

**A STUDY ON HOMESTAY AS A POTENTIAL TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
IN PORT BLAIR A “REAL HOME AWAY FROM HOME”**

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1.1 Introduction

Travelling is always to seek new experience .Urbanizations have changed the lifestyle of people tremendously .A large chunks of people are moving to metropolitan cities for better job opportunities and also living a standard lifestyle. The urban lifestyle provides very little opportunities to relax in the serene environments. This urges the people to take holidays and move to quiet and serene areas. The income, time, status and prestige, reduced family size is some of the factors which has added to the growth of tourism. New forms of tourism like cultural tourism ,eco-tourism, nature based tourism, agri tourism, rural tourism are growing demands of tourism where it brings a tourists close to natural environment and host community. Homestay aren't just a base from which to spend a few days exploring the local area they are a holiday destination in themselves. Frederick (2003) also defined the homestay as a stay by a tourists or a visiting foreign student who is hosted by a local family. Homestay can occur in any destination worldwide; residents of homestay countries encourage homestay in order to develop their tourism industry, also homestay as a concept is to bring people from varied background under a single roof, quite literally and offer an ideal platform for long lasting friendship. The homestay tourism department in India have introduced the concept of homestay in Kerala Karnataka, HimachalPradesh ,Delhi, goa ,uttarakhand ,Sikkim ,Rajasthan ,Gujarat are the states to have introduced the concept of homestay. Ministry of tourism India initiative in this direction has been the bed and breakfast scheme. Under this scheme comfortable home like, clean and affordable accommodation facilities are provided to the tourists.

Homestay is an alternative name for village tourism, which means staying in someone's home and providing an opportunity for the visitors to experience a place in an authentic, comfortable and homely setting. In general, homestay provides visitors (i) unique (one of a kind) opportunity to experience the rich and hospitable cultures of the village; (ii) an opportunity to see and experience astonishing objects no one else has seen or done before- especially amazing food (iii) to meet and really connect with the local people from the host country.

Become a part of a family, and an important part of a household, that is, a homely environment; (v) learn about environments and cultures through other people's eyes, (vi) contribute directly to the rural economy and people in need and (vii) provide opportunities to support the community in conservation initiatives (Devkota). Homestay activities are believed to promote tourism at the local level by protecting local culture, tradition and environment as well as empowering the locals by creating income and employment opportunities.

Homestay is a tourism product which was introduced to give a chance to the tourist to stay with selected local family and experience their daily lifestyle and learn their cultures. Ministry of Tourism Malaysia does not list the homestays as a part of accommodation industry because of its concept is more focused on lifestyle and experience which include culture and economic activity (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, 2011). Currently, there are 140 homestay with 227 villages throughout Malaysia with total of 3,264 houses offering 4,463 rooms until June 2009 (Ibrahim Y. et.a], 2010).

When tourism is growing fast, it is important to make its development sustainable and as beneficial as possible for the communities involved. According to Faure et al. (2014), sustainable tourism refers to mutual benefits and to so-called win-win situations for both tourists from the more developed countries and for the receiving countries that are less developed.

According to Ministry of Tourism Malaysia (2007), homestay as "an arrangement that provides accommodation for students or tourists in the home of the family in exchange for payment where the trip includes a homestay in a traditional villages, accommodation arrangement for students and school groups; and live with a local family in homestay and learn the language and culture of the locals". Thus, homestay is an accommodation that ensures local community's sustainable wellbeing in term of economic, social and culture aspects where the main concept which homestay is representing is the diversification of local people to attract the visitors (Din Mapjil, Chaiyatom et.aL.,2070)

1.2 Concept of homestay

Homestay is a visit to a home which allows visitors to rent a room from a local family in order to learn local culture, lifestyle or language. It is a living arrangement offered by a host or host family that involve staying in their furnished house. The guest of a homestay would be staying in home like accommodation with shared living spaces with facilities and amenities.Meals are usually included and the length of the stay could be daily, weekly, monthly or unlimited unless specified otherwise by the host(River,1998).Homestay offers a range of activities which give guest the unique opportunity to experience the specific culture of the area. Activities will differ from home to home and depending on the location.For example Homestay in Thailand can range from giving morning alms to monk,learning how to weave silk or cotton cloths participating in agriculture activities to going on nature tours, learn a skill practiced by local villagers such as making local handicraft or cooking thai food.In japan one can lean doll making art.Depending on the family many host will offer to take guests round the sights of their town or village sharing their local insights and an experience.

1.3 Homestay in India

India is one of those destinations found on every traveller's list. This is mostly because of its vast sprawling natural beauty, seasonal diversities, cultural richness and ethnicity & hospitality of its communities. India is considered by many locals to be a perfect land for homestay.With the aim of providing comfortable Home Stay facilities of standardized world class services to the tourists, and to supplement the availability of accommodation in the rural tourist destinations, State Government introduces Home Stay Facilities on the basis of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India "Incredible India Bed and Breakfast scheme. The basic idea is to provide a clean and affordable place for foreigners and domestic tourists alike including an opportunity for foreign tourists to stay.

Any private house located in rural areas of the State in good condition and easily accessible in the country-side i.e. within the Farm House, Orchards, Tea-Gardens etc. will primarily qualify under the Scheme. The house shall fulfil the minimum requirement of having one or more room's accommodation subject to a maximum of three rooms to cover under the scheme with attached toilet facility which will be made available to the tourists as Home Stay accommodation.Recently, the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development through "Rural New Economic Model" (2011) aims to build and expand the potential homestay in 500 villages as a rural tourism branding and mapping homestay as a national tourism icon.

The homestay program is one of the strategies in rural tourism. It involves tourists stay, dine and be entertained with traditional events and activities with the villagers involved. Through this program, tourists can interact directly with the host family (host) (Norliza A. &Salamiah A. Jamal, 2006).

1.4 Home stay opportunities and challenges for tourists

Homestay programmes have been a successful tool to increase tourism visitation and broaden accommodation options in poorer rural communities, especially in South-East Asia (Tourism Office Kiangang, 2012; ABV, 2013).Regarding the three pillars of sustainability economically, socially and environmentally various advantages are induced by homestays. Local communities occasionally benefit, but in an indirect way (Lindberg, 1996) and to a much lesser extent (Mirbabayev and Shagazatova, 2005). As income created through homestay programmes is handed directly to the host families, benefits of tourism are not monopolized by outside actors (Anand, Chandan and Singh, 2012). Livelihood opportunities, additional income and employment opportunities (ABV, 2013; Anand et al., 2012; Pusiran and Xiao, 2013) emerge from this concept, whereby it is considered as a tool for poverty eradication and development (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013). Moreover, no major investments are required to run a homestay, which makes the programme accessible to households across economic classes (Anand et al., 2012).Intercultural exchange enriches both visitors and host families, and culture is preserved through the active demonstrations of dances, food preparations and celebrations (ABV, 2013)

Facilities for tourists

- Authentic meals
- Homemade drinks
- Organic vegetables are grown and served
- Most of the families are multilingual and speak English and hindi and other regional language.
- Impeccably maintained rooms and high standards of cleanliness

External Challenges	Internal Challenges
Competition from other accommodation providers	Lack of community participation and commitment
Failure in meeting international standards	Unbalanced demography
Misuse of homestay terms by opportunities	Low standards of accommodation and infrastructure facilities
Lack of training	Conflict in community
Lack of marketing and promotion	Communication problem
Lack of tourists activities	Culture shock to village community
-----	Over commercialization
-----	Lack of hospitability experience and knowledge
-----	Inability of poor people to participate

Challenges

- Traditional and small-scale villages often suffer from migration problems whereby younger generations migrate to bigger towns or cities, an unbalanced participation in the homestay programme might be a problem for the community. Older generations have to run the accommodations and within a certain timeframe a lack of replacement hosts arise. As such, the sustainability of the programme is affected. Youth participation is crucial to maintain homestay programmes in the future (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013; Nor Ashikin and Kayat, 2010).
- Communication between hosts and guests. Good communication between both parties increases the intensity of the homestay experience. Whenever this contact is disturbed or impeded by a lack of communication skills or mastering of an international language, the intensity and goals of the programme are affected (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013; Zaki et al., 2011).
- Some village communities experience a culture shock when they open up their rural homes to international tourists (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013). Not only are they often astonished by the newest gadgets tourists bring along (e.g. smart phones, IPods, laptops, etc.), but discrepancies in socio-cultural norms occasionally cause some problems as well (Zaki et al., 2011). As these issues mainly arise when a village first opens up to the outside world, this might dissipate in time when inhabitants get more used to the concept of tourism and improve their interaction with guests (Pusiran and Xiao, 2013).



Economic Opportunities of Homestay
Transforming economic and employment opportunities to rural area
Encouraging micro entrepreneurship in tourism
Conservation of indigenous skills such as handicrafts and artisan works
Direct economic benefits consumption of food accommodation and purchase of souvenirs

Social Opportunities of Homestay
An ideal platform for cross cultural exchange
Reducing conflict among different races and nationalities
Retention of youth by involving them in local opportunities
Learning new languages skills and builds confidence among locals
Making local tech savvy and smart and independent

Environmental Opportunities of Homestay
Persuading the locals to keep the premises, kitchens and toilets etc. neat & clean
Increasing awareness on environmental conservation among host areas
Assembling funds for conservation of physical environment.

Tourism related Opportunities
Tourists get a chance to witness natural & cultural diversity.
Increase in accommodation supply capability of the destination.
Removing the problem of seasonality by promoting the destination all year round
Increase tourism awareness amongst local and foreign tourists by the constant Intervention by key role players.

Infrastructural Opportunities
Increasing accessibility to villages by linking them with easily accessible roads
Increasing safety & security of locals as well tourists at the destinations in question
Improving healthcare & public utilities at the remot destinations.

1.5 Product line of homestay

The important products offered by home stays have been discussed in general.

1.Accommodation:The homestays are in the houses of the locals. The houses are built on the regional/local architecture of the area. All over India there are many different types of homes, their various architectural styles are typical of the area they are found in, the history of their owners and a range of social and religious traditions. There are the Havelis of Northern India and the Tharavadu houses in Kerala, the planters' mansions on tea and spice plantations and the colonial bungalows. The homestay and the rooms have furniture of local flavour. The homestays may retain cowsheds, goathouse, herb garden, kitchen garden, honey comb etc as attractions. Rooms are single, double and twin. The rooms have attached private bathrooms with every room along with toiletries.

2.Cuisines:Meals form very integral part of stay in homestays. The local cuisine is served to the guests. At times delicious organic food is picked fresh and cooked straight from the garden and jungle. The food is eaten with the family.

3.Amenities: Apart from the accommodation, there are other features which are required for a comfortable stay. This comes in the form of amenities like laundry service, television in rooms/lobby, parking, wake-up call, mineral water, heating in rooms (as per the weather conditions), babysitting or child care , complimentary newspaper, non-Smoking , alcohol allowed .

4.Local Activities: Each area specialises in different activities because of the geographical location as well as the socio-cultural milieu of each place is distinct. The activities might also differ from day and night. Homestays give a real feeling of local culture and also gets an opportunity to learn about all sorts of local customs and traditions. Some of the local activities enjoyed are as follows:

- Lifestyle exploration through village walk
- Visiting ethnic groups
- Helping to milk the cow and churning, grinding corns, husking participating in the daily or seasonal chores with family.
- Cultural shows
- Tradition massage

Potential of Homestays as Tourism Product in Sikkim⁴¹

5.Sight Seeing: The homestays are located in the natural surroundings, places of historical and cultural importance. Thus the scope of sight seeing is immense. The family members of homestays or locals can prove good guides and provide good company.

- Village tour
- Camping, Boating, Campfire, Fishing,
- Walks and hikes to caves, lakes and waterfalls
- Visit to tea gardens/spices plantations/rubber plantations
- Elephant safari
- Plantation Visit

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Objective of the study

- To understand the benefits of homestay
- To identify the opportunities in homestay
- To understand the emerging trends in homestay
- To find out the expectation of guests who prefer this type of accommodation

2.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to identify about general and specific attributes of homestay accommodations in online tourist reviews and to bring an understanding on sentiments attached to them. It offers insightful thought on tourists/customer preferred attributes which in turn helps in designing and delivering better homestay services

2.3 Gap of the study

There was no study and awareness program conducted in Port Blair Island to the local community. The host community were not aware about the benefits of homestay and were having poor communication skills and were not able to approach the higher authorities in tourism. Lack of training skills and poor financial assistance were found in the island .It was also noticed that there was poor promotion and marketing done by the local authorities and government for homestay.

This study will help the local people and the tourism players to understand that importance of homestay because it will be adding a value to their lifestyle and the local community can develop themselves through the income which they earn while running a homestay. Improvement in accommodation facilities and services will encourage tourists from all over India .Homestay in Port Blair is a emerging concept and the local community can gain profit from it if they are guided well and collaborate with the A&N government and promote the homestay program. Homestay will give better opportunity to meet the local people and share a value meal along with budgeted stay by learning the local culture and customs.

3. Methodology

The data was collected both through primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected through qualitative and quantitative study. A sample size of 250 host community were asked to fill the questionnaires and 100 tourists were interviewed on how to improve the homestay services where they were given the opportunity to contribute their ideas and suggestions. Random sampling method was used.

4. Data Analysis

- The data collected states that the host community was not aware of the benefits of homestay as they were following the concept of hotels and lodges. The host community is not having any guidance and support from the public sector for operating homestay and they lack in undergoing training programmes.
- Primary data was collected with the help of interview and convenience sampling. Qualitative data was used for the study with a sampling of 384. A number of qualitative research was to allow host and providers to express their experience and opinions ,give insight into their ideas regarding homestay experience and indicate areas that may require further research. Questionnaires were distributed to homestay hosts which allowed for analysis of host profile and tourists.

- About 80% local community consider homestay as a tourists attraction than the source of income. In homestay tourism both the environment and culture are commoditized and is created with the demand of visitor.
- The local community is not able to interact with the tourists because they lack in communication. Most of the tourists speak English. About 75% people agreed that homestay is an ideal platform for cross culture exchange.
- About 90% of youth population do not involve themselves in homestay development and are not part of any local opportunities. Whereas, many homestay entrepreneurs are not tech savvy
- Tourists are able to get a chance to witness natural and cultural diversity and about 67% people agreed that the concept of homestay conversation of indigenous skills such as handicraft and artisan work still remains.
- There is also a need for improvement in infrastructure and other residential facilities. It is also noticed that there is lack of skilled human resources such as guide, entrepreneurs, hospitality professional.

5. Finding of the study

- The study shows that homestay is an opportunity for the host community, they realise that a tourists is coming to their village to stay or explore the community people, culture and traditions which gives happiness and encourages the community to standardise their services and empower the local communities as new job opportunities. The females are contributing to the family income as they are the ones who maintain the homestay
- The study shows that most of tourist is attracted because of beach tourism.
- The major problem faced by the tourists was the language, most of the tourist were finding difficulty in speaking hindi. Language becomes a barrier when it comes to communicate with the family members.
- Local cuisines served in the homestay which at times is not preferred by the tourists.
- Medical facilities are lacking and there is no one in the family to take the responsibility for any medical emergency.
- The communication network is good but lack of internet facility definitely makes the tourists unhappy.
- There is not much awareness programme organised by the Port Blair govt.
- The home that is unable to directly serve as home stays are also given the chance to supplement their income by acting for tourists or packing meals for travellers.
- The tourists mostly visit during October to December months. The tourists come either single or in pair. The duration of the stay in homestay is three to four days. Most domestic tourists prefer homestay than international tourists.
- The home stay project has undoubtedly brought new life to port blair city. The host community is happy and thus encourage the community to conserve its biodiversity and culture. Homestay have empowered the local communities as a new job opportunities created. The females control and contribute to the family income as they are one who maintains the homestay.
- The host community find that tourists are coming from different cultural background so at times they fail to respect the local traditions and customs. They fear at times to come people may get materialistic in their approach as they find that they are being benefited by the tourists. The young population try to copy the foreigners which may be a threat to sustainability of culture.

6. Conclusion

The Indian tourism market is huge and it has limitless offering and product. Homestay is a micro tourism entrepreneurship .However lot of enthusiastic groups and individual are eager to run this business with ideas and knowledge.Govt lack a concerted vision, plan, policy and strategy and program and this is a crucial aspect that must be addressed. Since the homestay providers are effectively running the homestay it is their responsibility to ensure they are adequately trained in area such as cross-cultural, communication and conflict management. Host need to be aware of their duty of care towards international tourists. Provider needs to ensure the homestay host are given regular training in cross-cultural communication and cultural awareness.

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