

RURAL-AGRI/ ECO-TOURISM: FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF TOURIST DESTINATION

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Abstract: Tourism is contributing nine per cent to the country's GDP and India is ranked as the seventh largest tourism economy in the world. Tourism contributes to the economy by way of employment generation, enterprise promotion and for the overall economic development of the country. In recent times rural-agri tourism is an emerging segment of the Indian tourism industry. This industry shows cases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural location. The present study on "Rural-agri/ Eco-tourism: Factors influencing the choice of tourist destination" has been conducted in the three purposively selected rural-agri tourism centers *i.e* Agadi thota, Eco-Village and Dharwad adventure base. From each center 40 tourists were selected, making a sample of 120. The personal interview method was used to collect the data and suitable statistical tools were used for analyzing the same. The study revealed that most tourists were aged between 35-50 years, were graduates, job holders, from nuclear medium sized families. The income ranged between ₹ 1,32,000 - 5,72,000. Most of the tourists were from within the state and first time visitors. Who got information about the tourist centers through friends/ relatives. Leisure & recreation was the purpose of their visit. Tourists expressed that the most important criteria for choosing to visit the tourist centre was experiencing nature, rural life/ agricultural activities. Cost and availability of healthy & good food are some other criteria.

Keywords: Rural-agri tourism centers, tourists

INTRODUCTION

Tourism involves travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas (Ziffer 1986). Tourism by far is one of the fastest growing sectors of the Indian economy.

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tourism can create employment for the local people and demand for many more industries, including improvement of infrastructure in rural areas. It can revive local art forms & handicrafts and give a fillip to traditional local foods. On the other hand for the urban tourist who live in concrete jungles such tourism centers are a boon as a get-away from the hustle and bustle of city life. The present study was envisaged with the following objective:

1. To study the profile of tourists visiting rural-agri tourism centers
2. To know the factors influencing the choice of tourist destination

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Dharwad and Haveri districts of Karnataka during the year 2018-19. Dharwad and Haveri districts were purposively

selected for the study because there are six rural- agri tourism centers located in Dharwad and Haveri. The three rural-agri tourism centers namely Eco-Village, Dharwad adventure base and Agadi thota were selected for the study because the three rural-agri tourism centers were better established than the others. From each of the three selected tourism centers, 40 tourists who visited the tourist centers were selected as the sample for the study, making a total sample of 120 respondents and pre-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data. Frequency, percentage and Garret ranking was used to analyze the data.

$$\text{Per cent position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij}-0.5)}{N_j}$$

Where,

R_{ij}= rank given for the *i*th factor by the *j*th respondents

N_j= number of factors ranked by the *j*th respondents

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age

It is seen that among tourists who visited rural-agri tourism centers, 41.66 per cent belonged to middle age group (35-50 years), Forty per cent of them belonged to young age (>35 years) and remaining 18.33 per cent of the tourists were in the old age (< 50 years) group.

The reason might be the youth of today like to hang out with friends, they wish to experience nature and participate in recreational & entertainment activities. They want to try out the rural and traditional games like gilli dandu, lagori etc. They like to enjoy a swim in the pond or dance in the rain. Adventure activities like rope games and boating have attracted the youth less than 35 years. The youth were also interested in bullock cart rides, camel ride, tractor ride in which they actively participate for sheer enjoyment and recreation. However, those in the 35-50 years age (41.66%) visited for experiencing the rural environment to enjoy nature, spend time with environment and enjoy the good food as well as recreation with their family members. With better health this age group also enjoy the

adventure based activities. There were few tourists (18.33 %) aged above 50 who had accompanied their children and grand children for rest and relaxation. The results are in accordance with the findings Malkanthi and Routry (2013), Berini *et al.* (2015) and Tan *et al* (2017).

Gender

With respect to the gender, it can be seen that 55.83 per cent of the tourists were female and 44.17 per cent of them were male.

There were more women visiting the centers than men because women want to experience culture, art and heritage. Moreover for women it is a change in the routine work when she does not have to cook. It is also fact that for such outings with children the women take the lead, while men may avoid taking the children by themselves. So, we see a higher per cent of women visiting the centers. The results are in conformity with the findings Aliman *et al.* (2014). But were not in consance of in the findings of Bagari & Kalal (2015) and Gok & Sayin (2015) where there were more male tourists than female.

Education

It could be seen that, 45.00 per cent of the tourists were degree holders, 18.33 per cent had completed PUC/ diploma, 16.67 per cent were masters degree holders, 13.33 per cent had completed high school education, 5.00 per cent were Ph.D degree holders and only 1.67 had received higher primary education.

The reason might be education plays an important role in predicting awareness and knowledge. Most urban educated have their roots in rural areas, they wish to experience rural life and moreover educated have better financial status and so, they are in a position to visit these centers. They are also aware of the importance of conservation of local art, culture and heritage and wish to experience the same. The results are in accordance with the findings of Berini *et al.* (2015), Aliman (2014), Gok and Sayin (2015) and Tan *et al* (2017).

Occupation

Regarding occupation of the tourists it could be seen that, 28.33 per cent of the tourists were

government job holders followed by private job (26.67 %). About 14.00 per cent women were housewives and 13.33 per cent were business men. Nearly nine per cent were students and 8.33 per cent were agriculturists by occupation.

Tourists from all occupations were visiting the tourist centers, irrespective of whether they are government or private job holders or even housewives. Most of them however were from urban background. Due to stress and work load in day-to-day life people are searching for change in their daily environment. So, they wish to spend time with nature & environment and for rest & relaxation.

The results are in line with Zoto *et al* (2012) and Singla (2014)

Income

About half of the tourists (52.50%) belonged to medium level of income (₹ 1,32,000 to ₹ 5,72,000), 27.50 per cent and 20.00 per cent belonged to low level (₹ <1,32,000) and high income level (₹ >5,72,000) respectively.

This is because most of the tourists were educated/ graduates and job holders with sound financial background. They are in a position to spend ₹ 500-700/ day for entertainment & recreation. Although with low income some of them may have visited the centers with their friends to enjoy & experience the new type of tourism *i.e* rural-agri tourism. Since it is once- a-while spending, they do not mind doing so. The results are line with Aksu (2010), Singla (2014) and Gok & Sayin (2015)

Family type

A majority (67.50 %) of the tourists were from nuclear families, while 32.50 per cent were from joint families.

Family size

It was noticed that, half of the tourists (51.66 %) belonged to medium size family (5-8 members), 35.00 per cent were from small size families (1-4 members) and 13.33 per cent of them were from large size families (9 and more members).

It could be seen that, a majority of the tourists were from nuclear family (67.50 %). Nuclear families are increasingly becoming the norms

of the day. With only the parents and siblings at home they wish to go out and enjoy their weekends and holidays. With visits to relatives & friends houses becoming scare, they were visiting these tourist centers. Nuclear families usually have a planned and economic way of spending. Thus, they are spending a part of their money on recreation and entertainment purpose. The results are in conformity with the findings of Boram & Hansheng (2013) and Wong (2013).

Locality

Table 1 also shows that, most of the tourists (95.83 %) were from within the state *i.e* Dharwad, Haveri, Belagavi, Uttar Kannada and Gadag districts. Only 4.17 per cent visitors were from other states like Andra Pradesh, Maharastra and Tamil Nadu.

The data in the Table 1 depicts that most of the tourists (95.83 %) were from within the state *i.e* Dharwad, Haveri, Belagavi, Uttar Kannada and Gadag. The reason might be the ease and convenience to reach tourist destination. People from cities are now looking out for short distance tourist spots, so that they spend less times travelling and more on experiencing. So, most tourists are from nearby towns and cities. Since, the centers are offering day visits with good food and accommodation, these centers are best for a quick get- away. The three selected rural-agri tourism centers are located nearly Dharwad and Haveri districts and so we seen that Agadi thota is visited by people from Hubli-Dharwad, Haveri, Davangeri and Gadag. People visiting Eco-Village are from Uttar Kannada, Dharwad and Belagavi. Dharwad adventure base is visited by people from Belagavi, Dharwad and Gadag. However, a small per cent of outside state tourists visited tourist centers who may have been the local visitors relatives or friends. The results of the study are line with Yacob (2011) and Nilanjan *et al* (2012).

Source of Information about the rural-agri tourism centers

Table 2 indicates the source of information about rural-agri tourism centers. A majority (70.83%) of the tourists' heard about the tourist destination from friends & relatives, while 11.67 per cent

got to know from mass media (*i.e* Television and news paper) followed by advertisements (8.33%) like bill boards, 6.67 per cent got information browsed the internet for information and only 2.50 per cent were told about the tourist centers by travel agencies.

This is because publicity by word of mouth is the most common source of information and people who experience new things have the habit of sharing with their friends and relatives. Although the details of the centers are available on the internet, people like to hear from relatives & friends who have visited the centers, as it is based on firsthand experience.

The findings of the present study agree with the findings of Gok & Sayin (2015) and Bagri & Kala (2015)

Purpose of visit to rural-agri tourism centers

The purpose of visit is revealed in table 3. It could be seen that a majority (72.50 %) of the tourists expressed leisure & recreation as the purpose of visit, 18.33 per cent came to experience rural life, five per cent visited for educational purpose, 2.50 per cent for knowledge and only 1.67 per cent for business purpose.

The reason for the purpose of visit presented in table 3 show that, a majority (72.50 %) of the tourists expressed that leisure & recreation was the main reason for visiting for the tourist centers. People visit tourism centers to take a break from their routine life, so they are looking out for recreation & games, as well as rest & relaxation. Many activities and events like folk songs & dances are organized by the tourist centers for tourists. About 18.00 per cent of tourists visited the centers to experience rural life. Most of the urban tourists have their roots in rural areas, where they were born and brought up. Such people visit the visit the centers for nostalgic purpose which revive their childhood memories. Due to stress and work load in the city they wish for a change in their daily life. Five per cent visited because of educational purpose, 2.50 per cent for knowledge and only 1.67 per cent for business purpose respectively. The reason is that tourists were interested to know and learn about environment conservation, sustainable models as well as rural life styles.

Companions during visit to the rural-agri tourism centers

Table 4 indicates that, 70.00 per cent of the tourists visited tourist centers with friends & family, while 15.00 per cent and 11.67 per cent visited with relatives and office colleagues respectively. Only 3.33 per cent visited with others *i.e* school children, etc.

The data in table 4 indicates that a majority (70.00 %) of the tourists visited tourist centers with friends & family and 15.00 per cent with the relatives. Friends and family & relatives are the primary groups, where the group members are concerned about one another and share activities and culture. It is therefore natural that most of the tourist had visited with family & friends where they enjoy at the best. In smaller numbers were the office goes who visited with their colleagues (11.67 %) and a few (3.33 %) were teachers who took students for a visit.

Factors influencing choice of the tourism destination

The Garret ranking applied to the data regarding the factors considered while choosing tourist destination (table 7) shows that, experiencing natural/rural life/agriculture activities was ranked first (I) followed by the cost involved (II), availability of healthy and good food (III), nature and its beauty (IV), entertainment and recreational activities (V), convenient to reach the place (VI) and local culture (VII) in that order.

The data in table 7 indicates the factors considered while choosing tourist destination. Experiencing nature/rural life/agricultural activities was ranked first followed by cost (II), availability of healthy & good food (III), nature and its beauty (IV), entertainment & recreational activities (V), convenient to reach the place (VI) and local areas (VII). The reason is that most of the tourists from urban areas, have lost contact with rural areas and due to urbanization, stress and workload in day-to-day life, they are searching for change in their routine jobs. They want to spend money on experience which are worth of the amount spent *i.e* they expect value for the money on recreation & entertainment activities. Food is the basic need and availability of healthy and good food was a

Table 1: Profile of tourists visiting rural-agri tourism centers (n=120)

Sl no.	Tourists profile	F	%
	Age		
	Young age (> 35 years)	48	40.00
	Middle age (35- 50 years)	50	41.67
	Old age (< 50 years)	22	18.33
	Gender		
	Male	53	44.17
	Female	67	55.83
	Education		
	Higher primary	02	01.67
	High school	16	13.33
	PUC/ diploma	22	18.33
	Degree	54	45.00
	Master degree	20	16.67
	Ph.d	06	05.00
	Occupation		
	Government job	34	28.33
	Private job	32	26.67
	Business	16	13.33
	Agriculture	10	08.33
	Housewife	17	14.17
	Student	11	09.17
	Income		
	Low (upto ₹ 1,32,000)	33	27.50
	Medium (₹ 1,32,000 to ₹ 5,72,000)	63	52.50
	High (< ₹ 5,72,000)	24	20.00
	Family type		
	Joint	39	32.50
	Nuclear	81	67.50
	Family size		
	Small (1-4 members)	42	35.00
	Medium 5-8 members)	62	51.66
	Large (9 and more)	16	13.33
8.	Locality		
	Intrastate	115	95.83
	Intra district	54	45.00
	Inter district	61	50.83
	Interstate	05	04.17

Table 2: Source of information about the rural-agri tourism centers (n=120)

Source of information	Frequency	Percentage
Friends / relatives	85	70.83
Mass media	14	11.67
Advertisements'	10	08.33
Internet	08	06.67
Travel agency	03	02.50

Table 3: Purpose of visit to the rural-agri tourism centers (n=120)

<i>Purpose of visit</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Leisure & recreation	87	72.50
To experience rural life	22	18.33
Education	06	05.00
Knowledge	03	02.50
Business	02	01.67

Table 4: Companions during visits to rural-agri tourism centers (n=120)

<i>Accompany</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Friends & family	84	70.00
Relatives	18	15.00
Office colleagues	14	11.67
Other (school children, etc.)	04	03.33

Table 7: Factors influencing choice of the tourist destination

(n=120)

<i>Parameters</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Garret ranking</i>
Convenient to reach the place	52.71	VI
Nature and its beauty	58.57	IV
Local culture	28.80	VII
Entertainment and recreational activities	54.76	V
Availability of healthy & good food	59.13	III
Experiencing natural/ rural life / agricultural activities	68.92	I
Cost /Expenses	68.33	II

very important factor. Tourists wish to spend more time in a tourist center than in travelling long distance so, convenience in reaching the place is also important. Tourists like to enjoy and participate in entertainment & recreational activities. Tourists like to enjoy and participate in entertainment & recreational activities than experiencing local culture.

CONCLUSION

Thus it was observed that the most important criteria for choosing to visit the tourist center was experiencing nature/ rural life/ agricultural activities. Accompanied with friends & family, people visit tourist centers to take a break from their routine life, for recreation & games, as well as rest & relaxation. Urban tourists have lost contact with rural-areas and due to urbanization, stress & workload in day-to-day life, they are searching for tourism destinations that only provide rest and relaxation but experience in rural life and participation in agriculture activities.

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