

# Rural Tourism Development Strategy Based on SWOT Analysis under the Background of Rural Revitalization Strategy——A Case Study of Litang County

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**Abstract:** Under the background of rural revitalization strategy, developing rural tourism relying on rural tourism resources is one of the significant ways to achieve rural revitalization. Litang County of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan province is selected to study its rural tourism development strategy, in order to explore effective ways of rural tourism development. SWOT analysis is employed to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the study area. Under the background of rural revitalization strategy, opportunities and threats coexist in rural tourism development. Combined with characteristics of the study area, four development strategies are proposed. As a result, it is necessary to seize the opportunities, improve infrastructure and services, adhere to scientific and green development, as well as build a brand with local features and expand publicity, so as to achieve the high-quality and sustainable development of rural tourism.

**Keywords:** rural revitalization strategy; rural tourism; SWOT analysis; Litang County

According to the report of the 19th CPC National Congress, the rural revitalization strategy was proposed to promote the economic development of rural areas. As an important growth pole of rural economy, rural tourism has played a significant role in promoting agricultural supply-side structural reform, boosting farmers' employment and rising income, promoting targeted industrial poverty alleviation and building beautiful countryside, showing broad prospects for development. [1] However, China's rural tourism industry is still confronted with many problems, such as weak infrastructure construction and shortage of talents. Therefore, it has become an important part of rural tourism development under the background of rural revitalization strategy to explore the development strategy of rural tourism and promote qualified areas to enhance quality and efficiency of rural tourism.

SWOT analysis is a method to draw conclusions by analyzing the main internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats of the object of study. The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of rural tourism development in the study area are analyzed by SWOT analysis. As a consequence, several strategies for rural tourism development are proposed.

## 1. General Situation of Litang County

Litang County belongs to Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province, 285 kilometers away from Kangding and 654 kilometers away from Chengdu. Located at east longitude 99°19'-100°56', north latitude 28°57'-30°43', it covers a total area of 14,352 square kilometers. [2] Dominated by mound-shaped plateaus and mountain plains, with some alpine canyons, [3] Litang County is a plateau climate zone, with long dry and cold winters and short warm and cool summers. The average temperature is 3.0°C, the maximum temperature is 25.6°C, and the minimum temperature is -30.6°C. [3] There are rich plant and wildlife resources. The criss-cross rivers are divided into two major water systems, the Yalong River and the Jinsha River. The county has a permanent population of 74,740, including 68,202 registered residents, with the urbanization rate of 39.19%. There are nine ethnic groups: Tibetan, Han, Mongolian, Hui, Naxi, Tujia, Yi, Miao and Qiang. Litang County has many titles, such as the "Gateway of Tibet," "Window of Kangzang," "the Holy Land in the Snow Region," "Litang Sacred Place," "Pearl of the Grassland," "Hometown of Equestrian," "City of Sky"

and “World High City.” [4]

## **2. SWOT Analysis of Rural Tourism in Litang County**

### **2.1. Strengths (S)**

#### **2.1.1. Abundant Natural Resources**

Litang is rich in wildlife resources. There are 2 species of grade II key protected plants, picea brachytyla and abies georgei; the main cash crops are sea-buckthorn, etc; at the same time there are a certain number of wild edible fungi species. Litang also has a wide variety of wild animals, including national first-class protected animals such as white-lipped deer, forest musk deer, horse musk, leopard, snow leopard, Chinese merganser, golden eagle, pallas’s fish eagle, bearded vulture, Chinese grouse, tetraophasis szechenyii, etc. and national second-class protected animals such as macaque, black bear, otter, lynx, Asian golden cat, red deer, Tibetan gazelle, goral, bharal, argali, tawny eagle, crossoptilon harmani. [3] The main tree species in Litang are fir, spruce, followed by redwood, alpine pine, cypress, poplar, quercus semecarpifolia, birch, willow, etc. [3]

The criss-cross rivers in Litang County are divided into two major water systems, the Yalong River and the Jinsha River. There are 48 tributaries with a drainage area of more than 100 square kilometers, eight of which, including the Wuliang River and Reyi River, empty into Yalong River, and three of which, including Naqu River, Labo River and Zhangna River, empty into Jinsha River. There is the world's rare ancient ice landform - Genie ancient ice landform. [3]

Litang County has Haizishan National Nature Reserve, Gemu County-level Nature Reserve, Zhaga Shenshan Nature Reserve, Wuliang River Provincial Wetland Park, and Caruoxi Scenic Area. [3] Compared with cities, rural areas have more abundant natural resources, which provide an important foundation for the development of rural tourism.

#### **2.1.2. Cultural Characteristics**

Litang County belongs to Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, in which the majority of the population is Tibetan. It carries the unique Tibetan culture, where tourists can enjoy the unique ethnic customs. Tibetan delicacies such as butter tea, tsampa and highland barley wine also attract tourists to Litang. The local government pays attention to the protection and inheritance of cultural heritage, deeply excavates cultural resources, develops cultural tourism products with cultural connotation and regional characteristics. [5]

In addition, the famous poet Tsangyang Gyatso wrote his last poem: “White-feathered crane, lend me your wings. I will not fly far, only to Litang then back.” This also makes many people who like Tsangyang Gyatso curious about Litang. Litang County held the first Tsangyang Gyatso Poetry Festival in 2017 to promote the development of cultural tourism.

#### **2.1.3. Location Advantages**

Litang is the junction of National Highway 318 and Provincial Highway 217, the central city of Chengdu - Kangding - Litang - Yading - Shangri-La tourism circle, and an important material transfer and commodity distribution center in southern Ganzi Prefecture. [6] Sichuan is a big tourism province. The province's tourism industry has maintained a rapid development for many years, and has become one of the important pillar industries. [7] Litang County has successfully integrated into some Sichuan tourism routes (such as Chengdu + Daocheng + Kangding + Xinduqiao + Litang) by virtue of its location advantages.

## **2.2. Weaknesses (W)**

### **2.2.1. High Altitude**

Litang is located at the eastern foot of Hengduan Mountains on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The average elevation of the county is 4,133 meters, and the county seat is 4,014 meters above sea level. [8] Litang is known as the “World High City”. Lack of oxygen in the air will have an impact on functions of the human body, and people may suffer altitude sickness.

### **2.2.2. Weak Infrastructure**

Litang County was once a state-level poverty-stricken county, which was officially lifted out of

poverty in February 2022. Its basic functional areas are incomplete, and its reception capacity needs to be improved. According to statistics, a third of Litang residents are identified as poor population, which has greatly hindered the development of local economy. At the same time, the natural geographical conditions of Litang County also make it difficult to improve infrastructure in housing, medical care, education and other fields. [9]

### ***2.2.3. Shortage of Talents***

The educational resources of Litang County are insufficient, and the overall education level of residents is not high. Therefore, there is a shortage of talents related to the development of tourism. There is no high school in Litang County so far. Students have to go to Luding, Kangding or Chengdu to go to boarding school if they want to continue to study after junior high school. [10] People there speak Tibetan. At present, the rural language education for the general public is almost blank, and the villagers lack formal and effective learning channels. The Chinese learning of villagers except students in school is in a state of disorder. [10] The low level of education and language barriers of local residents in Litang County have brought great challenges to the development of tourism.

## ***2.3. Opportunities (O)***

### ***2.3.1. Implementation of the National Rural Revitalization strategy***

Rural revitalization strategy has risen to a national development strategy, which not only highlights the important value of rural areas in the modernization construction, but also means that rural construction will become the focus of the modernization construction in the coming period. [11] Seizing this opportunity is of great significance to the development of tourism industry in Litang County.

### ***2.3.2. Support from the Local Government***

Litang County, on the basis of implementing the strategy of regional tourism development, focuses on highlighting its characteristics and advantages, and cultivates tourism as a leading and pillar industry. [12] Litang County government attaches great importance to the development of tourism and hopes to rely on tourism to lift Litang out of poverty, realize economic development and improve residents' living standards. Litang County government focuses on building the characteristic tourism brand, actively expanding the tourism market and strengthening regional cooperation in tourism, which is a powerful impetus for the development of tourism in Litang.

### ***2.3.3. Overall Development of Tourism***

With the development of Chinese economy and the improvement of per capita income level, people's demand for travelling is increasing day by day. Tourism has developed rapidly in recent years, and has formed a radiation effect on related industries. Under the general trend of the overall development of tourism, in recent years, the rural tourism revenue has been increasing with an average growth rate of 34.5%. Vigorously developing rural tourism is an important way to implement the rural revitalization strategy, as well as the key to rural economic development. [13]

### ***2.3.4. Development of New Media***

In the economic era, the Internet platform can be made use of under "Internet celebrity economy" to make money, promote cultural output, and expand publicity. [14] The popularity of Ding Zhen is a typical example. Ding Zhen, an ordinary Tibetan man, was photographed by a photographer by chance and has attracted a lot of attention online, which has made his hometown Litang County well known. Therefore the local bureau of culture and tourism offered him a job at a local museum, and he has become an ambassador for Litang.

Following the popularity of Ding Zhen, Litang quickly became an annual popular tourist destination. Qunar data showed that in the following week after the popularity of Ding Zhen, daily hotel bookings in Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture increased by more than double year-on-year. According to Tencent's annual tourism report, Ganzi Tibetan autonomous prefecture has become the top 5 cities of the year. [14]

## **2.4. Threats (T)**

### **2.4.1. Common Problems in Rural Tourism**

China's urbanization process is accelerating, and rural tourism market is expanding, but there are still some common problems such as incomplete infrastructure, unreasonable development and low management level. [1] At present, there is still a gap between urban and rural development, and the rural development needs to be improved. Many young people are leaving the countryside to work in the cities, so the rural areas are confronted with serious brain drain.

### **2.4.2. Eco-environment Stress**

Most of the rural tourism destinations in China have varying degrees of ecological damage and environmental pollution, mainly reflected in the exhaust emissions of vehicles and tourism service facilities. The living pollutants increase with the influx of tourists, and the original natural appearance is destroyed due to improper development. [15] Therefore, if the rural tourism areas are over-developed, the ecological environment will be damaged.

### **2.4.3. Impact of COVID-19**

Since the end of 2019, COVID-19 has changed people's lives, causing a great impact on all walks of life and seriously affecting economic development. To reduce the risk of the spread of the virus, many provinces have locked down and restricted the opening of many tourist attractions. People are urged to stay at home, and their willingness to travel has plummeted. Travel agencies, hotels, airlines and other enterprises have facing a large number of refunds, seriously affecting the entire tourism industry chain, the overall tourism industry in a downturn.

## **3. Strategies**

### **3.1. To Seize the Development Opportunities**

Positive response to the national rural revitalization strategy should be made to promote economic, cultural and ecological development in rural areas. The government should increase the investment in rural tourism, formulate relevant regulations, and pay attention to the training of relevant personnel to promote the high-quality development of rural tourism.

### **3.2. To Improve Infrastructure and Services**

The government should make overall plans to improve the layout and structure of regional functional zones to increase overall reception capacity. Transportation, water, electricity and information infrastructure should be strengthened. It is necessary to enhance the construction of supporting service system, gradually promote the construction of intelligent tourism scenic spot system, including the construction of scenic spot display virtualization and intelligent platform of scenic spot operation, scenic spot management and emergency response, and improve information construction and comprehensive management service of scenic spots. It is also indispensable to develop mobile APP software, QR code scanning, etc. [12] Scientific and reasonable approaches should be employed to train needed personnel to improve services.

### **3.3. To Adhere to Scientific and Green Development**

In the construction process, attention should be paid to the rational use of land and scientific layout. It is necessary to attach importance to environmental protection, avoid putting huge pressure on local environmental carrying capacity and adhere to green, coordinated and sustainable development. The garbage and pollutants generated in the process of tourism should be properly disposed of.

### **3.4. To Build a Brand with Local Features and Expand Publicity**

Nowadays this is the time when "good wine also needs bush." Tourism cities should not only "make good wine", but also "let people know the wine". [9] It is required to explore the natural and cultural characteristics of tourist destinations, build characteristic brands and develop characteristic tourism products. At the same time, efforts should be made to expand publicity and increase influence of the brand with the help of the new media.

#### 4. Conclusions

Under the background of rural revitalization strategy, the development of rural tourism has become one of the important ways to promote economic development and increase per capita income in rural areas. Despite many problems in rural tourism, efforts should be made to take full advantage of the natural and cultural resources in rural areas to promote the development of rural tourism industry. It is necessary to seize the development opportunities, improve infrastructure and services, adhere to green, coordinated and sustainable development, and strive to build characteristic brands and expand publicity.

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