

MARKETING OF RURAL DESTINATIONS AS A TOURISM PRODUCT: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED AREAS IN WEST BENGAL, INDIA

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Abstract

Destination marketing has been an integral part of tourism industry for the promotion of the rural areas as well as the development of the local community. The concept of rural tourism is not new in the global tourism industry as in European countries it has been marketed as “Holiday Village”. The rural villages of West Bengal offers rural culture, tradition, arts, handicrafts, scenery, landscape which has an immense potential to attract tourists across the globe. The various destinations located in different districts of West Bengal lacks proper marketing strategies and promotion for better positioning of the destination image in the industry.

The main objective of this paper is to understand the potentials of selected rural destinations (Ballavpur, Mukutmonipur and Antpur) of West Bengal, challenges involved in destination marketing and providing suitable suggestions for better rural tourism development from destination marketing perspective.

The study is based on partial primary data through survey as well as secondary data collected from various sources like Government departments, books and journals concerned with this research.

Keywords: Destination Marketing, Rural Tourism, Challenges, Recommendations

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the right vehicle for developing a state like West Bengal (a state of India) which is on the path of modern economic growth by structural transformation of the economy. The value added effect is increasing the quality of tourism in West Bengal. Over the last two decades the concept of rural tourism has become one of the issues of pivotal importance in modern tourism. Nature based tourism is one of the main facets of rural tourism. Rural Tourism is the travel in the rural areas and enjoyment of various rural aspects, like its art and culture, heritage, handicrafts etc. It carries out in a manner that promotes the protection of the various rural tourism products, interest and ultimately the rural communities. Rural tourism is directly related to the type, quantity and quality of rural environmental capital and socio-economic practices. West Bengal is such a province (state) in India where there are various types of rural tourism products of its lush green countryside. The Govt. of West Bengal has realized the huge potentiality of rural tourism segment and hence has formulated some appropriate policy frameworks to attract more and more domestic and international tourists as well as investors in this segment. Now tourism industry has turned into one of the important key drivers of the socio-economic development by creating various direct, indirect and induced jobs, business and concerned infrastructural development all over the world.

Table 1: Foreign Tourist Arrivals and Domestic Tourist Visits in the State of West Bengal

Year	Foreign Tourists (in Lakh)	Domestic Tourists (in Lakh)
2010	11.9	211
2011	12.1	222
2012	12.2	227
2013	12.5	255
2014	13.7	490
2015	14.9	702
2016	15.2	744
2017	15.7	796

Source: “India Tourism Statistics-2018”, Ministry of Tourism and State/ Union Territory Tourism Departments. [<http://www.tourism.gov.in>]

Table 2: Foreign Tourist Arrivals and Foreign Exchange Earnings of India

Year	Foreign Tourist Arrivals (in Million.)	Percentage Change Over Previous Year	Foreign Exchange Earnings (Rs. Crore)	Percentage Change Over Previous Year
2011	6.31	9.2	83036	25.5
2012	6.58	4.3	83036	15.1
2013	6.97	5.9	107563	12.5
2014	7.68	10.2	120367	11.9
2015	8.03	4.5	134844	12.0
2016	8.80	9.7	154146	14.3
2017	10.04	14.0	177874	15.4
2018(Jan-June)	5.16	7.9	95713	12.2

Source – “India Tourism Statistics-2018”, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

India’s foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) from the tourism sectors reached US \$27.31 billion in the year 2017. In the year 2017, as many as 10.04 million foreign tourists visited India, out of which 15.7 lakhs to West Bengal. Number of foreign tourist arrivals in India during 2018(Jan-June) is 5.16 million with a percentage change of 7.9 % over previous year. Whereas domestic tourist visit in West Bengal is also showing a steep hike as in the year 2017 total number of visit was more than 7.9 crore with a percentage share of 4.8 % over previous year making West Bengal to hold the 7th rank in domestic tourists visits in 2017. FTA’s in West Bengal in 2017 is also praiseworthy with more than 15.7 lakhs

foreign tourists arrivals with a percentage share of 5.9 % over previous year making West Bengal to hold the 6th rank in Foreign Tourists Visits in 2017.

II. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are mentioned below:

- To identify the potentials of the selected rural tourism destinations in West Bengal.
- To find out the challenges in the selected potential destinations for destination marketing.
- To suggest suitable recommendation for effective rural destination marketing.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data for the study has been collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. The primary data has been collected from selected tourist destination by questionnaire survey from the tourists where the respondents visited the destination for purely tourism purpose. The questionnaire is formulated to collect the information regarding tourists' satisfaction level of various services provided in the destination, problems faced in the destination, their expectations from the destination and overall tourism experience. Questions were asked sequentially to the respondents to seek their views which consisted of 20 numbers of structured questions. The respondents were selected randomly. The researchers has conducted this research work based on three rural tourism destinations viz. Ballavpur Danga in Birbhum district, Mukutmonipur in Bankura district, Antpur in Hoogly district among the sites selected by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India.

IV. RURAL TOURISM IN WEST BENGAL

The rich diversity and variety that India has in terms of different cultures in each province, the customs and traditions, colourful festivals, handicrafts and folk arts as well as performing arts and various heritage makes many rural areas in India as potential rural tourism destinations where West Bengal has immense contribution. Tourism festivals of West Bengal like Vishnupur Festival, Poush Mela, and the Dooars Utsav have been aimed for showcasing the rural heritage of the state. Some heritage of the state including Hindu and Islamic monuments, folk music like Baul (of Birbhum district), Vhawiya (of Coochbehar district), Bhaitali (of Murshidabad district), classical music like Bishnupur Gharana, several folklores and legends, dance like Chau (of Purulia district), and a variety of attractive arts and handicrafts items like the brass works, cane and bamboo works, silk and cotton textiles, hand embroidery (kantha stitch), terracotta etc. Rural fairs and festivals are also play an important role of rural cultures of Bengal like Joydev Kenduli Mela, Jagatdhatri Puja (of Kagram, Murshidabad district). South- Western region of West Bengal like Purulia, Bankura, West Midnapore and Birbhum districts are covered with Sal, Mahua, Mahogany forest. These forestlands are occupied by the tribal communities like Santals, Kols, Vil, Mundas etc. This region has already been

established as centres of eco-tourism in West Bengal. Destinations like Sutan, Ayodha hills, Jhillimilli, Kakrojore, Duarsini, Susunia hill, Maithan, Joypur forest, Amarkanan etc. are all ecotourism hotspots.

The Union Ministry of Tourism (India) in collaboration with UNDP launched a tourism project linked to the existing rural tourism scheme of the government in 2004. According to the project plan, the UNDP will cooperate in the areas of capacity building, involvement of NGOs, local communities and artisans forge strong community private and public sector partnerships. The Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India has selected these rural tourism sites for rural tourism development and promotion leading to increase in tourist inflow in these areas. (See Table 3)

Table 3: Rural Tourism Sites in WB and their USPs
(Selected by Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India)

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Districts	USPs
1.	Ballavpur	Birbhum	Folk Dance
2.	Sonada Village	Darjeeling	Heritage
3.	Mukutmonipur	Bankura	Sari Weaving
4.	Antpur	Hoogly	Sari Weaving
5.	Kamarpukur	Hoogly	Spiritual and Crafts

Source: Annual Report 2015-16 Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India

[<http://www.tourism.gov.in>]

Ballavpur Danga in Birbhum district for folk dance, Sonada village in Darjeeling district for heritage, Antpur village in Hooghly district for Sari weaving, Kamarpukur village in Hooghly district for spiritual and crafts and Mukutmonipur in Bankura district for Sari weaving, have been included as potential rural tourism spots along with their USP's in the Endogenous Tourism Project taken up by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, UNDP and the Women's Interlink Foundation.

Table 4: Rural Tourism Sites in Different Districts of W.B and their USPs
(Identified by Researchers)

Sl. No.	Name of the Village	Districts	Identified USPs
1.	Ballavpur	Birbhum	Eco-Park & Handicrafts (Metal Jewellery)
3.	Mukutmonipur	Bankura	Eco-Tourism Spots
4.	Antpur	Hoogly	Agro-tourism & Terracotta Temple (Radhagovindjiu)

Source: Primary Data

Besides the USP's listed by MoT, Govt. of India the researchers have identified some more USP's in the three major study areas of Ballavpur, Mukutmonipur and Antpur, which are the potentials (USPs) of the selected rural tourism destinations as far the objective is concerned. Ballavpur comprises of a Eco-Park named Ballavpur Wildlife Sanctuary along with locally made handicrafts (tribal metal jewellery) by the Santal Community, Mukutmonipur comprises of various Eco-Tourism spots in the confluence of Kangsabati and Kumari river; Antpur comprises of Terracotta Temples (Radhagovindjiu) along with Agro-Tourism (cultivation process of various crops).

V. CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research objective to find out the challenges in the selected potential destinations for destination marketing the researchers have pointed out the following challenges and provided suitable recommendations in an integrated way for betterment in quality of tourism services for marketing and development of selected rural tourism destinations are as follows:

Table 5: Respondents (Tourists) Feedback on Various Parameters

Sl. No.	Tourists' Feedback Parameters	Feedback on Four-Point Scale			
		Very Poor	Poor	Good	Excellent
1	Satisfaction on Services	31(34.4%)	20(22.2%)	32(35.5%)	7(7.7%)
2	Problem Faced on Facilities	Extremely	Average	Not Remarkable	No Problem
		25(27.7%)	30(33.3%)	32(35.5%)	3(3.3%)
3	Expectation on Facilities	Highly Expected	Expected	Not Remarkable	No Expectation
		35(38.8%)	37(41.1%)	12(13.3%)	6(6.7%)
4	Overall Experience	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Bad Experience
		15(16.7%)	26(28.9%)	33(36.7%)	16(17.8%)

Source: Primary Data

- Food Services

Most of the tourists are not satisfied on food services. So, good quality, less expensive and tasty food services may be made affordable to these rural destinations. Frequent inspection from government department regarding the quality and hygiene of food served in restaurants and hotels is highly essential.

- **Transportation Services**

Roads of the rural sides are very narrow, quality and conditions are very poor of these destinations. So steps may be taken to facilitate the transportation services like widening and developing of roads. Transfer as well as for sightseeing private cab is a necessity service in the study areas.

- **Shopping Services**

Shopping is one of the important parts to most of the tourists. But there is a prominent gap between shopping demand and shopping facilities in these rural destinations. So governments and NGO's should think about the shopping matters by establishing shopping market (*silpo haat*) with reasonable price at the rural tourist destinations or nearby towns where they are staying.

- **Travel Agency Services**

The study shows that expectations of the tourists are higher and their value for money needs to be satisfied by the services provided by the travel agency. Factors in the order of importance are provision of safety and support, proper information about availability of accommodation, package tours. The tour operators shall use effective marketing strategies for products and services in the West Bengal tourism market, for a better understanding of rural tourists who visits these destinations. Tour operators can be motivated to design inclusive tourism products or packages and the promotion of those. Some special incentives, awards etc. can be considered to reward the tour operators by the Government.

- **Local Services**

Drinking water facilities at the tourism spots or site seeing spots is a real life problem which has to be arranged. Positive attitude of local people, their personal care and support makes the visitors feel secure and tourists visit these destinations repeatedly for which awareness programme to be implemented by Government level and NGO's. Tour guides and taxi drivers do not have necessary educational qualification and multi-lingual ability to communicate with the tourists. A training programme for people from various walks of life like car drivers, E-Rickshaw (Toto) drivers, policemen and bus conductors whom tourists encounter face to face should be organised.

- **Apex Bodies**

The apex bodies in the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, Department of Tourism, Government of West Bengal, West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation (WBTDC), Market Research Division, Ministry of Tourism, Department of Tourism Govt. of West Bengal, Ministry of Culture Govt. of India has to work with mutual understanding for the infrastructural development of the selected destinations.

Local bodies like Lions club, Rotary club, Local Government Administration, Revenue Department and Tourism Information Office may work together for the development of Tourism in the areas. The tourism department should give efforts in processing the tourism data on time and the smart presentation of those data will be route map for the tour operators and the stakeholders involved in these destinations. It will be very much helpful for capacity building and long term planning.

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