

What is Agritourism in Nepal?

Kumar Bhatta

Chiba University, Japan

Kumar2bhatta@gmail.com

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Abstract

The agritourism (AT) concept in Nepal is growing. However, a proper definition based on the characteristics of the Nepalese economy and agriculture has not been given previously. Therefore, this study aims to define AT based on the Nepalese geographical division. Based on the secondary data, the author first presented the definition of AT in international society and compared the AT between developed countries and developing countries. Then, the definition of AT based on the three geographical locations of Nepal i.e., Himalayan, Hilly, and Terai region, is given. For the successful Nepalese AT, the target should be given to the trekkers and hikers.

Introduction

The terms agritourism (AT) and rural tourism (RT) were often used interchangeably in many countries for many years (Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005); however, in the recent years, many scholars started to debate on the same definition of RT and AT, and began to give their definitions (Darau et al., 2010). The term agritourism, therefore, is defined differently in different countries. Village tourism in

Corresponding Editor

Ramesh Raj Kunwar
kunwar.dr@gmail.com

Hungary means affordable accommodation and agricultural activities, RT in Slovenia means guest live with farmers' families, in Netherlands AT means camping on the farms, in Greece AT means accommodation in traditionally furnished rooms, AT in Italy means activities of hospitality services given by agricultural entrepreneurs, green tourism in Japan means accommodation services in full-fledged service goods (a new term No-haku started from 2017 meaning farm stay), AT in the USA includes visiting a working farm or any agricultural operation to enjoy and be educated participate "pick your own" crops/fruits, Christmas tree sales, hayrides, and on-farm festivals (McGehee & Kim 2004). (Carpio et al., 2006; Darau et al., 2010; Ohe, 2008, 2019; Ohe & Ciani, 2012). Further, in the Japanese case, Ohe (2020) mentioned that rural tourism indicates the general tourism activities performed in rural areas as well as by agricultural producers (Ohe, 2020). From this definition, we can understand that AT and RT are defined differently in a different context, and their intended meanings are also different even if the same terminologies are used. In this regard, the 1st World Congress on Agritourism held in Bolzano, Italy, in 2018 proposed a straightforward definition of AT as it is the activities that are performed at the farms and hosts by the farmers. Since AT is growing attention for poverty alleviation and rural areas development in developing as well as developed countries, and AT is in the developing phase in Nepal (Bhatta & Ohe, 2019; Bhatta et al., 2019; Bhatta, 2019). It is, therefore, necessary to understand the definition of AT in the Nepalese context. The author first presents the definition of agritourism at the international level, then mentions the different agritourism definitions currently using inside Nepal and finally defines AT for three geographical regions, i.e., Himalayan regions, Hilly region, and Terai region.

Agritourism: definition

The word "agritourism" is a portmanteau of "agriculture" and "tourism," highlighting their relationship (Sznajder et al. 2009; Ohe & Kurihara 2013). AT is a type of RT in which farm visitors participate in agricultural activities such as planting and harvesting, while farmers provide accommodation, meals, and guides, among other activities, on their farms (Barbieri and Mshenga 2008; Petroman and Petroman 2010). Agritourism, agrotourism, farm tourism, indicates the tourism only performed by the agricultural producers (Ohe, 2020). AT classifications yield many other distinguished fields, such as ecotourism, garden tourism, dairy tourism, and rural tourism (Sznajder et al., 2009). The AT definitions' intended meaning can be varied from demand (tourists) and supply (providers) perspective (Sznajder et al., 2009). For a tourist, agritourism means familiarizing oneself with agricultural production or recreation in the farming environment of which may include an opportunity to help with farming tasks during their visit. In terms of providers' perspectives, agritourism means providing services to tourists and holidaymakers

such as accommodation industry -agri-accommodation, food, and beverage industry -agri-food and beverage; relaxation -agri-relaxation; sports -agri-sports; and health care and rehabilitation -agri-therapy.

The difference of AT between developed countries and developing nations

Bhatta et al. (2019) discussed the characteristics of agritourism between economically developed countries and financially developing nations might be different from each other (Table 1). In the developed countries, infrastructure is highly organized, high-skilled farmers, degree of organization of AT is also high, and high quality of services to the tourists. Due to the weaker economies in developing nations, in most cases, the combination of less-developed infrastructure, lower-skilled farmers, less-organized agritourism activities, and lower levels of service make agritourism simpler, less formal, less sophisticated and more rustic.

Table 1. Difference in AT between developed and developing countries

Item	Developed countries	Developing countries
Infrastructure	Highly organized	Not organized
Skill level of farmers	High skilled	Low skilled
Agritourism	Organized	Not organized
Service standard	High quality	Low quality

Source: Bhatta et al., 2019

Similarly, due to the difference in economic opportunities and the level of income of the people of developed and developing countries, agritourists' demand also differs. As the number of farmers in the total population more in developing countries than of developed countries, the demand for AT is also differing. Since the number of farmers is more in developing countries, the farmers themselves cannot be the tourists for AT. Consequently, the number of domestic tourists for AT is less as compared to developed countries and vice versa. In this regard, the developing countries need more for foreign tourists in AT. In the case of developed countries, the domestic tourists are min for AT, which is mentioned Different previous scholars proved that the number of tourists in the AT in developed countries is the domestic tourists (Ohe, 2020; Ohe and Ciani, 2012).

Table 2. Tourists' activities in developed and developing countries

Items	Developed countries	Developing countries
No of farmers working in agritourism	Small	High
Domestic tourists in the farm	More	Less
International tourists in the farm	Less	More
Agritainment	High	Low
Family vacation	High	Low
Agricultural experiences	More demanded	Less demanded
Quality of service demanded	High	Low

Source: author's sorting out

The tourists from developed countries prefer more family vacation, expects higher agritainment, agricultural experiences and higher quality of services. Due to the weak economic condition in the developing countries, the demand for agritainment and agricultural experiences is less, the family visit is also limited, and demand for quality of services is lower (Table 2).

Agritourism and research in Nepal

Concerning the current situation of agritourism in Nepal it does not exist (Bhatta et al., 2019, Bhatta, 2019), however, in the eastern part of Nepal (near to Darjeeling and Sikkim, India), the tour to tea garden is becoming popular within the domestic tourists. Typically, farmers from a different part of the country go there to see the tea farming as educational tours, and monetary transaction inside the farms is minimal. Although the AT research in Nepal is limited some of the studies present the potential of Nepalese agritourism development. Pandey & Pandey, (2011) discussed the AT potential in Bhaktapur, Nepal. The authors (Pandey and Pandey 2011) demonstrate different types of agricultural products, forestry products, industrial products, handicrafts and discussed their potential linkage between these products and the fundamental principle of tourism. They defined AT as 'AT in Nepal means tourists can have a chance to know indigenous agricultural practices like crop planting and harvesting and how fresh foods and vegetables are transformed into delicious foods.' Similarly, Shrestha et al. (2011) studied the prospects of agritourism development in Kirtipur, near the main city center and defined as AT is attracting tourists by demonstrating agricultural activities; experiencing agriculture activities and farming system. Aoki (2014) studies the relationship between organic farming and tourism in western Nepal. The study (Aoki, 2014) demonstrates that some hotels practice organic agriculture, serving

organic products to their guests through their hotels in the city area and mentioned that it is the agritourism. Thapa (2013) also studied the AT practice in a restaurant at Lalitpur district called Bishram Batika, which is also located nearby the city center. AT in this restaurant means tourists can have traditional Nepalese food, especially grilled hot, spicy duck meat and vegetables in a relaxing and peaceful environment. The meat and vegetables are grown on their farm. Tourists can also enjoy boating, fishing, bird watching, and sunset view during their visit to the restaurant.

Some travel agencies in Nepal argue that selling their own organic products from their restaurant and trekking through the rural villages are the types of agritourism. Nepal Mission (2020) defined AT is a kind of rural tourism; the concept of AT is a direct expansion of ecotourism, which encourages visitors to experience rural life at first hand. An online blog mentioned that AT is a type of tourism in Nepal, and agritourists can have a chance to enjoy and explore Nepal in different ways and stay in the farms (Tourism in Nepal, 2020). Raj Bala Treks and Expedition mentioned that AT brings tourists to the countryside where they can experience spectacular views of the mountain landscapes, meet friendly and hardworking people, share a meal with them, stay at their houses as family guests and taste their local drinks. Another tour company, Alpine Adventure (2020), defined AT in Nepal was created to allow a person viewing the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of locally grown foods and drinks and stay at in a rural house. They also have an opportunity to learn the working farm. Moreover, AT allows tourists to contact close to the farmers and participate in traditional ways of agriculture (Pandey and Pandey, 2011). According to Himalayan Organic Farm Nepal (2020), AT is an opportunity for the travelers to explore the farm, peak seasonal fruits and vegetables by their hand and enjoy the meat of birds and animals on choice. From these definitions, we can majorly understand that the AT in Nepal is the combination of keywords such as local food, farm stay, nearby tourism attractions, local heritage, and culture.

After the political stability in Nepal, different new business concepts have been practiced in rural areas, even in the agricultural sector. Business motive farming, which is essential for AT point of view, is growing in Nepal like tea and coffee farming in the eastern part, fruit farming like citrus, orange, Kiwi in the hilly region, and apple farming in the Himalayan region is gaining attention. Besides foods and vegetable farming, animal husbandry is also gaining recognition in the country. In addition to the as usual sheep and yak farming in the Himalayan region, Kalij pheasant and quail farming in the Hilly region, ostrich farming in the Terai region has been started recently. Visiting tea garden in eastern Nepal, Jungle safari, and Tharu culture in the districts of Terai, spend a night in a homestay is becoming popular around the country. These are only the type of agritourism. As the 1st World Congress on Agritourism defines AT is to be performed in the farms, and by the farmers (Eurac

Research, 2018), the specific definition of AT is necessary. The explanation for AT in the Nepalese context can be divided into three sections. These divisions are essential because of the terrain's geographic landscape. Precisely, the activities which are performed on a farm of Terai cannot be executed on the farm of Himalayan region. Therefore, AT events are also differing from one region to another.

Himalayan region

From the tourism point of view, primarily this region is famous for either for trekking for mountaineering. Secondly, yak, donkey, and horse are popularly found in this region. In addition to traditional farming activities, apple farming is becoming more popular in some of the districts due to road connectivity. Thus, the agritourist can enjoy in the yak/sheep and apple farms. Tourists stay at the farms, enjoy local food and culture, participate in cheese making activities, enjoy handicraft making woolen handicrafts, participate in the seasonal apple picking program, enjoy horse riding, trekking, and hiking in the nearby hills and mountains.

Hilly region

Trekking and sightseeing are the major tourist attraction in this region. Therefore, AT can be the combination of current homestay, participate in the agricultural activities, seasonable fruits, and vegetable picking, enjoy the local cultures and heritage, eat locally produced indigenous foods. More specifically, the tourists can participate in the handicraft's productions, both metal and non-metal, enjoy local Raksi (alcohol like gin or vodka) making, participate in the local festival celebrations and cultural programs. The tourists further can enjoy trekking, hiking, bird watching, rafting, canoeing and canyoning in the nearby hills, mountains, and rivers.

Terai region

The plain land in the Southern part of Nepal is famous for tours and sightseeing. Most of the national parks in this region are famous for jungle safari, birdwatching, and so on. These parks are a good habitat for endangered birds and animals. Therefore, the tourists stay in the farms, eat local food, enjoy farm activities, visit the nearby villages for cultural exchange, enjoy the jungle safari to see the endangered birds and animals. We can take Mithila culture and Tharu culture as representative cultures in the region. The agritourist can also have opportunities to experience some more indigenous people like Madhesi, Dhimal, Satar, Muslim, Rajbansi.

To summarize, AT in Nepal is also means operated by the farms by the farmers. However, due to either small or less organized farms in Nepal, tourists solely cannot enjoy farm activities. It is; therefore, AT is the combination of nearby tourist attractions. Specifically, trekking routes, hiking hills, jungle safari, bird watching, sightseeing natural and historical spots, and so on can be the composite products of AT.

Conclusion

Defining agritourism is essential from both tourists' and hosts' perspectives. Based on the definition, the host can upgrade the service to the tourists, and the tourists can enjoy the activities on the farms.

In this study, the author first presented the definition of AT in international society, then compared the AT between developed countries and developing countries. Then, AT definition is given based on the Nepalese geographical divisions i.e., Himalayan region, Hilly region, and Terai region. The AT in the areas are defined what can be the possible activities to earn extra money to the hosts and what activities the potential tourists can enjoy in the farms.

At this moment, very limited farms can host tourists in their farms. Therefore, farmers capacity building is necessary. Concisely, the local government should train the farmers in order to start AT in their farms. Moreover, to promote the AT, the role of Nepal Tourism Board and Private travel agencies are crucial. To make the successful agritourism, the target should be given to the trekkers and hikers.

In this study, the author is fully dependent on the secondary information; the future study should be conducted based on the primary information.

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