

**AGROTOURISM AS A STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF KARJAT TALUKA,  
RAIGAD**

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**Abstract:**

Agriculture is India's most common occupation and is often regarded as the country's economic backbone. The share of agriculture in gross domestic product (GDP) has reached almost 20 per cent for the first time in the last 17 years, making it the sole bright spot in GDP performance during 2020-21, according to the Economic Survey 2020-2021. Agriculture is strongly established in Indian culture, and it is more than a career or a business. Tourism is a growth driver for many countries throughout the world. Agrotourism is a type of tourism that combines farming with tourism. As a result, supplementing agricultural revenue with some touristic activity is bringing fresh optimism and better lives to the region. Agrotourism is a sort of alternative tourism that is a better option than mass tourism in current scenario. People in urban areas are becoming agitated and distancing themselves from nature. They get away from their city lives every now and then. This study discusses how agrotourism can be used to boost agriculture and strengthen rural communities of Karjat taluka which is located at Raigad district of Maharashtra state.

**Keywords:** *Agrotourism, Touristic Activity, Agricultural Revenue, Rural Community, Alternative Tourism*

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**Introduction:**

The combination of tourism with agriculture is known as agrotourism. Agrotourism is a mix of agricultural and tourism-related enterprises with significant potential for rural development (Na Songkhla T. and Somboonsuke, B.2012). Traditional tourism has seen a decline in recent years. Agrotourism, ecotourism, nature-based tourism, green tourism, cultural tourism, and other community-based tourism in rural areas are some of the new fields of tourism that have evolved recently. It focuses on the strategies of protection, conservation and enhancement of rural areas.

According to Van der Ploeg et al. (2000), rural development is a multi-level, multi-actor and multi-faceted process. Rural development can be operationalized at the level of the individual farm household. At this level, rural development emerges as a redefinition of identities, strategies, practices, interrelations and networks. Agrotourism should be considered as a main activity which can increase the development of rural areas.

**History of Agrotourism**

Agrotourism is a notion that has been around for a long time. The evolution of history was linked to human growth as well as global technologies. An expert from the University of Tennessee Extension Publication highlighted the history of agro tourism by referring to it as Agritainment.

### **Agrotourism as a Concept**

Agrotourism can include both on-farm and off-farm activities, as long as they are agriculturally related. On-farm tourism activities have been distinguished between those that are directly connected to the agricultural business and those that use the farm for other recreational activities that take advantage of the farm setting (Busby & Rendle, 2000). The list of possible on-farm activities can also be distinguished as participant, education and spectator experiences including (Wilson, Thilmany, & Sullins, 2006).

Agrotourism is defined differently in different parts of the world. The basic notion of agrotourism should be founded on the need to create solutions for rural households, such as raising their incomes by maximising their economic potential, providing lodging services, and selling their local products. It can also refer to the act of travelling to natural places that have been mostly untouched.

In recent years, the government has recognised the potential of rural tourism. A large majority of India's population lives in rural areas, and rural tourism is getting momentum as an additional source of money, diverting attention to it. The Ministry of Tourism of the Government of India designated 153 rural sites across all Indian states and union territories, including 36 rural sites under its rural tourism scheme, which UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) has funded for capacity building. For the promotion of rural tourism in India, a sub-brand of Explore Rural India was created under the worldwide famous brand "Incredible India."

Maharashtra has 328 agro-tourism centres spread throughout 29 districts, including Pune, Aurangabad, Nagpur villages, and Thane's tribal region. Farmers in all parts of the state have seen a 25% increase in their earnings since the programme began. In 2018, 2019, and 2020, 4.7 lakhs, 5.3 lakhs, and 7.9 lakhs visitors visited these agro-tourism centres, resulting in a total revenue/income of Rs 55.79 crore for the farmers. Furthermore, the agro-tourism project assisted in the creation of almost 1 lakh jobs for women and youth in rural areas. Several cases in districts such as Raigad, Pune, and Satara have demonstrated that agro-tourism has a good social and economic influence on farmers' life and the entire village.

Agriculture and related activities are promoted as a tourism product. Agrotourism is a rural business that combines a working farm with a commercial tourism component. In the previous few decades, it has been conceptualised. In Europe and North America, this concept was born and developed. thereafter to expand to a large number of countries. In India, it began in Malegaon village, near Baramati, in 2005. Agri Tourism Development Company of Maharashtra (ATDC) is pushing agritourism centres as a viable business model. As well as establishing the notion of agrotourism in India. It also meets the demands of farmers by providing them with the necessary skills and technical expertise to get started and manage this venture at their farms.

### **Objective:**

1. To identify the linkages between tourism and agriculture.
2. To identify the important motivating factors to participate in agro-tourism.
3. To find out tourist satisfaction of agrotourism in study area.

### **Research Methodology:**

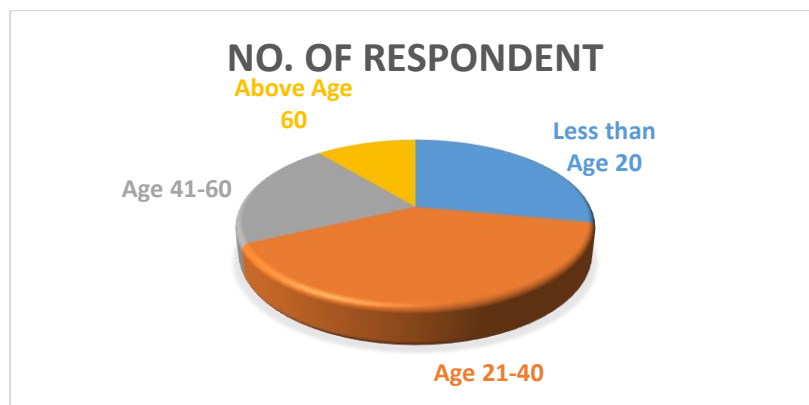
The present paper is based on primary and secondary data derived from field visit observations, interviews, questionnaires and various literature sources which includes research papers, news articles, and websites. The scope of the study is limited to identify the satisfaction level and motivating factors for visiting agrotourism. A sample of 100 visitors is selected at random to know their preferences for agro-tourism. The primary data were collected through a direct interview schedule through a well-designed questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, the respondents were asked about their demographic information so as to collect information about there are, profession and economic status. In second part, the respondents were asked about mode of communication, satisfaction level and tourist expectation and experience and so forth.

**Analysis and Interpretation:**

The respondents were asked to react to a question on what motivates them to visit agro-tourism and the results show that a combination of variables motivates them to go there. The majority of responders went to the agro-tourism to taste the food, local cuisine, mental and physical relaxation, closeness to the nature, calm the mind, spending time with family and friends, to enjoying the farm life and a relief from the busy and crowded city life.

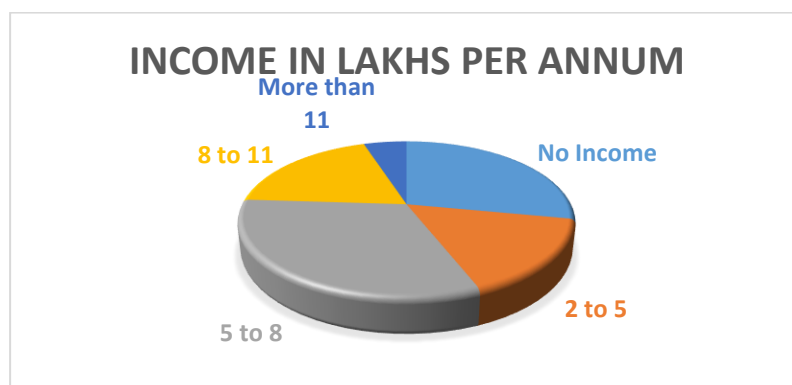
**1. Demographic characteristics of the sample respondent:**

Age	No. of Respondent
Less than 20	28
21-40	40
41-60	21
Above 60	11



**Interpretation:** The dominant age group of the tourists was 21 to 40 years (40 %), followed by less than 20 years (28 %), 41 to 60 years (21 %) and above 60 years (11 %) respectively.

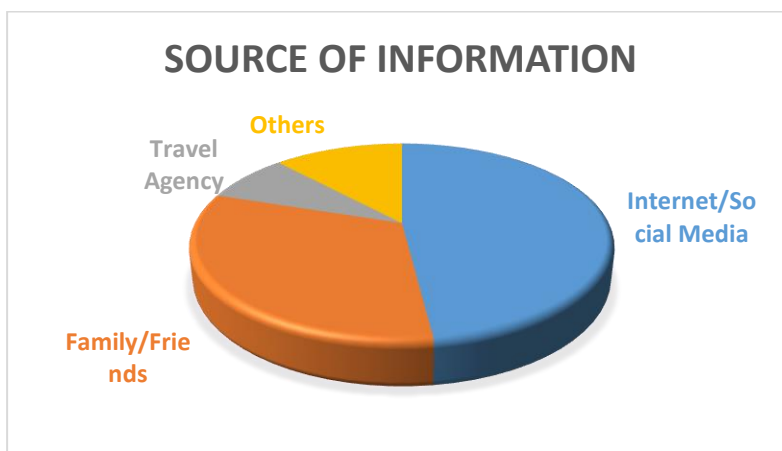
Income in Lakhs Per Annum	No. of Respondent
No Income	28
2 to 5	16
5 to 8	32
8 to 11	19
More than 11	5



**Interpretation:** Out of total tourists 32 %, 19 %, 16 % and 5 % respondents having annual income were 5 to 8 lakh, 8 to 11 lakh, 2 to 5 lakh and more than 11 lakhs respectively.

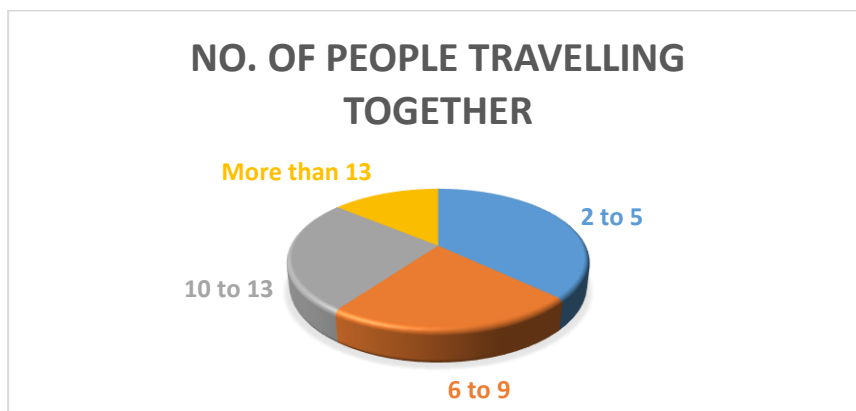
**2. Source of Information:**

Source of Information	No. of Respondent
Internet/social media	48
Family/Friends	32
Travel Agency	8
Others	12



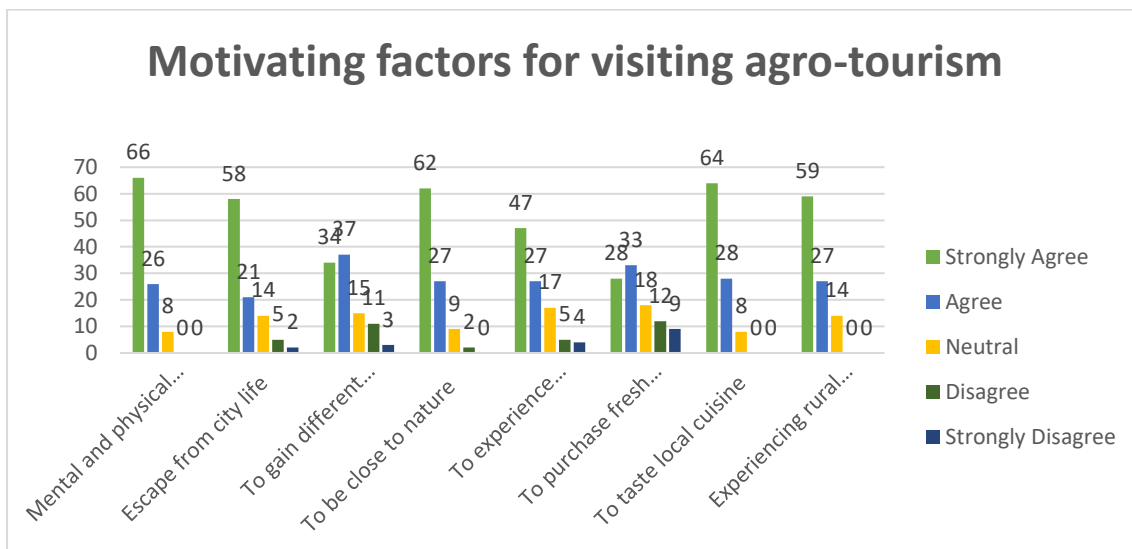
**Interpretation:** Major source of information of agro tourism were Internet/social media and family/Friends.

No. of people travelling together	No. of Respondent
2-5	37
6-9	23
10-13	26
More than 13	14



### 3. Motivating factors for visiting agro-tourism

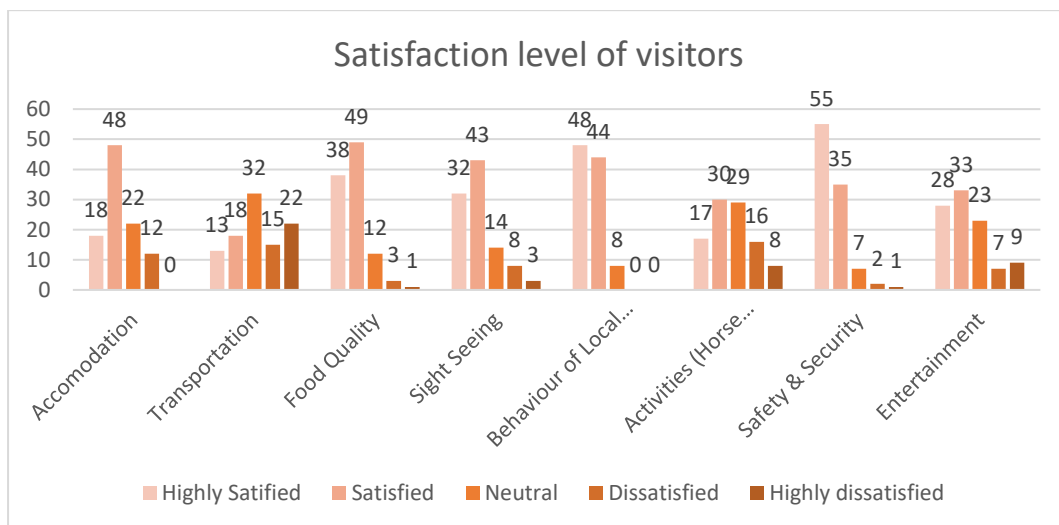
S. No.	Attribute	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Mental and physical relaxation	66	26	8	0	0
2	Escape from city life	58	21	14	5	2
3	To gain different knowledge	34	37	15	11	3
4	To be close to nature	62	27	9	2	0
5	To experience agricultural life	47	27	17	5	4
6	To purchase fresh farm product	28	33	18	12	9
7	To taste local cuisine	64	28	8	0	0
8	Experiencing rural living	59	27	14	0	0



**Interpretation:** The above graph depicts that almost two-third of the people strongly agreed that the motivating factor for visiting agro tourism is to be close to nature, to taste local cuisine and for mental & physical relaxation. Many people agreed that agro-tourism enables them to gain different knowledge about agricultural activities and gives them opportunity to purchase fresh and nutrient rich farm products from the site these are produced. However there still lies the disagreement also that agro-tourism is not able to fully provide that much quality of agricultural knowledge, farm products, experience of agricultural life and as an escape from the busy city life.

**4. Satisfaction level of visitors**

S. No.	Attribute	Highly satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Highly dissatisfied
1	Accommodation	18	48	22	12	0
2	Transportation	13	18	32	15	22
3	Food Quality	38	49	12	3	1
4	Sight Seeing	32	43	14	8	3
5	Behaviour of Local People	48	44	8	0	0
6	Activities (Horse Riding, Flying Fox Zipline, Bullock Cart Riding, Boating etc.)	17	30	29	16	8
7	Safety and Security	55	35	7	2	1
8	Entertainment	28	33	23	7	9



**Interpretation:** The points noticed from the graph above are that most visitors were satisfied with the good behaviour of local people, sight seeing activities, safety & security, food quality and the accommodation facilities. Also, it depicts that, the transportation facilities and the genre of activities were not up to the mark and most visitors were either neutral or dissatisfied from it.

**Challenges:**

The COVID-19 Pandemic affects agricultural systems in several ways. Agritourism has dramatically suffered the consequences of COVID-19, including a reduction in income for many small and medium farms. There is need to be focus on the impact of innovations on agrotourism farms on their profitability during or after the COVID-19 pandemic. Such research may show how important innovations (especially product innovations) are in diversifying the offer of agrotourism farms.

**Conclusion:**

Karjat taluka in Raigad District receives very few numbers of foreign tourists in comparison to other surrounding districts. The existing infrastructure is inadequate to support tourism in the district, and it needs urgent up gradation. Raigad district has wide range of tourism products, which need to be integrated and made a circuit to increase the duration of stay of the tourists in the district. The district has immense scope of development in the field of agrotourism sector due to the nearness of metropolitan city Mumbai and new emerging smart city Navi Mumbai. Since tourism is a major sector, which can contribute to the overall development of the district, and at the same time achieve the objectives of conservation and development of cultural heritage, art and architecture, there is a need for added attention on agrotourism development in this region.

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