

Agrotourism is an Immerging field of Sustainable Development for Rural Area: A case study of BhorTahsil of Maharashtra.

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ABSTRACT

Agrotourism is considered as the fastest growing sector in the tourism industry. The concept has been successfully implemented in Maharashtra. It has become a new avenue for earning the income for the rural farmers. In Maharashtra, rural areas have formed an organization named Maharashtra State Agricultural and Rural Tourism (MART). There are about 150 Agro tourism centers in the state working without financial assistance of the Government schemes. Agrotourism focuses on local Agriculture pattern and agro cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide and representing 6% of the world Gross Domestic Product, 11.4% of all consumers spending. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India during 2013 were 6.97 million with a growth of 5.9% as compared to the FTAs of 6.58 million during 2012 registering a growth of 4.3% over 2011. The Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from tourism in terms of US dollars during 2013 was US\$ 18.445 billion with a growth of 4.0% as compared to FEE of US\$ 17.737 billion during 2012 registering a growth of 7.1% over 2011. Substantial growth was observed in domestic tourism sector as the domestic tourist visits during the year 2013 was 1145 million, showing a growth of 9.59% over 2012.

Tourism or Agrotourism is inherent desire of human beings, which developed with the progress of human civilization. Every man on this planet earth is very fond of tourism, hence always attracted towards nature. The mountains, hills, valleys, oceans, rivers, lakes, islands, waterfalls, forests, wild animals, birds, butterflies etc. have become important attractions for the agrotourists. The improved standard of life and economic status of middle class society has brought ecotourism within their reach. At present there is pressing demand for planned, well-developed and perfectly managed ecotourism. India is truly famous for hospitality. "AtithiDeoBhav", means the visitors or guests are equal to God in Indian culture due to which India become the top most place for ecotourism in the world. The diverse culture, rich bio diversity, conductive climate, greenery and the peaceful as well as spiritual mind of the Indian people have become the main attractions for ecotourism as well as Agrotourism.

The pleasant weather, natural lakes, green hills, beautiful valleys and agriculture (Manly paddy field) are the main attractions for agrotourists in BhorTahsil Pune district. Hence there is an urgent need to investigate the hidden potential of Agrotourism management and sustainable development. Not only this, but it also become the potential area of employment to rural people and youth. Ecotourism development may become pivotal for socioeconomic transformation of villages with naturalecotourism sites.

INTRODUCTION

Agro-tourism is a part of tourism activities. It allows visitors to gain the knowledge of agriculture and appreciate the unique rural landscapes (Hall and Jenkins,

1998), and can be occasionally enjoyed as rural or farm tourism (Fleischer and Tchetchik, 2006). At present, agro-tourism is promoted widely in terms of a strategy for the conservation of agricultural resources

(Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996), and the allocation of economic and social benefits (Hron and Srnec, 2004). For example, agro-tourism in Italy conducting the agricultural and environmental education activities has served the protected areas from agricultural expansion (Scialabba and Williamson, 2004). In short, the concept of agro-tourism promotion covers the expectations on tourists' increase of knowledge and realization on environmental conservation and agricultural residents' quality of life improvement especially in developing countries which agriculture is still an important strategy in rural development (Akpinar et al., 2005). However, in sense of interaction, agriculture and agro-tourism may also compete against one another in terms of the use of agricultural resources of the farm, which are land, labor and capital. For example, a farmer growing commodity crops who intends to develop agro-tourism must allocate and convert part of his or her farming land to be used for agro-tourism (Sznajder et al; 2009).

Small land also increase Argo income Besides, even though Agrotourism is associated closely with the rural context, but agro-tourism farms also require accommodations and other facilities in a similar manner to other types of tourism business in addition to the existing agricultural resources (Halfacree, 1993). Development of agro-tourism activities also does not have a significant influence on increasing agricultural production within the household operating agro-tourism, neither is the increase in the number of agricultural producers directly related with the development of agro-tourism (Brscic, 2006). In 1978, the organization for economic co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that between 40 to 60 per cent of farmers in developed countries were now classified as, part time farmers since the majority of their incomes came from non-

agricultural sources (Dernoi 1983). The agro-tourism farm should be always near to main roads and highways and agri-tourism entrepreneurs should have contact with tourism agencies of cities or metros (Singh 2010). Butler et al (1998) noted that economic and social forces operating at the global level are determining both the nature and form of the rural landscape and how we value and use it.

In Agrotourism, agriculture production is not increase but the agricultural income increase because of the increase number of agrotourists. Bhor is a tahsil with full of natural resources which support tourism, arts, cultures, history; the unique attractions of local and foreign tourists. Moreover, the industries of tourism and revenue of the country have been increased continuously.

The importance policy to promote tourism according to a variety of needs is the key to the development of tourism and services. Nowadays travelling around the world has been changed; furthermore, travelers are interested in tourism, especially in Agrotourism and ecotourism. The development of the tourism based on the society is a guideline to travel to the engine in the economy and the social development of the country is sustainable. Considering the Bhortahsil infrastructure was found that two-thirds of the population which is in the agricultural sector and the different characteristics of plants under different farming areas. The characteristic of interested is the potential to develop tourist attractions known as agro-tourism. Especially some village in BhorTahisl are well developed in agriculture field, they use modern technology of agriculture e.g. Greenhouse and Polyhouse, well develop equipment and new in irrigation techniques, the name of village Kalwade, Kakiv etc.

The agro-tourism is travel to the farming community, agricultural plantations,

herb garden, livestock farms, and pets and aquaculture. It is included with public institutions and educational institutions with research and technological development of agriculture production. To receive the knowledge and experience based on responsibilities and awareness for the preservation the environment. The term agro-tourism emerged in the late twentieth century. It includes agricultural farms that are related to tourism. This notion represents all activities related not only to tourists but also to the organizers of the holidays in general. For this reason, agro tourism is understood differently by tourists, on the one hand, and by other groups related to tourism, on the other. For tourists, agro tourism means all activities through which people learn about the agricultural production or the regular stay in the farm environment and see the agro culture.

Practice shows that there are other entities interested in the agro touristic activity, while firms are focusing their activity less and less on agriculture. The meaning of “agro tourism” varies among different geographical regions. Furthermore the links between agriculture and rural tourism vary, this difference being due to the role of the community in these areas. Agro tourism is very important for rural communities as well as for urban areas. It can provide several advantages: income, employment, use accommodation, activities, natural resource conservation, recreation and education.

One of the main problems for many countries is the low level of farm income. Agro tourism intends to obtain higher standards of living for rural communities especially through increased income for people who work in agriculture. For this it uses various financial and agricultural policies. In many countries, agricultural farm income is almost equal to the average. There are many cases when farmers cover two

sectors at the same time, providing two sources of income. The reason of initiating various activities is that the income from agriculture is not enough and the labor force appears to be high. Changes in employment and income sources affect the reduction in the number of farmers who work part-time.

According to the WTO, service quality in tourism is meeting all customer requirements regarding the price, the sets guaranteed by law, the observance of safety and hygiene and harmony with the natural environment. The main instrument of the quality assessment is assertiveness and standardization of agricultural production and rural tourism. Many specialists and tourists visit the typical agricultural farms. The purpose of these visits is to review the use of modern technology in these farms for farm production and compare these with those of other countries e.g. Esrile.

Agro tourism is often defined as part of the Ecotourism for both are related and subject to natural attractions. Both are described as forms with a rapid development of tourism. These forms are more marked in developed countries, conducting as models of potential development of natural resources and economic support of local society. In the past agro touristic attractions were natural sights and plantations but the new agro tourism concept involves a system bringing together the tourism sector and the agricultural sector as a model of regional development (Stelazoto 2013).

Most policy makers think that tourism is a business perspective. WTO predicts that international tourist arrivals will increase from year to year, from 1 billion tourists in 2010 to 1.6 billion people in 2020. Various scholars emphasize that the motivations of tourists to visit destinations have changed dramatically and now tourists are more interested in specific things, enthusiastic activities and, most importantly, in the

quality experience of touristic products and services.

Increasing tourism demand is today an important source of income for rural farmers as low income farmers. Their touristic products are often complex and include a number of activities and facilities. Touristic product usually coincides with the level of business. In many countries agro tourism grows quickly when tourists seek to gain experience in activities that vary from everyday life and places they have visited before. Normally tourists travel to certain destinations to escape from stress, phones, traffic, etc. Especially parents are more interested to travel in order to please their children. Widespread is also the idea of family travel to a destination to spend a few days together and to visit farms, vineyards or wineries, to participate in productive activities of agricultural products.

The philosophy of Agrotourism is increase farmers income and the quality of life or rural society, the development of agriculture will provide the opportunity for local farmers to increase income and lifestyle. According to some opinions, agro tourism educates people and society about agriculture and contributes to the local economy; it reduces the level of urbanization as people work and earn more from agro tourism; it promotes local products and create added value through direct marketing and stimulates economic activities in order to increase benefits in societies where the agro tourism is developed.

In Maharashtra horticulture farms like vineyard and agriculture farms have potentate for agro-tourism. Today, urban children's world is restricted in the close doors of a school, home and center around television, video game, computer, fast food and internet. Living in urban and semi urban area, they have not enjoyed the beauty of Mother Nature. Agro Tourism Development Corporation, did the research in 2004, and

found that 43% of urban population did not have any relative left in the village. 97% of urban population wants to experience the rustic beauty of village life. This gives an opportunity to develop tourism center in the village based on agriculture activities. Maharashtra starts Pilot Project of Agro Tourism by ATDC under the supervision of Mr. PandurangTaware in 2005. In Maharashtra the best example of Agrotourism is Malegaon near Baramati, Pune.

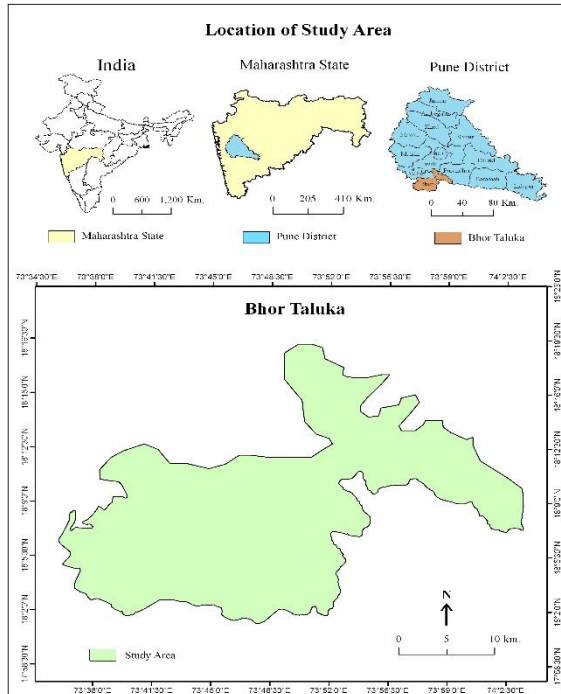
They start Agriculture Development Trust's farm and develop the Agrotourism. In 2007, ATDC launched Maharashtra State Agro Tourism VistarYojana 2007, they selected, 72 farmers for Agrotourism. In Maharashtra 80% farmers have marginal land holdings; it was danger that these farmers may left out of the tourism benefits.

STUDY ARES

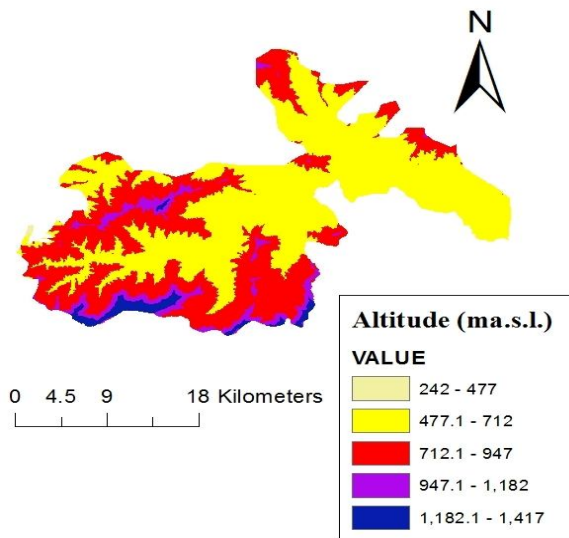
BhorTahsil is located 54km away from Pune City in a south-westerly direction. It is situated between 18⁰45'N & 73⁰15'E. It has an elevation of about 591.43m. BhorTahsil has an irregular shape, having an area of 892km², bordered by TahsilKhandala of Satara District on the east, Mahad of Raigad District on the west, Wai of Satara District on the south and Velhe, Haveli and Purandartahsil on the north. The climate is moist but healthy.

The vegetation is mainly of dry deciduous type and scrub type. It is due to moderate and irregular rainfall. Annual Average rainfall in BhorTahsil during the period 1998 to 2007 was 1233.73 mm. (www.agri.mah.nic.in)

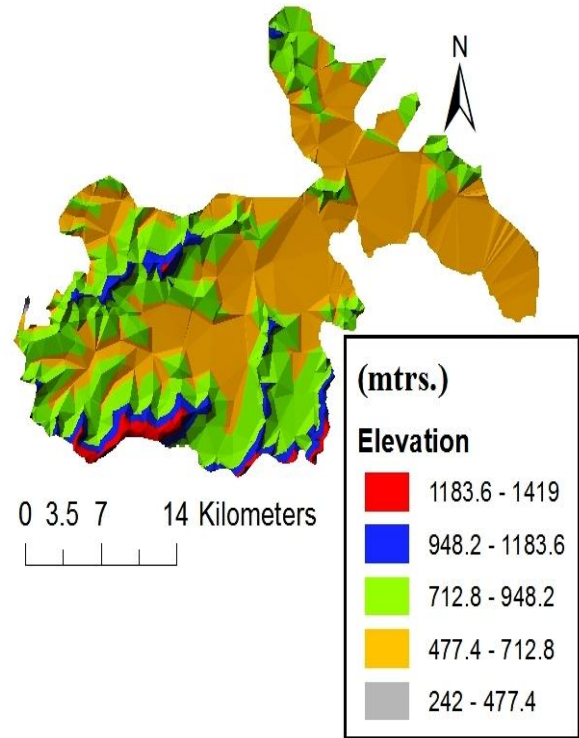
Location Map of Study Area



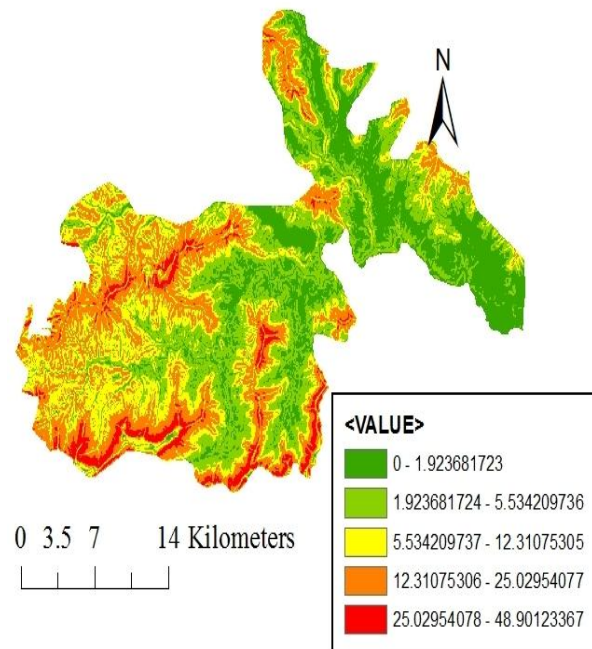
DEM of the Study Area



Elevation map of study area

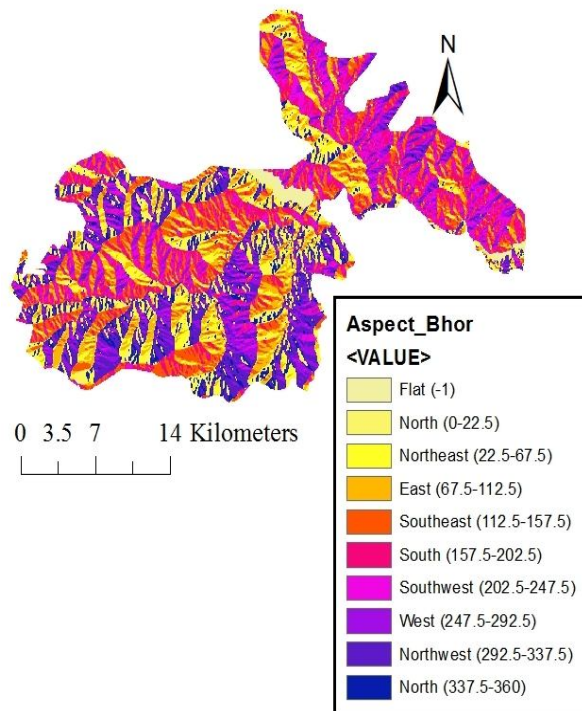


Slope map of study area



The above study area is hilly and mountainous low height is 242 meters and high height is 1417 meters. The average height of study area was 829.5 meters.

Aspect map of study area



OBJECTIVES

This research paper mainly focuses on the important ecotourism centers of BhorTahsil and their potential for development of Agrotourism.

1. To study Agrotourism attraction at different sites in BhorTahsil.
2. To study the socioeconomic impact of Agrotourism in the selected village of BhorTahsil.

METHODOLOGY

The primary and secondary data have been used for the research paper. The questionnaire has been prepared to collect the data. The cartographic technique has been also used to represent the data.

A) Primary Data

Interviews:-

This was the main method of data collection administered to the Government and to local community representatives. An interview guideline was prepared containing a detailed list of questions and checklist for

every department / official being interviewed. Data collected from interviews was documented through notes taken by the interviewers rather than through tape or video recordings as the latter would not have been appropriate with several government officials.

The primary data has been collected from tourists by filling up the questionnaires by random sample method; fifty tourists have been selected for filling up the questionnaires.

Focus group discussions:-

In order to collect perspectives from local community members, focus group consultations were organized. A discussion guideline was prepared for conducting the discussions. Data from the focus group discussions has been documented in writing and through audio visuals.

Field observation:-

Field observation has been another important instrument for collecting qualitative data, especially for socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism activity.

B) Secondary data

The main secondary sources of data that were inter alia examined were:

- Official websites of the respective state governments and Government of India
- SOI (Survey of India) topographical maps of the study area at the scale 1:50,000.

Assessment of Ecotourism Potential in BhorTahsil

The environmental assessment for ecotourism potential, its sustainable development, management and strategies for future planning are the crucial factors in ecotourism development. There are many parameters for assaying the environmental impact of ecotourism development e.g. frequency and attendance, location, distance etc. The assessment of ecotourism potential in BhorTahsil was done with seven different parameters of ecotourism potential. The formal and informal

assessment and standard tests were used for knowing of ecotourism potential of Bhor Tahsil. Environmental assessment, in any form, is a necessary component of effective ecotourism development.

The SWOT analysis includes:

Strong points: development of powerful agro-tourism; involvement of different ways of life and traditions; high quality service, peace and security and cultural activities.

Weaknesses: Lack of training; lack of legislation regarding the agro-tourism; lack of additional supply; the high cost of accommodation and restoration; lack of transportation network.

Opportunities: Promoting the preservation of customs and local traditions; new opportunities for employment in rural areas; alternative markets for local products; indirect advertisements of agro culture.

Restrictions: lack of planning and concrete goals; the risk of massiveness; low political awareness.

SWOT Analysis

Bhor Region tourism sector offers the following

Opportunities for the tourism potential in the region: attractive hilly - mountains landscapes, Two great water bodies (Bhatghar Dam, Niradevghar dam), a healthy climate, mineral water (yelwandi river-Niira river). the orientation to weekend visits, several-day tours around the region, development of special interest tourism, excursion to particular historical, cultural, archaeological places of interest to, potential for development of rural tourism and ecotourism forms (accommodation of tourists in the houses of villagers), ongoing improvement of the snow tourism, special interest tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism, further development of family tourism and hotel activities of full package type, revitalization of parks and population of

the forests with wild animals specific to these areas.

Agrotourism offers: cultural and historical places of interest (Two forts), potential for sport activities (the fishing in dam, climbing, parachute jumping), traditional cultural and religious events, handicrafts, works of wood and stone made by hands, typical dishes (food).

The **threats** and vulnerabilities present in the region of Bhor as an obstacle to the development of tourism in the region: the cutting and damages to forests, the uncontrolled hunting that has damaged flora and fauna, the competition with neighboring countries to improve standards, the infrastructure in tourist areas, the development of rural tourism in the region is not at the standards offered by the neighboring countries, the limited number of characteristic restaurants, the lack of regular transportation lines in tourism priority areas, but only on holidays.

CONCLUSION

ECO-TOURISM IN BHOR TAHSIL

Bhor, earlier famous as historic place it's one of the most important place in Marathi history. Currently it has more than three forts. The major-forested areas of the Bhor forest sub division 35941.392 ha, which include Bhor, Velhe and Purandhar. Reserved forests 17890.554 ha, protected forested 9.984 ha, Acquired forests 2163.440 ha, forest land notified under section 4 of IFA 1927, 15814.390 ha, Compensatory Aforestation 63.390 ha. These natural attractions consist of some hills; green areas and especially dam Bhatghar Dam on yelwandi river water body surface area 31,900 km² and Niradevghar dam on Niira river water body surface area 14,307 km². Which have become the famous natural ecotourism viewpoints of Bhortahsil. A total of 102 flowering plant species, 130 bird species, 15 mollusks and uncountable forms of insects

have been recorded in and around the BhorTahsil.

Table No.1 GPS readings and ecotourist center of a few sites in BhorTahsil area

| Locations in BhorTahsil | | GPS Readings | | | Agro and ecotourism center |
|-------------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|----------|----------------------------|
| Sr.No. | Location | Latitude | Longitude | Altitude | |
| 1. | Baneshwar | 18°15'406'' | 73°52'346'' | 655m | Temple with Garden |
| 2. | Bhor | 18°45'340'' | 73°14'601'' | 592m | Scrub |
| 3. | Pisavare | 18°07'902'' | 73°47'608'' | 601m | Plantation |
| 4. | Pombardi | 18°08'467'' | 73°48'926'' | 630m | Dance Forest |
| 5. | Wathar | 18°07'781'' | 73°47'636'' | 605m | Forest with Grassland |

The above table indicates the ecotourism centers in BhorTahsilthe kusgoan, kalwade and more villages. BhorTahsil is famous in Agrotourism. The above places are near to Pune city. Impact of that number of agrotourists is increase day by day and villagers happy to increase their income.

Table No.2 Socio-economic profile of the sample.

| | Variable | Frequency | Variable | Frequency | |
|----------------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|----|
| Age | <20 Years | 15 | Education | Primary | 0 |
| | 21-35 Years | 27 | | Secondary | 19 |
| | 36-45 Years | 39 | | High School | 13 |
| | 46-60 Years | 19 | | University | 68 |
| | >60 Years | 0 | Origin | Inbound | 60 |
| Marital Status | Single | 20 | | Outbound | 40 |
| | Married without children | 40 | Income(Per Annam) | 2 to 3 Lack | 7 |
| | Married with children | 40 | | 3to 4 Lack | 13 |
| Employment | Employed | 52 | | 4 to 5 Lack | 40 |
| | Self-employed | 14 | 5to 6 Lack | 18 | |
| | Unemployed | 14 | 6 to 7 Lack | 22 | |
| | Student | 18 | Gender | Female | 46 |
| | | | | Male | 54 |
| Retired | 2 | | | | |

Source-Writers

The profile of tourists coming to the area is as follows: mostly are aged between 21 and 45 years old, employed, with university level of education (due to the fact that it is the type of tourism that requires a certain level of education), foreign and domestic tourists, earning over 4 to 5 lack. This is because Agrotourism requires

considerable income. These tourists are coming mostly with their families (with or without children), and only 1/5 of them are single.

According to the study, 84% of the tourists in the sample have visited these areas 2-5 times (fig.1). This shows that the interest for this area is growing more and more, tourists seeking to return. The challenge, however, is if they will return more often. This will be possible only if they find something to do, which means that there should be an increase in the range of the offer, and an insistence on the intrapersonal relations of the inhabitants with the tourists. Otherwise these tourists will not continue to come repeatedly. (Fig. 1)

Tourist visiting frequency

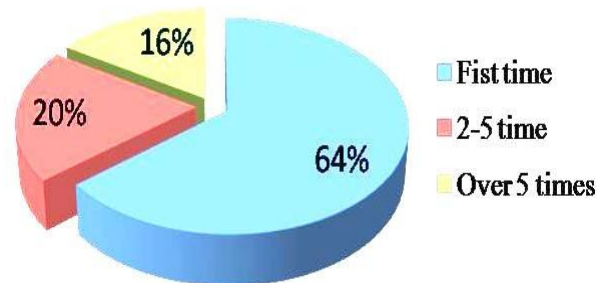


FIGURE NO.1 Tourist visiting frequency

Although the number of visiting tourists is growing, unfortunately, this does not apply to the duration of the stay. It is not too long, only 2-5 nights. (Fig. 2) Together with those who stay 6-9 nights, it gets to an average of 70%. So agrotourists vacations in this area last just a week. Only 12% spend stay 9-12 Days, and 8% - stay More than 12. This is because the area does not offer many activities and entertainment for the tourists.

The Duration of tourists' staying

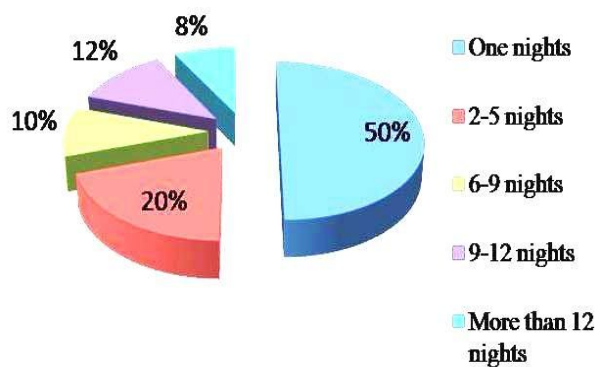


FIGURE No.2. The duration of tourists' staying

The main reasons for the touristic visit are participation in environmental activities as well as familiarity with the beauty and traditions of the area. Also, another strong reason is the tranquility they hope to find in the countryside. (Fig.3)

Reasons for tourists' choosing the region

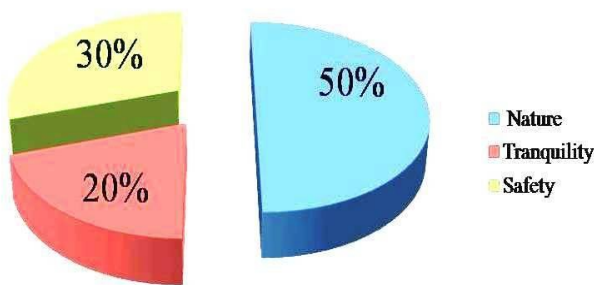


FIGURE No.3. Reasons for tourists' choosing the region.

They claimed that agro tourism is the most suitable for the development of these areas. This form of tourism can be developed better in the rural areas of our country due to the special natural values, its attractive power, the availability of host community and the increased interest, from both the local

power

Number of rooms available per house for tourists'

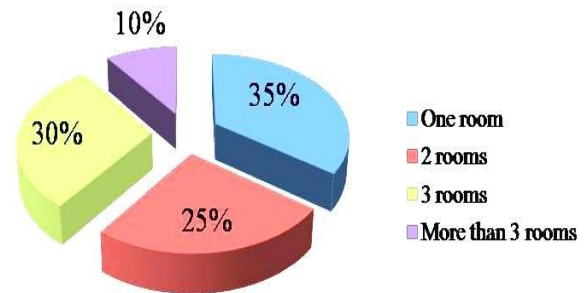


FIGURE No.4. Number of rooms available per house for tourists.

and the other stakeholders in the tourism industry.

But besides displayed interest, a close cooperation between the public and private sector is needed. This would bring about the rise of superstructure and infrastructure necessary for the reception of tourist flows. Currently in these rural areas there are about 70 percent houses which provide accommodation for tourists mostly during the summer and winter periods. Most of them have only one room to rent which means that the house structures are small, undeveloped, and not professional.

Despite all the efforts of residents there is still a lack of appropriate environments to achieve maximum satisfaction in tourists. From the answers given by the owners of these homes there can be drawn the conclusion that they feel a lack of experience in terms of ensuring the most appropriate the accommodation. So there must be undertaken a training program related to the recognition of agrotourists' requirements and ways furnishing accommodation facilities.

Another problem is the seasonality. Almost half of the demand is concentrated in the summer, while the other half is divided between winter and spring, autumn being negligible. This leads to a lack of capacity in

summer and very high prices, a surplus offer in fall, and as result - minimum prices. The challenge is to increase the touristic demand in autumn. An attractive slogan will be “after the hot summer holidays, come to the freshness at our village”. But this would not apply to families with children that start school at this period, what remains being the elderly, and people with special interests. The former have frequented the village in the summer. Challenge in the region is the weather, which is rainy, and this makes it difficult for many activities. So the activities should be carried out in closed environments or it will be related to weekend tourism, in nearby markets, such as the districts near Pune, or from neighbor cites.

Conclusions

Relying on the SWOT analysis we understand that the policy makers of the region have to concentrate their efforts on:

- Solving problems of infrastructure, water, energy and transportation;
- Attracting foreign investors or various associations for the expansion of the road network as well as rail network;
- Clearly defining rules for private buildings used for tourist purposes;

- Drafting and distribution guidebooks to their potential customers for finding the agro tourist centers.
- The establishment of Web-site presenting all the potentials offered by rural areas;
- Promotion through the media on the eve of every tourist season;
- Including the destination in professional packages of tour operators;
- Product orientation towards the market demand (trying to understand better the market).
- Improving service quality
- Professional training of farmers applying agrotourism in rural areas. The training can be carried out by non-governmental organizations.

In theFocus group discussions most of people says that natural beauty main attraction of tourist as well as physical property of BhorTahsil.

In the Field observation most of the tourist enjoy with natural beauty.

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