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EXPLORING THE MOTIVATION BEHIND FARM TOURISM IN KERALA: A PUSH AND PULL FACTOR APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Farm tourism in Kerala holds significant potential to draw visitors from across the globe. Gaining a clear understanding of the motivational factors influencing tourist behaviour is crucial for anticipating travel decisions. This research is grounded in data gathered from farm tourists, focusing on their demographic characteristics and the key factors influencing their travel and destination preferences. The study evaluated ten internal (push) motivations and twelve external (pull) factors related to the features of farm tourism destinations. Using an independent t-test, the analysis revealed notable differences between domestic and international agritourists in terms of what drives their travel and destination choices. For international visitors, the eco-friendly aspects of farm tourism destinations were the primary motivator, whereas domestic tourists were mainly driven by the desire for mental relaxation and recreation. These findings can help tourism marketers design and deliver more appealing and competitive service offerings tailored to different tourist segments.

KEYWORDS: Motivation, Tourism, farm tourists, Travelling, Destination, Farm.

INTRODUCTION

Farm tourism is an emerging segment within the tourism industry, offering significant potential for boosting economic growth and generating employment in Kerala (Sunil Runjaji, 2010). Given the ability of Kerala's farm tourism destinations to attract a substantial number of visitors, it is crucial for tourism marketers to design competitive products and services that align with the expectations of travellers. To ensure effective marketing, it is important to understand the specific motivations and preferences that influence farm tourists in their travel decisions and destination choices. This study aims to gather insights into the motivational factors that encourage tourists to visit farm tourism locations in Wayanad, along with assessing the level of importance they assign to various features of these destinations.

FARM TOURISM- A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Farm tourism represents a significant component of eco-tourism and is gaining popularity as a modern trend in the tourism sector that supports sustainable development.

Defined as a commercial venture operating on an active farm, ranch, or agricultural site designed for visitor recreation and providing supplementary income for the farm owner (Bernardo, Valentin, & Leatherman, 2004), it is commonly referred to as agrotourism, agritourism, or agricultural tourism. This form of tourism not only opens up new employment opportunities within the agricultural domain but also offers farmers an additional source of income while fostering public awareness about farming practices.

According to Krishna, Verma, Sahoo, and Kumbhare (2018), a visually appealing and well-maintained farm, combined with the farmer's ability to engage socially, is fundamental for the success of a farm tourism enterprise. Farm tourism encompasses visits to functioning farms or ventures engaged in agriculture, horticulture, or agribusiness. Tourists can take part in diverse activities such as farm stays, educational excursions, outdoor games, immersion in rural lifestyles, community interactions, nature appreciation, exploration of rural heritage, tasting local food, touring production and processing units, enjoying cultural performances, dining in multi-cuisine restaurants, shopping for souvenirs, staying in tree houses, house boating, hunting, fishing, trekking, and more (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2015).

Agriculture forms the foundation of the Indian economy and employs a large proportion of the country's population. Within this context, farm tourism emerges as a relatively new yet promising addition to India's tourism landscape.

FARM TOURISM IN KERALA

Kerala, with its strong foundation in agriculture and farming, offers immense potential for the growth of farm tourism. As a relatively new addition to the tourism sector in the state, farm tourism is gaining popularity due to Kerala's diverse crop cultivation, extensive plantations, pleasant climate, and scenic landscapes. These natural advantages position Kerala as an ideal location for the expansion of farm-based tourism activities. Such destinations are also known for offering natural products, making them attractive spots for eco-conscious shoppers.

Moreover, farm tourism presents a sustainable and economically viable method for conserving natural resources, wildlife habitats, and picturesque locations (Singh & Mishra, 2016). Recognizing its potential, the Kerala government has initiated several projects to encourage farmers to participate in tourism-related ventures. One such step includes allowing up to 5% of farmland to be utilized for tourism purposes (Deepthi & Davy, 2017). Kerala is home to several well-known farm tourism destinations, including Blooms Farm in Kenichira, Keerikkadan's Green Park in Kothemangalam, Bee Hive Honey Park and Passion Fruit Farm in Rajakkad, Tea Town Kerala in Munnar, Green Aqua Fish Farm in Vypin, KFDC Floriculture Centre in Munnar, and Mango Meadows Agricultural Theme Park in Kottayam, among others. Among the various regions, Wayanad stands out as one of the most picturesque and naturally endowed districts in Kerala. Its favorable agroclimatic conditions make it ideal for cultivating a wide range of crops, plantations, and spices. The region is also renowned for its organic farms that are entirely free from chemical inputs, making it a perfect destination to promote and experience farm tourism. Notable farm tourism sites in Wayanad include Blooms Green Farm in Kenichira, Pappy's Nest in Kalpetta, and the Parisons Plantation Experiences in Mananthavady.

PUSHAND PULL FACTORS

Tourist motivations are driven by their personal desires and needs, which play a crucial role in shaping their travel behaviour and choice of destination. These motivations are generally categorized into push and pull factors. Push factors originate from within the individual and represent internal drives—such as emotional or psychological needs—that encourage a person to travel. In contrast, pull factors refer to the external attributes or appealing features of a destination that draw tourists toward a particular location. (Gnoth, 1997).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Motivation is a key area of focus in travel and tourism research, as understanding why people travel can assist tourism marketers in forecasting future travel trends (Raji, 2012). Gautam (2014) emphasized that the underperformance of the tourism sector is often due to inadequate destination planning and ineffective marketing strategies. Crompton's seminal work in 1979 highlighted the relevance of both push and pull factors in tourist motivation, recommending that socio-psychological drivers should be prioritized when designing tourism products and promotional strategies. Bagari, Crowther, and Marr (2003) also supported this view, explaining that people travel as a result of internal urges (push factors) and the appeal of external destination features (pull factors).

Jonsson and Devonish (2008) approached tourist motivation by examining its roots and their influence on how destinations are perceived. They concluded that focusing on push factors can help resolve challenges related to tourist motivation. Similarly, Srikatanyoo and Campiranon (2010) studied agritourists and found a lack of success in many agritourism ventures due to insufficient understanding of visitor needs and motivations. Kozak (2002) explored motivational differences among tourists from the same and different countries, discovering that motivations can vary depending on nationality and destination.

Joseph and Vasanthi (2017) noted that effective tourism marketing requires strategic planning and the implementation of diverse marketing techniques, often supported by SWOC (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Challenges) analysis. Overall, the literature underscores the critical role of understanding tourist motivation in tourism development and destination marketing. Given that there is limited research specifically addressing the motivations of farm tourists in Kerala, this study holds particular significance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kerala possesses immense potential for the growth of farm tourism due to its favourable natural environment, diverse agricultural produce, and rich rural traditions and festivals. Since motivation serves as the foundation for all travel-related decisions, understanding what drives tourists is crucial. In Kerala's highly competitive tourism market, the success of farm tourism destinations depends on creating and offering services that effectively inspire tourists to visit and extend their stay. Gaining insights into the motivations behind travel and how they influence destination choices can help tourism planners better meet the expectations and needs of farm tourists. This study aims to examine the motivational factors influencing travel behaviour and destination preferences among farm tourists in Kerala.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is valuable for tourism marketers as it provides insights that can guide the design of farm tourism destinations and the development of promotional strategies aligned with tourists' preferences and expectations. Additionally, the findings will assist tourism planners in formulating effective strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction and retention.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to tourists visiting farm tourism destinations located in the Wayanad district of Kerala.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify and examine the key motivational factors that encourage tourists to visit farm tourism destinations.
2. To assess the specific attributes that influence tourists in selecting a particular farm tourism location.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between the domestic and foreign tourists with respect to the factors which motivate them to visit farm tourism spots.
2. There is no significant difference between domestic and foreign tourists with regard to the attributes which influence them while choosing farm tourism spots.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study follows a descriptive research design and utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire administered to tourists visiting farm tourism destinations in Wayanad. A purposive sampling method was employed, with a total sample size of 50 respondents, comprising 25 domestic and 25 international farm tourists. The data were analyzed using statistical tools such as the percentage method, mean, and independent t-test.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is based on a sample survey. So, there may be sampling bias.
2. The study is limited to a small area.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from farm tourists are analyzed under three main categories. The first section presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The second section examines the motivational factors influencing farm tourism, along with tests of statistical significance. The third section focuses on the key attributes that affect tourists' choice of farm tourism destinations.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE FARM TOURISTS

An analysis of the demographic details in Table No. 1 indicates that the majority of farm tourists fall within the age group of 21 to 40 years, making up 64% of the total respondents. Tourists aged between 41 and 60 years account for 22%, while only a small portion belongs to the senior category (above 60 years) and the youth segment (below 20 years), representing 8% and 6% respectively. The sample is predominantly male, with 78% male respondents compared to 22% female respondents.

Regarding educational qualifications, most tourists are well-educated. About 46% hold professional degrees, 34% are postgraduates, and 14% are graduates. Occupational analysis shows that 34% of the respondents are professionals, followed by 28% who are engaged in business. Government employees form 20% of the sample, 8% work in the private sector, and the remaining 10% are involved in other types of employment.

In terms of income, the majority of farm tourists belong to higher income brackets. Around 12% have a monthly income exceeding ₹1,00,000. About 62% earn between ₹50,000 and ₹1,00,000, with 32% earning ₹75,000–₹1,00,000 and 30% earning ₹50,000–₹75,000 per month.

FINDINGS

1. Gender and Age Composition: A significant majority of farm tourists are male (78%), with 64% falling within the age group of 21 to 40 years.
2. Educational Background: Most farm tourists are well-educated, with 46% holding professional qualifications and 34% having completed postgraduate education.
3. Occupational Profile: Professionals (34%) and businesspersons (28%) form the largest segments among the respondents.
4. Income Level: The income analysis indicates that a majority of the respondents have a monthly income exceeding ₹50,000.
5. Motivational Factors – Foreign Tourists: For foreign tourists, the most compelling motivational factor is the eco-friendly nature of the farm tourism destination.
6. Motivational Factors – Domestic Tourists: Among domestic tourists, the primary motivation is mental refreshment and recreation.
7. In the case of attributes in selecting a farm tourism spot, recreational activities, pollution free environment, farm attractions and farm stay are the important factors influencing both domestic and foreign tourists.
8. Hospitality of the staff, safety and security are other attributes considered by the foreign tourists. While accessibility and affordable price charges are the other major attributes influencing the domestic tourists.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Promote Organic Farming: Given that foreign tourists are primarily attracted to the eco-friendly nature of farm tourism, organic farms should be actively developed and promoted as key tourism attractions.
2. Enhance Recreational Opportunities: To appeal to both domestic and international tourists, farm tourism sites should incorporate a wider range of outdoor activities such as trekking, fishing, rafting, horseback riding, hunting, and petting zoos.
3. Select Pollution-Free Locations: Since a pollution-free and scenic environment is a major factor for most tourists, tourism planners should establish farm tourism spots in naturally beautiful, unpolluted areas.
4. Provide Business-Friendly Facilities: Considering that many tourists are well-educated professionals and businesspeople, farm tourism destinations should offer facilities for hosting conferences, training sessions, and business meetings.
5. Improve Accessibility and Affordability: To attract more domestic tourists, farms should be easily accessible and offer services at reasonable prices.
6. Emphasize Quality Hospitality: As hospitality is a key concern for foreign tourists, tourism operators should employ well-trained staff who can foster positive relationships and provide a welcoming atmosphere.
7. Ensure Safety and Security: Tourism planners should implement comprehensive safety measures, including security personnel, fire safety equipment, and emergency response protocols to enhance tourists' sense of safety.

CONCLUSION

Farm tourism in Kerala is still in its early stages of development. However, as an agriculturally rich state, Kerala holds immense potential to expand and promote farm tourism. This study focused on the Wayanad district and examined the demographic characteristics and motivational factors influencing tourists' travel behavior and destination preferences. The research identified key motivational drivers and essential attributes of farm tourism spots for both domestic and foreign tourists, revealing notable differences between the two groups. These insights are valuable for tourism marketers in developing targeted strategies and enhancing the appeal of farm tourism services in Kerala. The findings of the study can serve as a guide for promoting farm tourism ventures more effectively. Future research could explore additional dimensions such as the **service quality** offered at farm tourism destinations across the state, thereby contributing to the sustainable growth of this emerging sector.

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