

## Development of Rural Tourism

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India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provides a huge potential for the development of tourism and job creation in the country. The need is to develop tourist circuits on specific themes to attract tourists and create employment and livelihood opportunities for local communities. This can be achieved through the development of thematic circuits and destinations which are unique to the region in terms of theme and cultural backdrop. Such thematic tourist circuits and destinations need to be developed in a manner that supports communities, provides employment, and fosters social integration responsibly and sustainably.

**I**ndia is a kaleidoscope of ancient heritage, culture, diverse landscapes, and a great variety of biodiversity. India is enwrapped with the Mighty Himalayas in the North, the Indian Ocean in the South, the coastline of the Arabian Sea, and the Bay of Bengal on the western and eastern shores. Privileged with extraordinary climatic conditions and a plethora of cultures surviving and evolving over millennia, the land of India has a wide spectrum of communities celebrating unity in diversity. India is endowed with diverse tourist attractions and each State/ Union Territory has its distinct features.

The unique geography of India combined with its connectivity and adequate infrastructure offers a huge assortment of destinations, experiences, and activities for tourists from all walks of life. Tourist destination experiences range from the shopping experience in its bustling *bazaars* to serene natural retreats around protected areas, from exhilarating adventure sports to equanimous yoga wellness centers, from modern metropolitans to rural and tribal stories. It is an odyssey of joy and discovery travelling through the country.

The natural beauty of the Indian subcontinent



(Performance by Rajasthani Dancers)

is unparalleled with beautiful snowy peaks, dense forests, pristine beaches, crystal clear lakes, golden deserts and vast green valleys. The landscapes are further enhanced by the contrast evident across the regions between the cold deserts of Leh to the sun-drenched desert dunes in Rajasthan. Starting from the snow-capped Himalayas in the north, traversing the deserts of Rajasthan, crossing the lush forests of Madhya Pradesh and then sailing into the expansive backwaters of Kerala, and finally diving into the pristine waters of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the journey is full of adventurous highlands and serene plains and lowlands. A land boasting a diverse variety of flora and fauna, India is also home to many national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, tiger reserves and biosphere reserves, which offer enchanting wildlife sightings.

Ministry of Tourism promotes India as a holistic 360 degrees destination on different experiential themes like rural, wellness, and culinary amongst others. Rural Tourism is one of the Niche Tourism Products promoted by the Ministry of Tourism. The promotions are undertaken through Ministry's official website [www.incredibleindia.org](http://www.incredibleindia.org) and various social media platforms to have a conversation with travellers and build a bond beyond pure marketing of the destination in both domestic and overseas markets. Information on different destinations in India including rural tourism destinations is shared through the official website. Promotions are also undertaken through two social media handles of the Ministry on different themes.

Form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture, and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism.

Rural Tourism focuses on the visitor actively participating in a rural lifestyle. The tourist travels to a rural location and experiences life while taking part in the daily activities of the village. The tourist also gets a chance to imbibe the traditions

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and culture of the area. Rural tourism may also include an overnight stay in which the visitor also gets to know the unique lifestyle of the village at much closer quarters.

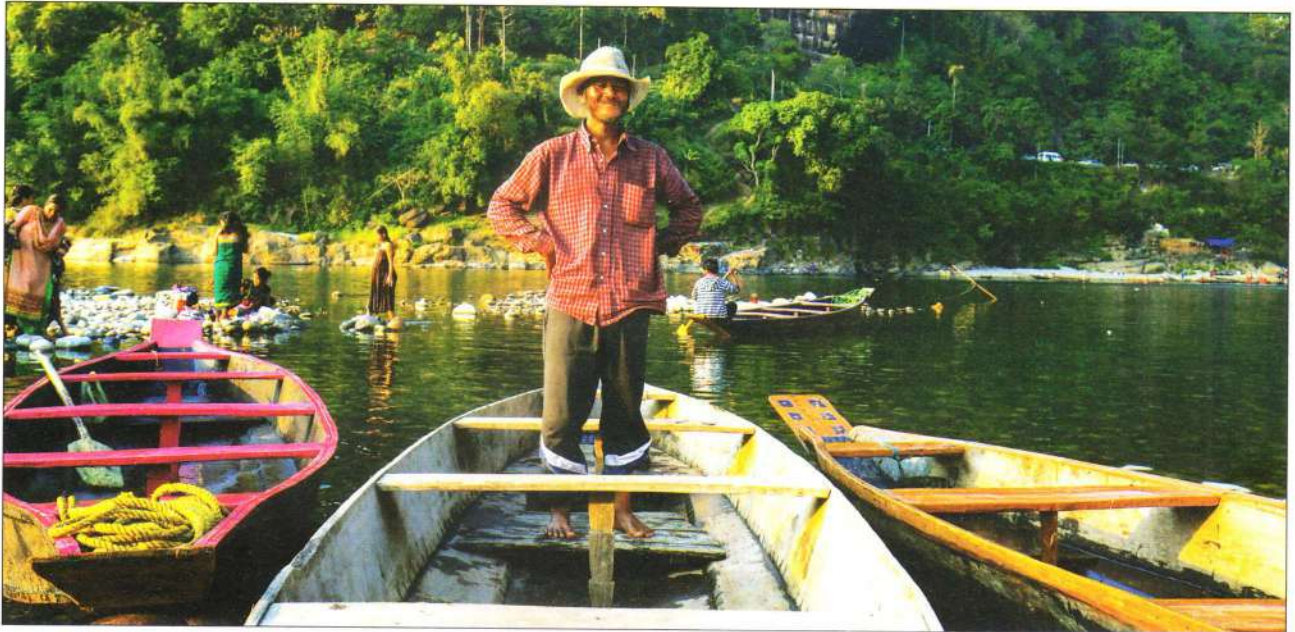
Rural tourism is multi-faceted and entails agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure and ecotourism, which are all closely aligned. Each of the 600,000+ villages has its unique story, heritage, and culture to share with the tourist.

The Ministry of Tourism supports the development of tourism infrastructure by its various schemes and initiatives, which currently include the Swadesh Darshan Scheme and the PRASHAD Scheme.

India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provides a huge potential for the development of tourism and job creation in the country. There is a great scope and need to develop tourist circuits on specific themes to attract tourists and create employment and livelihood opportunities for local communities. This can be achieved through the development of thematic circuits and destinations which are unique to the region in terms of theme and cultural backdrop. Such thematic tourist circuits and destinations need to be developed in a manner that supports communities, provides employment, and fosters social integration responsibly and sustainably.

In due recognition of this the Ministry of Tourism (MoT) had launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme (Central Sector Scheme)– for the integrated development of theme-based tourist circuits in the country in 2014-15. This scheme is envisioned to synergise with other Government of India schemes like Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Skill India, Make in India, etc. with the idea of positioning the tourism sector as a major engine for job creation, the driving force for economic growth, building synergy with various sectors to enable tourism to realise its potential.

Recognising the potential of Rural Tourism in the country, Rural Circuit has been recognised as one of the 13 thematic circuits to offer an exclusive



*(Boat ride in Dawki River, Meghalaya)*

experience to tourists and alongside develop lesser-known destinations located in remote parts of the country.

Among the 16 themes identified under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, 76 projects have been completed / inprogress across the various States / UTs of India which include 02 rural circuits, 10 North-East circuits, 07 Himalayan circuits, 10 coastal circuits, 01 desert circuit, 04 tribal circuits, 06 eco-circuits, 02 wildlife circuits, and 10 heritage circuits, sanctioned for a total of Rs 3,994.92 crore.

The development of Bhitiharwa, Chandraha and Turkaulia in Bihar and the Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project in Kerala has been undertaken under the Rural Circuit theme. This shall help in generating employment through active involvement of local communities and following community-based development and a pro-poor tourism approach.

The Government of India launched the Pilgrimage Rejuvenation And Spiritual Augmentation Drive (PRASAD) scheme in the year 2014-2015 under the Ministry of Tourism. This scheme focuses on developing and identifying pilgrimage sites across India for enriching the religious tourism experience. It aims to integrate pilgrimage destinations in a prioritised, planned and sustainable manner to provide a complete religious tourism experience. The growth of domestic tourism hugely depends on pilgrimage

tourism.

Pilgrimage and Rural tourism are inter-linked owing to the presence of major pilgrimage centres in close vicinity to rural areas leading to employment generation and development of peripheral infrastructure, thus, benefitting both tourists and locals alike.

Development of tourism, including tourism in rural areas and the setting up of Rural Tourism Parks, is the primary responsibility of the State Governments/UT Administrations. However, the Ministry of Tourism has formulated a Strategy and Roadmap for Rural Tourism which, inter alia, focuses on developing and promoting local products through tourism subsequently, resulting in the generation of income and jobs in rural areas and empowering local communities, youth, and women, fulfilling the vision of Aatma Nirbhar Bharat.

Recognising the immense potential of rural tourism in India and prioritising rural tourism at the national level, the Ministry of Tourism has formulated a National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism in the Country.

National Strategy of Rural Tourism aims at creating income and job opportunities in rural areas and empowering local communities fulfilling the vision of the Hon'ble Prime Minister for Aatma Nirbhar Bharat. The Strategy aims at the convergence of various schemes addressing issues



*(Houseboats in Kerala)*

such as poverty, empowerment of women, and strengthening the economic status of the rural people.

The Strategy suggests identifying clusters of villages having high potential for tourism development in different parts of the country. The themes for rural tourism can include local crafts and cuisines, folk music, shows, dramas, agri-tourism, organic farming, yoga and meditation centres, lakes, wetlands and eco-zones, rural sports, cultural events, national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and unique tribal culture proximity to existing tourism circuits.

The National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism is based on an overarching theme of sustainable and responsible tourism, which will be supported by six strategic pillars namely model policies and best practices for rural tourism, digital technologies for rural tourism, development of rural tourism clusters, marketing support for rural tourism, capacity building, Governance, and institutional support.

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) launched Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission on 21 February 2016 in an attempt to make the selected rural areas in form of the cluster, socially, economically, and physically sustainable regions by providing economic, social, and infrastructure amenities, thus leading to sustainable and balanced regional development in the country. Three Hundred Rurban Clusters with thematic economic growth points were proposed to be developed across the country under this innovative Mission. To ensure an optimum level of development,

twenty-one components have been suggested as desirable for the Cluster development. Tourism Promotion is one of the twenty-one components.

This year, the National Tourism Day (NTD), on 25 January 2022 was celebrated on the theme of Rural and Community Centric Tourism. This was done given the recent recognition of Pochampally Village from Telangana by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as the Best Tourism Village. The Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO initiative was launched to advance the role of tourism in safeguarding rural villages, along with their landscapes, natural and cultural diversity, and their local values and activities, including local gastronomy. India had nominated a few other villages as well for the UNWTO entries as the Best Tourism Villages 2021 including Kongthong in Meghalaya, Chitrakoot in Chhattisgarh, and Kevdi in Gujarat, Khonoma in Nagaland, and Kumarakom in Kerala. Given the significance of Rural Tourism as a unique tourism product, Ministry had developed promotional creatives highlighting India's entries to UNWTO best tourism villages

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