



Exploring the Current Status, Opportunities, and Challenges of the Homestays in Uttarakhand

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Abstract: Homestay programs have gained popularity as a sustainable form of accommodation in Uttarakhand, a picturesque state in northern India. These programs allow tourists to immerse themselves in the local lifestyle and culture by staying with host families. Beyond cultural exchange, homestays bring substantial economic benefits to communities, generating income and employment. A research study focuses on comprehensively understanding Uttarakhand's homestay sector, analyzing its current state, employment impact, and government support. The investigation explores the potential advantages, such as fostering sustainable tourism and preserving regional heritage. Challenges faced by homestay programs are also examined, ranging from limited local community engagement and resources to inadequate infrastructure. The study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and communities to promote and sustain homestay programs in Uttarakhand. Moreover, it may contribute to a broader understanding of homestay sectors in India and other developing nations, emphasizing their potential as a sustainable tourism model.

Keywords: Homestays • Uttarakhand, Employment Opportunities • Challenges

Introduction

The term "homestay" describes the practice of staying in an owner's residence. It refers to a residential arrangement where a household unit resides in its own place. According to Boonratana (2010), Homestay offers a distinctive opportunity to meet the lifestyle of the local inhabitants of a region, while being immersed in the authentic and customary cultures, all within the confines of a convenient domestic environment. The homestay idea has been around for a long time and helps people feel like they are at home (Lynch, 2003). Lynch et. al. (2009) expanded the concept of homestay to include "commercial homes" in which guests pay to stay with a host family's company. This innovative idea serves as a development tool to increase public understanding of the value

of cultural exchange and sensitivity to the customs of visitors staying with local families, making it a truly unique quality (Jamilah and Amran 2007). Homestays also give tourists a place to stay for a low price and lots of chances to have a good conversation with the host family and learn something about their way of life. This is also termed as "home-based businesses," "commercial home businesses," and "commercial homes" in the written word (Lynch, 2005; Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007). In various countries across the globe, a comparable concept to Homestay is recognized as a farm stay, bed and breakfast, agricultural Homestay, and home visit system. This arrangement entails the provision of lodging and breakfast to guests by their hosts (Getz and Carlsen 2000; Mapjabil et.al, 2011; Unlumlert, 2007). According to Jamal et.al.



(2011), homestays are frequently situated in rural regions and are actively managed, owned, and operated by the local communities in which tourists reside. These visitors engage in local traditions and cultural performances. Travelers staying in homestays in rural areas can experience the area's rich cultural and natural beauty (Gu and Wong, 2006; Musa et. al. 2010; Anand et. al. 2012; MacDonald and Jolliffe 2003). In this communication, it's suggested that homestays can be useful in building interpersonal and organizational skills. Changes in population composition, occupational structure, values, norms, the standard of living, and purchasing habits, as well as the preservation or disruption of cultural practices, are only some of the ways in which tourism can impact urban rejuvenation (Guo and Huang, 2011; Scheyvens, 2002; Sebastian and Rajagopalan, 2009; Kerstetter and Bricker, 2009; Pizam and Milman, 1986; Beeton, 2006; Gangte, 2011). Homestays are a great way for less developed countries to boost their economies, while also providing an unforgettable experience for visitors. For the host, in particular, hosting is a means of making money and developing what might be meaningful relationships with guests (Wang, 2007). Community-level standards of behavior, stakeholder collaboration, and restrictions from government authorities have all played a vital part in the growth of rural homestays in countries like Thailand, Nepal, India, and Malaysia. Community-based rural and homestay tourism has been promoted as a tool that has a minimum impact and environmentally friendly method to travel because of the increased worldwide awareness and actions about conserving the environment (Honey, 1999; Jones, 2005; J Kiss, 2004; Anand et. al. 2012). In recent years, there has been a notable increase in research about the homestay phenomenon. Governments in many different areas have used homestays to support their rural tourism industries. The homestay model is consistent with the advancement and

safeguarding of indigenous customs and countryside societies, while also stimulating community engagement in the tourism industry (Kayat, 2010; Ibrahim and Razzaq, 2010; Wang, 2007; Liu, 2006).

India is a prominent tourist destination globally, with a steady rise in inbound tourism over the last decade. This trend has played an important role in the nation's economic growth. Numerous homestay establishments have arisen innately to fulfill the demand for lodging among tourists. Apart from international tourists, domestic tourists also appreciate the comfort and accessibility of homestay lodging. The accommodation provides a sense of familiarity and comfort similar to one's own abode, coupled with a peaceful and inquisitive journey. As part of their plans for the next ten years, the governments of India's different states have allocated money to help the homestay idea grow. This will free up space for the increasing number of tourists and add to the number of jobs in this sector. State governments were recently requested to develop a new tourist plan that will prioritize increasing homestays.

Review of Literature

The usage of the term "homestay" may differ from nation to nation. In the UK, the phrase is commonly used to refer to English linguistic education, whereas in Australia it is commonly associated with agricultural stays. Some main dictionaries lack the term "homestay". Homestays are defined by "The Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2007" as "a period throughout which someone who is in a foreign country life with local communities" ("Reafflow, n.d."). The homestay programme is viewed as a community-based tourism option by various nations and the involvement of community members in community-based tourism is influenced by their motives. It is essential to educate individuals who are part of tourism systems about the scheme and plans



and motivate them to engage and actively contribute to it through various awareness-raising initiatives (Kayat, 2002). Similarly, to other tourism and travel industries, homestays have experienced tremendous growth as a community-based tourist offering in recent years (Jamal et al., 2011). Homestays involve the exercise of promoting one's home for financial gain. Homestay is a type of lodging that falls between staying with family or friends and staying in a hotel or other more traditional lodging (Churyen et al., 2015). According to Wang (2007), the implementation of home-stays contributes to the conservation of genuine local heritage, and individuals who are interested in personalized service and genuine cultural experiences with opportunities for social engagement are attracted to the concept of homestays. According to Singh (1991), the essence of heritage and regional architecture can draw in the majority of tourists. Homestays are frequently linked with additional activities like hiking, bird watching, and taking part in regional festivities in order to ensure a regular income source. MoT India/UNDP (2008) asserts that homestays constitute a fundamental component of the tourism product provided by the majority of rural tourism initiatives in India. The promotion of homestays by policymakers is being pursued with great enthusiasm as a means of minimizing the growing shortage of tourist accommodations, as reported by the MoT India/UNDP in 2008. "The Ladakh Himalayan Homestay" program is widely regarded as a prime illustration of successful community involvement and proprietorship in the tourism industry in India (MoT India/UNDP, 2008). "The Snow Leopard Conservancy", in collaboration with the local communities and with financial support from "UNESCO", launched the "Himalayan Homestays in Ladakh", which have boosted household incomes, assisted in the preservation of threatened animals, and promoted locals'

ownership of the project (Lama et al., 2012). The development of homestays in the Himalayan regions of Ladakh, Sikkim, and Spiti has been recognized as a valuable strategy for safeguarding both the cultural and natural assets of the area, despite the challenges involved. These homestays have also been found to empower women and provide the local people with sustainable livelihoods. (Lama et. al. 2012; Anand et al., 2012). The region of Uttarakhand in the Himalayan states has shown a notable shift towards sustainable accommodation options, particularly through the emergence of homestays. This trend has not only contributed to the generation of livelihoods and additional income for the local community but has also demonstrated a commitment to environmentally conscious tourism practices. This stands in contrast to other regions where sustainable tourism initiatives may not be as prevalent or successful (Bhalla et. al. 2016). Homestays offer a way for locals to support the country's tourism business in an indirect manner in the Indian hospitality sector (Kayat, 2010). For travelers seeking a less crowded and more sustainable tourism experience, ecotourism destinations may be an ideal option. These destinations are typically situated near parks and protected areas, allowing visitors to enjoy the natural beauty and unique cultural experiences while supporting the conservation efforts of the area. As highlighted by Dewi (2020), these destinations are often less crowded than more traditional tourist hotspots, allowing for a more peaceful and authentic travel experience. The problem of uncontrolled tourism development in developing nations, particularly India, has led to increased interest in rural tourism and homestays as potential solutions. This trend has gained popularity among both tourists and host communities (Mura 2015).



Research Methodology

This study is a conceptual exploration that utilizes a mixed methodology to gather comprehensive information on Homestay programs in Uttarakhand, India. The research involves a thorough review of relevant literature from a wide range of publications and research papers. Personal interview was conducted with homestay operators from various regions of Uttarakhand for the primary data. This research also incorporates qualitative data from numerous studies on Homestay programs, with a specific focus on exploring the challenges, opportunities, and prospects associated with these programs. The study looks at the six years from 2016 (the start of the Homestays program) to 2021. To ensure the validity of the findings, data was also sourced from government offices and websites.

Objectives

1. To investigate the present status of homestays in Uttarakhand.
2. To investigate the opportunities and challenges in Homestays in Uttarakhand

Present Status of Homestays in Uttarakhand: Homestays in Uttarakhand have become increasingly popular as a type of sustainable and community-based tourism. Many local communities in the region have started offering homestays in their homes as a way to provide travelers with a unique and authentic cultural experience, while also generating income for the local community. The state government has also been promoting homestays as a means of boosting tourism in the region. Homestays in Uttarakhand are gaining popularity among tourists who wish to experience local cuisine, local culture, and hospitality. They offer an affordable and authentic alternative to traditional hotels and resorts. Homestays are available in different regions of Uttarakhand including Nainital, Almora, Mussoorie, Rishikesh, and Auli.

Some homestays have also started offering adventure activities like trekking, camping, and rafting. The popularity of homestays has also given a boost to rural tourism in Uttarakhand and has provided a source of livelihood for many local families. In Uttarakhand, homestays are mainly located in scenic and serene areas, providing a chance for travelers to disconnect from the busy city life and immerse themselves in nature (added). The homestays are managed by local families who offer traditional hospitality and take pride in showcasing their culture and cuisine. Visitors get a chance to interact with local people, learn about their way of life, and participate in local activities. This creates a unique and memorable travel experience for visitors and also helps in promoting sustainable tourism. Homestays in Uttarakhand are a growing trend in the tourism industry and offer a unique and authentic experience for visitors, while also providing a source of livelihood for local communities.

Figure 1 shows the district-wise distribution of homestays and employment generated by them in Uttarakhand. The Nainital district has the maximum number of homestays (724), followed by Pithoragarh (686) and Uttarkashi (671). The total number of homestays in Uttarakhand is 4805, which is a significant number and indicates the growing popularity of homestays as a form of accommodation for tourists. The district-wise distribution of employment generated by homestays follows a similar trend as the distribution of homestays. Pithoragarh generates the highest employment (2744), followed by Uttarkashi (2684) and Nainital (2534) Dehradun, despite having a relatively lower number of homestays (654), generates a significant amount of employment (2943), which is greater than employment generated by Pithoragarh and it could be possible because of its status as the capital city and a major commercial hub.

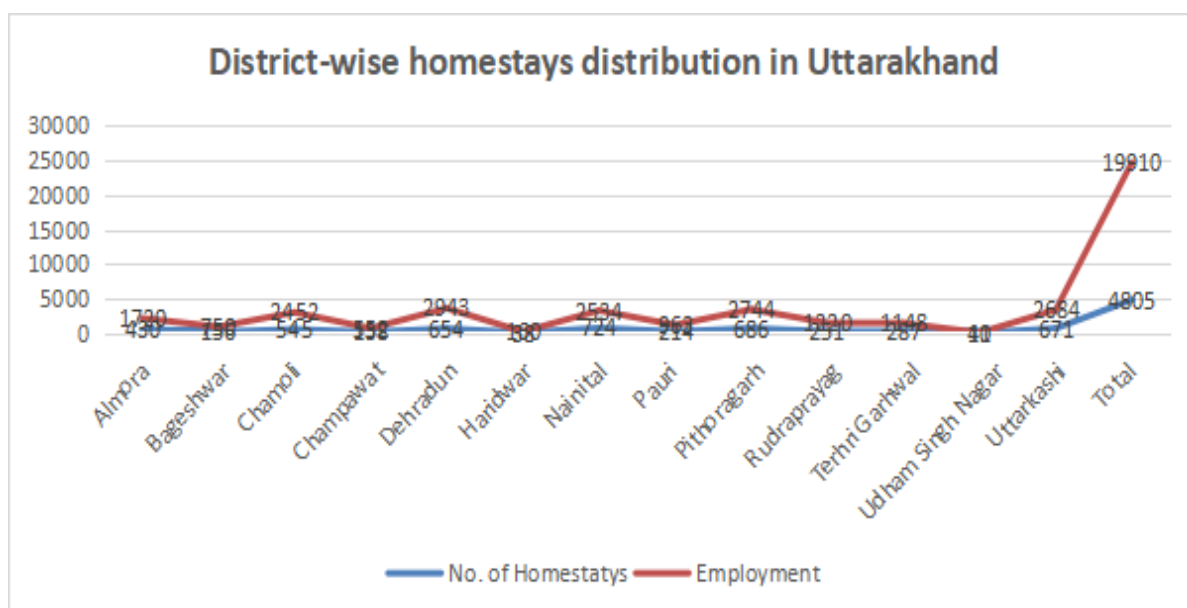


Figure 1. District-wise homestay distribution in Uttarakhand (Sources: <https://uttarakhandtourism.gov.in>)

Udham Singh Nagar has the lowest number of homestays (11) and generates the lowest employment (40). This could be attributed to the district's focus on industrial development rather than tourism. Overall, the data suggest that homestays are an important source of employment in Uttarakhand, particularly in districts with a higher number of homestays. Districts with a lower number of homestays could potentially benefit from promoting homestays as a form of accommodation to attract more tourists and generate employment.

Schemes by the Uttarakhand Government for promoting homestays in Uttarakhand:

The Uttarakhand Homestay policy was launched in 2016 in order to encourage tourism and job prospects in the state's mountainous regions. In the mountainous region of Uttarakhand, the government offers a subsidy of Rs. 15 lakhs for the establishment of homestays at the residences of the locals. To implement the policy, the government has established standards for transforming homes into homestays. The government is offering state assistance to eligible applicants who want to take out a loan from the bank in order to establish a homestay or renovate their house,

with reimbursement of the SGST for the first three years on income received from the homestay. Locals on the plains can use the plan as well. They can also turn their homes into lodgings. Residents in the plains receive a stipend of Rs. 7.5 lakhs. The administration wants to grow the state's tourism economy and offer people possibilities for employment and self-employment. In addition, a separate website and mobile app will be created to promote the scheme, and operators of homestays will receive hospitality training. The scheme also includes reimbursement of charges payable on bond deeds for business loans up to thirty lakh rupees, furnishing, maintenance in old buildings, upgradation, and construction of new toilets up to Rs. 2 lakhs without requiring land change.

Under the Mukhyamantri Swarozgar Yojana, the Uttarakhand government provides financial assistance to entrepreneurs and individuals for setting up various business ventures, including homestays. The scheme offers loans at subsidized interest rates, ranging from 4% to 9% per annum, and provides a 15% subsidy on the loan amount, with a maximum limit of Rs. 5 lakhs. The loan repayment period can vary from 3 to 7 years, depending on the nature of the business.



The Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) also provides assistance to homestay operators in terms of marketing, branding, and networking with the travel industry. The UTDB also conducts workshops and training programs for homestay operators to improve their hospitality skills and enhance the guest experience. The training programs offered by the UTDB cover various aspects of running a homestay, such as housekeeping, cooking, and customer service. The programs are designed to help the homestay operators understand the needs and expectations of the guests and provide them with a comfortable and memorable stay. Additionally, the UTDB also assists the homestay operators in obtaining the necessary licenses and registrations required to operate their businesses.

Motivational Factors for Homestays in

Uttarakhand: One of the primary motivators for homestay operators is financial gain. Homestay businesses can be profitable and many operators may be motivated by the prospect of earning income by renting out rooms or living spaces to guests. Many people start a homestay business as a way to earn additional income. Homestay businesses can be profitable, especially in popular tourist destinations or cities where there is a high demand for affordable accommodations. Homestay operators may also enjoy the flexibility of being able to earn income from home or supplement their existing income. Homestay operators may enjoy the lifestyle and flexibility that comes with running a homestay business. Many homestay hosts work from home, which allows them to set their own schedule and work on their own terms. This flexibility can be particularly appealing to those who want to work from home or have other commitments, such as caring for children or elderly relatives. Homestay programs are often designed to promote cultural exchange between hosts and guests. For some homestay operators, the opportunity to showcase their way of life and

culture with visitors from different parts of the world can be a rewarding and enriching experience. Hosts may also learn about other cultures and gain new perspectives through interactions with their guests.

Homestay operators who are passionate about hospitality and service may find that running a homestay business is a natural fit. These hosts may enjoy creating a welcoming environment for their guests, providing recommendations for local attractions and restaurants, and ensuring that their guests have a comfortable and enjoyable stay. Some homestay operators may be motivated by a sense of personal fulfillment or satisfaction. For example, they may enjoy meeting new people, helping others, or providing a unique and memorable experience for their guests. Homestay hosts may also find that running a homestay business allows them to pursue their passions, such as cooking or gardening, and share these interests with others.

Opportunities and Challenges in Homestays

in Uttarakhand: The expansion of the Homestay program has been considered to be attractive and headed in the correct path for the good of the region. There are a number of potential difficulties that local community and homestay operators may face, according to certain research papers that have examined these issues (Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010; Zaki et.al, 2011). According to the study by (Nor Ashikin, M. N., & Kayat, K. 2010) the effectiveness of community-based Homestay programs may be hampered by both internal and external difficulties.

Opportunities

Homestays offer diverse opportunities for both tourists and host families across economic, social, environmental, and tourism aspects. Economically, they can uplift rural areas by generating employment, mitigating poverty, and attracting local and international investments. The tourism sector benefits directly from increased spending on food,



lodging, and souvenirs. Homestays also empower marginalized groups, particularly women, by providing supplementary income for vital needs like education and living conditions. Socially, homestays facilitate cross-cultural exchanges, fostering understanding and reducing conflicts. Involving youth in local opportunities promotes community pride and ownership. Guests benefit from learning new languages and skills, fostering personal growth and cultural exchange. From a tourism perspective, homestays offer authentic experiences, promoting year-round destination appeal and mitigating seasonality issues. Moreover, they contribute to environmental awareness and conservation efforts, encouraging responsible practices and a deeper appreciation for local ecosystems. Governments and tourism boards can play a pivotal role in fostering a sustainable and mutually beneficial tourism industry by supporting and promoting homestays.

Challenges

During the interview conducted with homestay operators from various regions of Uttarakhand, their responses closely aligned with the findings of a study carried out by (“Zaki et al. 2011”), “(Ashikin and Kalsom 2010”) and (“Siwar et.al 2011”). The purpose of the study was to identify and evaluate the difficulties local homestay providers experience. These findings provided valuable insights into the difficulties encountered by homestay operators, shedding light on various aspects that hamper the development and success of the homestay.

The authors have categorized the challenges into two distinct groups: internal challenges and external challenges (Added). In this context, internal challenges are referred to as obstacles that arise within the operators and the community itself, which can be addressed through specific measures and controlled by the community. These challenges are typically discussed within closed discussions, allowing

for potential solutions to be proposed and implemented.

On the other hand, external challenges encompass factors that arise beyond the control of the internal community. These challenges are characterized by their origin outside the operators and community, making it difficult for the community to directly influence or control them. External challenges may include environmental, economic, or political factors, which affect the community but are beyond their immediate sphere of influence.

Internal Challenges	External Challenges
Incomplete infrastructure facilities	Lack of training
Lack of exposure and understanding of the tourism business	Lack of marketing and promotion
Lack of investment capital, expertise, and entrepreneurial ability	Identity problem - brand image issues
Sub-standard and not up-to-par services	The emerging of “false or fake” Homestay
Unbalanced demography	Exploitation by external parties
Leadership problems	Legal and Regulatory Issues

The success of homestays can be hindered by inadequate infrastructure, including poor roads, utilities, transit, and communication networks, limiting accessibility for visitors. This not only affects customer satisfaction but also deters potential guests, leading to a decline in demand. Homestay operators may lack exposure to the tourism sector, resulting in challenges related to marketing, guest relations, and hospitality norms. Insufficient understanding of client expectations can lead to low occupancy rates and dissatisfied visitors. Financial constraints may limit the ability to create appealing accommodations,



impacting overall competitiveness. Ineffective business planning and resource allocation, coupled with a lack of hotel management experience, can hinder growth. Unsatisfactory services, caused by inadequate cleaning and unskilled staff, can damage the homestay's reputation and lead to decreased bookings and revenue. The demographic composition of the local population can also impact the homestay's target market. Strong leadership is crucial for overcoming these challenges, as poor management can result in misalignment with market changes, variable service quality, and internal issues.

The ability of homestay operators to deliver quality services and satisfy the needs of visitors may be hampered by a lack of training opportunities and resources. For a successful guest experience, training in hospitality management, customer service, cultural awareness, and other necessary skills is essential. Without enough training, homestay operators would find it difficult to provide good services, which would leave guests unsatisfied and lead to negative reviews. Homestays frequently experience challenges attracting guests due to poor visibility and marketing initiatives. Reaching the target demographic and setting the homestay apart from rivals require effective marketing techniques, including online and offline promotion. Low occupancy rates and lost chances to highlight the special features of the homestay can be caused by a lack of marketing knowledge and resources. Homestays need to thrive by developing a strong brand identity and a unique identity. However, developing their brand identity, communicating their unique selling propositions, and separating themselves from the competition may be difficult for certain homestays. This may result in a lack of preference and awareness among potential customers, making it challenging to attract bookings and return customers.

Due to the growth of internet booking services and the popularity of homestays, there are now more listings that are false or misleading. Some people could falsely market residences as homestays by exaggerating the features, settings, or services provided. This may lead to guest concerns about safety and trust, which could harm the reputation of trustworthy homestays. It is crucial for homestay providers to build credibility and confidence through honest and precise postings, as well as through strong reporting and resolving fraudulent activity. External parties, such as tour operators, travel agents, or internet platforms, who may impose unfair commission fees, restrictive policies, or harsh contractual terms, can take advantage of homestays. The sustainability and financial success of homestays may be strongly impacted by these actions. To establish fair and useful interactions with outside parties, homestay operators must carefully assess their relationships and contracts. Compliance with local laws, licenses, and rules is essential for running homestays legally and avoiding legal issues. However, it can be difficult for homestay operators to navigate complex legal systems, secure essential licenses, and meet regulatory requirements. Penalties, operating difficulties, or even closure may result from the violation. To meet these external difficulties, it is crucial to keep informed of the relevant regulations and laws and to seek legal assistance when necessary.

Conclusion

The study underscores the significant potential of homestays in Uttarakhand, attributing its appeal to the region's natural beauty and cultural richness. Homestays offer an authentic and immersive experience, enabling tourists to connect with local communities, preserving heritage, and fostering cultural exchange. This not only enhances the tourist experience but also contributes to the economic growth of local communities, offering direct benefits to host families. The research emphasizes the



role of government support in promoting and regulating the homestay sector. State initiatives incentivize homestays, provide training, and market Uttarakhand as a preferred destination. Despite these efforts, challenges such as limited community awareness and participation, lack of resources and training for homestay owners, and the need for basic amenities persist. Overcoming these challenges requires community engagement, education, and government support. The study concludes that addressing these issues through collaboration among stakeholders can elevate Uttarakhand as a leading destination for sustainable tourism, enhancing both the tourist experience and the economic well-being of local communities.

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