

JOURNAL OF SCIENTIFIC METRICS AND EVALUATION



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Analysis of rural tourism as the main tourism modality in natural environments

Análisis del turismo rural como la principal modalidad turística en entornos naturales

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Suggested Citation (APA, 7th Edition): Noa Guerra, D., Mejía-Ríos, J., & Ramos Guzmán, F. (2024). Analysis of rural tourism as the main tourism modality in natural environments. *Journal of Scientific Metrics and Evaluation*, 2(I), 69-88. <https://doi.org/10.69821/JoSME.v2iI.12>

Article

Abstract

Keywords: rural areas, tourist activity, tourist modalities, rural tourism, economic diversification

Article History

Received: February 28, 2024;

Revised: March 12, 2024;

Accepted: April 8, 2024;

Published: July 18, 2024

Over the years, tourism has grown rapidly and managed to position itself as one of the main sectors of the economy. Due to its transformative nature, it is presented in natural environments with a varied range of offers and services, which place rural tourism as one of the main tourism modalities. Furthermore, the social, economic, and environmental dimensions are involved in the tourism management of these spaces, which guarantees the sustainability of tourist activities, taking into account the interests and needs of the local population. Based on these considerations, the objective of this article is to determine the importance of inserting rural tourism into the socioeconomic dynamics of rural areas; taking into account that they are spaces with the potential and capacities to manage initiatives or undertakings tempered with the particularities and development needs of the rural environment. To do this, a methodology with a predominantly qualitative approach was used, with documentary analysis as the main technique. The results were a detailed analysis of tourism management in rural areas based on the practical experience of the insertion of rural tourism in different countries. In conclusion, it was possible to confirm the importance of developing tourism management in rural areas through rural tourism, where tourism activity is seen as a fundamental complement that contributes to diversifying and revitalizing the local economy.



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| Artículo de Revisión | Resumen |
|---|---|
| <p>Keywords: áreas rurales, actividad turística, modalidades turísticas, turismo rural, diversificación económica.</p> <p>Historial del artículo Recibido: 28 de febrero de 2024; Revisado: 12 de marzo de 2024; Aceptado: 8 de abril de 2024; Publicado: 18 de julio de 2024</p> | <p><i>A lo largo de los años, el turismo ha crecido rápidamente y ha logrado posicionarse como uno de los principales sectores de la economía. Debido a su naturaleza transformadora, se presenta en entornos naturales con una variedad de ofertas y servicios, lo que coloca al turismo rural como una de las principales modalidades turísticas. Asimismo, las dimensiones sociales, económicas y ambientales están involucradas en la gestión turística de estos espacios, lo que garantiza la sostenibilidad de las actividades turísticas, teniendo en cuenta los intereses y necesidades de la población local. Basándose en estas consideraciones, el objetivo de este artículo es determinar la importancia de insertar el turismo rural en la dinámica socioeconómica de las áreas rurales; teniendo en cuenta que son espacios con potencialidades y capacidades para gestionar iniciativas o emprendimientos acordes con las particularidades y necesidades de desarrollo del entorno rural. Para ello, se utilizó una metodología con un enfoque predominantemente cualitativo, con el análisis documental como técnica principal. Los resultados fueron un análisis detallado de la gestión turística en áreas rurales basado en la experiencia práctica de la inserción del turismo rural en diferentes países. En conclusión, se pudo confirmar la importancia de desarrollar la gestión turística en áreas rurales a través del turismo rural, donde la actividad turística se ve como un complemento fundamental que contribuye a diversificar y revitalizar la economía local.</i></p> |



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INTRODUCTION

Currently, sociocultural and economic development has brought with it advances in various sectors of society, which is why various transformations have been evident that have contributed favorably to significant advances and improvements (Águila Sánchez, 2020; Rodríguez Torres, 2021; Rodríguez, 2022; Martin et al., 2023; Roman-Acosta et al., 2023; Pérez Gamboa et al., 2023; Monzón Pinglo et al., 2023; Roman-Acosta & Barón Velandia, 2023; Roman-Acosta, 2023; Pérez Gamboa & Sánchez Castillo, 2024; Hernández Delgado et al., 2024; Urquiza Mendoza et al., 2024; Pérez Egües et al., 2024), with the tourism sector being one of the most beneficiaries. In this sense, tourism activity in rural areas, worldwide, has had a dizzying evolution and has gained greater momentum since the 90s. This entire situation arises due to the complex socioeconomic reality, highlighting: the decrease in agricultural activity, the reduction of investments, the absence of basic services, and the exodus of the rural population to urban environments.

The scope of tourism is then recognized, since it is probably the only economic activity that involves many other sectors, levels, and interests of society (Toselli, 2019; Fernández López et al., 2022; Román Santana et al., 2023). The starting point is to identify the resources and tourist attractions of each rural area, which can be used to boost its economy based on intangible elements (traditions, history, artistic manifestations, gastronomy) and other tangible elements (fauna and flora).

In rural areas, tourism can be managed as a local development strategy, and in this way, revalue the heritage and authenticity of each territory (Gascón González & Noa Guerra, 2020). Work must be done on development axes oriented to environmental, technological, cultural, political, and socioeconomic aspects (Aguilar-Cano et al., 2021); since local tourism development is integrative and dynamic. In this context, the tourist management of these spaces is perceived as a need to counteract the decline of "rural" from a socioeconomic point of view.

The tourism sector evolves and adjusts to current demand, and in recent years, there has been a generation more committed to the environment (Mateo Burbano et al., 2020); thus, sustainable tourism is born. By highlighting the sociocultural values of the regions, this practice is encouraged, focused on respect and environmental care as a way of understanding the culture of the place visited (Campos Herrero et al., 2022; Rodríguez Jiménez et al., 2022; Sánchez-Calero et al., 2023). It is inferred that geography impacts and interrupts the perspectives of social mobility (Davies & Donnelly, 2023), which motivates visitors and commits to the practice of responsible tourism.

In another direction, the importance of tourism for the economy of any region is valued by the existence of cultural and/or natural resources of interest (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2023). Therefore, the tourist uses and exploitation of the natural resources of rural territories turn rural space into a suitable setting for leisure (García Rodea et al., 2023). Consequently, tourist activity must be well planned and, at the same time, reduce the negative impact on the environment. In this way, it contributes to increasing the standard of living of local residents (Almanza Valdés et al., 2023). Sustainable development is then understood in correspondence with equal opportunities for the local population.

When mention is made of improving the living conditions of the rural population, the need to support their productive activities with a sustainable development approach is raised. In this way, local resources become relevant and can be used as a direct source that promotes the transformation of the economy and society at a local scale (Gascón González et al., 2021). It is valid to point out that many territories have been affected by migration, urbanization and digitalization processes (Carlisle et al., 2023). This situation has modified lifestyles and has contributed to the development of new productive activities, where tourism is inserted into the economy with a predominant role.

Within the tourist activity that is inserted in rural areas, rural tourism stands out and can be defined as a non-agricultural activity that highlights the appreciation of natural resources, ecology, cultural heritage, landscapes, and local identities of any rural territory (Walter et al., 2023). Through this modality, rural areas enhance their cultural identity (material and intangible

heritage), and the farmer is considered a guardian of the land who aims to transmit his traditions and be socially revalued (Orlando Narváez & Choez Lucas, 2023; García García & Roman-Acosta, 2024). Its transformative nature is noted within the tourism sector and highlights the possibility it offers to diversify the economy in rural environments, always promoting the traditional local economy.

In many territories, there is a need to implement economic activities that diversify, and the insertion of rural tourism must be carefully evaluated due to the importance of valuing sociocultural, agrarian, and natural heritage as vital resources (Noa Guerra et al., 2024). In this scenario, this tourism modality is presented as a possible key factor within the local development of rural areas, where the protagonists of the process must be local residents capable of making decisions based on their well-being. This article aims to determine the validity of inserting rural tourism into the socioeconomic dynamics of rural areas.

METHODOLOGY

The present research had a qualitative approach, taking as reference the logical sequence of analysis described by Hernández Sampieri et al. (2014); at the same time, the documentary review was used, which had the mission of collecting, selecting, and choosing information derived from the analysis of primary sources. The fundamental objective of this technique was to guide the research, taking into account data already existing in various sources and the general vision of the topic addressed (Reyes & Carmona, 2020). Furthermore, it was taken into account that a documentary review involves a reflective process of elementary aspects that allow the evaluation of the categories of analysis studied (Obando et al., 2020; Roman-Acosta et al., 2024).

To develop this research, the following steps were outlined:

1. Identification of the topic: The topic of interest and specific objectives were defined
2. Selection of primary sources of information: The sources of information to be reviewed were identified and selected (articles from academic journals, books, research reports, theses, among others). The selection criteria were defined: relevance to the topic, academic quality and publication date
3. Data collection and analysis: A detailed reading was carried out, summarizing the findings and analyzing the information collected; which favored understanding the scope of the topic under study in different contexts
4. Presentation of results: The results of the analysis were synthesized and presented in a coherent and understandable manner in the context of the topic of interest

In this sense, a sample of 15 scientific articles and 1 undergraduate thesis was taken, which were detected after a review of the scientific literature, which allowed corroborating the necessary information on the topic under study in question, which, in turn, was summarized in table 1. These sources were key to clarify and determine the importance of rural tourism as the predominant tourism modality to be developed in rural environments.

Table 1

Main primary sources used to corroborate the research

| Authors | Year | Investigation title | Relevance level | Type of investigation | Methodology used |
|-------------------------|------|---|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Martínez Quintana | 2017 | Nature tourism: a sustainable tourism product | Medium | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| Cardoso Carreño et al. | 2019 | Analysis of rural tourism management based on local development | High | Original article | Mixed |
| Romagosa et al. | 2020 | International immigration and tourism in rural spaces. The case of the “microtowns” of Catalonia | High | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| Segura-Rodríguez et al. | 2021 | Agrotourism for Sustainable Development on Ecuadorian farms. A Documentary study | Medium | Original article | Mixed |
| Sánchez-Sánchez-Sánchez | 2021 | Determining factors of rural tourism in protected areas as a boost for rural development in Spain | High | Original article | Mixed |

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|-------------------------------|------|--|--------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Ramos Hernández et al. | 2021 | Impact of nature tourism in the Viñales National Park | Medium | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| Rivero Galván et al. | 2022 | Nature tourism in the form of agrotourism for sustainable local development in Guamuhaya | Medium | Original article | Mixed |
| Beltrán Panchana | 2023 | Sports tourism: water sports for the tourist development of Chulluype beach | Medium | Undergraduate thesis | Mixed |
| Frech Hurtado | 2023 | Knowledge management and tourism resilience in heritage destinations: the case of Oxapampa (Peru) | Medium | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| García Rodea et al. | 2023 | Analysis of the tourist profile and its relationship with the demand for rural tourism in the State of Mexico | High | Original article | Mixed |
| Orlando Narváez y Choez Lucas | 2023 | Peasant identities in Latin American community rural tourism. Ethnographic study in San Miguel de Chade, Manabí, Ecuador | High | Original article | Mixed |
| Guerra Dotto et al. | 2023 | The economy of experience in rural tourism entrepreneurship in the Sabiá Circuit in Matelândia – Brazil | High | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |

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|------------------------------------|------|--|--------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Quirós-Aguilar | 2023 | Analysis of the conditions for the promotion of sustainable tourism: Esparza canton, Costa Rica | Medium | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| Gordziejczuk y Mikkelsen | 2023 | Tourism and recreation in rural areas of Argentina: variations according to the 2002 and 2018 National Agricultural Censuses | High | Original article | Mixed |
| Garín Contreras et al. | 2023 | From traditional agriculture to rural tourism: Carahue, Chile | High | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |
| Montada Montero y Villarreal Reyes | 2024 | Economic contribution to the local development of the protected area of managed resources South Isla de la Juventud | Medium | Original article | Qualitative approach predominates |

Source: Own elaboration

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent decades, the effectiveness of tourism activity to facilitate and support quality of life policy, the revitalization of the community's heritage and culture, the preservation and protection of cultural and natural resources, among others, has become more relevant (Cruz Bermúdez & González Damián, 2020). It is taken into account that tourism transforms society because it provides new employment opportunities and promotes other commercial activities, such as agricultural activities (Lema Gallardo & Mullo Romero, 2022). In this framework, certain factors are distinguished that will be specific to determine the location of a natural space, which has the potential to insert tourism.

For these reasons, activities related to tourism must be carefully planned since they can cause negative impacts on the natural environment, and it is a worrying issue in terms of sustainability (Yayla et al., 2022). Correspondingly, it is advisable to temper and highlight the values and

commitment to a responsible practice of the different tourist activities to be developed, where the safeguarding of the natural environment is a premise, and the actors involved must achieve a coherent relationship between the management of tourist flows, market demand and the existing reality in the territory.

With the insertion of tourism in rural areas, an attempt is made to promote commercial and productive activities through an integrated offer of goods and services that generate employment for the population and satisfy their basic needs (Escobedo Garrido et al., 2023). Local entrepreneurs must create a favorable local economic environment, and the definition of strategies, policies, or lines of work will give way to the protection of the community from external interference. If we start from the endogenous, a tourism practice is generated that will respond to the needs of the territory in correspondence with the interests of the current tourism market.

Tourism in rural environments has been consolidated as a reactivating process, which enhances economic growth at a local scale and, in turn, generates structural changes (Noa Guerra & González González, 2023). This process is influenced by the use of the resources and assets of each community (Cerón Monroy et al., 2023); identifying them is vital to establish strategies and synergies that contribute to elevating lifestyles and diversifying the economy.

In the rural scenario, it is essential to identify the vocation and tourism potential, which will lead to the correct planning and feasible implementation of different activities. In this direction, Menoya Zayas et al. (2017) state that the tourist vocation is given by the interrelationships established between natural/cultural attractions and their potential for tourist use; the existing tourism product (combination of offers and infrastructure); the perception of the inhabitants and other intangible aspects, such as: peace, security, isolation or authenticity.

To develop tourism in these natural spaces, it must first be evaluated whether they have a tourist vocation, which depends on their tourism potential, and both elements must be considered when planning the development of different tourism modalities. In this direction, the tourism potential of a territory stands out, which lies in its capacity to attract tourists and satisfy their needs (Lazo Serrano et al., 2017). The capacities that a rural setting has to promote tourism and, in turn, attract visitors are distinguished, taking into account natural attractions as the main component.

When primary activities in rural settings, such as agriculture and livestock, fail to meet the needs of rural communities, new forms of income must be found; it is a reality that the greatest potential lies in the natural landscape that can be used from a tourist point of view (Battino et al., 2022). The tourism modalities that can be developed in rural areas stand out, responding to each

region's socioeconomic and natural characteristics. Table 2 summarizes these modalities, and it is worth highlighting that they can generate great interest and acceptance by producers in rural areas.

Table 2

Main tourism modalities that take place in rural environments

| Tourist modality | Assessments | Source |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Rural tourism | Economic activity complementary to agriculture, understood as a specific product that also emphasizes the flora and fauna of a territory together with its traditions; where the tourist is an active part of the community during their stay and participates in daily agricultural activities and other traditional events | (Cardoso Carreño et al., 2019; Romagosa et al., 2020) |
| Agrotourism | It is carried out on farms, plantations, cooperatives, farms, or agricultural facilities, where producers complement their income by providing a varied offer of goods and services; it is committed to the economic and social development of the communities and the motivation of the visitor focuses on livestock and agricultural practices, enjoying and learning about the cultural traditions of the town | (Segura-Rodríguez et al., 2021; Rivero Galván et al., 2022) |
| Nature tourism | It refers to natural habitats and their biodiversity, where the rural environment and the involvement of the resident population acquire great relevance; high conservation of the environment is appreciated, with attractive natural resources and a development of native cultural values; promotes the increase in environmental awareness and the creation of new markets for local and national economies | (Martínez Quintana, 2017) |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Ecotourism | Contributes to the conservation of the environment and its population, conservation of nature and natural resources, includes stays of up to one day and also a temporary vacation period | (Martínez Quintana, 2017) |
| Adventure tourism | It refers to trips made by tourists with the purpose of witnessing or participating in activities related to some type of sport during their stay, highlighting land, river, oceanic or aerial sports activities | (Beltrán Panchana, 2023) |

Source: Own elaboration.

Taking into account the bibliography consulted, in the author's opinion it is determined that rural tourism encompasses the rest of the tourism modalities that are developed in the rural environment (agrotourism, nature tourism, ecotourism, adventure tourism, others). Rural tourism is characterized by having a dynamic role with new job offers, which contributes to local development with economic, social, and environmental benefits, adding value to products and diversifying the family economy (Sánchez Sánchez & Sánchez Sánchez, 2018; Morales Hernández & Fernández Hernández, 2019; Romeu Torres and González Ramírez, 2019). Its validity is then understood as a complementary activity in those rural scenarios where the productive framework needs to be revitalized.

Rural tourism, as a productive diversification strategy at the local level, is considered a way to reactivate heritage and, at the same time, it constitutes a local development strategy that enhances processes and products with identity, providing a leading role to producers (Llugsha, 2021; Marenzana, 2022). Although it contributes to cushioning the demographic crisis in many rural areas, Soler Vayà and San-Martín González (2022) point out that it has not prevented the population from continuing to be lost in some territories.

This tourism modality transforms and complements the family economy, offering new work and production options to communities (García Arteaga & Cruz Coria, 2023). So, the products that originate have identity and offer unique experiences in contact with nature and local culture (Guerra Dotto et al., 2023). It has become key for social and economic development in the communities in which it is carried out since it ensures additional income from the tourist activity offered (Paredes Núñez & Franco Pérez, 2023). It is necessary to guarantee a group of goods and services in correspondence with the existing tourism potential in the rural scenario, which respond to the interests and needs of the tourism market.

Se tomaron como referencia un grupo de experiencias de diferentes países, lo cual se refleja en la tabla 3; y se consideraron varios elementos que permiten comprender el alcance de la inserción del turismo rural como modalidad turística predominante en zonas rurales.

Table 3

Distinctive features of rural tourism in different countries.

| Country | Experience | Values of the proposal | Aspects less addressed | Source |
|------------|---|---|---|--|
| Spain | Complementary and alternative activities | Involve their customs and natural resources | Planning with a management approach | Sánchez-Sánchez and Sánchez-Sánchez (2021) |
| Perú | Tourism activity from a sustainable approach (local entrepreneurs) | Presence of protected natural areas | Support from the local government | Frech Hurtado (2023) |
| México | Complementary tourist activities linked to local gastronomy | Valuable natural and cultural resources | Lack of design of integral tourist products | García Rodea et al. (2023) |
| Ecuador | Varied tourist packages | Natural goodness, exquisite folklore, diverse gastronomy, local productions | Planning with a management approach | Orlando Narváez and Choez Lucas (2023) |
| Brazil | Integrated visits to family farms of rural farmers | Local culture, nature, and family farming activities | Lack of design of integral tourist products | Guerra Dotto et al. (2023) |
| Costa Rica | Tourist activities linked to agrotourism, nature tourism and ecotourism | Local culture and its traditions (varied tourist product) | Support from the local government | Quirós-Aguilar (2023) |
| Argentina | Rural entrepreneurship (alternative recreational activities) | Local culture and natural resources | Planning with a management approach | Gordziejczuk and Mikkelsen (2023) |
| Chile | Tourism | Rescue of cultural | Lack of design | Garín |

| | | | | |
|------|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| | entrepreneurships and productive chains among some local entrepreneurs | traditions through of integral gastronomy and agricultural activities | and tourist products | Contreras et al. (2023) |
| Cuba | Tourist activity (tourist walks, observation of flora and environmental education workshops) | Landscape, and attractions; water, resources, historical sites | natural cultural, natural, marine and | Planning with a management approach Ramos Hernández et al. (2021); Montada Montero and Villarreal Reyes (2024) |

Source: Own elaboration.

When these experiences are analyzed, linked to the management of rural areas for tourism purposes, the growing demand for tourism in rural environments is noted. Each context has its particularities, but in all of them the natural component and local culture stand out, which are the basis for designing effective strategies that allow taking advantage of the tourism potential without compromising the authenticity of the rural setting. Without a doubt, each experience brings economic and sociocultural benefits, both to the locality and to the residents, but they must have better planning and subsequent execution since there are still perceived shortcomings that limit the full development of tourist activity based on local development.

Taking advantage of market behavior and tourism potential requires expanding the vision of rural tourism beyond its conception as an offer of recreational activities and provision of tourist services. The vacation motives of the tourism market must be transformed at the local level, into initiatives to transform, in a progressive and sustainable way, the reality of these territories, which differs from one rural scenario to another, such as: the introduction of structural changes; diversification of the traditional economy; improvement of the service network, among others.

In this sense, it should be noted that local actors are the most responsible in the practice of rural tourism, where tourism activity must increase the quality and efficiency of the tourist goods and services provided, and position the territory as an attractive destination. In this way, arriving tourists can find attractive experiences with high added value, which enrich their vision of nature, wildlife, and local culture. For these reasons, rural tourism strengthens other productive activities and forms the business fabric of the territory, which allows the creation of productive chains that promote a balanced economy.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is considered a socioeconomic driver of any country, which contributes to local development processes in communities since it generates significant income and can diversify productive activity at a local scale through prior planning that guarantees the practice of sustainable tourism activity. In this way, in certain rural scenarios, based on opportunity variables and analyzing its vocation and tourist potential, tourism can be inserted to modify its functional structure and serve tourist interests based on the different tourism modalities that can be developed. Consequently, rural tourism is presented in rural areas as a tourism modality that encompasses different activities and has an impact on the territory at a local level, giving prominence to small businessmen and their families by diversifying traditional economic activity; granting added value to the socio-cultural, natural and agricultural heritage.

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Declaration of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest that could have influenced the results obtained or the interpretations proposed.

Funding

The authors did not receive any funding for the development of this research.

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