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Rural tourism – an important pillar in rural community development

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On the occasion of World Tourism Day 2020 with the theme of Tourism and Rural Development, the tourism industry has an opportunity to recognize and reinforce its contribution to the development of rural communities towards sustainable development goals through its social, cultural, political, and economic value.

Rural tourism can be understood as a type of tourism where travelers from other places come to a rural area for leisure or experiencing a rural lifestyle and culture, thereby creating economic and social benefits for the locality.

According to The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a comprehensive definition of rural tourism should be: located in rural areas; built upon their special features in natural heritage, traditional societies customs; on small scale; traditional in character, growing slowly and organically, and connected with local families; sustainable development; representing the complex pattern of the rural environment, economy, and history.



Rural tourism can be divided into three main categories: ecotourism, agritourism and heritage tourism.

Ecotourism is a type of tourism based on nature, including activities such as visiting natural areas to enjoy the scenery, learn about local flora and fauna.

With agritourism, the second major type of rural tourism, agritourists often visit farms or ranches, participate in courses of gardening or agricultural product processing, visit agricultural exhibitions, flower festivals for the purpose of experiencing or education.

Finally, heritage tourism in rural areas may include activities such as visiting temples, monuments, relics related to history, war, art or archaeological sites.

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Benefits of rural tourism for the development of rural communities

Although rural tourism is a small market in the entire tourism industry, it has many vital contributions to the development of rural areas. Tourism is considered as one of the main economic pillars in many rural areas in the world. In the recently released Policy Brief on tourism, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres emphasized that “for rural communities, indigenous peoples and many other historically marginalized populations, tourism has been a vehicle for integration, empowerment and generating income.”

According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), there are nearly 1.8 billion young people in the world live in rural areas of low and middle-income countries. The youth in rural communities are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. This creates the tendency to migrate to the cities for seeking jobs and improving income. That causes disadvantages in maintaining and preserving local customs and heritages. With this reality, tourism is a solution to create jobs and income sources for rural communities, contribute to preventing migration trends of the youth. For many rural communities in the world, tourism offers employment opportunities and livelihood for many people, especially the youth and women.



Last September 27 marks the 40th anniversary of World Tourism Day with the theme “Tourism and Rural Development”, which is also the theme that UNWTO designated for 2020. In the current context, the theme “Tourism and Rural Development” is more relevant than ever because rural areas are being affected directly and indirectly by Covid-19. Disadvantages such as the old population, low income and lack of economic diversity make rural communities face many difficulties. UNWTO predicts that domestic tourism will resume before international tourism. And if managed well, this can help rural communities, protect locals’ livelihoods and boost local economies.

Besides, rural tourism also has positive impacts on the preservation of local heritage, natural landscapes and culture. Properly exploiting rural tourism will promote initiatives and innovations to preserve and promote the features and traditions of rural communities, thereby creating sources of revenue for restoration and protection of historical sites and natural landscapes.

Conclusion

According to UNWTO, the year 2020 with the theme of “Tourism and Rural Development” is an opportunity to promote the potentials of tourism to create jobs and opportunities for rural communities, as well as boost integration and highlight the roles of tourism in preserving and promoting natural and cultural heritage.

Source: [Destination Review](#)



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