportunities leading to desertion of villages. Rural tourism could be a solution to this. Along with this, increasing level of awareness, growing interest in heritage and culture and improved accessibility and environmental consciousness is also increasing the importance of rural tourism. Considering the advent of railway transportation in Kashmir and improved road connectivity which
shortens the relative distance between regions, rural tourism in Kashmir faces strong development opportunities. There is also great scope of rural tourism in Kashmir due to its unique natural environment that seem to be fashionable in the national and international tourism market. Rural tourism as supplemental income can contribute to the increase of well being of the rural inhabitants, the reduced out migration and to the development of the rural area. Tourism is increasing the life quality of the inhabitants of the study area and it reduces the differences between the rural and urban region.

**Socio- Economic Impacts of Rural Tourism Projects in Jammu and Kashmir**

The results in table 2 indicate the perception of residents towards different socio-economic impacts of rural tourism projects in Jammu and Kashmir. The residents were asked to respond from significantly increased (=5) to significantly decreased (=1). Therefore higher values in the table indicate increase in parameter and vice versa

**Local Employment:-**

Rural tourism contributes positively to the increase in employment. Youths are found to be engaged in one or the other work related to the rural tourism projects. The high mean value of 0.321 indicates that rural tourism projects improved local employments.

**Growth of Infrastructure:-**

One of the major issues in connection with rural tourism models is to dedicate or at least prioritize many of the infrastructure facilities for the use of tourists. The results indicate that rural tourism has improved the availability of basic infrastructure in the area.

**Increase in local Income:-**

Rural Tourism in Jammu & Kashmir has helped to generate additional income to the residents. Most of the respondents strongly agree that there is improvement in the local income due to these tourism projects as reflected by the high mean value of 4.13.

**Preservation of Culture and Tradition**-

Residents are generally positive about the influence of rural tourism on their culture. The respondents felt that tourism has contributed positively to the cultural advancement of the region.

**Ecology & Environment**:-

Since rural tourism model in Jammu and Kashmir is in its infancy the number of tourists to the place is very low. Therefore the damage to ecology and environment due to tourism is also less. A mean value of 0.385 for this parameter indicates people feel that the implementation of rural tourism project has enhanced environmental consciousness and has resulted in better preservation of ecology and environment.

**Growth in Quality of Life:-**

The perception of people regarding the improvement in quality of life due to rural tourism is neutral. The people do not agree that rural tourism has enhanced their quality of life as indicated by a neutral mean value of 2.53 along this dimension.

**Enhancement of Knowledge**:-

The development of tourism in the place led to conscious efforts among many villagers to develop their knowledge and skills. Since the overall perception of residents is positively oriented (0.364), as the tourism in Jammu and Kashmir matures there will be significant value addition to their knowledge and skill.
8. Table 2: Perception of Residents on Socio-Economic Impact of Rural Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>CV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>19.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>Growth of Infrastructure</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>10.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Increase in local Income</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>28.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Preservation of Culture &amp; Traditions</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>12.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>Ecology &amp; Environment</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>29.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>Growth in Quality of Life</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>19.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07</td>
<td>Enhancement of Knowledge</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>18.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Challenges in Rural Tourism

The major challenges are need to preserve the environment and natural resources, the need for education, proper understanding for both tourists and local people, and the need to generate a democratic movement which helps people at all levels to participate in tourism development. Also they need to focus on occupation & training, handicraft promotion, and improvement of both the landscape and the basic infrastructure, to increase the villagers’ quality of life by creating a healthy environment. Apart from above the major challenges that Rural tourism Development faces are as follows:

**Legislation Problems** - Tourism is a part of entertainment so all hotels, motels and cottage having license are paying high taxes to the government. But in rural tourism as rural people will also be involved, there should be a provision of tax holiday.

**Lack of Trained Manpower** - People trained in hotel management would not like to go to the rural areas so it will have to depend on rural people who are required to be trained to cater to the needs of the tourists. Skills and knowledge are often acquired by trial and error. Hence, awareness of customer expectations is limited, so sometimes workers have only basic skills in hospitality and service. Moreover a rural location sometimes entails limited supplies and uneven quality in the services available.

**Insufficient Financial Support** - Government should encourage rural tourism by providing financial support to start the projects. Sufficient financial support is required for essential developments like human resource, enforcement of rules and regulations, building of physical infrastructures, and to preserve the local culture, traditions, heritage, art etc.

**Lack of Local Involvement** - Since the rural people lack knowledge and skills, they may get the jobs of unskilled worker. The basic concept behind rural tourism is to emphasize on participation of rural people. But in practice local people are seldom involved in decision making, planning and implementing policies. Most of the rural people do not have much
knowledge of tourism, and are misled by outside investors who hope to take most of the economic benefits from rural areas

**Illiterate Population**- Vast majority of the rural populations are uneducated and illiterate so they are bounded by the traditional values and customs. Their culture, religion, superstition have a strong influence on their attitudes and behaviors. They follow a slow life style pattern and like to stick to their traditional jobs whether they are remunerative or not and are not interested to take up risk.

**Lack of Communication Skills**- Language and education is the basic hindrance in communication and creates negative impacts on tourists. Villagers will have to understand the tourist wants and needs. There should not be any communication gap between the guest and the host. Either the rural people have to upgrade themselves to communicate with the tourists or they will not get much benefit from the rural tourism.

**Lack of Physical Infrastructures**- Majority of the villages in Jammu and Kashmir lack all weather roads. For developing tourism in rural areas, not only all-weather roads but also safe drinking water, electricity, telephone, safety and security, etc. are needed. Facilities such as telecommunication and latest updated technology are rather poor in rural areas of State.

**Lack of Investment** - Another problem in the rural regions of Kashmir is lack of investment. To a certain extent, a poor track record and relatively low revenues repel potential investors. Moreover, high costs for insurance and a rather rigid framework of regulations are other reasons for relatively limited engagement in rural tourism. Hence, dependency on public investment and support programmes is high because private capital for investments is absent.

**Business Planning Skills**- For any business, technical knowledge and skill is required to organize and maintain it. With the help of government or non-government organization, business plan could be prepared. But, the villagers should participate in developing and implementing the project on rural tourism, otherwise it will not give much benefit to the rural people.

**9. Conclusion**

Rural tourism is in its nascent stage in Jammu and Kashmir but it is bound to grow. The government of India has notified rural tourism as one of the major sources for generating employment and promoting sustainable livelihood. The experience of many countries shows that rural tourism can be seen as an alternate source of livelihood and employment. The paper examined the role of government in rural tourism development of Jammu and Kashmir and the study revealed that Public sector has successfully developed various rural tourism projects in different parts of J&K. However, it was revealed that rural tourism presently faces the challenges of lack of investment, infrastructure, shortages of trained manpower, inadequate physical amenities, language problems and business planning skills etc. But besides this still J&K as a rural tourism destination has a very vast scope for such kind of product. To facilitate the development of tourism in Kashmir provision of good road networks to facilitate tourists’ traffic and other physical infrastructure to stimulate development of tourist facilities should be considered. As the government is the prime provider of the above mentioned services, the process of imaging Kashmir for rural tourism will depend on the input of government in physical infrastructures. The study further concluded that the government should develop efficient strategies to tap the potential by the involvement of local community by realizing their benefits from rural tourism.
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