

The Future of Homestays: A Study on Opportunities and Challenges in the State of Himanchal Pradesh (India)

Dr. Mamta Joshi

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce,
DSB Campus, Kumaun University, Nainital.
Email - mamata_j2005@yahoo.com

Dr. Pooja Joshi

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce,
DSB Campus, Kumaun University, Nainital.
Email - mamata_j2005@yahoo.com

Abstract: Homestay is a recent development in the tourism industry sector that has evolved as a profit-making venture in its own unique way. Homestay is a form of tourism that uncovers the host community life, culture, art and heritage, thus benefiting the host communities socially and economically. Such form of tourism has created incredible impact on the local economy of the concern destination on one hand and carries a potential scope for the residents on the other hand. This paper makes an effort to study the various types of opportunities available which can come out of homestay tourism and benefit all the stakeholders. Further, this paper also studies the challenges that act as a major hindrance for the development of homestay tourism in the state of Himanchal Pradesh. The paper concludes by suggesting certain recommendations which can prove to be useful in the development of homestay tourism in the concerned region.

Key Words: Homestay, Tourism, Opportunities, Challenges, Himanchal Pradesh.

1. INTRODUCTIONS: Prelude:

In the year 1864, the British declared Himanchal as their summer destination, till 19th century the tourism was related only to pilgrims and had a few spiritual destinations. The Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation has taken special efforts to break the seasonality factor and has developed diversified tourism products to attract tourists in all the seasons. After the independence more investment in the infrastructure sector led to opening up of tourism in the state. ⁽¹⁾

In India, Himanchal is one of the most popular and easily accessible Hill State. However, the biggest boost of this sector was in mid-80 and 90. Now, Himanchal is known as destination for all seasons and all reasons. In fact, the Government has laid a special emphasis on the development of activity-based tourism and opening up of new tourism destinations. To promote appropriate infrastructure is being developed with the available resources. ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾

Homestay gives more flexibility, as it offers more space and homely environment to the guest and they can live like a local. Comparatively often cheaper for an equal quality of services also generates income for locals. The future of home stay looks promising, as they continue to gain popularity among both domestic and international travellers. Which provides a unique and authentic travel experience by allowing guests to stay with local families and immerse themselves in the local culture. ⁽⁴⁾

As per the data of the tourism department there are 1,657 home stays in Himanchal. However, the number is quite high than the data of tourism department as a large number of homestays which are not registered. ⁽⁵⁾

Table 1 Homestays in Himachal Pradesh

District	No. of Homestays
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Bilaspur	14
Champa	106
Hamirpur	7
Kangra	267
Kinnaur	66
Kullu	327
Lahaul and Spiti	258
Mandi	100
Shimla	336
Sirmaur	42
Solan	125
Una	9
Total	1,657

Source: Indian Tourism Statistics 2022

Besides trekking, the home stays, located in rural areas, offer ample offbeat activities such as apple picking, jam preparation, etc. to make their stay more desirable. The new mantra of healthy living to boost immunity against Covid-19 has rather come as a blessing in disguise for these home stays owners, much to the chagrin of the hoteliers. With uncertainty prevailing around corona virus and for how long it will last, this preference for home stays seems to be here to stay. ⁽⁶⁾

As per population census 2011 the tourist arrival in the year 2022 and the details of the same are given in Table 2

Table 2 Tourists - Himachal Pradesh

Nationality	No. of Tourists
Indian	15070944
Foreigners	29333
Total	15100277
***Total Increase 167.87% as compared to 2021	

Source: Indian Tourism Statistics 2022

2. Literature review:

Suraj Bhan and Lakhvinder Singh (2014) stated that the homestay tourism is an emerging tourism concept evolved lately in the tourism world. India can be a model homestay for its multi-faceted potentialities. India can harness the boon of tourist potentiality rampant at the rural areas where government has pro-poor programs. This form of tourism is based on three aspects namely service, facility and attraction. Sustainable tourism takes place if home grown resources and natural settings are effectively served to the tourists and as well as they are also preserved. Promotion of tourism thus is highly dependent upon the active participation of the private sector and communities where the role of government becomes that of a facilitator. ⁽⁷⁾

Jyoti Sood (2016) is of the opinion that the hospitality landscape worldwide and specifically in India, is going through a transition with introduction of homestays. Homestays or Bed & Breakfasts (B&Bs) are growing rapidly and changing the old and established norms of hospitality trade. A SWOT analysis was conducted to get an in-depth understanding of the homestay product of Himachal Pradesh. The strengths of homestays lie in their unique offering of homeliness which

is not offered in any other form of tourist accommodation. Their apparent weakness lies in the fact that unlike hotels, they might not be able to provide that level of privacy. Currently the product is fragmented and not organized and there is low awareness among tourists and homestay operators. Overall homestays have great prospects despite of some foreseeable threats and weaknesses, if they focus on their inherent strengths and build on their unique offerings. There are challenges which can be resolved by active participation and engagement of communities. ⁽⁸⁾

Kamal Sharma (2016) in his research stated that rural tourism is a recent offshoot of tourism sector that has grown up to be a potential business in its own space. Rural tourism is a form of nature-based tourism that uncovers the rural life, culture, art and heritage at rural locations, thereby favouring the local communities socially and economically. Rural tourism is an opportunity for rural development. According to 2011 census of Himachal Pradesh, 89.96 % of the state dwells in the villages. A group of villages of Shimla have got immense potential in terms of rural tourism product to showcase the rural life, art, culture and heritage thereby benefitting the indigenous population economically and socially as well as enabling a rich & real tourism experience. This research paper is exploratory in nature and inspects the rural tourism resources of the villages of Shimla. It further focuses on identifying the rural population’s understanding of the rural tourism’s development and its consequent benefits. ⁽⁹⁾

Anjali Dube and R. A. Sharma (2018) made an effort to briefly discuss the conceptual framework and emergence of homestays and the global & Indian trends in homestays. Focused reviews of existing literature have been undertaken to evolve perspectives on primary drivers (motivations) and barriers (challenges) faced by homestay owners in different countries of the world. It was noticed that as in other businesses, money was not the sole driver in this industry. It also appears that the study of motivations and challenges faced by homestay hosts’, particularly that of urban areas remains a little researched topic. ⁽¹⁰⁾

Aastha Singh, et.al. (2023) stated that the concept of staying in people's homes as part of a vacation has caught on all throughout the country, propelling it to the forefront of tourism as a whole as a model for creativity and progression in the industry, and bringing in ever-increasing sums in recent years, the Indian Ministry of Tourism has been increasing the amount of investment it makes in the development of homestay destinations, which have a significant and long-term impact on the socioeconomic conditions of rural areas. The government anticipates that the expansion of the rural tourism sector, particularly tourism that involves staying in people's homes, will contribute to the improvement of the socioeconomic development of the communities in the areas that were impacted. Because homestay tourism is able to take advantage of the natural beauty of the area as well as the exquisite customs and cultures of the community as appealing strategies to draw tourists to their village, tourism activities. ⁽¹¹⁾

3. Objectives of the study:

- To study the growth rate, trends and innovation of homestay tourism in Himanchal Pradesh.
- To emphasize the major opportunities available for homestay tourism in the state of Himanchal Pradesh.
- To identify the challenges faced in the development of homestay tourism in the state.
- To give valuable recommendations to make homestay tourism more viable in the hills.

4. Discussion:

Results for the impact of passage of time on the number of Indian tourist arrival

1. Bilaspur

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.277 ^a	.077	-.007	383489.335	1.147

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.069 ^a	.005	-.086	145.503	.630

2. Hamirpur

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.313 ^a	.098	.016	266644.553	1.009

Model Summary^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.550 ^a	.303	.240	13.597	.935

3. Kangra

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.313 ^a	.098	.016	266644.553	1.009

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.108 ^a	.012	-.078	682944.887	.926

4. Kinnaur

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.031 ^a	.001	-.090	33425.005	1.099

Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.304 ^a	.092	.010	163717.113	1.372

5. Kullu

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.095 ^a	.009	-.081	805734.003	.939

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.582 ^a	.339	.279	29244.488	1.196

6. Mandi

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson

1	.081 ^a	.006	-.084	279572.671	1.278
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(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.615 ^a	.378	.321	2668.499	.625

7. Shimla

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.021 ^a	.000	-.090	801716.582	.934

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.200 ^a	.040	-.047	39783.102	.860

8. Sirmour

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.202 ^a	.041	-.046	213743.968	1.042

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.310 ^a	.096	.014	852.910	.560

9. Solan

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.411 ^a	.169	.094	280776.199	1.118

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.186 ^a	.035	-.053	1456.246	.639

10. Una

(INDIAN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.308 ^a	.095	.013	448123.096	.837

(FOREGIN VISITORS) Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.310 ^a	.096	.014	88.892	1.103

Interpretation:

- *The regression results to assess the impact of passage of time on the change in Indian tourist arrival is found, there is a downfall in the number of foreign tourist arrival.*
- *The correlation values indicates that there exists weak positive correlation between passage of time and number of tourist arrival.*
- *The R-square value indicates that the independent variable is able to explain the dependent variable, which means there exists a good explanatory power*

Opportunities for homestays:

Economic Opportunities:

There are number of benefits for the host community and these includes economic benefits such as opportunities for local businesses which allows for increased trade among the increased number of visitors and then develops a variety of local businesses. It creates jobs, strengthens the local economy, contributes to local infrastructure development and can help to conserve the natural environment and cultural assets and traditions, and to reduce poverty and inequality. a major engine of growth for future and as such contribution of the tourism sector to the State GDP is 6.6% approximately which is quite significant. ^{(12) (13)}

Social Opportunities:

It is a wonderful venue for intercultural exchanges such as guest host interactions. Social opportunities help to reduce tensions between different races and nationalities. It is useful in the retention of youths through participation in local opportunities. The local residents of the area gain confidence by learning new languages and abilities. As modernization advances in, make native's tech aware, "smart," and self-sufficient. There is tourism related social opportunities for the host community. Tourists get the opportunity to see natural and cultural variety. There is increased capacity of the destination's accommodation supply and by advertising the location all year, the problem of seasonality is also eliminated. Then by including important stakeholders on a consistent basis, you may raise awareness about tourism among domestic as well as foreign passengers. ^{(14) (15)}

Environmental Opportunities:

It has been seen that the concept of homestay tourism has increased conservation awareness, fostered environment conservation, waste management and increased plantation activities. The host community has experienced increase in conservation awareness and many believe that homestay tourism can help to reduce pollution in the surrounding areas. The version of tourism has proved to be very helpful in reducing common sanitation related diseases since training would be conducted. It has further persuaded the locals to keep the premises, kitchens and toilets neat and clean. Homestay tourism has increased awareness on environmental conservation among host areas and the assembling funds for conservation of physical environment. ^{(16) (17)}

Tourists Opportunities:

The tourists get a chance to witness the natural and the cultural diversity of that particular destination as such opportunities are not available in the hotels. Homestay tourism directly or sometimes indirectly helps to increase the accommodation supply capability of that particular destination. It further helps to remove the problem of seasonality by promoting the destination all year round. Homestay tourism has also helped to increase tourism awareness amongst local and foreign tourists by the constant intervention by key role players i.e., host community, travel agents, state government and the central government. ^{(18) (19)}

Infrastructure Opportunities:

Tourism in any form or in any destination has given all kinds of benefits to almost all the sectors across the economy and probably infrastructure has gained the maximum. Homestay tourism has led to increased accessibility to villages by linking them with easily accessible roads. Infrastructure opportunities from homestay tourism has resulted in increased number of education and training centres for capacity building. There is also an increasing feeling in the safety and security of locals as well tourists at the specified destinations. Due to increased number of tourists in the specified destination the overall healthcare and public utilities facilities have improves especially in the remote destinations. ^{(20) (21)}

5. Challenges For Homestays:

Like any other industry or sector the homestay industry in the state of Himanchal Pradesh has its own set of challenges and some of these are listed in the following lines: ⁽²²⁾

- ❖ The rules and regulations especially related to registration of homestays, bookings and others are not as stringent as they should be.
- ❖ There is a shortage of skilled tour guides, owners and persons who have expertise in this business because there are not enough educational and training establishments.
- ❖ The state's infrastructure is not up to the mark and because of this it is difficult to give better services to the tourists.
- ❖ Additionally, the marketing and promotion of homestay tourism across the state suffers from a severe lack of resources.
- ❖ There is also a noteworthy hindrance in the form of inappropriate resource management in the state and this results in further expanding this industry.
- ❖ There is a lack of coordination among the stakeholders such as government, industry participants, intermediates and other nongovernment groups.
- ❖ The general population of the community has a lower awareness of how important it is to preserve natural and cultural resources.
- ❖ The lack of ecotourism best practices is one of the most serious difficulties and it is also one of the most significant barriers to expansion for homestays in the state.
- ❖ Improper management of resources at the destination is also a big challenge in extension of homestay tourism in the state.

6. Recommendations For Homestays:

The main purpose of recommendations is to make any industry or sector viable and the following recommendations were made: ⁽²³⁾

- ❖ The host community should be technically assisted to prepare homestay planning and development.
- ❖ The host community should be given training on leadership, hospitality along with food and beverage so that the tourists can get quality service.
- ❖ Loan subsidy and other monetary benefits should be provided to the host community for upgrading their existing facilities.
- ❖ Host community should be connected with other tourism stakeholders and promotion should also be done by public and private agencies.
- ❖ Government should give special benefits to their employees and encourage them to stay in homestays.
- ❖ While planning for development of homestays, every member of the host community should be taken care and given the benefits arising out of it.
- ❖ Establish community tourism fund in the homestay destinations so as to invest in capacity building and infrastructure.
- ❖ There is a need of development of homestay tourism database so that tourists can easily explore, choose and book their stay.

7. Conclusion:

The tourism market across the country and especially in the state of Himanchal Pradesh is enormous and it offers boundless opportunities. All that is required from the stakeholders is that they should exploit and reap these benefits. Homestay as a form of tourism is a micro business venture and it is relatively a new concept in our country. Nevertheless, there are numerous passionate groups and persons who are keen to run this business. The matter of fact is that there is a lack of vision, plan, policy, strategy and program and this is a vital aspect that must be taken care of. Diverting domestic and foreign tourists to the homestays should be one of the tourism policies. It is beneficial to create a homestay environment and facilitate the host community to carry out the business to the benefit of all stakeholders. There are nonetheless countless temporary challenges which can be resolved with appropriate strategies and careful planning.

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