

**Scope and Challenges of Agro-tourism Centers in South Maharashtra Plateau  
(Maharashtra): A Geographical Perspective**

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**Abstract**

Agro-tourism complements conventional contemporary agricultural operations in a positive way. Agrotourism has shown to benefit not just farmers but also the village as a whole. The government should prioritize the agritourism industry in Maharashtra. Agrotourism has shown to benefit not just farmers but also the village as a whole from a social and economic standpoint, as demonstrated by Satara and Kolhapur. The government should prioritize the agritourism industry in Maharashtra by implementing the necessary policy measures, even though the sector is expanding and needs government assistance through suitable and favorable regulations for agritourism growth. To further disseminate the idea that agro-tourism is a readily customizable and implementable economic opportunity for Indian farmers, a suitable business model is required. There are answers for each of the aforementioned problems, and agritourism may be introduced bit by bit. It all comes down to the farmers' determination and the appropriate marketing techniques used to introduce the idea to weekend travelers.

**Key Words:** *Agro-tourism, Scope of Agro-tourism, Rural Development, Agriculture.*

**1. Introduction:**

The core of the Indian economy is agriculture. About 6.40 lakh villages are home to around 68.84 percent of the population, who grow more than 250 Metric Ton of food grains annually. 13% of the GDP is generated by agriculture. India's rural areas are primarily home to farmers. It is bolstered by side ventures that supplement their primary source of income, such as dairying, chicken farming, etc. One further service that might provide an extra revenue stream is agrotourism. Any industry or activity centered on agriculture that draws people to a farm or ranch is referred to as agritourism, or agro-tourism. Agriculture tourism offers a unique way to see rural India. Agro-tourism is the practice of drawing tourists or other visitors to a farm. It is a chance for travelers or other guests to have a close-up view of agriculture. Because of its many advantages, agro-rural tourism has grown in popularity both domestically and abroad throughout time in India. Both the farm owner and the guests benefit from this outdoor activity since it gives the tourists a chance to admire and protect the environment. The terms "agri-tourism," "agro-tourism," "farm tourism," "agricultural tourism," and "agritainment" are frequently used interchangeably with "agritourism" (Verma, 2022).

Manhas defines "agricultural tourism" as "travel that blends rural or agricultural settings with agricultural products, all within a tourism experience or a range of activities, services, and amenities provided by farmers." Additionally, he refers to it as "enterprising farmers' innovative income-generating activity" (Manhas, 2012).

Many other authors define the word "agro-tourism," although not all of them agree with what is said here. "It is a business venture at a working farm run for guests' enjoyment that brings in money for the proprietor" (Farm Bureau Federation of America, 2004). "Agrotourism is a kind of rural tourism where guests can engage in agricultural activities, but the hosting house has to be integrated into an agricultural estate" (Marques, 2006). Present study gives the information about south Maharashtra plateau and agro-tourism scenario past and recent years.

## 2. Study Area

This research examines the growth of agrotourism on the south Maharashtra plateau. It is situated between latitudes  $15^{\circ} 44'$  and  $18^{\circ} 35'$  north and longitudes  $73^{\circ} 33'$  and  $76^{\circ} 25'$  east. It forms the south Maharashtra plateau and is a component of southern Maharashtra. According to the 2011 census, the area is 41,592 sq. km. and has 14, 15426 residents. Administratively, it consists of 44 tehsils and covers the districts of Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara, and Solapur in the state of Maharashtra. A geographical area in the southern portion of the Indian state of Maharashtra is known as the South Maharashtra Plateau. This plateau is surrounded by the Deccan Plateau to the east and the Western Ghats mountain

Range to the west. It is distinguished by its high landscape, which is made up of gently undulating hills. The area is well-known for its agricultural production, including the growing of cotton, sorghum, millet, and pulses. Numerous towns and cities of distinct cultural and historical value, including as Satara, Kolhapur, Sangli, and Solapur, are also located on the plateau. In general, Maharashtra's South Maharashtra Plateau is a significant agricultural and cultural area.

### Objectives

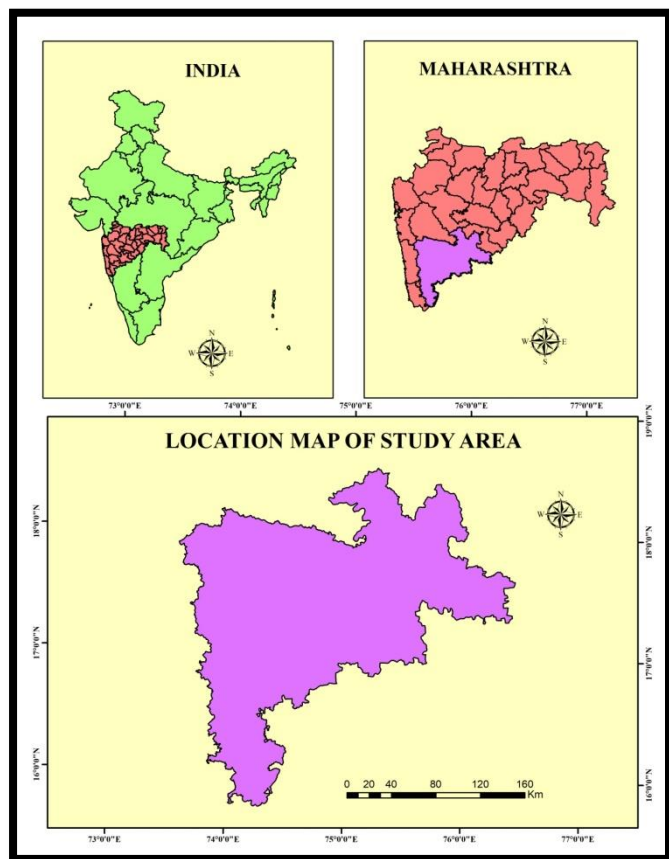


Fig.1 Location Map of Study Region

To analysis of Scope and Challenges of Agro-tourism Centers in Study Area.

### Database and Methodology

#### Sources of Data:

The Maharashtra State Agri and Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART), Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (MTDC), and Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) records provided the **primary data** and basic information for the study. The investigator first created an interview schedule based on the objectives, and then conducted in-person interviews with the proprietors of agritourism centers.

The following sources provided the **secondary data** and other pertinent information for the study: published documents, reports, and other data from various farm organizations. Books, reports, bulletins, journals, and periodicals issued by various authors and agencies that are relevant to the subject matter are considered references.

Postgraduate and doctoral theses relevant to the field has been referred and referenced. Attending lectures, workshops, and training sessions on the topic are also considered.

The districts of Sangli, Satara, Kolhapur, and Solapur are part of the South Maharashtra Plateau area. The South Maharashtra Plateau region's four districts were all included in the research. The Maharashtra State Agri and Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Limited (MART), Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation Ltd. (MTDC), and Agri-Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) are the organizations that oversee the agro-tourism centers in the area. Agritourism centers are also functioning in the area without being registered with anybody. About 23 active agrotourism facilities were chosen for the study from a list of well-functioning, operational centers that was created with the aid of a survey. Forty randomly chosen respondents from four districts made up the sample. The study's exploratory research design was chosen. The structured interview schedule is a data collection instrument. An interview schedule was created with the study's goals in mind. The method of conducting in-person interviews was employed to gather data. Using criteria like frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation, the data were processed and summarized.

### Data Analysis

#### A) Present situation of agro-tourism in study region

The four districts of western Maharashtra that make up the study region are Satara, Sangli, Solapur, and Kolhapur. In the research region, 102 agro-tourism centers were identified, with the Satara district having the highest number at 64. However, the Sangli area on the other hand has the fewest agrotourism centers (9) of any place.

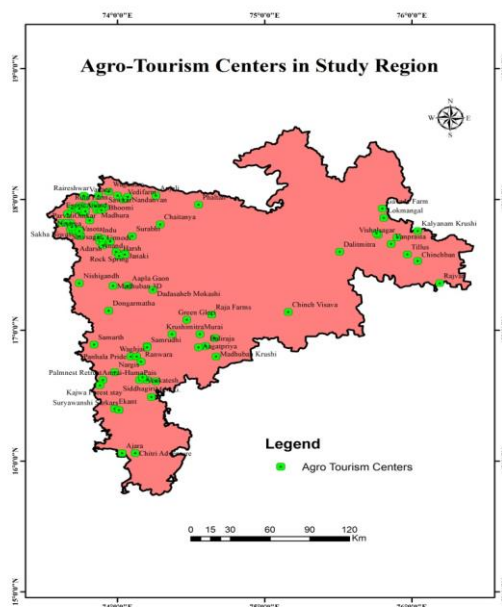


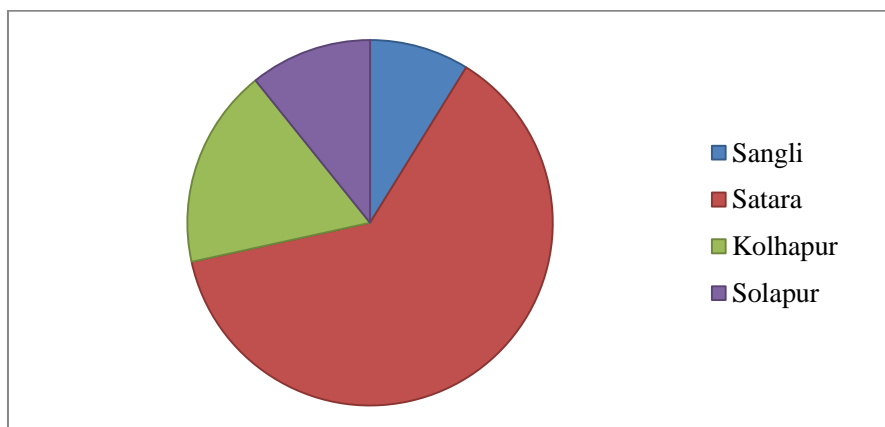
Fig. 2 Map of Agro-tourism Centers in Study Region.

The Satara district is well-known for its hill station, Wai, Panchgani, Mahabaleshwar, Kas Plateau, and plenty of old forts. Agrotourism destinations have recently proliferated in the Satara district, particularly in the tehsils of Wai and Mahabaleshwar.

Table: 1 District wise Distribution of Agro-tourism centers in Study Region (2022)

Sr. No.	District	No. of Centers	Percentage
1	Sangli	09	8.82
2	Satara	64	62.75
3	Kolhapur	18	17.65
4	Solapur	11	10.78
	<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Source: www.martindia.org



Above table and graph shows district wise distribution of Agro-tourism centers in south Maharashtra plateau. Highest percentage of Agro-tourism centers are observed in Satara district with 64 centers and overall 62.75 per cent. Lowest number of centers was indicated in Sangli district with 9 centers 8.82 per cent.

### B) Scope of Agro-tourism Centers in Study Region

A burgeoning global trend, agrotourism, or agritourism, combines tourism activities with agricultural experiences. The Satara district in Maharashtra, India, has a substantial opportunity for agrotourism because of its rich cultural legacy, varied agricultural environment, and close proximity to popular tourist spots like Mahabaleshwar and Panchgani. The Kolhapur district has a lot of promise for agrotourism because of its rich cultural history, varied agricultural terrain, and historical significance. The Kolhapur district is well known for its horticultural and agricultural industries, which include sugarcane, jaggery manufacture, turmeric cultivation, and more. Visitors can take part in agricultural activities, tour farms, and learn about customary farming methods. Due to its excellent road and rail connections, the Kolhapur district is readily reachable from major cities such as Bangalore, Pune, and Mumbai. Because of its enormous sugarcane farming, Sangli district is referred to as the "Sugar Belt of India". In addition to sugarcane, the area grows vegetables, bananas, grapes, and turmeric. Travelers interested in farm experiences and agro-based enterprises are drawn to the region by the excellent soil and pleasant temperature, which offer perfect circumstances for a variety of agricultural activities. Some part of the Solapur district having very good condition for agro-tourism development especially in eastern and central area of the district.

Western Maharashtra has a lot of promise for agro-tourism destinations because of its diverse population, stunning scenery, and long history of agriculture. Overall, there is a ton of room for growth and development for agro-tourism destinations in western Maharashtra, since they provide distinctive experiences that blend environment, culture, and agriculture. These centers have the potential to make significant contributions to the region's tourism economy with the correct infrastructure, marketing, and community participation.

### C) Challenges of Agro-tourism Centers in Study Region

A field survey of 23 agro-tourism establishments in the study region was conducted in order to identify the primary and most significant challenges that would-be owners must overcome. Many towns have very high rates of, which deters many travelers. About 55% of the interviewees expressed worry about the state of the approach roads. During the rainy season, landslides and severe soil erosion are caused by the steep terrain and heavy rainfall in a section of the research area. Although 72.50% of agritourism center owners are locals, they have migrated away from their hometowns many years ago; therefore they don't receive much support from the community. Ninety percent of individuals questioned said they were concerned about not being able to obtain government benefits. A bit more than 80% of those polled mentioned the problem in social situations. Agritourism center operators saw the pressing need for capacity building and training to handle foreign or urban visitors. The problem of joint land ownership resulting from shared land holding was brought up by almost 65% of those questioned. Families in the studied regions own aggregate land holdings, according to the Agriculture Census 2000–01.

Table: 2 Challenges of Agro-tourism Centers in Study Region (2022)

Sr. No.	Problems	Respondents N= 40	
		Number	Percentage
1	Poor conditions of the Approach Roads	22	55.00
2	Poor Support from Local Community	29	72.50
3	Little Access to the Information on Government Schemes	36	90.00
4	Challenges while Interacting with Public	32	80.00

5	Joint Land Ownership due to Common Family Farm	26	65.00
6	Next Generation is Not Interested in Agritourism	33	82.50
7	Unskilled Workforce	20	50.00
8	Load Shedding	31	77.50
9	Scarcity of Labours and High Labour Wages	34	85.00
10	Lack of Finance	35	87.50

Source: Field Survey, 2022

In general, 82% of the participants talked about the problem of younger people's disinterest in agritourism. All of the villages within the study zone are completely electrified, yet several places within the district experience frequent power outages. Usually, load shedding occurs once a week for around six hours. Many interior sites periodically face unplanned power outages; these outages typically last two to four hours each day. The agritourism industry is not recognized by the government. Since they were not farmers and worked in services, self-employment, or other professions, almost 85% of agritourism center proprietors had no prior agricultural experience. They thus do not have the steady agricultural labor force that farmers usually do. In our study region, agrotourism destinations are growing rapidly. Despite this, there remain obstacles that prevent Maharashtra's agrotourism industry from growing any further.

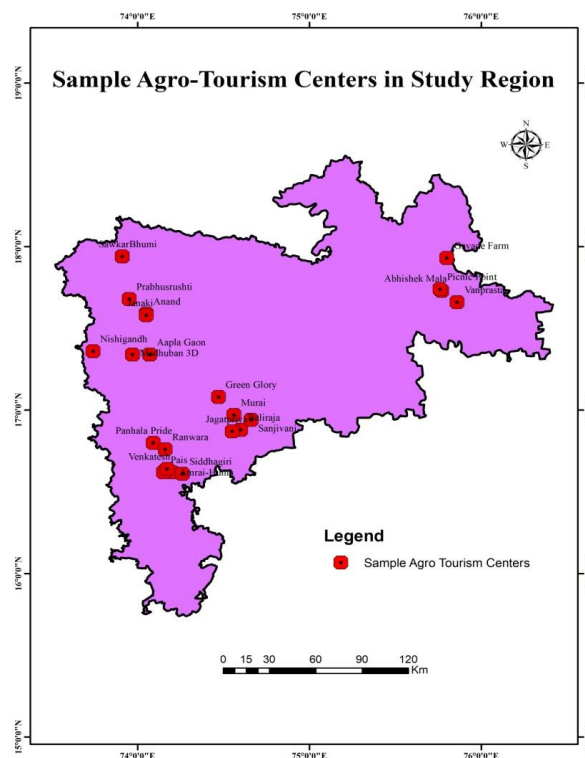


Fig. 3 Map of Sample Agro-tourism Centers in Study Region.

## Conclusion

Agro-tourism complements conventional contemporary agricultural operations in a positive way. Farmers now have the chance to employ the resources at their disposal in novel and creative ways. It makes things advantageous for both farmers and visitors. By creatively utilizing the resources at their disposal, farmers are able to increase their income, while tourists may affordably experience rural life and the natural world. Not only that, but also the growth of agri-tourism also benefits the communities. A few instances of agritourism in the Maharashtra districts are under consideration. Agrotourism has shown to benefit not just farmers but also the village as a whole from a social and economic standpoint, as demonstrated by Satara and Kolhapur. The government should prioritize the agritourism industry in Maharashtra by implementing the necessary policy measures, even though the sector is expanding and needs government assistance through suitable and favorable regulations for agritourism growth. To further disseminate the idea that agro-tourism is a readily customizable and implementable economic opportunity for Indian farmers, a suitable business model is required. There are answers for each of the aforementioned problems, and agritourism may be introduced bit by bit. It all comes down to the farmers' determination and the appropriate marketing techniques used to introduce the idea to weekend travelers.

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