

FINTECH REVOLUTION

RESHAPING FINANCIAL SYSTEMS



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EroGanic[®] Publications

Erode - 638112.

Tamilnadu, India.

<https://publications.eroganic.com>

Title : FINTECH REVOLUTION RESHAPING FINANCIAL SYSTEMS

Editor Details : Dr. P. S. GEETHA
Program Lead, School of Commerce,
VET Institute of Arts and Science (Co-Education) College,
Erode - 638012, Tamil Nadu, India.

Dr. L. RAJENDRAN
Head & Associate Professor,
Department of Commerce (PA),
VET Institute of Arts and Science (Co-Education) College,
Erode - 638012, Tamil Nadu, India.

Publisher Details : EroGanic Publications
Erode - 638112.
Tamilnadu, India.
<https://publications.eroganic.com>

Edition : 2025

ISBN : 978-81-19824-25-0



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INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE INTO AGRO-RURAL TOURISM: BOOSTING CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT THROUGH TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

Mr. Shijin P¹, Dr. Mohana Priya .M²

*^{1 & 2} Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and
Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai*

Email id: mpshivangmcks@gmail.com.

ABSTRACT

Agro-rural tourism represents a distinctive fusion of agriculture and tourism, offering visitors immersive, hands-on experiences in sustainable farming practices, rural lifestyles, and traditional food systems. This research highlights how integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)—including age-old farming methods, Ayurvedic food traditions, and indigenous hospitality customs—can greatly enhance tourist engagement. By blending farm-to-table experiences with deep cultural interactions, agro-tourism not only supports environmental sustainability but also delivers economic advantages. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study examines classical agricultural literature, Ayurveda-based culinary practices, and the ethos of Atithi Devo Bhava (Guest is God). The findings reveal that embedding IKS into agro-tourism not only helps conserve India's agricultural legacy but also fosters stronger bonds between travellers and rural communities.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge Systems, Agro-Rural Tourism, Farm-to-Fork, Ayurveda, Indigenous Hospitality, Customer Engagement.*

INTRODUCTION

While urban living was once the preferred lifestyle, there has been a noticeable shift in recent years toward rural tourism. This growing interest has made agro-tourism a compelling travel choice, offering both cultural enrichment and economic benefits for all stakeholders involved (Aayog, 2018). A key aspect of this trend, particularly within Farm-to-Fork tourism, is the rise in both domestic and international travel, which supports the preservation of traditional cuisines while enhancing visitor experiences and contributing to the economic development of rural areas (Subercaseaux, 2021).

According to Draganescu (2010), Indian Knowledge Systems—deeply rooted in agriculture, food science, and rural hospitality—allow visitors to experience rural biodiversity and lifestyles more authentically when integrated into Agro-Rural Tourism. For agro-tourism to be truly sustainable, focus areas should include:

- ◆ **Vrikshayurveda** (Traditional Plant Science)
- ◆ **Indigenous Agricultural Practices**
- ◆ **Ayurvedic Culinary Systems**
- ◆ **Community-Based Hospitality** (Ridwansyah, 2017)

Modern tourism development should ensure inclusive participation across all rural stakeholders while addressing the unique economic challenges faced by various regions in India. Integrating IKS into agro-tourism makes the model more dynamic, inclusive, and environmentally sound (Aayog, 2018).

Many rural communities, untouched by commercial influences, continue to practice organic farming and prepare traditional cuisines. Unfortunately, current agro-tourism ventures often overlook these rich cultural assets, instead focusing narrowly on India's performance-driven economy.

Agro-tourism offers a promising route to align economic, environmental, and social goals by supporting rural initiatives that are attractive to tourists. This study draws on the philosophy of Athithi Devo Bhava—the traditional Indian belief in treating guests as gods—combined with age-old agricultural knowledge and Ayurvedic traditions, to advocate for leveraging local heritage in farming and cuisine to advance sustainable agro-tourism.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore traditional agricultural and culinary practices that enrich Farm-to-Fork tourism experiences through ancient references and indigenous food systems.
2. To analyze the role of conventional farming techniques, Ayurvedic dietary traditions, and local hospitality in promoting sustainable agro-tourism.
3. To evaluate the influence of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) on enhancing visitor engagement within the agro-tourism sector.

Literature Review

Agro-rural tourism bridges traditional agricultural practices with modern tourism, offering visitors immersive experiences in sustainable living, cultural heritage, and local economic development. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into agro-tourism presents opportunities to highlight ancient agricultural wisdom, Ayurveda-inspired dietary practices, and indigenous hospitality models.

Although existing research acknowledges the potential of IKS for sustainable tourism, there remains a gap in systematic frameworks that effectively integrate these aspects into agro-tourism.

1. The Role of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in Agro-Rural Tourism

Indian Knowledge Systems encompass a rich repository of ancient wisdom on agriculture, food, health, and hospitality. These practices, rooted in sustainability, biodiversity preservation, and holistic well-being, offer significant value to modern agro-tourism models (Kumar, 2023).

1.1 Traditional Farming Techniques in Agro-Rural Tourism

IKS-based agricultural practices align naturally with the goals of agro-tourism, particularly in promoting organic, sustainable, and biodiversity-friendly farming.

- ◆ **Vrikshayurveda**, a 10th-century Indian agricultural text, advocates for natural fertilizers, organic pest control, and soil health—principles that can be incorporated into agrotourism workshops.
- ◆ **Panchagavya**, a bio-fertilizer made from five cow-derived products, enhances soil fertility and promotes organic farming.
- ◆ **Rishi Krishi**, a method blending Vedic chanting, cow care, and spiritual connection with farming, enriches the emotional and cultural dimensions of agro-tourism.
- ◆ **Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF)**, a modern revival of traditional farming wisdom, offers cost-effective and eco-friendly solutions, ideal for demonstration in rural tourism training and workshops.

These practices foster visitor engagement while promoting climate-resilient agriculture and sustainability.

1.2 Ancient Texts and Sustainability in Agro-Tourism

- ◆ **Krishi Parashara** (4th century CE) details climate-based sowing and water conservation techniques. Exhibiting such texts and their practices within agro-tourism sites can offer educational and interactive experiences (Shende, 2019).
- ◆ **Indigenous Seed Preservation** is critical for food security and biodiversity. Agro-tourism centers can promote seed-saving workshops and showcase traditional seed banks to highlight climate resilience (Kumar, 2023).

2. Ayurvedic and Traditional Indian Food Systems

Ayurveda, the 5,000-year-old Indian medical science, emphasizes diet as a central component of health. Texts like the Sushruta Samhita and Charaka Samhita outline food practices based on seasonality, natural processing, and local sourcing—principles that align closely with farm-to-fork tourism (Aayog, 2018).

2.1 Ayurvedic Nutrition in Agro-Rural Tourism

Ayurvedic dietary principles can elevate agro-tourism by introducing guests to holistic wellness through food:

- ◆ **Rasa (Taste)** – Enhancing digestion and overall health.
- ◆ **Virya (Potency)** – Understanding food's warming or cooling effects (Subercaseaux, 2021).
- ◆ **Vipaka (Post-digestive Effect)** – How food metabolizes and affects long-term health (Kumar, 2023).

These concepts offer a unique health-focused dimension to the agro-tourism experience.

2.2 Traditional Processing Techniques in Agro-Rural Tourism

Integrating Ayurveda-backed food processing methods can enrich agro-tourism by showcasing eco-conscious and health-enhancing culinary practices:

- ◆ **Fermentation** – Traditional foods like Idli and Dhokla, rich in probiotics, can be demonstrated live.
- ◆ **Sun Drying** – A sustainable method for preserving foods such as mango papad; ideal for visitor workshops.
- ◆ **Cold Pressing** – Retains the nutritional value of oils and is often featured in Ayurvedic wellness retreats.

These hands-on experiences can deepen visitor understanding of sustainable food traditions.

3. Indigenous Hospitality and Cultural Aspects in Agro-Tourism

The Indian ethos of “*Atithi Devo Bhava*” (“The Guest is God”) exemplifies the essence of traditional hospitality in rural areas. According to Joshi (2020), farm stays, eco-lodges, and homestays provide direct cultural immersion through:

- ◆ Participation in organic cooking, farming activities, and craft making.
- ◆ Emotional bonding between hosts and guests, enhancing authenticity.
- ◆ Opportunities to explore rural traditions, communal living, and indigenous social customs.

Hospitality in rural India reflects social unity, food-sharing customs, and a deep sense of belonging—making it an essential part of agro-tourism.

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-DRIVEN HOSPITALITY ON TOURIST ENGAGEMENT

Community-oriented hospitality is a cornerstone of agro-tourism, promoting genuine cultural interaction and emotional connection between visitors and rural residents. Unlike mainstream tourism, which often leans toward being commercial and detached, this form of agro-tourism invites tourists to actively participate in rural life, forging deeper, more meaningful ties with local hosts.

As noted by Joshi et al. (2020), accommodations such as homestays, eco-lodges, and farm-based lodgings offer culturally immersive experiences. Tourists get the chance to engage with local traditions, celebrate festivals, and take part in everyday agricultural activities. Such active participation not only enhances the overall tourist experience but also makes their visit more impactful and unforgettable.

Studies exploring tourist engagement in rural contexts highlight two key forms: experiential engagement, which involves direct participation in farming and related tasks, and emotional engagement, which stems from building personal relationships with host families. Experiential engagement may include learning sustainable agricultural techniques like Vrikshayurveda and Zero Budget Natural Farming, as well as traditional culinary practices such as fermentation and sun-drying. Emotional engagement, meanwhile, develops through shared experiences during festivals and daily life, fostering mutual understanding and even spiritual connection.

These profound interactions often lead to lasting memories, prompting tourists to return and share their meaningful encounters with others. Community-based tourism thus promotes social inclusion by immersing visitors in local ways of life, customs, and indigenous traditions. Research shows that staying in rural homestays enhances tourist satisfaction, strengthens emotional ties to the location, boosts willingness to support rural development, and fosters a deeper appreciation for sustainable living.

4. Benefits Of Community Hospitality in Agro-Rural Tourism

Agro-tourism provides a valuable source of supplemental income for farmers by opening their lives and landscapes to visitors. In many rural communities, especially across India, women are increasingly taking the lead as hosts, chefs, and cultural ambassadors, thereby contributing significantly to local economic development (Joshi et al., 2020). This participatory model also plays a key role in preserving and transmitting cultural practices such as traditional farming, folk music, and storytelling to younger generations (Mascarenhas, 2011). Tourists, through the purchase of local crafts and participation in cultural events, actively support this heritage conservation. Celebrations like Pongal in Tamil Nadu and Baisakhi in Punjab exemplify how agro-tourism can generate substantial economic benefits for local communities.

Aligned with the principles of sustainable development, agro-tourism encourages eco-friendly practices like organic farming, fosters rural entrepreneurship, and helps maintain cultural identities. The genuine hospitality of rural communities transforms a simple visit into a deeply immersive experience, often leading to high visitor satisfaction and repeat tourism. By integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into agro-tourism, India has the potential to strengthen its rural tourism landscape, preserve cultural wealth, and economically empower village populations.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE SCOPE

Even though IKS-based agro-tourism is becoming more popular, it still faces a few hurdles, such as:

- ◆ A lack of awareness among tourists and stakeholders about the advantages of traditional farming and food systems.
- ◆ Insufficient infrastructure and government backing for rural homestays, eco-tourism spots, and craft-based tourism.
- ◆ The challenge of balancing commercialization with authenticity, making sure that tourism doesn't undermine indigenous traditions.

Looking ahead, future research should concentrate on:

- ◆ Crafting structured policies that support IKS-based agro-tourism models.
- ◆ Aligning agro-tourism efforts with global sustainability goals, like the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- ◆ Utilizing digital marketing and technology to boost awareness and make rural tourism experiences more accessible.

CONCLUSION

Agro-rural tourism is emerging as a powerful tool for promoting sustainable rural development by blending traditional agricultural practices with immersive travel experiences. The integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)—including time-honored farming techniques, Ayurveda-based food traditions, and community-driven hospitality—enables agro-tourism to provide visitors with authentic, culturally rich, and environmentally conscious experiences.

Central to this approach is the farm-to-fork model, which encourages tourists to engage in organic farming, participate in seasonal culinary activities, and experience eco-friendly rural lifestyles. This not only fosters deeper connections between travelers and local communities but also contributes to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and heritage.

The convergence of IKS and agro-tourism presents a unique opportunity to transform rural tourism in India. It promotes cultural continuity, supports sustainable agricultural practices, and significantly enhances tourist engagement. By harmonizing ancient wisdom with modern tourism dynamics, India holds the potential to lead globally in sustainable rural tourism—advancing environmental stewardship, empowering local economies, and enriching cultural narratives.

Ultimately, agro-tourism is more than a leisure activity; it is a meaningful journey into nature, tradition, and human connection. By embracing the principles of IKS, rural tourism can evolve into a transformative force for long-term positive impact across generations.

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