

2012 Wild Asia Responsible Tourism Awards Winner Best in Cultural Preservation



Agri Tourism based in rural Maharashtra countryside in central India, is an innovative scheme to invite city-slickers to get back to their rural farming roots. In an area where youngsters are eager to flee a declining farming industry for quick cash in neighboring urban areas, Agri Tourism is successfully reversing this trend and giving new hope to rural populations.

This dynamic business is attracting tourist from far and wide wanting to experience agriculture heritage. Generating interest, income and demand for this important part of India's culture, Agri Tourism is witnessing local farmers diversifying to reap the benefits of both agriculture and tourism.

Why Wild Asia loved this Winner

Our favorite concept!

Sustainable Livelihoods - Prior to the introduction of Agri Tourism holidays, rain water thirsty Maharashtra was having some serious challenges seeing a future in farming. Yet, by diversifying farms for tourism activities, farmers have experienced a 25% growth in business. This money is helping to change up farming habits to a more sustainable way and it's attracting more people back to their cultural heritage, especially younger generations. To date, Agri Tourism has trained over 1000 farmers in tourism capacity building and 350 farms have diversified, reaping the benefits of a newly found [sustainable income](#).

- **Local Employment** – 100% local staff from the immediate village is preventing urban migration and an aging rural population. They also have initiatives for youths, women empowerment and all staff are paid the legal minimum wage or above
- **Cultural Exchange** - In an area that historically had no tourism whatsoever, locals are now benefiting from learning from other cultures as well as showcasing their own to new found friends (such as their annual [Kite Festival](#) which sees over 500 attendees, traditional bullock cart rides or evenings in traditional dress). Not only is the centre a cross cultural learning experience for foreigners, but Indian guests are satisfied by learning about their own ancestral heritage and culture
- **Community Development** - 15% annual profits go to the primary school next door, this money is spent on improving the level of education and for clean drinking water
- **Water** – Neighbouring wealthy areas have benefited from the introduction of canal systems, this area would not have been eligible given its sparse population, but the government has expressed interest now there is tourism money coming in and are exploring bringing new canal systems to the village in next 5 years. This will be hugely beneficial to villagers who are losing their crops due to change in climate (very dry)

What did the Judges have to say?

1. *“This is a fantastic project – really impressed”*
2. *“a very useful model for community-based tourism elsewhere in India and throughout Asia Pacific”*
3. *“A complete all-rounder”*