

RURAL TOURISM – AN OVERVIEW

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research provides an overview of rural tourism, types of tourism, its benefits for rural communities and some examples of rural tourism development in Canadian provinces and other jurisdiction of the world.

Rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments.

Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism. A major form of tourism is agritourism, which refers to, “the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation.

There are a wide and innovative set of rural/agritourism products and services available to the traveling public in all Canadian provinces. It includes agritourism, agricultural festivals, special events and festivals, the celebration of village historic sites, country fairs, agricultural travel routes that feature themes. All provincial governments, as well as local communities, are actively involved in rural tourism deployment and support agritourism networks.

Rural tourism is also revolutionizing businesses and prompting economic development across the globe. The US government has implemented several regional and state-wide development projects to increase the effectiveness of rural tourism/farm activities. The Australian and UK governments have also offered a wide range of products and services to promote tourism in the rural areas.

Tourism events have been found to increase business, income and employment in the region and are seen to assist with social and economic development. Rural tourism has many potential benefits for including employment growth, an expanded economic base, repopulation, social improvement, and revitalization of local crafts.

The extent to which these benefits are realized remains the subject of much debate. Certainly, there is evidence to support the claim that, as a vehicle of economic growth and diversification, tourism can make an important contribution to rural incomes both at the level of the tourism operators and more widely in the local economy.

As a general rule, however, rural communities are challenged to take full advantage of the tourism industry due to lack of sufficient infrastructure to support year round visitors. Therefore, in a bid to exploit the cash injection that tourism provides, with minimal additional resources, many rural communities have opted to host tourism events on a yearly basis. However, the single yearly basis events have limited potential benefits to the communities.

Tourism is not the panacea for all rural problems but it has number of positive attractions. It is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes.

1. BACKGROUND

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world¹. In both developed and developing countries, tourism is frequently supposed to be a viable means of raising the economic activity of regions². Additionally, the development of a tourism industry has been noted to promote the destination's image, enabling the region to achieve other objectives, such as business recruitment and retention³.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, tourism generates 12% of the global gross national product and it employs around 200 million people worldwide⁴. Tourist arrivals are estimated to reach 1 billion by 2010 and 1.6 by 2020 worldwide⁵.

The tourism and hospitality industry is an important contributor to Alberta's economy and is identified as a priority value-added sector in the province's economic development strategy. In 2006, tourism revenues were estimated to be in the order of \$5.3 billion. Approximately 10 per cent of Alberta's workforces – over 180,000 people – work in the tourism and hospitality industry. Alberta's tourism and hospitality industry is expected to experience strong growth over the next 10 years. Employment in the accommodation and food services segment of the industry is expected to grow on average by 2.2 per cent annually over the next five years and generate almost 10,913 new jobs by 2011⁶.

One of Travel Alberta's reports show that Alberta's current tourism revenue is \$5.8 billion with visits in Alberta numbering 23.6 million. The goal is to enable industry to grow revenues to \$6.2 billion and visits to 25.1 million by 2013⁷.

Given the expected growth of tourism there is a great optimism for rural tourism. Numerous agencies and academic researchers have identified tourism as a potential economic development tool, particularly for rural communities⁸. Rural Tourism is increasingly being used as a development strategy to improve the social and economic well being of rural areas.

Rural Tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or manmade attractions, amenities and facilities, transportation, marketing and information systems⁹. Rural tourism is very diverse and fragmented in terms of operational structures, activities, markets and operating environments¹⁰.

Rural tourism is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays,

¹Edgell 1990; Lo & Lai 2003

²Hall 1994

³Barkley 1993

⁴WTTC, 1995

⁵Pearce, 1995

⁶Statistics Canada and Alberta Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, *Canadian Business Patterns – Business Register March 2006*, Statistics Canada, *Total Tourism Sector and Labour Force Survey 2006*, Statistics Canada

⁷Travel Alberta Business Strategy 2010-2013.

⁸Wilkerson 1996; Prosser 2000

⁹Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997

¹⁰Roberts & Hall, 2001, citing Pearce, 1989)

adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism.

2. OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To collect information on rural tourism and to identify different types of rural tourism.
- To provide an overview on driving forces and benefits of rural tourism.
- To review tourism development in Canadian provinces and other jurisdictions.
- To identify issues for future research and development for rural tourism.

3. APPROACH AND SCOPE OF STUDY

This study draws on previous research available on websites and other documents. The research is not limited to Alberta but also reviews tourism development in other Canadian provinces and countries.

The study focuses on types of tourism, driving forces in rural tourism, its benefits and what makes rural tourism successful. It provides some examples of rural tourism in Canadian provinces and other countries.

The study also provides information on some best practices from other countries representing different geographic regions and stages of tourism development. The study also highlights some areas for future research and development for rural tourism.

4. WHAT IS RURAL TOURISM?

Rural tourism can be defined as the ‘country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments.¹¹ Consequently, rural tourism in its purest form should be¹²:

- Located in rural areas.
- Functionally rural – built upon the rural world’s special features of small-scale enterprise, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, “traditional” societies and “traditional” practices.
- Rural in scale – both in terms of buildings and settlements – and, therefore, usually small-scale.
- Traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families. It will often be very largely controlled locally and developed for the long term good of the area.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lane B., (1994, “What is rural tourism”, Journal of sustainable tourism Volume 2, No.7

5. TYPES OF RURAL TOURISM

Tourism is synthesized from mass and alternative tourism. Mass tourism is characterized by large numbers of people seeking culture holidays in popular resort destinations. Alternative tourism is sometimes referred to as “special interest tourism” or “responsible tourism” and it’s usually taken to mean alternative forms of tourism which give emphasis on the contact and understanding of inhabitants’ way of living and the local natural environment.¹³

The diversity of attractions included within rural tourism includes heritage tourism (sometimes referred to as cultural heritage tourism), nature-based tourism/ecotourism, agritourism, as well as partnership-based approaches, such as scenic byways and heritage areas. Heritage tourism refers to leisure travel that has as its primary purpose the experiencing of places and activities that represent the past.

A second major type of rural tourism activity is nature-based tourism/ecotourism (sometimes called recreation-based tourism), which refers to the process of visiting natural areas for the purpose of enjoying the scenery, including plant and animal wildlife. Nature-based tourism may be either passive, in which observers tend to be strictly observers of nature, or active (increasingly popular in recent years), where participants take part in outdoor recreation or adventure travel activities.

A third major form of tourism is agritourism, which refers to, “the act of visiting a working farm or any agricultural, horticultural or agribusiness operation for the purpose of enjoyment, education, or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation¹⁴. It includes taking part in a broad range of farm-based activities, including farmers’ markets, “petting” farms, roadside stands, and “pick-your-own” operations; engaging in overnight farm or ranch stays and other farm visits; and visiting agriculture-related festivals, museums, and other such attractions¹⁵.

¹³ Smith V., Eadington W., (1992), “Tourism alternatives, potentials and problems in the development of tourism”, Wiley, Chichester .

¹⁴ Lobo, 2001

¹⁵ Dane 2001

6. DRIVING FORCES IN RURAL TOURISM

These forces have been identified by many authors and can be summarized as¹⁶:

- Tourism generating regions for rural tourism are highly developed and urbanized – the stresses of urban living and the remoteness from the natural environment has created a desire for escape from the monoculture of city living. Rural locations offer an idealized release from stress and the opportunity to re-engage with a simpler, quieter way of life that offers rest and relaxation.
- Demand fuelled by media, over-familiarity and congestion with traditional tourist resorts and increased interest in alternative attractions – with its voracious appetite for content and the resultant over-exposure of many traditional tourist destinations, the media have sought out new and interesting tourism experiences for their lifestyle productions.
- Increasing environmental awareness and interest in the relationship between humans and the environment. Green issues have raised the attractiveness of rural experiences as ecologically sustainable tourism.
- Transport, communications, and the removal of political and economic barriers to travel have facilitated accessibility of rural areas.
- Increasing numbers of Free Independent Travelers and world-wide long-haul travel – many more travelers are FIT than in the past due to the increased capacity, especially in long-haul transport modes. When combined with increasing discretionary incomes, greater awareness of the range of experiences on offer, and greater mobility through private transport, the accessibility and attractiveness of rural destinations has been dramatically improved.
- A move toward short-break holidays - income and leisure time have changed so that shorter breaks with greater choice of leisure activities are sought. Changing work patterns have increased the popularity of shorter breaks that minimize the absence from work and the effect of absences on work flow and involvement.
- Better-educated travelers have increased interest in outdoor recreation, eco-tourism and special interest tourism - individualism drives a need for unique experiences and rural tourism, because of its fragmented nature and diversity of offerings, can satisfy this need.
- An increased interest in heritage can be satisfied through rural tourism as rural areas are often the repositories of remnant heritage.
- Rural areas are perceived as healthier, offering fresher air, cleaner water and the opportunity for outdoor recreation. Rural areas offer fresh, and sometimes, specialty foods.
- An increasing desire for authentic experiences including interaction with local people - Rural tourism is REAL (Rewarding, Enriches the spirit, provides Adventure and Learning); authenticity is believed to be found in genuine country experiences and lifestyles¹⁷.

¹⁶ Mackay, 1997; 117

¹⁷ MAF, 1994; DOT, 1993; Jenkins et al, 1997; Bartmann and Baum, 1998: 692-693; WTO, 1997c; Streckfuss, 1997

7. BENEFITS OF RURAL TOURISM

Rural tourism, while still only a minority tourism market, is making a valuable contribution to rural economies. Its contribution can be expressed not only in financial terms, but also in terms of jobs, contributions towards funding conservation, encouragement to the adoption of new working practices, and the injection of a new vitality into sometimes weakened economies. Potentially rural tourism promises some of the following benefits to rural development:

7.1. Job retention

Rural tourism cash flows can assist job retention in services such as retailing, transport, hospitality and medical care. It can also provide additional income for farmers, and, in some cases, for foresters and fisherman. Job retention is not as politically glamorous as job creation, but, by helping the viability of small communities, it is critical to the survival of marginal areas. Studies of rural Austria, Sweden and Ireland have documented the role of tourism in job retention.

7.2. Job creation

Job creation typically occurs in the hotel and catering trades, but can also take place in transport, retailing, and in information/heritage interpretation. Studies in Britain suggest that job creation varies by enterprise type. Farmhouse accommodation and bed-and-breakfast can create up to 23 jobs per £ 100 000 of tourism revenue. Job creation effects are less marked in hotels and caravan/campsites, yielding approximately six jobs per £ 100 000 of revenue.

7.3. New Business Opportunities

Tourism generates new opportunities for industry¹⁸. Even those rural businesses not directly involved in tourism can benefit from tourist activity through developing close relationships with tourist facilities where local foods can be used as part of the tourism offering in a locality¹⁹. Rural tourism facilitates expansion of complementary businesses such as service stations and new businesses are created to cater to tourist needs for hospitality services, recreational activities and arts/crafts²⁰.

7.4. Opportunities for Youth

The tourism industry is often promoted as an exciting and growing industry suited to the energies and enthusiasm of young people²¹. Career options are enhanced with the opportunities for training and direct involvement in running tourism businesses, especially those within small communities²².

¹⁸ Oppermann, 1996; WTO, 1997b; USTTA, 1995; EC-AEIDL, 1997; Hall, 1997; NSWTC, 1991

¹⁹ Telfer et al, 1996

²⁰ DOT, 1995b; ATSC, 1996

²¹ DOT, 1995b

²² ATSC, 1996

7.5. Service retention

Visitor information services can be provided by existing outlets, such as shops, thus increasing income flows if payment is made for acting as information outlets. Services can also benefit by the additional customers which visitors provide. Finally, tourism's importance to national economies can strengthen the political case for subsidies to help retain services.

7.6. Community diversification

Community diversification *is* an important activity in many upland and climatically marginal regions. Forest regions have suffered serious socio-economic problems in recent years, partly because of the mechanization of tree felling and processing, and partly because of falling prices following reduced timber demand. Rural tourism can assist forestry by diversifying income sources for forest communities if the special qualities of the forest environment for recreational use are realized and developed.

7.7. Rural Tourism Enhances and Revitalizes Community Pride

Tourism encourages conformity to an ideal image of community which can result in growth of personal ties and community solidarity. Thus the basis for community solidarity shifts from shared cultural background to shared image²³. Amenities play a fundamental role in shaping a community's identity and pride and so the potential of tourism for improvements to facilities and amenities has positive implications for community pride, particularly rural museums as an important repository of rural culture²⁴.

7.8. Preservation of Rural Culture and Heritage

In rural tourism the 'sense of place' is a fundamental element in both the tourists' and host community's feelings of what makes the area attractive to visit and live in. This sense of place is maintained partly through rural museums which play a vital role in preserving heritage²⁵.

7.9. Increase arts and crafts sale

Arts and crafts have a special place in the cultural heritage of regions and nations. Many commentators have noted that tourism can assist arts and crafts, both by recognizing their importance, and by purchasing craft products. Income flows from these activities are well documented. Support between the arts and tourism can be a two-way process. Many communities now use arts and crafts festivals as a marketing mechanism to encourage visitors to come to their areas.

7.10. Landscape conservation

Landscape conservation has become an increasingly important form of heritage protection. Landscape is of crucial importance to rural tourism but, equally, visitor use is vital to the

²³ Huang et al, 1996

²⁴ Betz, 1993; Prideaux et al, 1997).

²⁵ Macbeth, 1997; Prideaux et al, 1997

landscape conservation industry. Visitor use brings political benefits, can bring economic gains, and can provide jobs in maintaining and repairing traditional landscapes worn by recreational activities.

7.11. Environmental improvements

Environmental improvements such as village paving and traffic regulation schemes, sewage and litter disposal can be assisted by tourism revenues and political pressures from tourism authorities. These help develop pride of place, important in retaining existing population and businesses, and in attracting new enterprises and families.

7.12. The historic built environment

The historic built environment can benefit from rural tourism in two ways. Many historic properties now charge for admission in order to maintain their fabrics and surrounding gardens and parklands. Secondly, there are important buildings from the past which have become redundant. Churches have lost their congregations, castles have lost their wars, farm buildings have become too small for modern equipment, railway stations have lost their trains, and canal warehouses no longer have barge traffic.

The tourist industry can usually use these redundant buildings profitably and imaginatively: they can become attractions in their own right. The small town of St. Jacobs in Ontario, Canada, has converted grain stores into a craft centre; in Lanarkshire, Scotland, a folly constructed in the shape of a pineapple has become sought after as a cottage for holiday lets; in the Swiss valley of Safiental, a timber farm-house is maintained in its original pre-twentieth century condition by using it as a Youth Hotel.

A wide range of benefits has been identified as potential outcomes associated with promoting the development of agritourism²⁶. From an agricultural industry perspective, agritourism is perceived to be a means of:

- expanding farm operations;
- using farm based products in new and innovative ways;
- improving farm revenue streams;
- developing new consumer market niches;
- increasing awareness of local agricultural products;
- increasing appreciation of the importance of maintaining agricultural land uses;
- channeling additional on-farm revenues directly to family members who might otherwise have to work off the farm;
- giving a stimulus to upgrade farm living and working areas, as well as leisure facilities;
- providing opportunities to acquire managerial skill and entrepreneurial spirit, and
- increasing the long term sustainability for farm businesses.

²⁶ Agritourism Market and Product Development Status Report Prepared for British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food & Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, Centre for Tourism Policy and Research Simon Fraser University April 30, 2001

8. RURAL TOURISM / AGRITOURISM IN CANADIAN PROVINCES

8.1. Alberta

There is an extensive set of product and services available in the province which includes farmers' markets; farm and garden retail centres; various forms of accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfasts, cabins and cottages, campsites and RV parks); farm gate markets (e.g. flowers, plants, meat, dairy products, and processed foods); U-Pick centers; on-farm recreation activities (e.g., hunting, fishing, riding, nature observation, dancing); crafts retailing (e.g. local woodworking); events (Horse shows, workshops); and farm tours.

The provincial department of Agriculture and Rural Development coordinates agritourism development. The Department is involved in several agritourism development and promotion initiatives. Most of its initiatives in this regard are communicated via its website²⁷. The site also provides additional links which include: farmer's markets; agricultural fairs and exhibitions; the Alberta Country Vacation Association²⁸; Museums and Heritage Sites²⁹; Cowboy Trails³⁰ and a vacation planner associated with Travel Alberta³¹.

An example of a program which indirectly supports agritourism is Tourism Together³². This program provides information on product development, marketing, planning and communications strategies related to tourism.

In addition to government programs, the Alberta Market Gardeners' Association is producing information and publications of use to agritourism operators in their activities³³. These include: Find a Grower: Maps to Members; Seasons of availability for produce from Alberta's Market Gardeners; Tips & FAQ's for visiting U-Pick gardens; Recipes using fresh picked produce; and references to other related information sources (e.g. weather, farmers markets).

8.2. Ontario

There are a wide and innovative set of agritourism products and services available to the traveling public in Ontario. Services available in Ontario include a variety of guided agri-tours which are designed to complement more urban experiences. For instance, these include several walking tours, visits to museums, restaurants, and venues related to the production of agricultural produce (e.g., yarn and cheese factories, pork shops, as well farms featuring emus, goats, elk, horses and dairy cows). Ontario has been particularly effective in building themed tourism routes based on alliances between tourism communities and agricultural operators.

²⁷ [/www.agric.gov.ab.ca](http://www.agric.gov.ab.ca)

²⁸ <http://albertacountryvacation.com>

²⁹ <http://www.gov.ab.ca/mcd/mhs/mhs.htm>

³⁰ <http://www.thecowboytrail.com>

³¹ <http://www.travelalberta.com>

³² <http://www.tourismtogether.com>

³³ <http://www.amga.ab.ca>

The Apple Route is a 64 kilometer themed travel route is a massive man-made feature called *The Big Apple*. Its historical guide highlights the agriculture, retail, natural and cultural attractions along the route³⁴.

The Huron Harvest Trail and Explore Ontario's West Coast programs have been developed to spotlight this rich agricultural area³⁵. Travelers are encouraged to explore villages and country lanes, as well as discover farm gate markets featuring fresh produce and other foods, country butchers, bakeries and unique farm adventures. Locally produced crafts, bed and breakfasts, country inns, lakeside resorts and farm vacations are all partnered into the Trail's product mix.

A "*Just Can It*" program offering individuals, service clubs, church groups and entrepreneurs the opportunity to create their own preserves in a fully-equipped food processing kitchen. With their motto being "*Savour Niagara ... One Bite At A Time*," the goal of this program is to assist local growers and processors of Niagara specialty food items to develop and market their products³⁶. A Wine Country Cooking School *with a "participation kitchen"* emphasizes "great-tasting, straightforward recipes that work — using fresh, local, seasonal ingredients with an eye to matching food and wine."³⁷

8.3. Québec

A large range of sites and attractions are associated with Québec's tourism industry. Agritourism products and services are offered by maple syrup operations, honey producers, wineries, cheese producers, as well as accommodation, food service and agricultural events suppliers. Maple Syrup Farms operations attract tourists from around the world³⁸. Many of the more successful ones have focused on a traditional or folkloric type of operation - demonstrating how maple syrup was produced in the past. These operations are also successful in selling their produce in various forms (e.g. maple sugar, maple butter, syrup and foods) with many of these operators having to purchase additional supplies for sale from neighboring commercial producers.

Two types of farm based agritours occur in Québec. The first is exotic farm tours, while the second is old fashioned or folkloric farm tours. Québec farms which open their doors to tourists for farm tours are generally those with exotic animals such as llamas, emu and ostrich. Very few commercial farms offer farm tours. Wineries and Vineyards of Québec are an important component of the tourism industry and many of them have three facets to their operation - tourism, education and the sale of products³⁹.

³⁴ <http://www.appleroute.com/>

³⁵ www.ontarioswestcoast.ca/

³⁶ <http://www.niagara.com>

³⁷ www.npat.com

³⁸ www.canadamaplesyrup.ca

³⁹ <http://www.winesofcanada.com/quebec.html>

8.4. Manitoba

The Manitoba government has produced an Agritourism: On-Farm Diversification brochure for farmers that might wish to consider diversifying into agritourism⁴⁰. As well, the Ministry of Agriculture maintains a directory of agricultural enterprises in Manitoba entitled *Agriculture and Food Ventures in Manitoba 2000-2001 Directory*⁴¹. From a tourism perspective, the province's Manitoba Vacation Planner includes a range of tourism products and services. Included in the Planner are agritourism products associated with cultural heritage themes. For example, Steinback's Mennonite Heritage Village and Dauphin's Ukrainian Heritage Village are two high-profile attractions which spotlight not only agricultural, but also cultural and homesteader themes. In addition, several farm and ranch operators provide full descriptions of their operations in this Vacation Planner directory.

8.5. New Brunswick

Examples of New Brunswick's agritourism initiatives include Maple Sugar Madness⁴², which features a hike to a sugar camp, participation in the production of maple syrup and the baking of a maple sugar treat, and Splendid Scenes and Salad Greens, which highlights a bike tour of a herbal farm, pepper hothouse and edible flower garden and the preparation of a customized salad and dressing.

A variety of initial programs designed to encourage agritourism development have been instituted in recent years. The province's Rural Development Branch launched a Product Development Program in 1998 to support cottage industry producers that were developing new products for entry into the market place. The Edible Adventure agritourism product was also launched in 1998⁴³. Participants in the Edible Adventures program are advertised in the Provincial Travel Planner and other travel guides.

8.6. Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan's rural tourism includes fixed attractions (e.g., historic farms and agricultural heritage museums), events (agricultural conferences/conventions, rodeos, fairs and exhibitions, historic events) and services (e.g., accommodation, catering and tour operations). While agritourism in Saskatchewan has limited market recognition, several strategies and tactics are being considered to address this situation. These include:

- Developing an agritourism "product club" that can be linked with other related agritourism operations across the region (e.g., Pan-Prairie Agritourism Product Club) and Canada;
- Sponsoring conferences to validate agritourism as a growth sector and to create provincial momentum;
- Developing databases for promotion and marketing of agritourism products;
- Introducing multi-generational programs which package agritourism products for grandparents and grand-children;

⁴⁰ <http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/financial/agribus/ccf01s01.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.gov.mb.ca/agriculture/financial/foodventures/agritourism.html>

⁴² <http://www.tourismnewbrunswick.ca/Home/AboutNewBrunswick/WeatherSeasons/Spring/MapleSyrup.aspx>

⁴³ <http://www.apascc.org/other/nbardjan1999.htm>

- Creating farm-based immersion travel programs;
- Increasing the scope and number of agri-related festivals;
- Promoting hunting/fishing opportunities with rural B&B and country vacation destinations;
- Partnering with local corridor marketing associations;
- Partnering with other international agricultural marketing initiatives;

9. RURAL TOURISM IN OTHER COUNTRIES

9.1. United States

Several regional and state-wide development projects have been implemented to increase the effectiveness of rural tourism/farm activities. These include:

- Numerous states have developed a farm tours brochure program to promote agritourism.
- The development of several training publications on how to open and operate farm-based bed and breakfast businesses, as well as other agritourism and valued-added processing enterprises.
- The delivery of professional development conferences for agritourism farmers.
- Creating new direct marketing networks and identifying and responding to marketing issues affecting small farmers by sponsoring an annual forum of farmers market managers and conducting regional focus groups.
- Establishing a one-stop farmer direct marketing information clearinghouse for handling inquiries and routing calls to appropriate sources⁴⁴.
- Establishing a directory of all active farmers markets, which will be maintained at the website, with a new directory published in July of each year.
- Development of a training program for managers of farmers markets and marketing information programs for small farmers through distance learning facilities.
- Feasibility studies for year-round farmers market facilities.

North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Association (NAFDMA) provides information and education support to direct farm marketing operators in Canada and the United States. NAFDMA helps operators, growing a wide range of products, to maximize their efforts⁴⁵.

9.2. Australia

Australian agritourism suppliers offer a wide range of products and activities. Agritourism experiences include farm holidays, horse riding treks, day farm visits and technical tours and wine tasting tours for individual travelers and groups. All of these experiences involve meeting Australian people and experiencing their unique lifestyles.

In Australia, farm vacations or "stays" are recognized as a significant component of the country's tourism product mix. From a public policy perspective, the nation's State tourism authorities have regional branches, which play marketing and promotional roles with host farms. In some cases the host farmers are asked to pay for the inclusion of their properties in State brochures, but this is not always the case. Each state within the country has a membership funded Association representing Host Farm operators.

The state associations play a role in promoting their member's products in advertising brochures. The nationally based Australian Farm and Country Tourism is mandated with the responsibility of coordinating the promotion of farm based tourism at the national level. Its role is to contribute to the efficiency, quality and profitability of Australia's rural tourism operators, while increasing

⁴⁴ www.ams.usda.gov/directmarketing

⁴⁵ <http://farmersmarket.ucdavis.edu/docs/about.html>

the profile and recognition of the importance of tourism for rural Australia. The Australian Tourism Industry Association also promotes farm stay tourism as a component of their overall product portfolio.

9.3. *United Kingdom*

Many of the rural tourism and agritourism development programs in the United Kingdom are driven by policies applicable in other European jurisdictions. The UK's most significant agritourism marketing organization is the Farm Holiday Bureau (FHB). It co-ordinates the marketing of a network of over 1000 farms providing both bed-and-breakfast and self-catering accommodation. These establishments are found throughout the United Kingdom. The focus of the marketing program is on promoting quality accommodation with value for money prices.

FHB member properties are inspected regularly to ensure that a high standard of cleanliness, courtesy and service is maintained. Ireland's Department of Agriculture and Food has developed a Grant Aid for Agritourism and Organic Farming program⁴⁶. The objective of the scheme is to ensure a regular supply of organic produce to the market by the development of organic co-operatives/groups/companies.

⁴⁶ <http://www.csfinfo.com/htm/projects/agriculture/agritourism.htm>

10. SOME BEST PRACTICES OF RURAL TOURISM

10.1. Ballyhoura (Ireland)

Ballyhoura's countryside is attractive and typically Irish, but has no outstanding tourism resource. It has relied on promoting a genuine rural experience and warm welcome, hence the slogan 'Truly rurally yours'. The region has only emerged as a tourism destination since 1986⁴⁷. Building from a low base, it now includes a range of accommodation, small scale attractions (such as open farms and interpretative centres), and countryside recreation facilities. The tourism strategy has two overall objectives to provide a cooperative marketing function through groups of enterprises working together and to improve the range and quality of the tourism product, on three levels:

- encouraging local people to start up new enterprises;
- supporting the improvement and expansion of existing enterprises;
- attracting new inward investors, piggybacking on successful development.

The approach has been to provide a standard of facilities appropriate to the market. Recently, the emphasis has changed from expanding the range of the products to improving the quality and performance of existing businesses. Attention is also being paid to the quality of infrastructure and services delivered by Ballyhoura Fáilte as a whole. Wider community involvement is seen as very important. A community consultative committee of 50 members includes representatives from each village and local societies such as heritage groups. The main thrust of marketing is to tour operators and agents, providing them with a long term and quality personal service. Ballyhoura's own website has become a major source of individual enquiries. Careful attention is paid to the quality of the site, and the use of key words used by search engines related to known consumer interests.

A central reservation service is on offer for independent visitors. All visitors receive a basic information pack which includes a welcome letter, questionnaire and information leaflets. All enterprises are encouraged to talk to their guests. They are asked about their experiences during their visit, so problems can be rectified before they leave. As a result worthwhile adjustments have been made, such as introducing language training as a product.

Ballyhoura Development has administered many grants. The allocation of LEADER resources reflects the market demand for accommodation and also focuses on quality. For example, grants are available for upgrading self-catering accommodations.

a) *Managing tourism impact*

Policy objectives focus on economic benefit. For each initiative, employment targets are set and monitored. Direct employment is measured by obtaining feedback from enterprises. In addition, an economist commissioned by Ballyhoura developed a simple model for relating visitor numbers and accommodation occupancy levels to revenue generated and employment supported. Separate ratios are calculated for domestic and foreign visitors and for different types of

⁴⁷ <http://www.ballyhoura.com/>

accommodation. This has helped to check achievement against targets. The impact of tourism on the local community is monitored through the Community Consultative Committee.

b) Key success factors

- Making use of established national agencies, brands and quality standards.
- Working with a few motivated enterprises to improve quality.
- Actively targeting the group market.
- A successful organizational model, based on a development agency with funding and a cooperative marketing agency.
- Effective use of the internet.
- Strong involvement of the local community in initiatives.
- A visitor centre as a tangible focus for visitor and business services.
- An emphasis on product development, backed by grants and training, leading to improved physical and service standards.

10.2. Basilicata (Italy)

Basilicata is a small region in the far south of Italy⁴⁸. It has two short stretches of coastline but is primarily an inland region. It has rich vegetation and a notable cultural heritage ranging from Greek temples and Roman thermal baths to Norman castles and medieval abbeys. Basilicata has a modest amount of tourism. Tourism has been slowly growing; however, it is very highly concentrated in the summer season and on the coast, with the internal rural area being little visited. Rather than a comprehensive tourism strategy, the approach has been to concentrate on a specific quality initiative. The broad objectives were:

- to develop collaboration between the public and private sectors;
- to understand the needs and expectations of existing and potential markets;
- to help enterprises meet these needs through training and advice;
- to set up and promote a specific quality offer, which would influence others through demonstration.

The resulting initiative was called *ÔTurismo di Qualit.Õ*, a phrase applicable to the output as well as the process. It was realised that in order to create a quality product, detailed research was required on the resources, the enterprises and their views, and potential markets as well as current visitors. The first phase, in 1996, involved a comprehensive audit of tourism facilities, services, cultural and environmental heritage and relevant infrastructure. The second stage involved two extensive consumer surveys. These surveys revealed a divergence of opinion between people who had been to the region and those who had not.

The positive reaction of existing visitors to the local culture and heritage confirmed the basis for a quality offer. Feedback from operators with a potential interest in the area pointed to the opportunity to package these strengths in specific itineraries and programs. This is being maintained, with further customer satisfaction surveys. Training workshops and advice on business and quality improvements were held as part of the scheme. This training has been extended more widely in the region.

Key success factors

- Innovative role of the local development agency.
- Product audit and feedback from operators.
- In-depth research on non-visitors as well as current visitors.
- Effective use of international study visits.
- Working together to create a specific product.
- Providing a bookable product by linking small rural experiences.

⁴⁸ <http://www.aptbasilicata.it/Home-Page.1+M52087573ab0.0.html>

10.3. Lungau (Austria)

Lungau is a small sub-region of the Salzburg region of Austria⁴⁹. It has a population of 21,000 spread over 15 municipalities. This is an attractive mountainous area with a complex of interlocking valleys. Tourism is important in Lungau but not dominant. Tourism employs approximately 600 people directly (10% of jobs), but overall around 20% of jobs are dependent on tourism.

There are 250km of cross-country skiing routes and five downhill skiing areas, without intensive winter sports development. In summer people come simply to enjoy the mountains, to walk and to cycle. Cultural attractions include castles and folk museums, but the main appeal is its rural atmosphere, local produce and natural, unspoiled environment. Based on these strengths Lungau competes with higher profile destinations. Key components of the strategy are:

- Improving traffic management with an emphasis on public transport.
- An attractive farm holiday product.
- Greater identity for, and promotion of, local specialty products.
- Strengthening land use planning policies, and agreement on capacity limits for new development.

The key to the new approach lies in bringing together the 15 separate municipalities into one strong body for Lungau as a whole. A Regional Development Corporation was formed to implement the regional development plan. Involvement of local businesses and other relevant organizations occurs through the tourism working group and subject working groups. The working groups have concentrated on strengthening quality in a number of themed areas, together with associated marketing campaigns.

This has involved identifying quality criteria, sometimes promoted through a label, and developing links with regional and national schemes. A *Nat.rlich Lungau* label is available to all kinds of enterprises, such as restaurants, farms, bakers, and wood producers⁵⁰. It is integrated across other sectors beyond tourism. The main criteria are that the product is made in Lungau; ingredients come from the Lungau area; and that the process is ecologically sound. For example, restaurants must have at least two dishes on their menu made from produce from Lungau organic farms. The quality label and corporate identity for the campaign is based on ÔGiant SampsonÕ, a figure from folklore. Individual initiatives have promoted local food and craft produce to visitors.

The quality management approach adopted in Lungau has centered on quality criteria and labels for different sectors, based on professional judgement and an overall understanding of market requirements. Various measures are taken on overall environmental quality. For example, air quality monitoring equipment measures pollution levels at certain times of the year. Results suggest that Lungau has a very clean environment.

⁴⁹ <http://www.lungau.at>

⁵⁰ www.regiemarket.org/.../Best_Practice_Presentation_Lebensraum_Lungau_Christine_Stadler.pdf

Promoting tourism by public transport has been a strong feature in Lungau. From the beginning the approach has been consumer orientated - providing an opportunity for a special kind of visit as well as reducing environmental impact from cars. The Lungau valleys bus was introduced to take visitors around the area. Lungau has won a number of prizes for its approach to public transport and is a member of a European initiative to promote sustainable transport in tourism destinations.

Key success factors

- New central tourism organization covering 15 municipalities.
- Strong link between tourism offer and local produce.
- Creation of quality criteria and labels for local produce; and niche markets such as families and activity tourism.
- Strong links to overall Salzburg region for quality and marketing initiatives.
- Comprehensive approach to promoting public transport.

10.4. Trossachs (Scotland)

The Trossachs is one of the Scotland's outstanding scenic areas with a population of 6,000 (dispersed throughout small rural communities). Forestry, agriculture and tourism are the main employers. Scenic beauty and accessibility from major urban conurbations makes it a hugely popular visitor destination, attracting 2.2 million visits each year. A handful of sizeable attractions cater for the mass market, but the majority of tourism businesses are small and family run⁵¹.

A number of public sector agencies have a long-standing commitment to developing tourism in the area. Visitor pressure and a lack of investment have led to a decline in the quality of visitor experience and some environmental degradation. To tackle these issues the Trossachs Trail Tourism Management Program was established in 1992 an overall aim to develop tourism in a way which brings maximum benefits to local communities and the local economy, while sustaining and enhancing the quality of the Trossachs environment. Key components of the program strategy are:

- to safeguard and enhance environment assets;
- to strengthen the local tourism industry and improve the quality of the visitor experience;
- to increase visitor contributions to the area;
- to increase visitor understanding and respect for the area;
- to monitor visitor levels and activities in order to find ways of managing and controlling their impacts.

The tourism management program has been very successful in bringing together influential agencies with differing remits, including potentially conflicting aims such as environmental conservation and tourism promotion. A community forum has been established with representatives from the private, voluntary and community sectors to discuss the progress and future work of the management program. Good communication has been established with the local community councils.

a) *Initiatives*

The Trossachs Trail is a car touring route linking tourism enterprises and natural attractions throughout the area. The route is signed and attractions are featured on a colourful map-based leaflet available in large quantities in various languages.

A network of 40 information boards has been established in car parks and lay-bys. Village welcome signs have been established as a cooperative venture, with community input into their design.

The two *tourist information centres* in the area have been promoted as visitor attractions in themselves. The new centre has attracted a 400% increase in visitor numbers and a much wider clientele, including the many coach parties which stop in the town.

⁵¹ <http://www.trossachs.co.uk/>

Gastronomy: The Food Partnership Project is a local scheme for which two local groups were established, a producers group and consumers group, to encourage local purchasing and to promote the marketing opportunities for tourism businesses.

Marketing: Marketing activities have been undertaken through the regional tourist board who produce a range of print and a central booking service.

Monitoring: A comprehensive monitoring program has been a key strength. It aims to track the scale and distribution of visitation, as well as visitor attitudes and satisfaction. An economic monitor, involving interviews with 130 enterprises, has investigated general levels of business as well as measuring awareness and impact of the program amongst local businesses.

Training, grants and quality assurance: The local enterprise company and regional tourist board operate several schemes aimed at improving quality in the local industry. A small grants scheme offers local businesses up to 8 000 euro for physical improvements or market development. A training program offers over 40 workshops each year.

b) Key Success factors

- Increasing the quality of the visitor experience through physical improvements.
- A focus on visitor orientation and information provision.
- A strong strategy accompanied by clear goals and action plan.
- A flexible partnership of influential agencies achieving more than would be possible individually.
- A local base generating credibility and community involvement.
- A systematic and comprehensive program of monitoring.

11. WHAT MAKES RURAL TOURISM SUCCESSFUL?

11.1. Community involvement

For an area to become a rural tourism destination, not just a stop off point, structured networks and collaborative agreements between public and private sector actors are essential. Community involvement is a key part of the equation.

11.2. Proximity to a generating market or gateway

Rural tourism destinations must be easily accessible to potential visitors through reliable transportation systems.

11.3. Product Development (Tourism planning, infrastructure, and activities)

This should include sound tourism development planning, investment in tourism-related infrastructure, and a range of activities to satisfy the diverse tastes of visitors. Work to support rural tourism infrastructure development by providing technical assistance, facilitation and promotion, and economic impact analysis support.

11.4. A visitor center

Rural communities must have a welcoming center where visitors can seek information on local attractions, activities, and accommodations, and ask questions of people who are knowledgeable about the area.

11.5. Partnership Collaboration /Cultural Heritage Welcome Centers

Key to maximizing rural tourism marketing efforts is the need to create and leverage potential partnerships with cultural/heritage segments. It may help to provide value-added services for consumers, including providing directions and creating awareness for rural tourism locations and historical/cultural activities—successfully differentiating them from other destinations.

11.6. A quality brand and regional label

Brand identity may increase awareness of the destination among its identified target market segments. A brand is the way in which consumers perceive or distinguish a destination. To be effective, a brand should unify all of rural's functional (recreation and events) and emotional benefits (fun, culture and solitude) under one all-inclusive identity (image and positioning statement) to create an indelible impression in the mind of the consumer.

11.7. Funding

Identify creative ways to support rural tourism funding in an effort to maximize and leverage existing marketing efforts. The long-term sustainability of tourism rests on the ability of community leaders and tourism professionals to maximize its benefits and minimize its costs.

12. FUTURE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

In almost all business sectors research and development involves a partnership between the public and private sectors. The need for partnership is very important if rural tourism is to succeed. Rural tourism is growing in a fragmented and ad hoc way: public sector partnerships can co-ordinate activities. Since many of rural tourism's activities take place in the public domain, careful research into environmental and visitor management is necessary to maintain established community goals such as landscape, nature and heritage protection during the restructuring of the rural economy away from primary production towards a greater reliance on the service sector. Research in the following areas could benefit most of rural tourism initiatives:

12.1. Market Information

Little is known about the market rural tourism. This is a major problem in determining the size, characteristics and requirements of the market. Without this information, it is difficult to plan infrastructure investment, to provide effective business training, to encourage suitable numbers and types of new entrants into rural tourism and develop marketing campaigns. Market information studies need to cover market groups already taking rural holidays, and those who do not. For both groups, basic positioning information should include age/family size/occupational characteristics/area of origin/holiday patterns during current year and previous years/ perceived requirements of holidays/likely accommodation type/likely method of travel/method of choosing holidays/knowledge and perception of specified "control" areas⁵².

12.2. Market relations

Directly linked with the market information question comes the issue of how best to relate to markets. Major resorts and tour operators use sophisticated, expensive and sometimes wasteful methods to reach their customers. Rural tourism areas often (but not always) have weak and amateur links to their markets. There would be value in the publication of an evaluated good-practice guide looking at a range of successful areas and the techniques they have employed to relate to their markets.

12.3. Benefit Assessment and Enhancement

Rural tourism investment is undertaken largely to improve the economic, environmental and social well being of rural areas. Relatively little is known about the levels of return on different types of investment: almost nothing is known about the long term impact of less tangible forms of investment such as training, strategy planning etc. Typical problems faced by investment planners in rural areas are gaps in knowledge on returns from:

- tourism information centres;
- visitor and heritage centres;
- craft workshops and galleries;

⁵² TOURISM STRATEGIES AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT PARIS 1994

- on-road cycle route provision;
- off-road cycle route provision;
- public transport enhancement;
- scenic road construction;
- training in business skills;
- training in hospitality skills;

12.4. Management, Control and Operational Issues

Research is necessary to evaluate the management, control and operational questions involved in creating sustainable rural tourism. Evaluation should be made in terms of job retention, creation and diversification, visitor satisfaction, capital and manpower requirements, environmental protection and community participation and partnership. For long term strategic planning, an increasing number of rural regions and localities are developing tourism strategy plans. These plans assess tourism assets, weaknesses and environmental carrying capacities. After a review of market opportunities, the long term plan looks at how best to develop and manage specific areas, communities and ecosystems. The plans discuss infrastructure requirements, traffic management schemes, new enterprise development, training for tourism businesses and marketing techniques.

At the tactical level, the implementation of strategic plans requires detailed knowledge of issues such as visitor management schemes, heritage interpretation, ways of encouraging new entrants to tourism, the validity of co-operative marketing schemes, rural public transport schemes, historic building conservation and ways of successfully integrating nature conservation and tourism.

12.5. Training

Successful rural tourism requires new skills: in marketing, in hospitality, in catering, in heritage interpretation and guidance, in visitor management, in festival and event promotion, in building conversion, and in rural tourism strategy planning itself. Training has tended to concentrate on small businesses and employees. It has usually been short term, with little linkage between courses, and no long term training plan. Existing business courses have usually been adapted: little specifically tailor-made material has been produced on rural tourism. Training for rural tourism professionals, planners and administrators is less well developed. The market is smaller, but paradoxically, the need is probably greater. Training materials are usually adapted from other subject materials, and a series of unrelated short courses are the norm.

12.6. Community Involvement and Community/Industry Co-operation

Community involvement and community/industry co-operation are special features of rural tourism in some places. They can bring local capital investment into play, can lessen conflicts between visitor interests and local interests, and can contribute towards the authenticity of rural holidays which many visitors seek. Yet community involvement is unsuccessful in some places, while very valuable in others. Research is needed to ascertain whether there are any basic ground rules for this type of work, whether involvement is only successful in the short term, and what exactly can and cannot be delivered in co-operation with rural communities.

12.7. Best or Bad Practice Assessment

There are many examples of rural tourism initiatives across the world. Few are known about beyond their national or even regional boundaries. Written evaluations of the initiatives are usually published in obscure places. Comparisons of one initiative with another are rarely possible because different criteria are used in each case. Perhaps most important of all, only successful schemes are normally covered. Yet, much can be learnt from failures and, in an experimental field, failures are a necessary risk if new ideas are to be tested.

13. FINAL THOUGHTS

Generally, rural tourism is an opportunity for rural development however; it may not be as great as some perceive and it may not be suitable for every location. For example, local tourism impact varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force qualifications, characteristics and seasonality issues. Therefore, the development of rural tourism offers potential solutions to many of the problems facing rural areas. As a result there has been an increasing dependence on and support for rural tourism in the hope of achieving the potential benefits.

The extent to which these benefits are realized remains the subject of much debate. Certainly, there is evidence to support the claim that, as a vehicle of economic growth and diversification, tourism can make an important contribution to rural incomes both at the level of the tourism operators and more widely in the local economy.

Rural Tourism events have been found to increase business, income and employment and are seen to assist with social and economic development. Tourism can be an important source of jobs for rural communities. Tourism not only offers business opportunities to local residents, but it can also enhance local quality of life. Tourism can also support local culture in rural areas by encouraging restoration of local and regional historic sites.

However, as a general rule, rural communities are challenged to take full advantage of the tourism industry due to lack of sufficient infrastructure to support year round visitors. Therefore, in a bid to exploit the cash injection that tourism provides, with minimal additional resources, many rural communities have opted to host tourism events on a yearly basis.

The fact that rural tourism enterprises tend to be small scale and supply a highly seasonal market present a number of other challenges for rural tourism development. Not all rural areas are equally attractive to rural tourists and simply providing accommodation facilities does not guarantee demand. The total product package must be sufficient to attract and keep tourists, offering suitable opportunities for spending⁵³. Developing and organizing rural tourism may require a significant investment either beyond the means of the business owner or greater than justified by potential returns⁵⁴. Local communities and businesses may find it difficult to adapt to a service role. The quality of products and services must match tourist's demands and expectations.

Therefore, Tourism is not the panacea for all rural problems but it has number of positive attractions⁵⁵. It is one of the many opportunities that rural communities might consider to improve productivity and incomes.

⁵³ Gannon, 1994

⁵⁴ Fleischer & Felenstein, 2000

⁵⁵ Long and Lane 2000

