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Back to the Roots: Agritourism in India

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Synopsis and Learning Outcomes

This case study introduces agritourism as an approach to tourism which may pave the way for sustainable development in rural areas. It provides a detailed discussion of the concept of agritourism, including the benefits, constraints and success factors involved, using the example of India, a country where 85% of the population depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

The Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) is an initiative which develops, actively promotes and encourages agritourism in the state of Maharashtra. The organisation aims to create sustainable livelihoods in rural areas by providing training, creating employment opportunities and linking tourism with agricultural production and related activities such as the manufacture of handicrafts. ATDC has established 113 Agri Tourism Centres across the state, which are run by local farmers and organisationally connected by ATDC. These Agri Tourism Centres serve predominantly domestic tourists from urban areas, who are provided with the opportunity to interact with rural villagers and farmers in order to experience authentic Indian agricultural traditions in unexploited natural environments.

This case study discusses the contributions of agritourism to farmers directly involved as well as to villagers indirectly affected by it. These contributions may range from economic benefits, education and awareness of the necessity to preserve natural resources to empowerment of marginalised community groups.

After completing this case study, learners will be able to:

- 1 Discuss advantages and disadvantages of implementing agritourism in rural areas.
- 2 Distinguish this approach from other tourism approaches.
- 3 Apply the concept of agritourism to specific cases and different contexts.

■ Background

In 2005, entrepreneur Pandurang Taware initiated a previously unknown business model in India, incorporating his professional experience and his family's farming background. Believing as he did that agritourism can contribute to poverty alleviation through the creation of sustainable livelihoods and the diversification of rural economies, he founded ATDC to promote and facilitate agricultural tourism in Maharashtra. The aim of this business model is to create employment opportunities and increase community income through small business development and local entrepreneurship by broadening the market base for local businesses (WTTC, 2012a). Mr Taware's vision is not purely based on business concepts; rather, he hopes that agritourism can revive an appreciation of Indian agricultural tradition and awareness of its importance within Indian society.



Figure 10.1: Agri Tourism Founder Pandurang Taware

ATDC acts as an umbrella organisation for the 113 regional Agri Tourism Centres, which are operated by local entrepreneurs and employees, and promotes their products in the target markets. Furthermore, the initiative provides training and capacity building for farmers, local guides and communities in the areas of small enterprise establishment and tourism product development. Since 2005, this free training has been provided to over 1,500 farmers (ATDC, 2012). In addition to offering these educational programmes, ATDC provides technical assistance and consulting services related to the preparation of project reports, sales and marketing activities (WTTC, 2012a).

The ATDC programme has various socioeconomic benefits:

- It generates additional income for the farmers, who have experienced a 25% income increase across the state.
- Activities in rural communities generate extra income for community members, such as retailers and service providers, who are not partners of ATDC. New tourism enterprises have been established by local community members under the guidance of ATDC as a result of new consumer market development.
- Awareness of local agricultural products has increased in urban communities, leading to direct sales from farmers to urban households.
- On-site employment opportunities have been created for members of farming families, eliminating the necessity to migrate to urban areas.
- Understanding of the value of agriculture and thus of the importance of maintaining agricultural lands has been improved through communication between urban Indians and rural people about the challenges of daily life.

Strong links between ATDC and the Maharashtra State Government have also led to improvements in the physical infrastructure (tourism accommodation facilities, road networks, electrical generating and distribution systems) in support of the Agri Tourism Centres (WTTC, 2012a).

Between 2007 and 2011, the offerings of Agri Tourism Centres across Maharashtra attracted over 200,000 visitors. Figure 10.2 shows that tourist arrivals in ATCs have increased significantly since 2007.

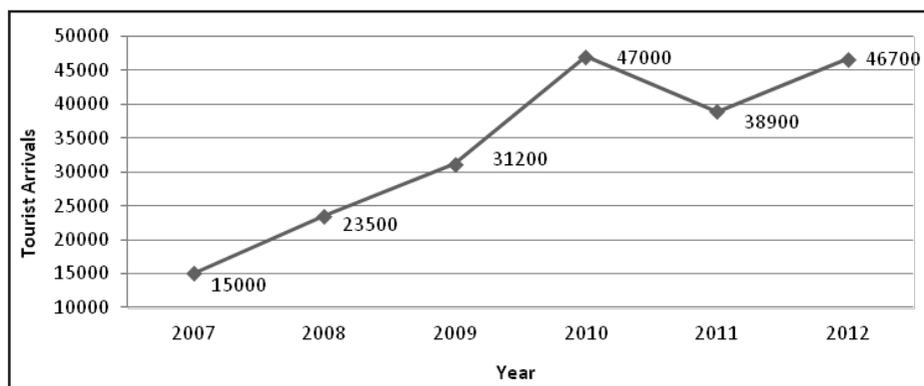


Figure 10.2: Tourist Arrivals in Agri Tourism Centres 2007–2012

Source: Based on data from Taware (2013), personal communication.

Domestic urban areas are the key markets, with 70% of all visitors originating from the city of Pune. The ATDC programme offers tourists participatory activities which provide an opportunity to experience local agricultural practices (horticulture, harvesting, beekeeping, dairying), rural ways of living and local culture (music, food, dances, handicrafts). Through its involvement with local