

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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**AGRITOURISM IN INDIA: UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER OPPORTUNITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Tourism has emerged as one of the largest global economic activities and agritourism is the form of tourism which capitalizes on rural culture as a tourist attraction. It has gained a new dimension as a potential income and job generating activity. The basic objective of this research is to understand and know expectations of the consumer related to agritourism experience. Agritourism center owners and agritourism visitor are key element and thus it is important to understand their characteristics and expectations to serve them better. This paper reports our survey findings on consumer opportunity focusing demographic characteristics of agritourism visitors and their way of thinking related to consumption. Descriptive statistics showed significant differences in agritourism preferences across gender, levels of agritourism experience, and amenities attached in agritourism. This also research identified that there is a group of consumer who are most interested in agritourism. Furthermore, this study results would help farmers, agritourism center owners to recognize opportunity and develop agritourism activity in region.*

**KEYWORDS**

agritourism, farm tourism, rural areas.

**INTRODUCTION**

The tourism industries have been growing rapidly in recent years, bringing in huge revenues through overseas as well as domestic tourists in many parts of India. Although tourism has started receiving some attention from last decades, but agritourism was never given any priority. From the 1950s through the 1980s, farmers in developed nations experienced a tremendous shift within the agriculture industry. Globalization, free-trade, falling commodity prices, oversupply of goods, changes in subsidy policies, and increased reliance on technologically intensive production all impacted the livelihoods of farmers (Che et al 2005).

Butler et al (1998) studied that economic and social forces are changing rural landscape. These changes, coupled with new ideas and approaches to leisure and recreation time are encouraging tourism development in rural areas at an ever increasing pace.

While agritourism seems relatively new term, agritourism activities are not. In many countries variety of farms have worked to attract visitors for years. Others are just getting started. Until recently there was no information on how area farms use agritourism to boost their bottom line. The agriculture industry is facing a growing number of challenges, such as market competition, rising land and input costs, encroachment, and a complex regulatory environment. In order to stay in business, some operations have had to look for ways to add value to their products and create dependable revenue sources. Hence agritourism could add substantial benefits for local agriculture

Agritourism is defined as any business conducted by a farmer for the enjoyment or education of the public, to promote the products of the farm and to generate additional farm income (Hilchey 1993).

(Lobo et al., 1999) mentioned that agritourism can be an effective tool to educate consumers about local agriculture, and its importance for the county's economy and quality of life. In addition, authors cited that agritourism provides opportunities for diversification and economic incentives for growers, promotes economic development. (McCallum 2003, Churchill 2004), have stated that agritourism is growing segment of the tourism industry, as a way to save the farm as well as provide customers with personalized service; high-quality, fresh food; and farm, nature, and family experiences.

There is enough of scope to join agricultural activities to promote agritourism in correspondence with farming and promote enhanced income generation for farmers in rural areas. Considering given scenario, this paper carefully refines and optimizes the most promising opportunities using quantitative research techniques.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Agritourism is a hybrid concept that merges elements of two complex industries (namely, agriculture and travel/tourism) to open up new profitable markets for farm products and services and provide travel experiences for a large regional market (Bruce and Christopher, 2003).

Agritourism has enjoyed sustained growth in the world especially in Italy and other parts of Europe since the 1980s. It is a carefully blended mixture of two industries, agriculture and tourism, that offers farming communities, as well as tourists, substantial advantages. These have proven to be socially, environmentally and economically beneficial to both groups.

Agritourism is that Agri-Business activity, when a native farmers or person of the area offers tours to their agriculture farm to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting, and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugar cane, corn, or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country.

Agricultural Tourism is the Holidays concept of Visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural, or agribusiness operations for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation

Kiper (2011) defines agritourism as activities and services which are provided by the farmer or the rural community in order to generate extra income for their business while showcasing the rural setting. Agritourism as a subset of rural tourism can play an important role in the general development of a specific area in the country. In general, Agritourism is the practice of attracting travelers or visitors to an area or areas used primarily for agricultural purposes. However, Agritourism is small-scale, low-impact, and, in most cases, education-focused.

Jolly and Reynolds (2005) studied consumer demand for agricultural and on-farm nature tourism. Study identify consumer preferences for agritourism experiences, spending on agritourism, and consumer habits regarding food and the agricultural system. Jensen et al. (2006) explained economic impact of agritourism visitor expenditures on economic activity. Recent studies show that agriculture based recreation activities have a widespread appeal to economic and community development since they generate benefits, not only to farmers, but also to providers of other goods and services in the community.

A search of related literature have been carried out to understand consumer preferences and interest towards agritourism (Lobo et al., 1999; Jensen et al., 2006; Che, Veeck, & Veeck, 2007; Jolly & Reynolds, 2005;). But no significant progress has been seen in understanding and knowing expectations of the Indian consumer related to agritourism experience.



**PURPOSE OF RESEARCH**

The very purpose of this research is to understand and know expectations of the consumer related to agritourism experience. In addition, researchers want to understand primary purpose of visit of tourist to agritourism places and understanding consumer opportunities. It is also an obligation to understand about the customer's wants and their expectations and serve accordingly. This research would like to bring farmers who are interested in supplementing their farm based income together with consumers who would like to experience farm related activities.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research is an empirical in nature with intension of understanding consumer preference and opportunities for agritourism. This study surveyed in Maharashtra having 158 minimum sample sizes for statistical analysis. Reason for selecting Maharashtra is, it enjoys the highest level of Agritourism development among other states. Considering objectives of the study, survey instrument was developed to collect information from the residents of state. Descriptive analyses were used to assess parameters of the study. Mean scores were calculated for each attributes to understand meaningful inferences

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Considering previous studies, participants in this study indicated a high level of previous involvement in agritourism activities and were likely to return to participate in the same agritourism activity (Che et al.; Jensen et al.; Jolly & Reynolds). Therefore, more information about the agritourism has been extracted; specifically focusing on interests and preferences of consumers.

In this research, overall awareness and familiarity with agritourism was low, but there was some interest after knowing more about it. Total of 29% of respondents said they had heard of Agritourism before this research. Experience with agriculture activities in general was also limited i.e. total of 11% visited a farm in the past years.

Lack of this knowledge about the overall structure of the agritourism and marketing of agritourism is an important issue because, without it, one cannot adequately and thoroughly characterize the different benefits that grow to the farms, to the consumer and to other economic sectors from these activities.

There are varied source of information about Agritourism activity. Analysis result shows that 14.7% of respondent get to know about Agritourism activity through friends followed by internet that is 12.6%. About one tenth of respondent that is (9.4%), (11.0%), and (10.5%) come to knows about Agritourism activity from signage, promotional flyer/ Leaflet and Agritourism Web site respectively (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT AGRITOURISM**

Source of Information about agritourism <sup>a</sup>	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Newspaper	13	6.8%	46.4%
Brochure	10	5.2%	35.7%
Radio	12	6.3%	42.9%
Signage	18	9.4%	64.3%
Television	5	2.6%	17.9%
Tourism/guide book	7	3.7%	25.0%
Chamber of Commerce	5	2.6%	17.9%
Internet	24	12.6%	85.7%
Promotional flyer/ Leaflet	21	11.0%	75.0%
Recommendation from Friends	28	14.7%	100.0%
Agritourism Web site	20	10.5%	71.4%
Travel Website	11	5.8%	39.3%
Social Networking sites	17	8.9%	60.7%
Total	191	100.0%	682.1%

It has been found out that more than half (61.9%) of respondents do not know about Agritourism activity. There are 12.2% of respondent who thinks it's a costly affair and about one fifth (20.9%) of respondent find it's too far and inconvenient. Remaining 5% of respondents are not interested.

**TABLE 2: REASONS FOR NOT PARTICIPATING IN AGRITOURISM**

Reasons for non Participation <sup>a</sup>	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
Did not know about Agritourism	86	61.9%	100.0%
Costly Affair	17	12.2%	19.8%
Too far away/inconvenient	29	20.9%	33.7%
Not interested	7	5.0%	8.1%
Total	139	100.0%	161.6%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

It has been found out that about one fourth (26.6%) of respondent shows interest to visit Agritourism activity in month of December, while one fifth of respondent that is (19.4%) and (21%) shows interest to visit Agritourism activity in month of June and September respectively. In month of May and October about (9.7%) of respondent shows interest to visit Agritourism activity. There are very few respondents in months of February, March, July, August, and November who wants to visit Agritourism activity.

**TABLE 3: SEASONS FOR AGRITOURISM**

Season for agritourism <sup>a</sup>	Responses		Percent of Cases
	N	Percent	
February	3	2.4%	8.1%
March	1	0.8%	2.7%
May	12	9.7%	32.4%
June	24	19.4%	64.9%
July	5	4.0%	13.5%
August	2	1.6%	5.4%
September	26	21.0%	70.3%
October	12	9.7%	32.4%
November	6	4.8%	16.2%
December	33	26.6%	89.2%
Total	124	100.0%	335.1%

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

To understand relationship between age and reasons for visiting agritourism centres, hypothesis have been derived and tested subsequently.

H<sub>0</sub> : Reasons for visiting agritourism centres do not vary significantly across the various age groups

H<sub>1</sub> : Reasons for visiting agritourism centres vary significantly across the various age groups

After testing all three reasons, ('To have fun with family/friend',  $p < 0.05$ , 'To understand agricultural activities',  $p < 0.05$ , and 'To experience Rural life',  $p < 0.05$ ) result showed significant difference among various age groups. Hence, purpose for visiting agritourism centres varies according to age groups.

**TABLE 4: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULT FOR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND REASONS FOR VISITING AGRITOURISM CENTRES**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
To have fun with family/friends	37	4.38	.594	3	5
To understand Agricultural activities	37	3.92	.894	1	5
To experience Rural life	37	3.70	1.051	1	5
Age	37	1.84	.374	1	2

**TABLE 5: KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST RESULT FOR RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AGE AND REASONS FOR VISITING AGRITOURISM CENTRES**

	Age	N	Mean Rank
To have fun with family/friends	18-24	6	29.50
	25-35	31	16.97
	Total	37	
To understand Agricultural activities	18-24	6	31.33
	25-35	31	16.61
	Total	37	
To experience Rural life	18-24	6	33.00
	25-35	31	16.29
	Total	37	

**TABLE 6: TEST STATISTICS<sup>a,b</sup>**

	To have fun with family/friends	To understand Agricultural activities	To experience Rural life
Chi-Square	8.594	13.579	13.072
Df	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.003	.000	.000

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Age

In addition, various income groups have been checked in context of visiting agritourism.

H<sub>0</sub> : Reasons for visiting agritourism centres do not vary significantly across the various income groups

H<sub>1</sub> : Reasons for visiting agritourism centres vary significantly across the various income groups

Table 7 represents reasons for visiting agritourism centres. Two out of three reasons tested ('To have fun with family/friend',  $p < 0.05$ , and 'To experience Rural life',  $p < 0.05$ ) showed significant difference among various income groups. While the reason 'To understand agricultural activities' ( $p > 0.05$ ) does not show significant difference among various income groups. That indicates respondents having income more than 5 lakh per annum give less preference to 'To have fun with family/friends' (Mean Rank 11.68) and 'To experience Rural life' (Mean Rank 11.59) than the respondents having annual income less than 5 lakh.

**TABLE 7: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULT FOR UNDERSTANDING REASONS FOR VISITING AGRITOURISM CENTRES**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
To have fun with family/friends	37	4.38	.594	3	5
To understand Agricultural activities	37	3.92	.894	1	5
To experience Rural life	37	3.70	1.051	1	5
Income	37	7.03	.763	6	8

**TABLE 8: KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST RESULT**

Ranks			
	Income	N	Mean Rank
To have fun with family/friends	Rs. 3,00,000 – Rs. 3,99,999	10	20.75
	Rs. 4,00,000 – Rs. 4,99,999	16	22.94
	Rs. 5,00,000 – Rs. 6,99,999	11	11.68
	Total	37	
To understand Agricultural activities	Rs. 3,00,000 – Rs. 3,99,999	10	18.10
	Rs. 4,00,000 – Rs. 4,99,999	16	20.25
	Rs. 5,00,000 – Rs. 6,99,999	11	18.00
	Total	37	
To experience Rural life	Rs. 3,00,000 – Rs. 3,99,999	10	21.50
	Rs. 4,00,000 – Rs. 4,99,999	16	22.53
	Rs. 5,00,000 – Rs. 6,99,999	11	11.59
	Total	37	

**TABLE 9: TEST STATISTICS<sup>a,b</sup>**

	To have fun with family/friends	To understand Agricultural activities	To experience Rural life
Chi-Square	9.445	.550	8.064
df	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.009	.760	.018

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Income

Further analysis explained relationship between age groups and importance about facilities

H<sub>0</sub> : Importance about facilities do not vary significantly across the various age groups

H<sub>1</sub> : Importance about facilities vary significantly across the various age groups

After analysing data, researchers found out that there is no significant difference about importance about 'Accommodation',  $p > 0.05$ , and 'Sightseeing'  $p > 0.05$ , across various age groups. Whereas importance of all other facilities ( $p > 0.05$ ) varies significantly according to age groups.

**TABLE 10: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS RESULT**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Accommodation	37	3.32	.944	2	5
Food	37	4.00	1.155	1	5
Nearby Sightseeing	37	3.05	.880	1	4
Sell of farm produce	37	3.19	1.101	2	5
Convenient location	37	4.19	1.023	1	5
Picnic area	37	3.22	1.109	2	5
Age	37	1.84	.374	1	2

**TABLE 11: KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST RESULT**

Ranks			
	Age	N	Mean Rank
Accommodation	18-24	6	15.50
	25-35	31	19.68
	Total	37	
Food	18-24	6	29.00
	25-35	31	17.06
	Total	37	
Nearby Sightseeing	18-24	6	17.00
	25-35	31	19.39
	Total	37	
Sell of farm produce	18-24	6	8.00
	25-35	31	21.13
	Total	37	
Convenient location	18-24	6	28.50
	25-35	31	17.16
	Total	37	
Picnic area	18-24	6	7.50
	25-35	31	21.23
	Total	37	

**TABLE 11: TEST STATISTICS<sup>a,b</sup>**

	Chi-Square	df	Asymp. Sig.
Accommodation	.835	1	.361
Food	6.916	1	.009
Nearby Sightseeing	.277	1	.599
Sell of farm produce	8.430	1	.004
Convenient location	6.490	1	.011
Picnic area	8.925	1	.003

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Age

Table 12 represents the types of agritourism activities that the respondents reported participating in over the years.

**TABLE 12: PARTICIPATION IN AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES**

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percent	
Agritourism Activity Participation	Farm Tour and Accommodations	22	17.3%	61.1%
	Experience of Village Life	30	23.6%	83.3%
	Adventures activities	20	15.7%	55.6%
	To Attend Festivals, Events And Shows	10	7.9%	27.8%
	Participation in Farm Activities	26	20.5%	72.2%
	Sale Of Agricultural Produce, Arts And Craft	19	15.0%	52.8%
Total	127	100.0%	352.8%	

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The study provides information in which to frame the identification and estimation of current and future agritourism and marketing benefits to the farmers to the consumers and the economy of the country. There is need to do some innovative activities in the agriculture, which will help to farmers, rural peoples, hence this study helps to understand opportunity to develop agritourism business in country.

**CONCLUSION**

India has a great potential to the development of agritourism, because of natural conditions and different types of agricultural products as well as variety of rural traditions, festivals. After analyzing this study, agritourism center owners and stakeholders might utilize this valuable information to form a consumer profile based on the location of the agritourism attraction. In addition, this research also identified that there is a group of consumer who are most interested in Agritourism. Now it's up to agritourism owners who seize this golden opportunity. Future study can be conducted on more specific areas in order to understand prospective agritourism visitors in depth.

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