
Homestay Tourism – A Concise Narrative Review

Aditya Sharma¹, Dr. Pankaj Kumar²

¹Research Scholar, ²Head of Department,

^{1,2}Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Mizoram University, India.

Keywords

- Homestays
- Homestays Tourism
- Experiential Tourism
- Rural Homestays

Abstract

Homestay tourism has been getting recognition as an experiential and community-based attraction that helps connect visitors to the local people, culture and their everyday way of life. This concise narrative review presents an overview of the existing work on homestays in the broader tourism literature. Empirical evidence emphasises that homestays generate economic advantages, promote cultural exchange, and help empower the local communities through income generation and participation. At the same time, the segment faces persistent challenges, such as rapid unregulated growth, excessive commercialisation of the concept, service quality challenges, etc. The paper advocates for targeted intervention studies to investigate the measures to maximise the socio-cultural benefits of homestay tourism. Policy measures that prioritise active participation of the community can position homestay tourism as a scalable and inclusive development for the rural destinations.

Introduction

Tourism is an activity that carries notable environmental, sociocultural and economic importance (Cooper & Pigram, 1984). The travel and tourism industry's impact extends beyond employment and GDP; in 2024 the travel and tourism sector contributed 10% to the global GDP i.e. USD 10.9 trillion (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.). Tourism is considered as an ever-evolving industry, one of the fastest growing service sectors (Deborah & Passah, 2019; Jacob et al., 2021). Moreover, tourism can act as a tool for regional development by reducing the gap between developed and undeveloped regions (Tosun, 1999).

The Tourism Policy of 2002 of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, embraced community-based tourism and rural tourism promoting their wider adoption (Rashid, 2020). Moreover, tourism acts as a vital development sector for the remote destinations across the Himalayas. Successful tourism development depends upon local community acceptance and participation. The development of tourism should ensure the local community's economical and social upliftment. Economically, tourism should generate employment opportunities for the local population. This ensures enhancement of the standard of life of the locals (Government of Assam, n.d.). Experiential Tourism is the new trend as the tourists are looking for experiencing something unique and firsthand. Therefore, it is vital for the stakeholders and the local community to engage in producing a unique product for the tourists (Isa et al., 2016; Ministry of Tourism, 2021a). The National Strategy and Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism emphasises that tourism can lead to both affirmative as well as negative repercussions with respect to sustainability. Hence, the strategy advocates sustainability in all forms of tourism and at all destinations (Ministry of Tourism, 2021b).

Homestays as accommodation

Accommodation is the largest and most ubiquitous sub-sector of the tourism economy (Fyall, 2018) and a fundamental component of the tourism supply (Poudel, 2013). Alternative accommodation typically includes three broad types: guest houses, commercial homes and service apartments. The homestay falls under the category of commercial homes (Ramli et al., 2015). Although, opening private houses for lodging have always existed since early travel days, such as under different labels such as inns, caravan, serai, taverns, and boarding houses, etc (Dawson & Brown, 1988; Sood, 2012) to the modern term homestay gaining attention more recently. The first one to coin the term homestay was Lynch in the year 2003 (Sood, 2012). The concept of homestays varies from across countries and regions (Hamzah, 2008; Muslim et al., 2017; Janaji & Ibrahim, 2019).

These are an alternative tourism product which provides accommodation to the tourists and are ideal especially for the destinations in nations that cannot stress on building

infrastructure investment (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Shukor et al., 2014). Homestays are unique and different from other accommodation units such as hotels, motels, camps, etc. as they attract tourists, especially of a certain demographic profile who desire to seek different and authentic experiences (Ramli et al., 2015; Muslim et al., 2017). Hamzah (2008) points out that homestays differ from the B&B concept as in homestays the guest participates in the host's way of life. "B&B: A Matter of Choice" is one of the earliest studies by Dawson and Brown (1988) which entailed a survey of B&B establishments in New York state. As per the West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy, "Globally, homestay tourism is defined as the form of tourism where tourists can stay with the members of the family wherein social and cultural interaction takes place along with exploring various tourist destinations." (Preamble section, Government of West Bengal, 2022). Homestay Tourism can be referred to as "soft tourism" (Bhakuni & Kumar, 2020) which has recently evolved and is still emerging (Bhan & Singh, 2014). As per Yadav et al. (2018), the vital elements of a homestay entail accommodation, amenities, cuisine, local activities and sightseeing. Bhan and Singh (2014) pointed out that homestay tourism is based on three components i.e. service, facility and attraction. Homestays add to the tourist experience by enhancing the socio-cultural richness and provide opportunity to the guest by gaining a genuine experience and connect with the local's culture, lifestyle and traditions by opting for living in a homestay (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Lama, 2013; Singh et al., 2021).

Existing explorations on homestays

This section synthesizes the empirical studies on local community perceptions, participation and the implications of homestay tourism. The literature shows that the perception of the engaged community plays a vital role and shapes their future involvement. Several studies show that central role of community perception in fostering their involvement.

Gu and Wong (2006) assessed the homestay operators's view of tourism impacts in Dachangshan Dao, China. They argue that examining tourism impact is the starting point in developing a local community involvement process. Rashid (2020) revealed that there exists a strong role of support for tourism development and the perceived impacts of tourism. Also, Majin et al. (2016) found that the indigenous community are willing to support the development of the tourism industry as tourism has led to an enhancement in their quality of life and they are affected economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally.

Indian case studies show both the potential and challenges of homestay. Sood (2012) explored the potential of homestay tourism in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh, and noted that tourists who did not opt to stay in homestay mainly cited the concerns related to cleanliness, hygiene and safety. Kulshreshtha and Kulshreshtha (2019) observed an exponential growth of homestays in India, and argued that beyond economic

growth and authentic tourism promotion homestays can foster a belongingness, sense of ownership, and responsibility among both hosts and guests.

The literature also links community participation with empowerment and sustainability. The study by Lekaota (2015) on community participation and rural tourism stressed upon the empowerment of the local community of the destination through participation in all stages of tourism ventures. This partnership will lead to sustainable rural tourism. Baniya et al. (2018) emphasized that, Community Based Tourism can create a transformative effect on an individual, community as well as the society. Wang et al. (2021) in the study proposed a model entailing community participation, overall happiness of life and support for tourism development in future.

Singh et al. (2021) found out that the satisfaction level of the guests is heterogeneous as per their socio-demographic profile and other factors such as travel behavior, past visits, length of the stay etc. The study recommends the civic authorities to develop basic infrastructure in the rural areas of for catering to the tourists living in the homestay.

Consideration to sustainability are also becoming a center to the discussion. Tourism is highly dependent on the environment, environmental resources are a source of tourism (Mensah, 2006) but tourism too is a source to various negative ramifications on the environment such as leading to climate change by emitting around 5% to the carbon dioxide emissions globally due to transportation and accommodation. Accommodation is a significant user of the non-renewable resources i.e. land, water and energy (Sustainable Tourism for Development, 2013). Ensuring sustainability in tourism is today's need of the hour. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defined sustainable tourism using the Brundtland definition as "Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity, and life support systems." (Fletcher, 2018, p. 225). In 1988, the UNWTO defined sustainable tourism then in 1992, the 'Earth Summit' in Rio De Janeiro was held which established the triple principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability making the principles of sustainable tourism adopted by the tourism industry globally (Ministry of Tourism, n.d.). Lama (2013) reveals that homestay is an effective tool in tourism as it promotes economic sustainability as well as natural sustainability. Also, Poudyal and Thapa (2019) stressed that the threat to homestay tourism is its sustainability and homestay tourism can collapse if it is practiced by the unemployed, uneducated, and dependent members passively. Janjua et al. (2021) revealed that studies on "homestay branding, homestay and entrepreneurship, homestays and information and communication technology (ICT) competency, homestay operator's training and development about sustainability" are scarcely addressed in the present scenario. The study of Mathachan (2018) pointed out the growth of the unorganized homestays in Coorg has led negatively on the sustainable development of the destination and also loss of scenic beauty. Sustainability in homestay tourism cannot be achieved without tourist satisfaction (Basak et al., 2021; Singh et al.,

2021). As per Dey et al. (2020), there exists few studies with respect to the 'alternative travel accommodation'. Basak et al. (2021) emphasized that there exists a gap in studies with respect to the advantages of sustainable homestays for tourist satisfaction. Similarly, Agyeiwaah (2013) states that less studies examining the motivating factors for choosing homestays have been done.

After reviewing the literature, it is evident that a substantial number of studies have recently examined homestays. Research on communities, community participation, and residents' (host populations') perceptions of tourism impacts across different stages of tourism development has also received considerable attention. In the context of homestays, several studies have assessed the prospects of homestay tourism, along with its opportunities, challenges, and the role of community participation. However, a clear research gap remains in comprehensively examining the implications of homestay tourism development for engaged communities and local residents in relation to environmental outcomes and the long-term sustainability of the phenomenon.

Conclusion

The academic work in the field of homestay tourism is burgeoning. As a demand for authentic immersion travel increases and the segment is expected to grow even more in the coming years. The present review calls for a more dedicated inquiry into the specificities of homestay tourism which may make this tourism more appealing and more beneficial to the grassroots rural communities. Moreover, this segment has the potential to boost and bring benefits directly to the people at homes, which makes this tourism powerful.

Although the review presents an overview of the extant work, it is not exhaustive and does not adhere to a systematic literature review process. Therefore, future work can undertake a systematic review with clearly defined objectives, search strategies, and inclusion exclusion criterias, to map the homestay literature more precisely and accurately.

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