



Homestay Tourism in Ukhimath Block: An Assessment of Current Status and Economic Impact on Local Stakeholders

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Abstract: This study investigates homestay tourism in the Ukhimath block of Uttarakhand, highlighting its role in rural development and cultural preservation. Based on responses from 62 stakeholders, the research reveals that 83.87% experienced increased income due to homestay tourism. Beyond economic gains, homestays foster cultural exchange by enabling tourists to engage with local traditions. Using a descriptive methodology and structured online questionnaires, the study assesses the current status and impact of homestays on community livelihoods. It emphasizes the importance of active community participation in maximizing benefits and ensuring long-term sustainability. While the findings support homestays as a means to reduce rural poverty and promote self-employment, challenges such as infrastructure limitations and host difficulties must be addressed. The study concludes that with proper policy support and inclusive strategies, homestay tourism can become a powerful tool for economic empowerment, cultural revitalization, and environmentally responsible rural tourism in Himalayan regions like Ukhimath.

Keywords: Tourism • Homestay Assessment • Employment Opportunities • Uttarakhand

Introduction

In homestay tourism, both the local environment and culture are commercialized, creating economic value in response to visitor demand. This system offers financial incentives to indigenous communities for preserving their culture and environment (Laurie et al 2005). Homestay tourism plays a significant role in reducing rural poverty, incorporating activities such as trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, and ecotourism (Devkota 2010). It generates foreign currency, improves the balance of payments, boosts tax revenue, and promotes national economic growth, while creating employment opportunities and offering new markets for local products (Budhathoki 2013). A homestay is a type of rural business where the entire family gains from their involvement (Kannegieser 2015). In Uttarakhand, people follow the Vedic tradition of treating guests as gods ("Atithi Devo Bhava"), and homestays

are central to this. The government launched a homestay initiative to promote rural development, reduce migration, and encourage self-employment. Homestays offer guests a familiar, cost-effective environment while enabling host families to earn additional income. Several studies have highlighted homestays as a source of income, a tool for community development, and a means of reducing migration (Arya 2019, Singh et al 2013). Homestay programs also allow tourists to engage in cultural activities and provide financial benefits for local communities (Roslan et al 2017). Homestays are known to promote sustainable tourism, especially in rural areas, and while they are prevalent in developing countries in Asia, specifically in India empirical studies remain limited. Homestays foster economic development through job creation and community empowerment (Bhalla et al 2016). They are an alternative form of tourism that supports



sustainable community growth, offering tourists authentic experiences while contributing to the local economy. However, most research focuses on the tourists' perspectives, and more studies are needed on the needs and challenges faced by homestay hosts (Agyeiwaah et al 2013; Jamal et al 2011). Research also suggests that greater community participation in homestay tourism could enhance its benefits for both residents and visitors (Kayat 2002, Sood et al 2017). Homestays have garnered attention from both government and private partners because of their potential for economic development. They are increasingly acknowledged as an effective tool for promoting community growth (Acharya et al 2013). Tourism is often held responsible for deforestation and environmental degradation, leading to a reduction in benefits for local communities and the deterioration of a healthy environment. The losses from these environmental impacts are considered greater than the economic gains from tourism (Banskota et al 1995). Additionally, tourism can have various adverse effects on society, including rising crime rates, an increase in the sex trade, greater alcohol consumption, negative influences on local lifestyles, exploitation of resources, and impacts on local religious practices. These factors contribute to a negative perception of tourism (Bhan et al 2014).

To increase employment opportunities for the local people, the government of Uttarakhand introduced a new concept called "homestay." Due to the mountainous terrain of Uttarakhand, there is a shortage of resources, and the people here often struggle with unemployment. The homestay concept has provided new employment opportunities for the rural population. Every year, a large number of tourists visit Uttarakhand, making it an ideal location for running homestay businesses. Tourists enjoy various benefits through homestays, which are often not available in city-centered luxury hotels. These

include organic food, a homely atmosphere, interaction with the owners and local residents, and an open environment in the lap of nature things that cannot be found in luxury hotels.

Objectives

1. To examine the current state of homestay tourism in the study area.
2. To assess the effect of homestay tourism on the income levels of stakeholders involved in homestay operations within the study area.

Study Area

Ukhimath block is located in the northwest part of Uttarakhand, a northern state of India. The study area lies between 30°25'0"N and 30°32'35"N latitude and 79°02'25"E and 79°08'10"E longitude, with an altitude ranging from 1,000 to 6,000 meters. Due to this wide altitudinal variation, the area exhibits unique physiographic, climatic, and topographic conditions. The region is renowned for its rich biodiversity, culture, traditions, and mythology. Moderate to heavy snowfall occurs from December to February. A large crowd of tourists come here to see the snowfall. (Semwal et al.,)

Ukhimath is a small block of Rudraprayag district and a Hindu pilgrimage site in Uttarakhand, situated at an elevation of 1,311 meters and approximately 41 to 60 km from Rudraprayag. During the winter, the Utsava idols from the Kedarnath and Madhyamaheshwar temples are brought to Ukhimath, where they are worshipped for six months. Ukhimath serves as a central destination for visiting nearby sites like the Madhyamaheshwar Temple, Tungnath Temple, Deoria Tal and several other scenic locations. These attractions contribute to the promotion of the homestay business in the region. Travelers come to Chopta and Tungnath throughout the year, due to which most of the homestays are present in these villages, such as the homestay business is most popular in Sari village and Ukhimath.

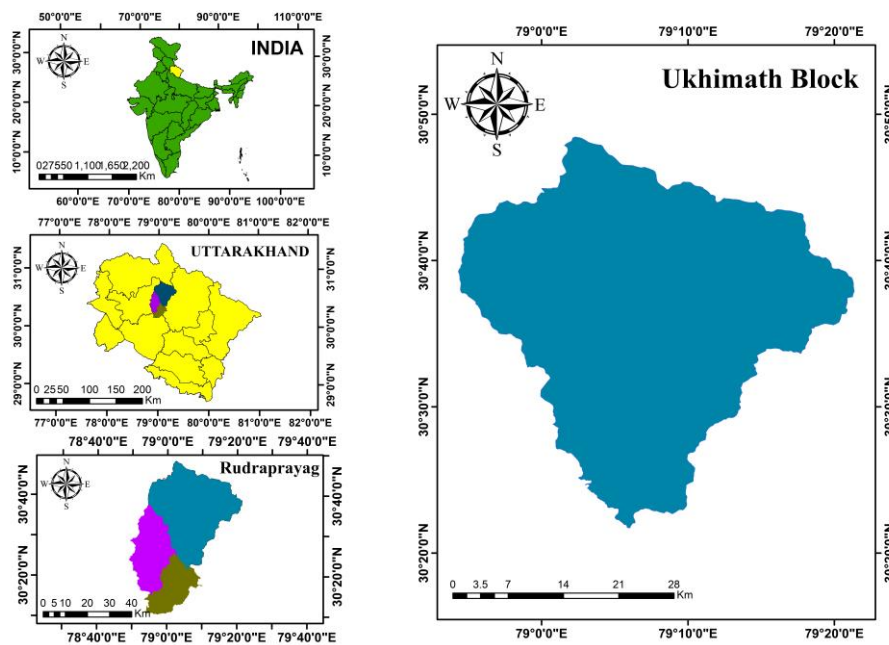


Fig. 1: Geographical location of Ukhimath Block in Rudrapur (Sources: Survey of India)

Fig 2 has been created to provide directions to each tourist destination in Ukhimath Block. The map highlights National Highway 107 in red, which connects the area's major tourist spots, such as Kedarnath, Gaurikund, Trijuginarayan, and Guptkashi. There is an 18 km trekking route from Gaurikund to

Kedarnath. From kund, a road leads to Ukhimath, which is part of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (Prime Minister's Rural Road Scheme). Tourist destinations along this route, such as Chopta, Tungnath, Deoria Tal, and Madhyamaheshwar, are located here, and travelers visit these places throughout the year.

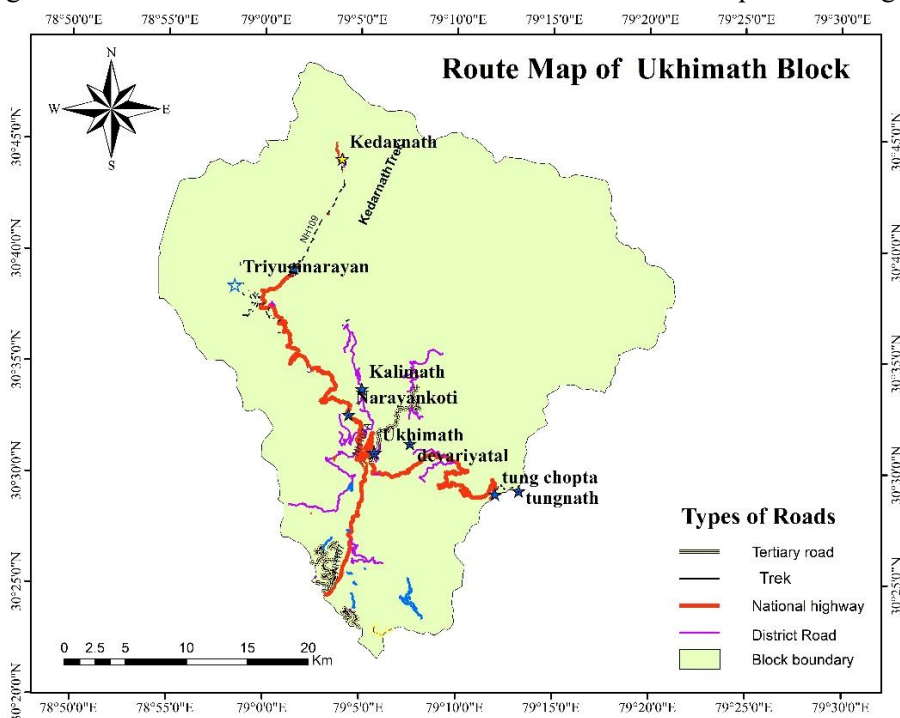


Fig. 2: Road Connectivity of Ukhimath Block (Sources: Bhukosh, Geological Survey of India)



Methodology & Data Collection

To achieve the objectives of this study, a descriptive research design was employed. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized to ensure a comprehensive analysis. The study was conducted in the Ukhimath block of Rudraprayag district, located in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, India. A simple random sampling method was adopted to ensure unbiased representation of respondents. The target population consisted of homestay owners and stakeholders in rural tourism. Out of 130 individuals approached through digital platforms, 62 respondents successfully completed and submitted the questionnaire, representing a response rate of approximately 47.7%. The limited response was primarily due to poor internet connectivity and inadequate communication infrastructure

in remote areas. Primary data was collected using a structured online questionnaire, administered through platforms such as Gmail, WhatsApp, SMS, and telephonic interviews. Secondary data was gathered from credible sources, including publications from the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Corporation (UTDC), relevant academic literature, newspapers, government reports, and magazines focusing on rural and homestay tourism. Data Analysis Descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze and interpret the data: Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) were applied to identify the concentration of responses. Standard deviation was calculated to measure the variability and spread of data. Minimum and maximum values were assessed to determine the range of the dataset and identify outliers.

Result and Discussion

Table1: Major Homestay Sites and Room & Bed Capacity in Ukhimath Block

Village Name	Number of Homestay	Number of Rooms	Capacity of Beds
Sari	44	180	384
Ukhimath	23	93	192
Guptkashi	17	76	144
Kalimath	11	33	72
Jagpura	10	65	130
Chopta	8	37	74
Chaumasi	8	21	42
Triyuginarayan	7	27	54
Bhetsem Narayankoti	7	36	72
Jamu	7	25	50
Chandrapuri	5	21	48
Kandara	5	12	24
Kimana	5	20	40
Total	157	646	1326

Table 1 presents the distribution of registered homestays, rooms, and bed capacity across villages in Ukhimath Block. Out of approximately 230 registered homestays, 157 are concentrated in 13 major tourist destinations. Sari and Ukhimath have the highest numbers, owing to their proximity to key attractions like Chopta, Tungnath, and Deoria Tal. Triyuginarayan also records a significant count due to its historic temple, believed to be the wedding site of Lord Shiva

and Goddess Parvati. Sari leads in bed capacity, suggesting better accommodation facilities, while Sankari and Kandi have the lowest. Villages like Nyalsu, Sankari, and Kandi also show the least number of homestays. Tourist footfall remains consistent year-round due to nearby sites offering snow views in winter and lush meadows during the rainy season, with the Tungnath Temple being a major highlight due to its elevation and panoramic scenery.



Figure 3. shows the total number of homestay villages. There are a total of 230 homestays in the Ukhimath block. Rudraprayag district has three blocks, and Ukhimath has the highest number of homestays because it has the most attractive tourist destinations. The majority of homestays in this block are located in Sari

village and Ukhimath, as they are near Chopta, which is known as the "Mini Switzerland" of Uttarakhand. Additionally, the Madhyamaheshwar and Tungnath temples, nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, are also nearby, which attracts a large number of tourists to the area

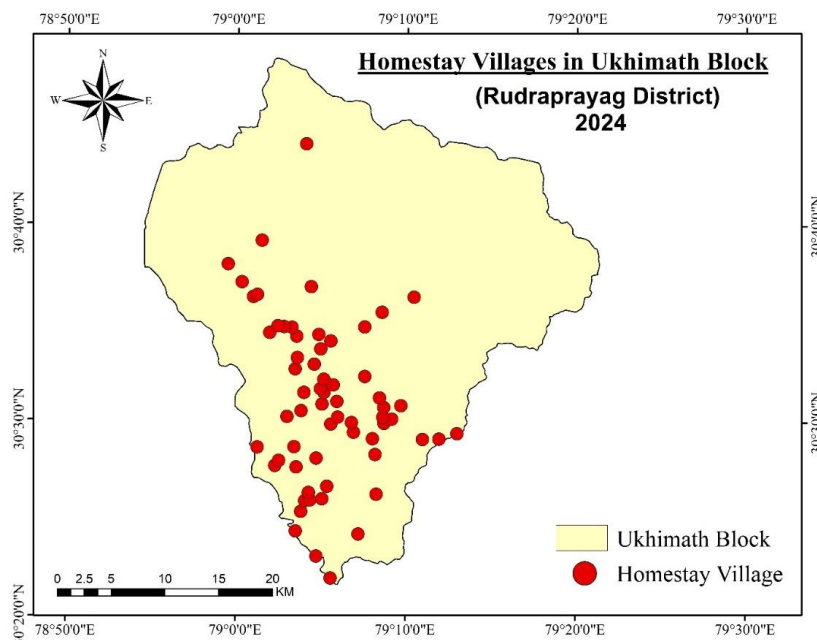


Fig. 3: Number of Homestay village map in Ukhimath Block (Source: Rudraprayag Tourism Department of Uttarakhand)

Fig. 4 illustrates the distribution of homestays into three categories: Gold, Silver, and Bronze. The size of each category represents its proportion of the total. For example, Gold contributes 17% to the total number of

homestays, Silver 51%, and Bronze 32%, with Silver having the highest contribution. Gold: These homestays offer better amenities such as parking, internet connectivity, and residential facilities.

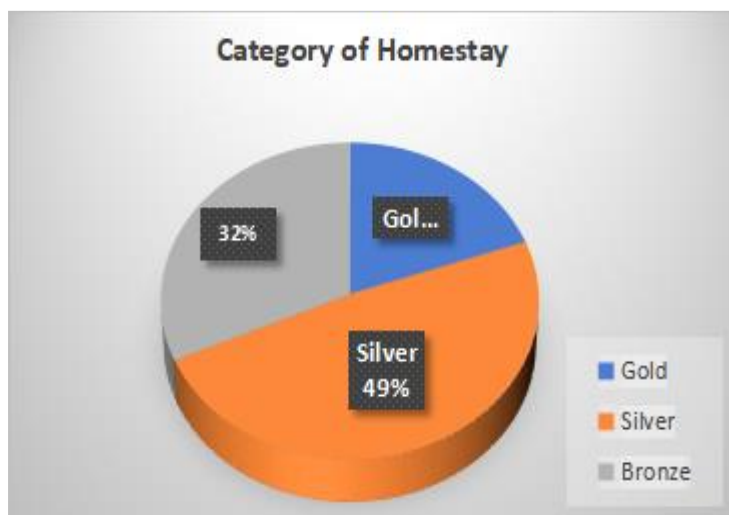


Fig. 4: Category of Homestay in Ukhimath Block (Source: Tourism Department of Rudraprayag, Uttarakhand)



In urban areas, parking is essential, but in rural areas, it is optional. Additionally, facilities like geysers and televisions are available where applicable. Silver and bronze homestays are categorized based on the amenities they offer.

Table 2: Statistical Demographic Profile of Homestay Entrepreneurs in Ukhimath:- presents the respondent's demographic details and their responses, expressed as percentages. The data reveal a higher proportion of male participants compared to females in the

homestay program. The majority of participants fall within the 41-60 age group, representing the predominant demographic in rural Garhwal's homestay tourism sector. A significant 69% of stakeholders operate their homestays as a part-time venture alongside other occupations, with agriculture being the most common secondary activity. Additionally, approximately 60% of stakeholders have 3-4 family members actively engaged in the homestay business.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of Ukhimath block Homestay Operators

SN.	Characteristics	Description	Frequency	%
1	Age category	below 22 years	2.00	3.22
		23-40 years	27.00	43.55
		41-60 years	31.00	50.00
		above 60 years	2.00	3.23
2	Gender identity	female	9.00	14.52
		male	53.00	85.48
3	Level of education	illiterate	1.00	1.61
		10 th	12.00	19.35
		12 th	21.00	33.87
		Graduation	16.00	25.81
		Post graduation	12.00	19.35
		Others	0.00	0.00
4	Additional occupations alongside homestay	Agriculture	43.00	69.35
		Govt. servants	1.00	1.61
		Adventure (Tour guide)	1.00	1.61
		Others	17.00	27.42
5	Number of members participating in the homestay	less than 2	16.00	25.81
		3 to 4	37.00	59.68
		5 to 6	9.00	14.52

Table. 3: An income-related source of Homestay Owners

	Characteristics	Description	Frequency	%
6	Homestay tourism serves as the only source of income	Yes	14.00	22.58
		No	48.00	77.42
7	Your income over the year	>50 k	18.00	29.03
		50k to 1 L	15.00	24.19
		1 L to 2.5 L	20.00	32.26
		2.5 L to 5 L	3.00	4.84
		5< L	6.00	9.68
8	Homestay tourism is boosting the income of individuals participating in the homestay sector	yes	52.00	83.87
		No	10.00	16.13
9	Homestay tourism is providing benefits to the local community	Yes	52.00	83.87
		No	10.00	16.13



10	Homestay tourism brings benefits to the local people through	Travelling	22.00	35.48
		Adventure	2.00	3.23
		Local Goods	1.00	1.61
		Domestic Products	0.00	0.00
		Travelling & Adventure	28.00	45.16
		All	9.00	14.52
11	Other members' income is included in your annual average	Yes	48.00	77.42
		No	12.00	19.35
		Yes/No	2.00	3.23

Table 3: Assessing the Financial Contribution of Homestay Enterprises in Ukhimath Block provides an overview of income-related issues. Approximately 77% of individuals do not rely solely on the revenue generated by their homestays; they also depend on various alternative income sources, including agriculture, cottage industries, government employment, and pensions. A significant 83.87% of participants agree that homestay tourism contributes to the enhancement of stakeholders' income levels. Around 32% of participants report earning between 1 to 2.5 lakh per year from this enterprise. The residents of Ukhimath Block derive multiple benefits from the initiative, particularly from the influx of tourists to the region.

Table 4: - Offering Business Opportunities: - The findings in this section indicate that homestay tourism creates significant employment opportunities in Ukhimath Block.

Table. 4: Related to Business Opportunities

Characteristics	Description	Frequency	%
Homestay tourism offers a good opportunity for self-employment or business	Yes	48.00	77.42
	No	7.00	11.29
	yes/No	7.00	11.29

Table. 5: Progression of Traditional Culture through homestay

Promotion of Traditional Culture through homestay	Yes	52	83.87
	No	10	16.13
Availability of traditional home-cooked meals in homestays	Yes	52	83.87
	No	10	16.13
Homestay is built in a traditional architectural style	Yes	32	51.61
	No	30	48.39
Workshops on traditional crafts or cooking	Yes	45	72.58
	No	17	27.42

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis of Traditional Culture, Business, and Income Variables: - The traditional culture-related factors have the

Approximately 77.42% of respondents agree that operating a homestay is a viable option for self-employment or entrepreneurship, expressing satisfaction with this opportunity.

Table 5:- Culture Aspect - This section outlines how homestay tourism contributes to the promotion of local culture. According to Table 6, around 83.87% of respondents agree that homestay tourism helps preserve and showcase traditional customs, cuisine, and rituals, while allowing tourists to engage in daily activities based on their preferences. Such involvement by tourists in local customs and routines plays a significant role in promoting cultural heritage. 83.87% of respondents serve tourists their traditional cuisine. Additionally, this cultural promotion aids in enhancing the local economy through the sale of popular regional products, homemade goods, and the organization of traditional festivities.

highest mean, median, and mode, suggesting a strong focus on cultural aspects in the data. In contrast, the business opportunities-related factors exhibit the highest standard deviation,



indicating a greater variability in responses and more diverse opinions. Meanwhile, the income-related category shows a wide range of responses, with some very high values significantly influencing the mode.

Table :6- Distinctive statistical data

Descriptive statistics of data			
Description	Objective of the study		
	Income related	Business Opportunities related	Traditional culture related
Mean	18.60	20.67	31
Median	13.00	7.00	31
Mode	48	7.00	52
Standard Deviation	17.75	23.68	17.56
Minimum	0	7.00	10
Maximum	52	48	52

Conclusion

The assessment of homestay tourism in Ukhimath Block reveals a multifaceted impact on the region's socio-economic and cultural landscape. The study confirms that homestay tourism has emerged as a vital supplement to rural livelihoods, especially in areas enriched with natural and spiritual attractions like Chopta, Tungnath, and Madhyamaheshwar. Despite challenges such as limited connectivity and infrastructure, the growth in the number of registered homestays—especially in villages like Sari and Ukhimath—indicates rising interest among locals in tourism entrepreneurship. The research highlights that while most stakeholders do not rely solely on homestay income, the initiative significantly boosts household earnings and creates part-time employment opportunities. Approximately 83.87% of respondents acknowledged improved income levels, and over 77% viewed homestays as a viable self-employment avenue. Furthermore, the involvement of family members, especially women and youth, underscores the potential for inclusive economic growth in these rural communities. Beyond financial benefits, the homestay model in Ukhimath plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting local culture. Traditional cuisine, rituals, and daily routines are being shared with visitors, contributing to cultural

continuity and pride. Tourists' engagement with local life also promotes demand for indigenous products and services, further stimulating the village economy. In conclusion, homestay tourism in Ukhimath is not merely an economic initiative but a community-based model that intertwines livelihood, culture, and heritage. For sustained success, strategic interventions in infrastructure, training, digital connectivity, and marketing are essential to enhance service quality, increase tourist footfall, and maximize benefits for local stakeholders.

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