

## **AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i09.003 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2020.v05i09.003>

### **ABSTRACT**

This research provides an overview of sociological perspective of sustainable development of rural areas by promoting rural tourism in differential scale. It traces out the strategic approaches to the planning of rural development and identifies the problem of their overall execution. The goal of the article is to set the process of analysis of rural tourism potential and reveals the necessity of utilisation of the effective planning and marketing approach as the key factor of sustainable development of rural tourism. Determinants were assessed by micro survey conducted on North 24 Parganas, a district of West Bengal for better understanding and clarification of the findings of the paper. Apart from the literature review, statistical techniques, cartograms and SWOT analysis have been used in support of the study.

**Key words:** rural tourism, sustainable development, strategic planning

### **Introduction**

Tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural and manmade attraction, amenities and facilities, transportation marketing and information system. Different academic research found as a tool of potential economic development particularly in rural communities. Rural tourism thus may be used as a development strategy to improve the social and economic wellbeing of the rural areas. In contemporary studies rural tourism is discussed with a positive approach for sustainable economic development of rural areas. Moreover, rural tourism particularly helps both types of small business in rural areas: those that are directly engaged in tourism e.g., farm stays, tour, tour guide etc. and those who are indirectly involved like stores, local transport etc. Thus, rural tourism may be defined as the countryside experience that encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in non urban areas. It is characterised by functionally rural, built upon small scale enterprise, open space, direct contact with the nature, traditional in nature, in terms of society, culture and practices.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

Some of the major objectives are determined on the basis of research gaps observed in respect to the development of rural tourism are summarized below:

- To illustrate differential types of rural tourism
- To provide an overview of the driving forces of rural tourism in West Bengal, India
- To discuss the theoretical bases of rural tourism and sustainable development through effective planning and marketing approach
- To analyse the problems and prospect of rural tourism through micro study in North 24 Parganas, a province in West Bengal
- And finally to identify the issues for future research and development of rural tourism.

A sample survey was conducted at North 24 Parganas, West Bengal for empirical study. Statistical techniques, mainly supporting and demanding factors are analysed, SWOT have been done and cartograms were used for interpretation of the primary data supported with a few maps.

## **An overview of rural tourism**

Mainly three types of rural tourism are observed West Bengal, heritage tourism, ecotourism and agritourism. The main driving forces of rural tourism are as follows:

- Stresses in urban living
- Demand fuelled by media on popular places
- Increasing environmental awareness,
- Increasing number of free independent traveller (FIT),
- Rural tourism is REAL (Rewarding, Enriches spirit, provides Adventure and Learning)
- Rural areas offer fresh air , water, environment and pure scenic beauty

Benefits that we enjoy from rural tourism are in three ways:

- Economic: Rural tourism can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care, also to the marginal farmers, employment generation among youth population, new business opportunities
- Social: Public service improvement, revitalizing folklore, local traditional practices, preservation of historical artefacts etc.
- Environmental: Increasing the overall environmental knowledge of the visitors as well as the local people, increased use of natural and cultural elements, improvement in stability and biodiversity of the environment.

## **Frame of rural tourism and sustainable development:**

Sustainable development in rural tourism can be seen in terms of:

- (a) Quality of life, including standard of living, public transport & service and infrastructural development.
- (b) Prosperous economy, including social economy that is based on cooperation and solidarity of the local stakeholders.
- (c) Responsibility towards the natural environment.

The procedures for analysis of sustainable rural tourism demands:

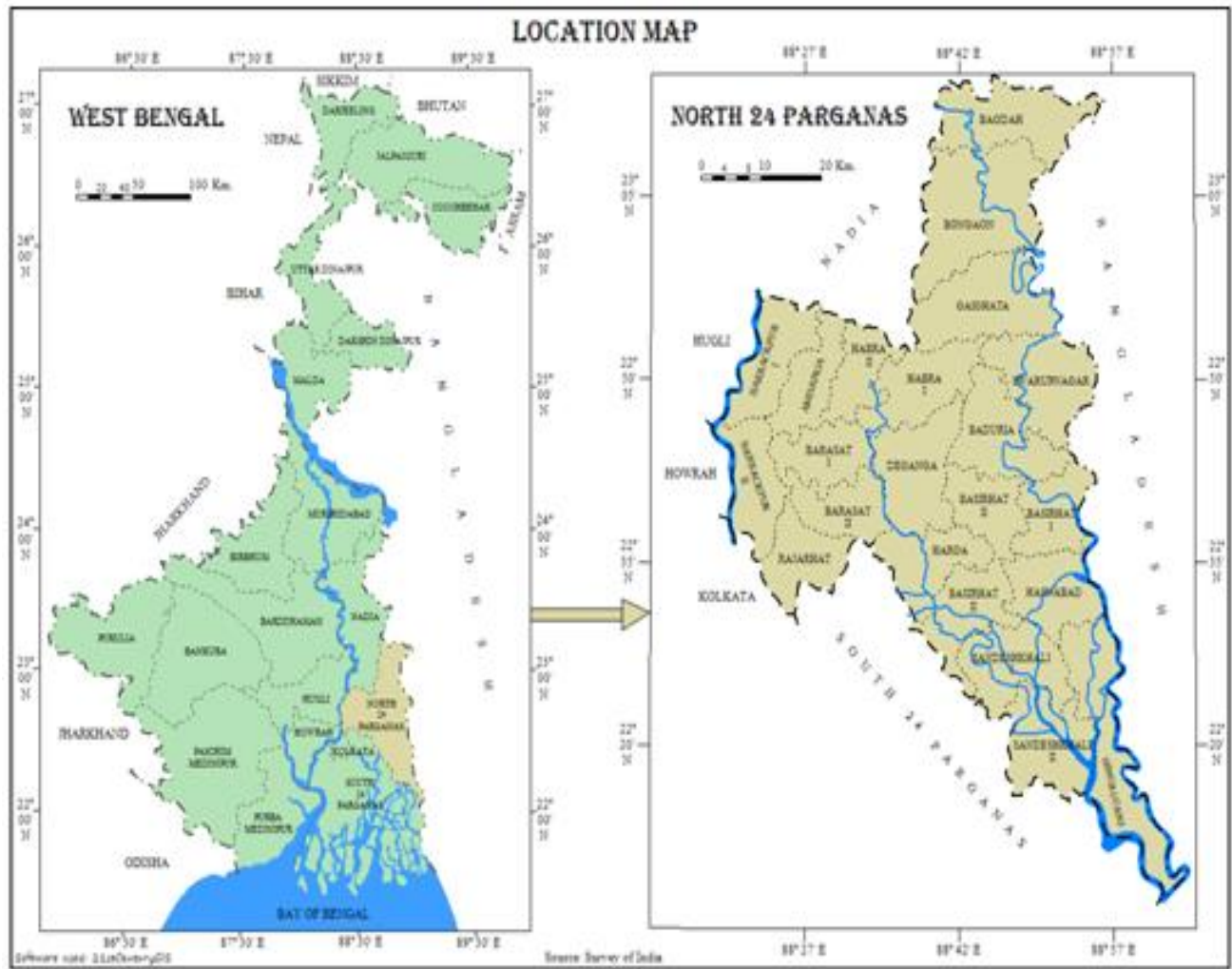
- (a) Evaluation of the place appropriate for rural tourism.
- (b) Analysis and understanding the prospect of business and local specific risks should be identified in relation to rural tourism.
- (c) Assessment of sustainable indicators of the place.
- (d) Explore the attractiveness of the locality.
- (e) Infrastructural requirement through questionnaire survey,
- (f) Illustration of financial source and marketing strategy.

Some of the strategic plans of sustainable rural tourism that should be considered for execution are:

- (a) Sustainable use of local resource
- (b) Responsible and ethical approach towards artificial and natural environment
- (c) Local benefits should be planned
- (d) Awareness programme for stakeholders
- (e) Limits must be well assessed (capacity limit, biological limit, social limit and psychological limits)

#### **Micro study on north 24 Parganas:**

A micro study has been executed in North 24 Parganas, West Bengal for better understanding of the concept. A seasonal questionnaire survey was conducted at Kochua Dham at Kochua village of Bashirhat II block and Chandraketurgarh at Berachampa village of Deganga Block.





Kochua Dham is a very popular religious tourist attraction while Chandraketurgarh is well known for historical background. Two different categories of rural tourist destination have been chosen for a comparative approach in the study.

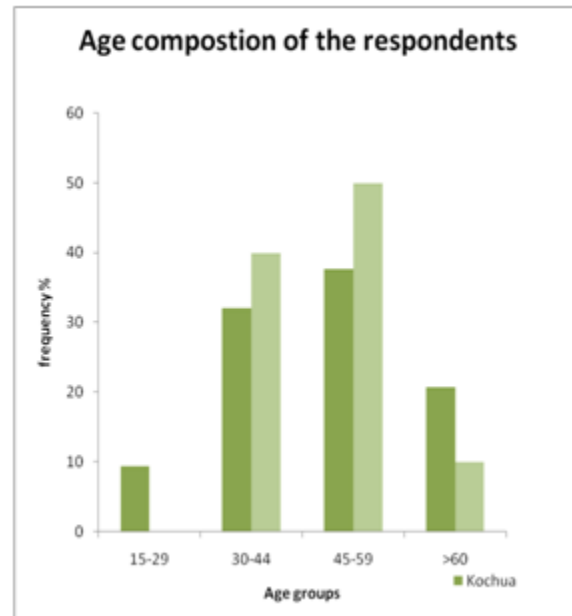
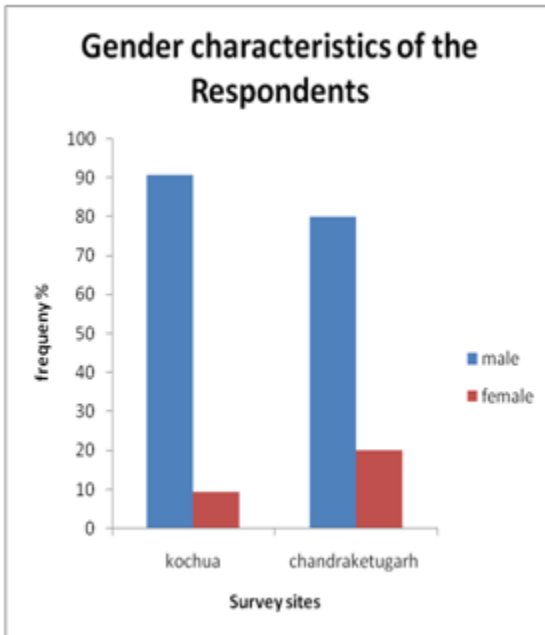
### Result and Discussion

Different types for respondents were surveyed during the research. Kochua Dham is a famous for Lokenath Temple where innumerable pilgrims use to come during the birthday of saint Lokenath. Tourist profile remains high here in weekends and in other holidays also.

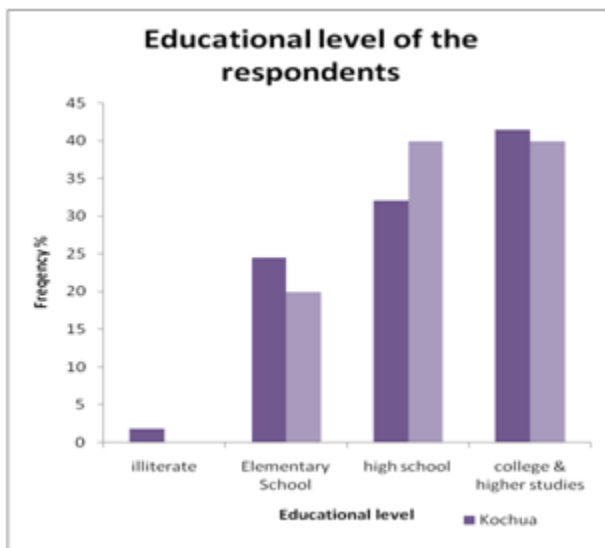
**Table 1. Types of Respondents**

Respondents	Kochua Dham		Chandraketugarh	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Members associated with hotel business	8	15.00	2	20
Packman and roadside hawkers	6	11.32	2	20
Food stall owner	4	7.54	1	10
Variety shop owner	5	9.43	Nil	-
Regular tourists	10	18.87	Nil	-
Seasonal tourists	20	37.74	5	50
Total	53	100	10	100

- ❖ Respondents' characteristics: Different demographic and socio economic profile of the respondents are discussed in the micro study.



Male population is high in both Kochua (97.53%) and Chandraketurgarh (80%). The visitors in both the places are within the age group of 30 to 60. But during the holy birth month of Saint Lokenath pilgrims of Kochua records a huge number of aged population also.



Most of the people visiting in these places are enough educated, this picture is reversed during the holy season in Kochua. But very few people are aware of the historical importance of Chandraketugarh. Kochua is much more viable place of economy generation because of the religious belief of people.

- ❖ Tourism factors identified: Basically two types of tourism factors are observed in the study area.

**Table 2: Description of tourism factors**

Supporting Factors (SF)	Demanding factors (DF)
Distance and transportation of these places are good.	Exposure of Chandraketugarh is much more required than Kochua. The place is archaeologically important and has high potential for tourism development.
Infrastructural facilities are better in Kochua.	Accommodation facilities are absent in both the places. Particularly Chandraketugarh can be exposed to the foreign tourists as it is a historical place.
Historical value is highly appreciable in Chandraketugarh while Kochua has its religious value.	Beatification and other amusements like parks and gardens can boost the potentiality of these places.
Rural traditional environment is prevailing in these areas with natural scenic beauty.	Participation of local people and involvement of NGO's are required.

Statistical analysis of supporting factors (SF) and demanding factors (DF) of the places:

**Table 3: Mean and SD of SF**

Sl.No.	Competitive Indicators	Kochua Dham		Chandraketugarh	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
SF1	Distance and transportation	4.21	0.878	3.83	0.686
SF2	Infrastructural facilities	2.23	0.511	1.92	0.744

SF3	Historical and religious values	3.62	0.562	2.94	0.689
SF4	Rural traditional environment	4.77	0.706	3.36	0.809

**Table 4: Mean and SD of DF**

Sl.No.	Competitive Indicators	Kochua Dham		Chandraketugarh	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
DF1	Exposures of the spots	4.62	0.584	1.36	0.532
DF2	Accommodation facility	3.69	0.543	3.62	0.546
DF3	Beautification and other amusement	4.52	0.712	3.64	0.521
DF4	Participation of local people	5.75	0.4.15	2.36	0.612

Statistical analysis has been done for better understanding the impact of supporting and demanding factors for both of the tourist places. One sample ‘t’ test have been done with 95% level of confidence. The result exhibits supporting factors SF3 and SF4 are influencing of the tourism of the places while demanding factors DF1, DF3, DF4 are very much needed for sustainable tourism development of the study area.

**One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SF1	2	4.0200	.26870	.19000
SF2	2	2.0750	.21920	.15500
SF3	2	3.2800	.48083	.34000
SF4	2	4.0650	.99702	.70500
DF1	2	2.9900	2.30517	1.63000
DF2	2	3.6550	.04950	.03500
DF3	2	4.0800	.62225	.44000
DF4	2	4.05500	2.397092	1.695000



**One-Sample Test**

	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
SF1	21.158	1	.030	4.02000	1.6058	6.4342
SF2	13.387	1	.047	2.07500	.1055	4.0445
SF3	9.647	1	.066	3.28000	-1.0401	7.6001
SF4	5.766	1	.109	4.06500	-4.8929	13.0229
DF1	1.834	1	.318	2.99000	-17.7211	23.7011
DF2	104.429	1	.006	3.65500	3.2103	4.0997
DF3	9.273	1	.068	4.08000	-1.5107	9.6707
DF4	2.392	1	.252	4.055000	-17.48202	25.59202

❖ The analysis of findings according to SWOT method are discussed below:

Strengths(S):

- Other than Kochua Dham and Chandraketurarh the existence of unique appeals of some other rural tourist areas in North 24 parganas, like Deuliya, Berachampa, Saibona village, Dhanyakuriya Rajbaria, Narkelberiya etc.
- Enriched native culture and historical significance.
- Places with rich handicrafts and artefacts.
- Some of the places are under local administrative interest in recent days.

Weaknesses (W):

- Improper internal & external marketing.
- Lack of proper healthcare, welfare, transportation.
- Lack of proper exposure in many of the historically significant places, particularly to foreign tourists.
- Urban tourism in north 24 Parganas is given more priority.

- Lack of proper hotels and restaurants in rural waysides.
- Reluctance of private sector investments.

*Oppurtunities(O):*

- West Bengal tourism dept. has focussed in some of the potential places like Parmadanpur, Chandraketurgarh and Dhanyakuriya Rajbari very recently.
- Possibilities of historical places to be exposed.
- Arrangements of different fairs, open air theatres.
- Possible potential sites for construction rural amusement parks.

*Threats(T):*

- Environmental pollution due to wastes and plastics materials commonly used by tourists.
- Rural land use may change up to some extent.
- Local vegetation will be damaged due to the construction of accommodation sites and other amusement parks.
- Decline of open space and free movement of local people may be interrupted.

**Recommendations and conclusion**

- Sustainable rural tourism demands appropriate financial sources.
- The historical places should be given priority by archaeological department.
- Motivation and campaigning is required for the involvement of local people.
- Both public and private investments are to be encouraged for employment generation.
- Proper committees should be formed for the designing, executing and monitoring of the strategic plans.
- Much more surveys and visits must be conducted by the government officials to explore the potential rural sites.
- The religious rural places which are already popular must be ecologically preserved by declaring them as plastic free zones.

Moreover with strategic development and effective planning it is necessary to have psychological up gradation and spontaneous attitude of the tourists and the local people towards an ecological as well as sustainable development of rural tourism. The slogan must be, “*Think globally, and act locally*”.

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