

GIST OF KURUKSHETRA

RURAL TOURISM



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CHAPTER 1- RURAL INDIA AS A HUB OF ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism has emerged as a strategic instrument in India's rural development agenda, offering a model that integrates **economic diversification, environmental stewardship, and social inclusion**.

- As defined by the International Ecotourism Society, it emphasizes *responsible travel that conserves the environment, sustains local communities, and encourages interpretation and education*.
- This aligns strongly with India's **rich biodiversity, cultural landscapes, and rural heritage**, making ecotourism a natural fit for inclusive and sustainable development.
- With travelers increasingly seeking **low-impact, authentic, and community-centric experiences**, the demand for ecotourism has surged. Policymakers have also recognized its potential for conservation financing, rural livelihood generation, and green economic growth.

Current Status of Tourism Sector in India

- The **tourism sector** is witnessing strong **post-pandemic recovery**, led by **domestic tourism**, and India ranks **10th globally in travel and tourism GDP contribution**.
- **International tourist arrivals** are expected to reach **30.5 million by 2028**, with FTAs at **9.24 million in 2023** (up from 6.43 million in 2022), led by **Bangladesh (24.5%), USA (20.4%), and UK (6.9%)**.
- The sector's **economic contribution** stood at **US\$ 199.6 billion in 2022**, projected to reach **US\$ 512 billion by 2028**, growing at **7.1% annually**, and expected to generate **53 million jobs by 2029**, highlighting its role as a major **employment provider**.

Policy Landscape and Government Initiatives

- **National Strategy for Ecotourism (2022)**- The strategy **aligns** the Ministry of Tourism with **MoEFCC**, emphasizing **eco-certification, responsible tourism in fragile ecosystems, community participation, carrying-capacity assessment, and conservation-linked tourism**.
- **Swadesh Darshan Scheme & Swadesh Darshan 2.0**- Since **2014–15**, the scheme has sanctioned **Rs 5,292.91 crore** for **76 projects** (with **75 completed by 2024**), while **SD 2.0** shifts towards **sustainable and responsible tourism**, including eco-circuits such as **Pathanamthitta–Gavi–Vagamon–Thekkady (Kerala)** for rainforest trekking and birdwatching, and **Dalma–Betla–Netarhat (Jharkhand)** for wildlife-focused forest tourism.
- **PRASHAD Scheme**- The scheme has sanctioned **Rs 1,646.99 crore** across **48 projects**, supporting **eco-spiritual circuits, heritage-linked tourism, and essential infrastructure upgrades**.
- **Capacity Building & Skill Development**- A network of **56 IHMs and 13 Food Craft Institutes (2024)** provides **training in sustainable hospitality**, thereby strengthening **human capital for rural and ecotourism-based livelihoods**.
- **Travel for LiFE Mission & Dekho Apna Desh**- These initiatives promote **citizen engagement, responsible tourism behavior, and women- and youth-led rural tourism models** aligned with sustainability principles.

Rural India: Market Dynamics & Emerging Opportunities

- **Fast-growing sector:** Ecotourism valued at **USD 19.8 billion (2024)**, projected **USD 50.4 billion (2033, CAGR 9.8%)**, contributing **~5% to GDP**.
- **Sustainability-driven demand:** **82% of Indian travellers** prioritise eco-lodges, homestays, trekking, birdwatching, agro-tourism (IMARC, 2025).
- **Rural growth potential:** **2,509 million domestic visits (2023)**; **9.66 million FTAs (2024, +19.8%)**.
- **Employment & entrepreneurship:** Tourism generates **12.57% of jobs (42 million in 2024, 48 million by 2025)**, enabling **women-led microenterprises, youth employment, and diversified rural incomes**.

Table 1: Key Policies related to Rural Eco-tourism and their Features

S.No.	Policies	Key Objectives Relevant to Rural Eco-tourism	Rural Components
1.	National Strategy & Roadmap for Rural Tourism	Promote rural tourism as driver for job creation, local culture, convergence with other welfare schemes; make rural tourism sustainable & inclusive.	Cluster development, local crafts, homestays, marketing support for villages, governance/institutional support.
2.	Swadesh Darshan / Swadesh Darshan 2.0	Thematic circuit development (including Rural Circuits), improving infrastructure, visitor experience, community participation, sustainability.	Rural circuits: specific projects in Bihar, Kerala under "Rural Circuit" theme. Also rural tourism infrastructure in identified circuits.
3.	PRASHAD Scheme	Develop pilgrimage-spiritual tourism infrastructure; improve access, amenities; integrate with heritage. Some sites are rural/spiritual in villages.	Some pilgrimage destinations are in rural areas; projects include amenities that benefit local communities.
4.	Ecotourism / Sustainable Tourism Strategy & Guidelines	Promote conservation, biodiversity protection, regulate ecotourism around protected areas; ensure ecological & socio-cultural sustainability.	Rural areas near forests, wildlife, and biodiversity zones are targeted; community involvement required; advisory for protected area buffer zones.
5.	National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays (2022)	Standardise and promote homestays in rural areas, enabling rural households to earn income; ensure quality, marketing, capacity building.	Homestay owners in villages; support/training; link to scheme projects under Swadesh Darshan etc.

Source: IMARC, 2024

Economic, Social & Environmental Impacts

- **Economic:** Increases **household income 35–60%**, promotes **micro-entrepreneurship**, e.g., **Periyar Tiger Reserve (₹60–80 crore, 50% to locals)** and **Mawlynnong (+60% incomes)**.
- **Social:** Empowers **women (18,000 in Kerala)**, reduces **youth outmigration (Khonoma – 30%)**, and strengthens **community ownership, cultural preservation, and inclusivity**.
- **Environmental:** Revenues fund **conservation, restoration, anti-poaching**, e.g., **tiger protection (MP)**, **mangrove/coral restoration (Western Ghats, Sundarbans)**, creating **self-sustaining biodiversity protection**.

Key Challenges

- **Over-commercialization & greenwashing** dilutes sustainability standards.
- **Carrying-capacity stress:** Overcrowding in **Ladakh, Jim Corbett, Kerala** strains ecosystems, water, and waste management.



- Climate threats: Glacial retreat, sea-level rise, heatwaves, forest fires endanger eco-destinations.
- Regulatory gaps: Weak eco-certification, fragmented monitoring, poor enforcement.
- Infrastructure constraints: Limited sustainable transport, waste management, and climate-resilient facilities in rural areas.

Way Forward

- **Strengthen eco-certification & standards:** Mandatory audits, unified national eco-label.
- **Carrying-capacity-based tourism:** Visitor caps, zonation, differential pricing for fragile ecosystems.
- **Diversified destinations:** Promote lesser-known rural circuits to reduce pressure on flagship sites.
- **Integrate with rural livelihoods:** Link with organic farming, handicrafts, renewable energy, agro-forestry, tribal tourism.
- **Community-led & climate-resilient development:** Revenue-sharing, women/youth cooperatives, green infrastructure, and public-private-community partnerships for eco-lodges and conservation-linked enterprises.

Ecotourism represents a powerful lever for **rural transformation**, combining economic upliftment, environmental conservation, and social empowerment. With rising domestic demand, international visibility, and supportive policy frameworks, rural India is uniquely positioned to emerge as a global leader in **inclusive, responsible, and regenerative tourism**.

CHAPTER 2- VIBRANT VILLAGES PROGRAMME

The **Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP)**, launched by the **Government of India**, aims at **holistic development** of border villages, focusing on **tourism-driven economic growth, infrastructure, and livelihood generation**.

- It promotes **eco-tourism, agro-tourism, cultural tourism, and community participation**, enhancing **local entrepreneurship, showcasing indigenous arts, crafts, and cuisines**, and helping **curb outmigration** by creating sustainable employment opportunities.

Phase I: Key Features and Achievements

- **Scope and Implementation:** Launched with a financial outlay of Rs. 4,800 crore (2022–23 to 2025–26), VVP-I targeted 663 villages across 19 districts and 46 border blocks in Arunachal Pradesh (455), Himachal Pradesh (75), Sikkim (46), Uttarakhand (51), and Ladakh (35).
 - Village-level **Action Plans** were prepared in collaboration with **Gram Panchayats** and **local institutions** (SHGs, NGOs, cooperatives).
- **Infrastructure and Connectivity:** The programme strengthened **road connectivity** (113 roads, 8 low-suspension bridges, Rs. 2,400 crore), **4G telecom connectivity** (342 villages), and **electrification** (474 on-grid, 127 off-grid; 43 power projects, Rs. 238 crore).
- **Livelihood and Tourism Promotion:** VVP supported **community-managed homestays, local fairs, festivals**, and the promotion of **eco-resorts, adventure tourism, and tourist centres** (102 projects, Rs. 48 crore). **Agri-businesses** under the **One Village One Product** model enhanced sustainable livelihoods.

- **Comprehensive Development:** Alongside tourism, Rs. 556 crore was allocated for **agriculture, education, health, energy, cooperatives, and Khadi & Village Industries**. The programme ensured **inclusive participation of women and youth** in economic activities.
- **Recognition and Motivation:** Villages under VVP-I were highlighted during **Republic Day 2025** celebrations, showcasing **successful community-led development models**.

Phase II: Expansion and New Focus Areas

- **Outlay and Coverage:** VVP-II, approved in **April 2025**, continues until **FY 2028–29** with **Rs. 6,839 crore**, expanding to **border villages beyond the northern border** in states and UTs including **Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal**.
- **Tourism and Cultural Promotion:** Emphasis is on **village fairs, festivals, awareness camps, and national day celebrations**, showcasing **local culture, heritage, and indigenous products** to attract tourists. **Tourist circuits connecting border villages** are being developed.
- **Sustainable Livelihoods:** Focus on **agro-based value chains, branding of local agri-products and cuisines, and community-driven enterprises**, creating **employment and curbing youth migration**.
- **Infrastructure and Digital Integration:** VVP-II targets **all-weather roads, telecom, television connectivity, electrification, and education infrastructure**, including **SMART classrooms** and leveraging **digital tools like PM Gati Shakti** for planning and implementation.
- **Tourism Incentives and Competitions:** The **Best Tourism Village Competition (BTVC)** motivates villages to adopt **community-based sustainable practices**. Inaugural edition (2023) saw **795 applications**, with **35 villages recognized**, while the second edition (2024) had **991 applications**, with **36 winners across eight categories** including **Adventure, Agri, Community-Based, Craft, Heritage, Responsible, Spiritual/Wellness, and Vibrant Villages**.

Significance and Outcomes

- **Economic Growth:** VVP promotes **local entrepreneurship, agri-businesses, handicrafts, and village tourism**, providing a **sustainable source of income**.
- **Social Empowerment:** Ensures **inclusive development, with active participation of women, youth, and community institutions**.
- **Cultural and Ecological Preservation:** Helps **preserve heritage, customs, and ecological resources** while fostering **responsible tourism**.
- **Strategic and National Vision:** Strengthens **border development, security, and vibrancy**, aligning with **Viksit Bharat @2047** and the vision of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat**.

Conclusion

The **Vibrant Villages Programme** demonstrates a **synergistic model of rural development, tourism promotion, and border prosperity**. By integrating **infrastructure development, community participation, skill enhancement, and sustainable livelihoods**, VVP transforms border villages into **self-reliant, vibrant, and economically secure communities**, contributing to India's vision of a **prosperous, inclusive, and strategically strong nation**.



CHAPTER 3- AGRO-TOURISM IN INDIA

India, the **world's 4th largest economy in 2025**, with **15 agro-climatic zones** and diverse cropping patterns, has significant potential to leverage **agro-tourism** as a driver of **sustainable agriculture, rural livelihoods, and socio-economic growth**, contributing to **Viksit Bharat @2047**.

- Agro-tourism integrates **tourism with agriculture**, providing additional income to farmers while promoting **eco-friendly farming practices, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship**.

Significance of Agro-Tourism

- Economic Contribution and Employment:
 - Sustainable Agriculture and Environmental Benefits:
 - Agro-tourism connects **tourists with farming activities**, promoting **indigenous farming, organic agriculture, and environmental stewardship**.
 - Encourages **income-centric farming strategies** rather than mere production-centric approaches, enhancing **long-term sustainability for small farms**.
 - Supports **eco-friendly crop protection and sustainable farm management**, as promoted under **UNIDO-India FARM project (GEF-UNIDO, 2024)** implemented by HIL (India) Ltd.
- State-Level Initiatives and Best Practices:
 - **Maharashtra:** Agro Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) established in 2005; covers **200+ villages, 1,000+ Agro Tourism Centres (ATCs)**, attracting over **80 lakh tourists**, with **500 farms officially recognised**.
 - **Kerala:** Agri-Tourism Multi-State Co-operative Society Ltd (ATCOS) promotes **farm stays, spices cultivation, organic farming, resorts, yoga, naturopathy, and backwater tourism**.
 - **Sikkim:** India's **first organic state**, promotes agro-tourism, with increased participation of **rural women**.
 - **Karnataka:** Coffee plantation stays in **Coorg** attract domestic and international tourists.
 - **Punjab:** Farm Tourism Scheme exposes tourists to **agrarian lifestyle**, provides **cultural experiences**, and generates **supplementary income for farmers**.
- Agricultural Resilience and Growth:
 - Agriculture sector showed consistent growth of **~5% annually (FY17-FY23)**; **3.5% growth** in Q2 FY2024-25.
 - India is the **largest producer of milk, pulses, and spices**, and **second-largest producer** of fruits, vegetables, tea, farmed fish, sugarcane, wheat, rice, cotton, and sugar.
 - **Foodgrain production** rose from **265.05 million tonnes (2014-15)** to an estimated **347.44 million tonnes (2024-25)**.
- Socio-Economic and Community Impact:
 - Agro-tourism enables **rural community participation**, creates **additional revenue for local businesses**, and strengthens **local economy** through **job and income generation**.
 - Promotes **cultural preservation, traditional arts and crafts, and local cuisines**.
 - Encourages **inclusive participation of women and youth**, ensuring **equitable benefits**.
- Global and Policy Alignment:
 - **UNIDO and FAO** promote agro-tourism for **rural development** aligned with **UN-SDGs**: poverty alleviation, food security, decent wages, and economic growth.



- Requires **financial assistance, infrastructure development, awareness, and skill training** to mobilize rural resources and ensure **sustainability and remunerative returns**.

Way Forward

- Formalization and Policy Support:
 - Agro-tourism should be integrated into **national and state-level schemes**, providing **capacity building, infrastructure, digital services, and skill development** for farmers.
 - Promote **eco-friendly, income-centric farming models** to ensure sustainability and enhanced rural livelihoods.
- Rural and Cultural Integration:
 - Leverage **India's 6.65 lakh villages, diverse cropping patterns, and unique culture** to create immersive tourism experiences.
 - Develop **tourist circuits**, local fairs, festivals, and community-based initiatives.
- Economic and Agricultural Synergy:
 - Agro-tourism can drive **inclusive growth**, empower farmers, promote **sustainable practices**, and help India achieve **global food leadership**.
 - Encourage **marketing and branding of local agricultural products**, integrating **tourism, hospitality, and rural economy**.

Conclusion

Agro-tourism represents a **convergence of agriculture, tourism, and rural development**, fostering sustainable farming, rural livelihoods, cultural preservation, and economic growth. With **policy support, capacity building, and strategic promotion**, agro-tourism can contribute to India's vision of **Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Viksit Bharat @2047**, while aligning with **UN-SDGs** and ensuring **inclusive rural prosperity**.

CHAPTER 4- RURAL FESTIVALS IN INDIA

Rural festivals in India not only **reflect cultural heritage** but also serve as **engines of economic growth and rural development**. Supported by government schemes like **Swadesh Darshan, PRASHAD, DAY-NRLM, and TRIFED**, these festivals promote **tourism, entrepreneurship, and local livelihoods**, transforming traditional celebrations into sustainable economic opportunities.

Significance and Socio-Economic Role

- Cultural and Economic Integration:
 - Festivals embody **traditions, customs, and community spirit**, while acting as platforms for **tourism-driven income generation**.
 - Events like **Mawlynnong (Meghalaya), Sualkuchi (Assam)**, and Odisha fairs demonstrate how **community initiatives** attract **national and international visitors**.
- Tourism Promotion and Employment Generation:
 - Around **65% of India's population lives in rural areas**, where festivals provide **seasonal employment** for artisans, farmers, and small traders.
 - Festivals encourage **rural tourism**, increasing demand for **local accommodation, food, and transportation services**, while boosting **village cash flow**.
 - Festivals serve as **platforms for local crafts, handlooms, folk music, and dance**, promoting entrepreneurship.

- Tourism and Cultural Branding:
 - States leverage festivals as **tourism identities**:
 1. **North East**: Hornbill Festival (Nagaland)
 2. **North India**: Surajkund Fair (Haryana), Pushkar Fair (Rajasthan)
 3. **East India**: Chhath Puja (Bihar), Tusu Parva (Jharkhand)
 4. **South India**: Pongal (Tamil Nadu), Thrissur Pooram (Kerala)
 - Festivals help **preserve folk culture, rituals, and heritage**, while generating **sustainable local income**.

Schemes/ Initiatives	Operating organization	Objectives / Key Features	Latest Status / Statistics	Impact on rural festivals
Swadesh Darshan 2.0	Ministry of Tourism, Government of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of theme-based tourist destinations • Priority given to rural, spiritual and cultural tourism • Rural fairs and festivals included in the tourism circuit 	52 projects worth ₹2,108.87 crore approved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening the rural festival infrastructure in many states • Increase in local employment and tourism
PRASHAD Scheme	Ministry of Tourism, Government of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rejuvenation of religious tourist places • Inclusion of local religious places in the tourist circuit 	Several new projects approved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better facilities for tourists visiting during religious festivals • Increase in local business
Incredible India Campaign	Ministry of Tourism, Government of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking rural festivals to a global audience • Digital branding and promotion of state fairs 	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in the number of foreign tourists • International recognition of rural crafts and culture
Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana – National Rural Livelihood Mission (DAY-NRLM)	Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment of rural women and self-help groups • Participation of SHGs in fairs and festivals 	10.05 crore women and over 90.8 lakh SHGs active by June 30, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in income from stalls and group sales in the fair
TRIFED / Van Dhan Vikas Kendra	Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing of tribal products • Value addition through Van Dhan Kendras 	Hundreds of centers have been established across the country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in tribal income through sale of forest produce in festivals and fairs
State Level Investment Package	State governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment and development through state-sponsored fairs and cluster packages 	Several states register domestic tourist growth and investment proposals in 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial expansion of festivals through state-sponsored fairs and cluster packages
Self-reliant India Campaign – Tourism Village Initiative	Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India and State Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing selected villages as tourist villages • Promotion of local handicrafts and cultural events • Active participation of women SHGs 	--	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New energy in the rural economy • Employment opportunities for women and youth

Challenges

- Environmental and Infrastructural Concerns:
 - Environmental pressure, waste management, erosion of traditions due to overcrowding, and dependence on weather.
 - Insufficient infrastructure (roads, toilets, accommodation) and lack of **equitable economic distribution**.
- Potential Solutions:
 - Budget allocation for **local infrastructure development**.

- Enhanced **community participation**.
- Adoption of **digital tools**: e-ticketing, digital payments, crowd management systems.

Way Forward

- Rural festivals should be **systematically integrated into tourism policy**, linking **digital promotion, infrastructure, and community ownership**.
- Year-round activities beyond festivals can provide **sustainable employment**, increase **village incomes**, and **promote cultural branding**.
- Leveraging these festivals can establish India as a **global hub for festival-based rural tourism**, supporting **inclusive rural development and socio-economic empowerment**.

Conclusion

Rural festivals bridge **cultural heritage and economic opportunity**. Case studies like **Hornbill** and **Surajkund** illustrate their **multiplier effect on the local economy**. Systematic planning, community engagement, and sustainable practices can position India as a **festival tourism destination**, boosting **livelihoods**, **preserving culture**, and **promoting rural prosperity**.

CHAPTER 5- VOCAL FOR LOCAL

The ‘**Vocal for Local**’ initiative, launched by **Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2020** under the broader **Aatmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan**, aims to promote **self-reliance** by encouraging the use of **locally made products and services**. It seeks to strengthen the **domestic economy**, empower **artisans, MSMEs, and start-ups**, and reduce dependency on imports, while preserving **cultural heritage**.

Key Components and Strategies

- Government Procurement and Local Prioritization
 - The **Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) Order, 2017** (amended 2020) mandates **preference to ‘Class-I Local Suppliers’** (products with >50% local content) in government procurement.
 - Global tenders require special approval for projects up to **₹200 crore**, ensuring fair opportunities for local suppliers.
- Support for Artisans, Handlooms, and MSMEs
 - Financial assistance for **equipment upgrades, design innovation, and marketing** of handloom and handicraft products.
 - Schemes include:
 1. **PM Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)**: Subsidies for new micro-enterprises.
 2. **Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro & Small Enterprises (CGTMSE)**: Collateral-free credit for MSMEs.
 3. **Scheme for Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI)**: Organises artisans into clusters for competitiveness.
 4. **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme**: Financial incentives to boost domestic manufacturing in sectors like electronics, pharmaceuticals, and automobiles.



- Promotion of Grassroots Entrepreneurship
 - NITI Aayog's **Aspirational Blocks Programme** highlights local products through the 'Aakanksha' window on the **Government e-Marketplace (GeM)**.
 - **Start-up Runway on GeM**: Allows DPIIT-recognised start-ups to sell directly to government entities with **relaxed procurement norms**.
- Digital Enablement and Skill Development
 - Partnerships with **GeM** and **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)** facilitate **e-commerce onboarding, technical support, and financial literacy** for local entrepreneurs.
 - Skill training enhances **operational capacities** of artisans and MSMEs.
- Citizen Engagement and Marketing
 - Campaigns encourage **citizens to purchase locally made goods**, particularly during festivals.
 - The **Ministry of Textiles** organises **exhibitions, social media campaigns, and celebrity endorsements** to increase visibility and demand for indigenous products.

Economic and Strategic Significance

- Strengthens **domestic industries** and reduces import dependency.
- Creates **employment opportunities** and enhances rural and urban **entrepreneurial capacities**.
- Preserves and promotes **cultural heritage and traditional crafts**.
- Contributes to India's vision of becoming a **global manufacturing hub**.
- Aligns with the '**Atmanirbhar Bharat**' vision by fostering **self-reliant, resilient local economies**.

Challenges and Way Forward

- Maintaining competitiveness against **cheaper foreign alternatives** remains a challenge.
- Continued focus on **capacity building, digital enablement, infrastructure support, and market access** is essential to ensure **sustainability and scalability**.

UPSC Mains Practice Questions-(Around 250 words)

- Q.1 "The Vibrant Villages Programme seeks to transform border villages into self-reliant and vibrant communities through tourism, infrastructure, and livelihood interventions."
Discuss the objectives, key initiatives, and socio-economic impact of VVP in strengthening India's border areas.
- Q.2 "Rural festivals are not only a reflection of India's cultural heritage but also act as catalysts for rural economic growth."
Examine the socio-economic significance of rural festivals in promoting tourism, employment, and local entrepreneurship, with reference to case studies like Hornbill Festival and Surajkund Fair.





