



Research Article

STATUS AND GROWTH PROSPECTS OF AGRITOURISM: MULTI-STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The present study was conducted to assess the impact of agri-tourism as perceived by its stakeholders. The sample comprised of forty-five Agri-tourism Centres (ATCs) drawn from two states i.e. Maharashtra (n=30) and Goa (n=15). The total number of visitors selected for the study was 200, thus consisting 100 visitors each from respective states. It followed an ex-post facto research design and was purposively conducted in Maharashtra and Goa. The status was determined by combination of parameters such as package tariff per person per day, level of dependency on farm income, seasonal trend of agritourists arrival to farms, agritourists motivation to visit and agritourism selection criteria. The overall prospects of agritourism venture among the operators of both states combined was as high as reported by 46.67 percent of the total respondents while equal percentage (26.67%) reported medium and low overall prospects. Similarly, in terms of increasing promotional activities, 46.67 percent of the respondents reported high prospects and 40 percent of the respondents were willing to add facilities to the agri-tourism unit thereby indicating great prospects of agri-tourism venture in the study area.

Keywords: Agritourism centres (ATC), Stakeholders, Ex-post facto, Status, Prospects

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Introduction

Agritourism is the idea of visiting an agricultural, horticultural, animal husbandry or agri-business activity for the purpose of recreation, education or active participation in farm or project activities [1]. In general, agritourism is the practice of attracting visitors to an area used primarily for agricultural purposes. Agritourism is a junction where agriculture meets tourism and there is certain learning along with leisure and vacation. Indian agriculture, which is currently under stress in terms of farmers' earnings and vagaries of nature, agritourism can benefit farmers by increasing their earnings and this benefit could snowball to the village community. The paybacks of agritourism development are diverse. It includes cash flow during the off season, opportunity to sell the "experience" of agricultural venue, opportunity to trade products grown and harvested in the agricultural operation and opportunity to share the passion of agriculture with others [2]. Thus, by providing substitute income via farm products and farming activities, agritourism can add to a farm's overall income, cash flow and profitability [3]. But the profit is mainly dependent on its status and growth of agritourism in the entire region not just sporadic patches of agritourism sites. Thus, present objective was to find the status of agritourism in the study area and assess the growth prospects by considering relevant parameters.

Material and Methods

The current status of ATCs engaged in agritourism venture is studied with respect to response of both the operators and tourists regarding few parameters which are listed in the following table.

Further, prospects of agritourism were studied in terms of farmer's willingness to increase facilities and promotional activities in agritourism as a means of increasing their socio-economic benefits. Further, the willingness of the farmers was studied in terms of future plans of the farmers regarding the various types of agritourism activities they were willing to provide and offered the agri products, which were of interest to the tourists.

It was measured on a three-point continuum i.e. willing, somewhat willing and not at all willing and score of 2, 1 and 0 was assigned, respectively. The instrument used is modified from [4]. The data were collected by personal interview as well as focused group discussion methods. The collected data was analysed with the help of various statistical methods in STATA, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and XL-STAT.

Table-1 Status of agritourism

Categories	Measurement
Package tariff per person per day	Amount of rupees charged per person per day at the ATC
Level of dependency on farm income	Measurement instrument developed by Borlikar (2017)
Seasonal trend of agritourists arrival to farms	Number of tourists visited the ATC in previous year
Agritourists motivation to visit	Primary motive behind visiting any agritourism centre
Agritourism selection criteria	Basis on which an ATC is selected by the visitors/tourists to experience the agritour

Agritourism motivation and selection criteria of ATC for visit were prioritized according Garret ranking method.

Results and discussion

Status and Growth prospects of agritourism in the study area

The current status of ATCs engaged in agritourism venture is studied with respect to response of both the operators and tourists regarding few parameters which are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Package tariff per person per day

The [Table-2] reveals that the agritourism centres offered at least two packages to the tourists. Firstly, the 8 to 9 hour ' Day Package ' from morning to night which typically involves breakfast, lunch and evening snacks along with a few operations that fit in that period.

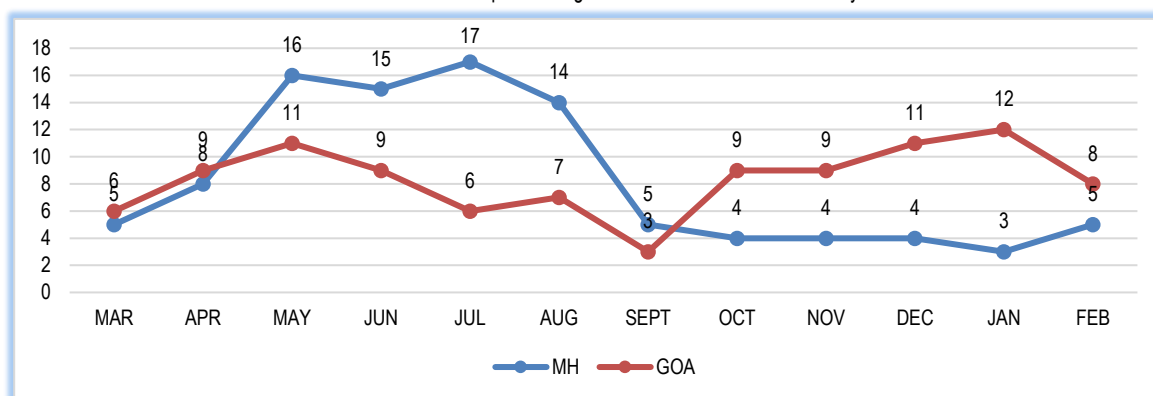


Fig-1 Arrival pattern of visitors to Agritourism farms in Maharashtra and Goa in previous years

The other package offered by the centres is 'overnight package' or 'one day – one night' package, which includes lunch, dinner and a breakfast along with the stay at the centre. The cost of 'day package' varies from ₹350 to ₹1000 per person whereas the tariff for 'overnight package' was largely between ₹1000 to ₹2000. The package of more than ₹2000 involves extra events and activities along with increased duration of stay.

Table-2 Distribution of ATC operators based on their present status of agritourism parameters (n=45)

SN	Particulars	Category	f	%
1	Package Tariff Per person per day	< ₹1000	2	4.4
		₹ 1000 - 1499	29	64.4
		₹ 1500 - 2000	10	22.22
		> ₹ 2000	4	8.88
2	Level of Dependency	All income from farming	10	22.2
		Farm income Primary	15	33.3
		On and off-farm income equally important	8	17.8
		Off-farm income Primary	8	17.8
		Farm income not critical	4	8.9

Level of Dependency

The data in [Table-2]. shows the distribution of the respondents into five levels of economic dependency. The majority of the respondents are found to be belonging to total economic dependency to medium level of economic dependency on the farm income.

Arrival pattern of visitors to ATCs of sampling area

The arrival pattern is the regularity of visits by the agritourists in last three years which is drawn into a figure by converting number into percentage. The data on number of visitors in the previous years was collected using their entry registers. In few cases where registers were not fully updated, approximate number was calculated based on owners' memory. [Fig-1] shows the trend of arrival of agritourists to the ATCs in the previous years. The visitors for both Maharashtra and Goa ATC are shown in the separate line graph that highlights the variation in the seasonal trend for both the states.

The number of tourists in percentage increases for both states from March to May but gradually it decreases for Goa and increases for Maharashtra. Further, from September to December, the tourists' arrival gradually increases in case of Goa because of holiday season and year end whereas the number starts downward trend in case of Maharashtra from August till January because of lack of rainy season. Moreover, rabi season in MH will not attract as many tourists as kharif season. The results of the trend analysis in visitor's arrival to ATCs is in line with findings of [5].

Agritourists motivation to visit

Data in the [Table-3]. shows the preferred ranking given by all the agritourists combined together of both Maharashtra and Goa regarding their motivations for being an agritourist. The weighted Mean Ranking method was used to get these results from the ranking data. This list of probable motivations was listed based on previous study of [6]. Further, few were modified according to the respondents as

well. The opportunity to be close to nature is ranked as the most motivating factor to choose agritourism by the respondents.

Table-3 Motivations for being an Agritourist (n=200)

SN	Motivating attributes	Weighted Mean	Rank
1	To be close to natural environment	4.30	I
2	Different holiday experience	4.10	II
3	Local cuisine	4.08	III
4	To be together with family/friends	4.03	IV
5	Mental & physical relaxation	3.95	V
6	To experience agricultural life & activities	3.77	VI
7	To experience authentic rural culture & living	3.73	VII
8	Escape from city life	3.71	VIII
9	Escape from stress	3.50	IX
10	Knowledge about agriculture	3.42	X
11	To purchase agri-products	3.36	XI
12	Nostalgia	3.14	XII

Results show that a short but relaxing break from the monotonous urban lifestyle, with the chance to spend some quality time with the family and friends, while relishing the authentic rural cuisine were the important motivational factors for the respondents. The opportunity of learning about the rural - farming life and agriculture along with purchasing opportunity of fresh agri-products is weighted bit less by the respondents. Despite the minimal weight given for 'nostalgia' in the results, it is still a very important attribute of agritourism.

Agritourism selection criteria

Tourists consider several aspects while selecting the agritourism centre to visit. Major considerations were listed and the respondents were asked to rank them according to their preference. The results are shown in [Table-4]. after processing the data using Garrett Ranking Method. The majority of the agritourists gave the utmost importance to the agritourism centre's proximity from their starting point (Garret score 69.57). This was followed by checking whether the agritourism centre had any famous tourist destination in the vicinity area.

Table-4 Agritourism selection criteria (n=200)

SN	Criteria	Garrett Score	Average	Rank
1	Close proximity from home city	13915	69.57	I
2	Close proximity to a famous tourist attraction	13695	68.47	II
3	Recommended by friends or relatives	10905	54.52	III
4	Impressed by the website or advertisement	10875	54.37	IV
5	Familiarity gained through earlier / repeated visits	7445	37.22	V
6	Recommended by media	6645	33.22	VI

Many of them considered opinion from friends and relative while choosing ATC to visit. Impression by website, previous self-experience and the promotional attempts of the ATC were considered by lesser people whereas media helped only few people to decide which agritourism to visit.

Prospects of agritourism in the study area

Prospects of growth of agritourism were determined by eliciting the response of the ATC hosts in two categories. First parameter was to add facilities to the agritourism unit and second was attitude towards increasing promotional activities. [Table-5] shows the frequency and extent of willingness to add facilities to the agritourism unit as expressed by the ATC operators/hosts of study area of both states.

Table-5a Prospects as perceived by the respondents in practising agritourism (n=45)

Various aspects of Prospects	W		SW		NW	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Increase/expand area under agritourism	24	53.33	3	6.67	18	40
Integrate more interesting activities	21	46.67	9	20	15	33.33
Improve accommodation facilities at the site	42	93.33	3	6.67	-	-
Offer rural Indian cuisine for breakfast, lunch and dinner	39	86.67	6	13.33	-	-
Provide better medical facilities during emergency	39	86.67	6	13.33	-	-
Offer more recreational activities that excites the tourist	27	60	3	1.67	15	33.33
Offer agri-products at reasonable prices	42	93.33	3	1.67	-	-
Regularly maintain and follow visitors' feedback book	45	100	-	-	-	-
Improve transport facilities to site	33	73.33	12	26.67	-	-
Providing pick and drop facilities	39	86.67	6	13.33	-	-

All the sampled hosts agreed that they regularly maintain and follow visitors' feedback book which keeps track of the trend of visitors and identification of major areas of visitors. Majority of the hosts also showed favourable attitude for improving accommodation facilities and rural cuisine. The only concern was that only 53.33 percent of the hosts were willing to expand the area under agritourism. It was evident from the data that they were willing to enhance the quality of services as against area expansion until they found complete sustainability and net profit in all the seasons.

Table-5b Prospects as perceived by the respondents in practising agritourism (n=45)

Various aspects of Prospects	W		SW		NW	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Regular Advertisement of the farm house unit	28	62.22	15	26.67	2	4.44
Development of own website and update regularly	42	93.33	3	1.67	-	-
Developing contact with Schools, Colleges, NGOS, Club, Union and other Organisation	33	73.33	9	20.00	3	1.67
Arrangement of cultural programme	30	66.67	6	13.33	9	20
Creating Opportunity for rural games	21	46.67	12	26.67	12	26.67
Provision of information about Marathi / Konkani culture	39	86.67	6	13.33	-	-
Development of good relationship with the tourist	45	100	-	-	-	-
Customising agro-tour package for different type of tourist	27	60	12	26.67	6	13.33
Making availability of agritourism related literature	45	100	-	-	-	-

(W=willing, SW=somewhat willing and NW=not willing)

The second component in assessing the prospects was to increase the promotional activities and majority were willing to maintain good relationship with tourists and make availability of literature. Regular advertisement and opportunity for rural games was less favourable because of lack of enough skilled labour into

it.

Table-6 Overall prospects as perceived by the respondents in practicing agritourism (n=45)

SN	Prospects	Category	f	percentage
1	Over all prospects	Low (11-14) Medium (14-17) High (17-20)	12	26.67
			12	26.67
			21	46.67
a	Adding facilities to the agri- tourism unit		12	26.67
			15	33.33
			18	40.00
b	Increasing promotional activities		12	26.67
			12	26.67
			21	46.67

The overall prospects of agritourism venture among the operators of both states combined was as high as reported by 46.67 percent of the total respondents while equal percentage (26.67%) reported medium and low overall prospects. Similarly, in terms of increasing promotional activities, 46.67 percent of the respondents reported high prospects and 40 percent of the respondents were willing to add facilities to the agritourism unit thereby indicating great prospects of agritourism venture in the study area [7]

Conclusion

The status and prospects are the indicators of growth of agritourism into mainstream venture. Both quality and quantitative growth of the venture in terms of diverse activities would attract more visitors and expand the season bound activity to all time profitable business activity [8]. This can only be augmented not only by the strong will of the hosts and visitors but also by the institutional interventions such as policy and research backstopping must include Government strategies and suggestions for agritourism development. Reduction of high initial investment through introducing low cost construction materials through extensive research and case studies would bring the establishment cost to minimum level so that even the semi-medium and small farmers can also take up the venture. Provision of loan through PACs/ Commercial banks under MUDRA or startup scheme will encourage the young and interested farmers to take this venture. Provision of subsidy for low cost agritourism farms would strengthen as an agritourism. Agritourism can flourish and be financially viable only if all the promotional and prospective efforts are met efficiently.

Application of research: Research is helpful in identifying the agritourism status along with its growth prospects considering some qualitative and quantitative measuring tools.

Research Category: Agritourism

Abbreviations: ATC-Agri tourism centres, MH-Maharashtra

SPSS- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

PAC-primary agricultural cooperative societies

MUDRA- Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency

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Research project name or number: PhD Thesis

Author Contributions: All authors equally contributed

Author statement: All authors read, reviewed, agreed and approved the final manuscript. Note-All authors agreed that- Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to publish / enrolment

Study area / Sample Collection: Various districts Maharashtra and Goa

Cultivar / Variety / Breed name: Nil

Conflict of Interest: None declared

Ethical approval: This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

Ethical Committee Approval Number: Nil

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