

Turning Fields into Fortunes: Exploring the Entrepreneurial Goldmine of Agritourism

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Growing need for recreational tours

Due to post-COVID-19 effects, people are looking to disconnect from their daily tech life and reconnect with nature, as it helps them escape their daily lives. The health and wellness trend is also in boom, creating an awareness to take care of physical and mental health, seeking organic food, and sustainable and mindful experiences. In recent times, there has been an immense growth of experiential tourism as more travellers now value doing than just sightseeing. According to Booking.com's 2024 travel trends report, 65% of tourists prefer travel experiences that help them connect with local culture and environment. This provides immense scope for agritourism to satisfy the need to connect people with local culture.

Agritourism and recreational demand

Agritourism, a form of niche tourism that combines agricultural environments with recreational tourism, offers visitors immersive educational and recreational experiences on working farms while promoting sustainable rural development, cultural preservation, and generating additional farm income for the farmers. Agritourism generally takes place at working fields, and it focuses on educating and entertaining visitors. Agritourism is the best way to escape from daily life as it provides authenticity by providing real experiences like nature walks, picking fruits, gaining education on harvesting, milking cows, cooking and eating farm food, etc. Provides a healthy environment, fresh air, organic food and mental relaxation. It fulfils travel goals or a weekend getaway for visitors at budget-friendly prices.



Preparing a farm for agritourism: The 4E approach
In our research, we found that the best Agritourism farms blend 4Es (education, entertainment, esthetics, escapism) of experience to create memorable visitor experiences. Entertaining experiences lean towards customer absorption and passive participation- like watching flora and fauna by tourists without disturbing them, while Educational experiences involve active participation and absorption- Like tourists planting trees, cheese-making workshops, and composting lessons on a farm. Escapist experiences may include a degree of education but involve greater customer immersion, for example, immersive and active involvement that lets tourists escape their daily routine, "Be a farmer for a day" programs, fruit-picking, livestock care, and tractor rides. Esthetic experiences typically result in higher levels of customer immersion but with low levels of customer participation-

for example, nature walks, peaceful accommodations, aesthetic farm layout and design. The best experience often blends all these four Es and creates a balance, forming a "sweet spot" around the area where the 4 spectra meet (Pine & Gilmore 1998).

Future market and entrepreneurial scope in agritourism

According to the Ministry of Tourism, agritourism is an entrepreneurial goldmine, as it is included under its rural tourism promotion schemes to encourage micro-entrepreneurship in villages. As it's a low-capital investment business, it creates employment in hospitality and guiding. The 2019 NABARD report states that agritourism can increase a farmer's income by 30-40% when it's executed effectively. Some of the states in India promote agritourism to a greater extent, Maharashtra being the first state to draft an agritourism policy in 2020 and has about 100-plus registered agritourism centres. Punjab has over 400 farm stays, as they attract both domestic and foreign tourists. Whereas Kerala and Tamil Nadu are integrated with eco-tourism and Agro-heritage tourism.

Challenges in agritourism entrepreneurship

There are a number of challenges in agritourism entrepreneurship, such as a Lack of infrastructure, including poor rural roads, electricity and internet problems, and restrooms that create a lower tourism attraction. Adding on to this knowledge gap of farmers regarding marketing or hospitality services, creating a challenge in execution.

Absence of administrative support, such as complicated licensing, limited funding/grants for services. A lack of standardisation while providing quality services. These challenges affect the agritourism business.

Conclusion:

Despite challenges, turning fields into fortunes is an Agritourism model; it solves major problems like declining farmers' income, rural unemployment, migration to urban cities, etc. With proper execution and support, agritourism entrepreneurship can emphasise the need for organic food practices, create employment, and boost the local economy.

Reference

Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (2011). The experience economy. Harvard Business Press.

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