

Rural Tourism

Catalysing the Multifold Developments in Rural India

Rural tourism in India is emerging as a catalyst for economic growth and community empowerment. Government initiatives, competitions, and international recognition, such as UNWTO awards, spotlight successful models like Pochampally and Dhordo. The Vibrant Village Program focuses on comprehensive development in border areas, and capacity-building efforts aim to sustain rural tourism, fostering collaboration and resilience for the well-being of local communities.

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Rural tourism is tourism that happens in the countryside or a rural area. However, it has been noted that the concept of rural tourism is much more diverse when it is dismantled to the elemental level. Superficially, the elemental level of rural tourism consists of the area that concerns the land use pattern, economy of the area, involvement of

the community, undisturbed development of the area, and its traditional and cultural identity.

As a practice the initiation of rural tourism at the global level dates back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the countryside started appealing to tourists as a result of rapid expansion in the industrialisation in the cities. Since the 1980's after the World Commission on Environment and Development's

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report on 'Our Common Future' and the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 rural tourism has been seen as the tool for the regeneration of the rural economy and development by the developed as well as the developing nations.

Rural tourism in India is still in a nascent stage, emerging as a niche sector within the broader tourism industry. A significant portion of India is rural, with a substantial population residing in these rural areas, remaining untrodden to take tourists on a stroll to showcase glimpses of the authentic essence of India. Fostering the growth of the rural economy by creating employment opportunities.

India's villages serve as a storehouse of the nation's rich culture, traditions, crafts, heritage, and agricultural practices. Harnessing the potential of these local elements through tourism cannot only generate income but also create job opportunities in rural regions. This approach is empowering local communities, youth, and women. Moreover, it contributes to mitigating distress migration from rural areas, addressing poverty, and promoting sustainable development.

Realising the Potential

In India, one of the first mentions of rural tourism can be seen in the tenth five-year plan (2002 - 2007). However, rural tourism was first prioritised through the eleventh five-year plan (2007 - 2012) by providing infrastructural development in these areas as the new form of tourism. Within the specific time frame, out of the total 1003 projects 65 were specifically sanctioned for rural tourism.

The twelfth five-year plan (2012 - 2017) tries to embrace the opportunities and opening the avenues for the development of the niche areas of tourism like medical tourism and rural tourism.

Strategising the Way Forward

The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for promoting and developing rural tourism in India has formulated two strategies.

The National Strategy and Roadmap for the Development of Rural Tourism in India and the National Strategy for the Promotion of Rural Homestays in India. Both strategies are formulated with a broader vision to capitalise on the potential of Indian rural tourism. The strategies focus on the holistic approach for developing rural tourism uplifting the rural economy

alongside. To deliver the multifold benefits of rural tourism the strategies are based on several major key strategic pillars:

- I. Benchmarking of state policies and best practices
- II. Digital technologies and platforms for rural tourism
- III. Developing clusters for rural tourism
- IV. Marketing support for rural tourism
- V. Capacity building of stakeholders
- VI. Governance and Institutional Framework

The Ministry of Tourism to bust the predicament lying in the rural areas for strategic development has formulated strategies focussing on providing multidimensional developmental opportunities like secondary forms of occupation, training and development, infrastructural development, reverse migration and opportunity generation, etc.

For the effective implementation of the National strategies and the providing support for, promotion and development of Rural Tourism in the country Ministry of Tourism has designated Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management as the Central Nodal Agency for Rural Tourism and Rural Homestay.

Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment & Poverty Alleviation

Tourism is an industry with no boundaries. Nations are working in harmony to reap the benefits of tourism. World's largest economies came together in the form of G-20. Among the discussions on the numerous horizons the first Tourism Working Group (TWG) meeting held at Rann of Kutch with the special focus on Rural Tourism. The first side event of the first TWG meeting was on the Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment & Poverty Alleviation. The discussions at this global level event



Rann Utsav, Dhorado, Gujarat

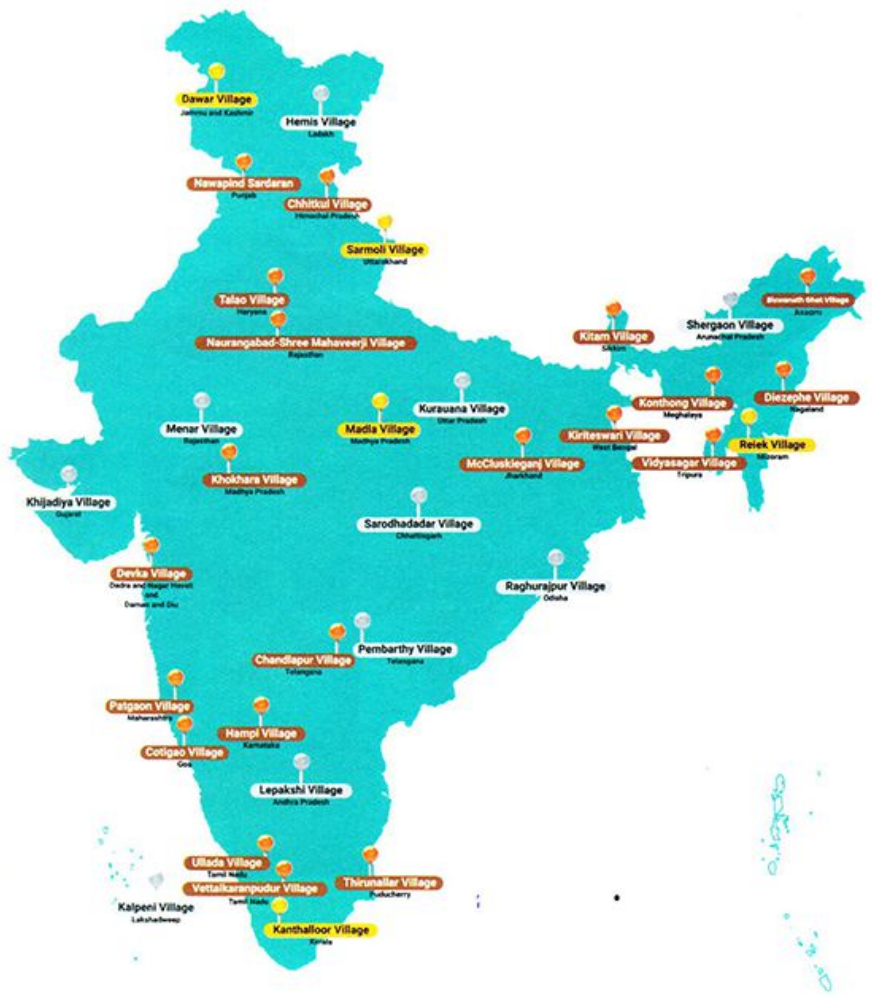
focused on the maturing multiplier effect of rural tourism at the ground level. The Ministry of Tourism is focussing on brightening the impact of rural tourism on the environment, culture, tradition, and economy alongside strengthening the local community has been added as the objective of rural tourism.

Cataloging Indian Rural Tourism

India is a land that has countless potential for rural tourism. To map the potential of Indian rural tourism the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has launched the Best Tourism Village Competition and Best Rural Homestay Competition.

In the first edition of the Best Tourism Village Competition, a total of 795 villages filed applications from 315 districts spanning over 31 states and UTs out of which 35 villages were recognised as the Best Tourism villages of India. The recognised 35 villages were analysed from multiple perspectives and the best practices and the models were drawn out from these villages which will be shared with the rest of the villages for the replication of the existing models and the development of the villages.

The current edition of the Best Tourism Village competition has received a total of 991 applications in the Best Tourism Village Competition 2024 and 802 applications in the Best Rural Homestay Competition 2024.



In the race to identification of the Rural Tourism destinations and making the globe aware about Indian rural tourism the Ministry of Tourism has launched a dedicated website (www.rural.tourism.gov.in) for rural tourism of India. The website has been developed to showcase the potential of Rural Tourism in India. The website has information about the rural tourism

Applications from States in the Best Tourism Village Competition 2023 and 2024





Khonoma Village, Nagaland

destinations in India, Rural homestays in India, government and industry initiatives for rural tourism, etc. The website will act as an Indian Encyclopedia for Rural Tourism and also work in setting up equilibrium between the Government, stakeholders, community and tourist.

Positioning Indian Rural Tourism at Global Level

The efficacy and triumph of the initiatives undertaken by the Government of India to foster rural tourism development are being accentuated by the international acclaim received from the UN Tourism (earlier UNWTO). Pochampally village from Telangana state is recognised as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village in the year 2021. Pochampally is a small hamlet of weavers known for the renowned Pochampally silk adorned with the Ikat design. The village

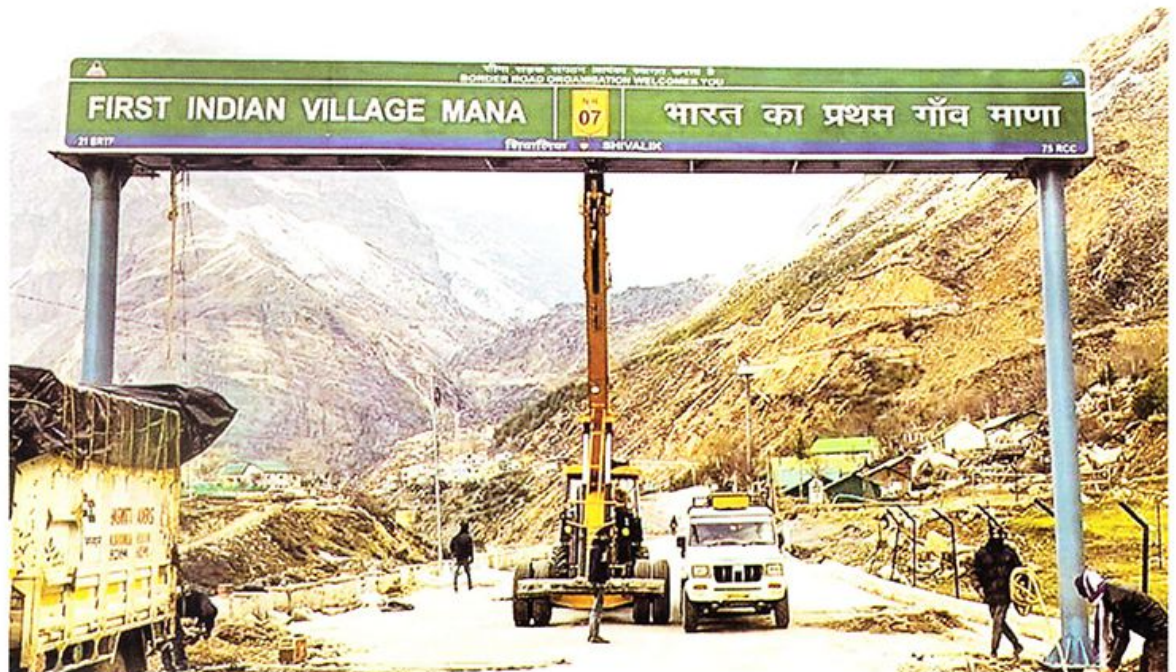
demonstrates one of the finest models of community involvement in rural tourism and their development thereto.

In the year 2023, Dhordo from Gujarat state was recognised as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village. Dhordo village sets the perfect example of incorporating tourism as the key economic driver impacting trade, job creation, investment, infrastructural development, social inclusion, etc. Also, the recognition of Dhordo as the UNWTO Best Tourism Village is a testament to Dhordo's commitment to eco-conscious living and its contribution to promoting sustainable tourism.

Khonoma, Nagaland, and Madla, Madhya Pradesh were recognised under the Upgrade Program of the UNWTO. These villages were recognised in the years 2022 and 2023 respectively. The villages recognised in the upgrade program had the potential to be the Best Tourism Villages with a scope of improvement.

From the Last Village to the First Village

The so-called last villages of India located at the country's border are not the last village but the First village of India. With the same vision Government of India has initiated the Vibrant Village Program for India's Border Villages. These villages have been inhabited by determined class people who work hard to sustain their way of life. The livelihoods of the locals are based on farming, raising cattle, and other traditional jobs. The Indian government has put in place several development programs and efforts to raise living standards in border communities,



upgrade infrastructure, increase access to healthcare and education, and foster economic growth. The basic areas of development are connectivity with all-weather roads, drinking water, 24x7 electricity – Solar and wind energy to be given focused attention, and mobile and internet connectivity. Tourist centres, multi-purpose centres, and health and wellness centres.

Community Reinforcement

Identifying the need to generate awareness and understanding about rural tourism Ministry of Tourism is strategising capacity-building initiatives amongst the stakeholders ranging from the Central Government Ministries to the local communities. To enhance the capacity and ensure the enduring sustenance of rural tourism, the Government is aiming to establish Capacity Building Resource Centres at the National, State, and Cluster levels. These resource centres will serve as pivotal platforms for stakeholders, facilitating knowledge exchange and fostering interaction among practitioners, educational institutions, government agencies, and volunteers. These Capacity Building

Resource Centres at various levels will serve as repositories for tourism knowledge. This knowledge will be tailored into modules for local communities and MSMEs, contextualised for regional use, and used to develop standards for responsible tourism. The centres will also support local community-based tourism, build stakeholder capacities, and emphasize collaboration over competition for the resilience of communities and rural tourism providers in the face of challenges.

In fostering rural development, rural tourism plays a pivotal role in providing a range of benefits and avenues for development. Initiatives like competitions, international recognition, and strategic programs taken for the development of Indian rural tourism, unlock economic growth, preserve cultural heritage, and empower local communities. These comprehensive approaches not only showcase the untapped potential of rural India but also position it as a vibrant hub for responsible tourism, fostering resilience, and enhancing the overall well-being of rural communities. □