



# Eco-friendly Hospitality in Himalayas: An Investigation on Homestay Services in India

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**Keywords:**

Eco-friendly services, Homestay, Hospitality, Himalayan destination, Local economic development.

**Abstract.**

The hospitality sector has been considered as an equal contributor to tourism impacts. As far as the sustainable destination development is concerned, there requires a balanced approach by the authorities for economic benefits and the benefits to the environment. The concept of homestays is attaining its popularity among tourists, its contribution to economic development to the locals is as important as keep the understanding that these hospitality services are aligned with eco-friendly practices, thereby reflecting upon the sustained life of the Himalayan tourism. Hence, this study is conducted to inspect the home stay practices in locals and to examine if these practices are aligned with environmental safety. The study has been conducted in various regions of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. The study revealed a requirement for the awareness and increase in knowledge among the homestay authorities for adopting the sustainable hospitality practices in regular service operations along with considering its benefits for local economic development.

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**Kata Kunci:**

Pelayanan ramah lingkungan, Homestay, Destinasi Himalaya, Pengembangan ekonomi lokal.

**Abstrak.**

Sektor perhotelan telah dianggap sebagai kontributor yang sama terhadap dampak pariwisata. Dalam kaitannya dengan pengembangan destinasi yang berkelanjutan, diperlukan pendekatan yang seimbang oleh otoritas untuk manfaat ekonomi dan manfaat bagi lingkungan. Konsep homestay mencapai popularitasnya di kalangan wisatawan, kontribusinya terhadap pembangunan ekonomi bagi penduduk setempat sama pentingnya dengan menjaga pemahaman bahwa layanan perhotelan ini selaras dengan praktik ramah lingkungan, sehingga mencerminkan kehidupan pariwisata Himalaya yang berkelanjutan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk memeriksa praktik home stay di penduduk setempat dan untuk memeriksa apakah praktik ini selaras dengan keamanan lingkungan. Penelitian telah dilakukan di berbagai wilayah Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh dan Sikkim. Studi tersebut mengungkapkan kebutuhan untuk kesadaran dan peningkatan pengetahuan di antara otoritas homestay untuk mengadopsi praktik perhotelan berkelanjutan dalam operasi layanan reguler bersama dengan mempertimbangkan manfaatnya bagi pengembangan ekonomi lokal.

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Article history: Received 19<sup>th</sup> January 2022; Accepted 18<sup>th</sup> August 2022; Available 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

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## 1. Introduction

It is well known global fact that eco-friendly principles and practices are a usually way to conserve and protect environment, but the involvement of locals interest which generally emerges from the economic benefits has not been discussed or considered much in this field of research. Local peoples are the one who know and understand the needs and requirements of their destinations. The Himalayan destinations which are ecologically vulnerable require a balanced approach even in terms of ecotourism. In fact, such form of tourism has raised another concern of exploitation of natural resources (Rynjah & Sailo, 2021; Andrei et al., 2014). Rather than involving up the outsider agencies and authorities to develop and promote the ecotourism in Himalayas, it is necessary to support the residents and make them aware of this concept so that they can retain and earn from the tourism and

they can participate in the conservation of the environment. Promoting or developing the concept of environmentally friendly tourism cannot be called as a beneficial step for conserving the nature in Himalayas, unless there is support from the local community.

The more a community felt the benefits of tourism through eco-friendly practices the more they work to safeguard their ecology and environment, thus may help to balance, and support the local economic development through the ecotourism practices (Agarwal & Mehra, 2019). The community enterprise concept delivers the self-help reaction for resolving the unemployment and other economic issues (Thapa, 2012, Sufianto et.al., 2019). The development of home stays concept in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim has efficiently contributed to make the community people to get intact with the tourism activities and to keep subsequent benefits from them. However, the sustainable business is not only supposed to consider the process of money-making, but at the same time service providers requires to be conscious and aware about the environment of the area and make sure the organization does not have harmful effects on ecology of the area (Khan et.al, 2017; Yang, 2021). In other words, economic sustainability is subsequently associated with social and environmental concerns (Emawati, 2020; Thapa, 2012).

There is a requirement to find out whether these activities are eco-friendly or are aligned with it. The purpose of this study is to examine the part of home stay practices in local socio-economic growth of people; and to recommend ways to improve present ecotourism hospitality services in selective Himalayan region or destinations.

## 2. Literature Review

The increased trend for eco-conscious travel has put the industry to look forward to green hotel certification programs (Fukey & Issac, 2014; Yusnita & Awang, 2018; Dani, Tiwari & Negi, 2021). In terms of hospitality sector, environment management aspects involve the adoption of continuous practices by which a service activity are examined and applied to minimize the harmful effects on the atmosphere of a destination (Nana Ato Arthur, & Victor Mensah, 2006). In terms of the eco-tourism, the activities which compel services and practices are the essential elements in a sustainable tourism that seeks to conserve, improves and minimize the impressions on the local environment (Siti-Nabiha et al., 2014). Cai et al (2009) explained that the tourism activities should contribute to the economical, physical and socio-cultural developments that determine the overall destination development. Hence, contemporary tourism with its tendency and characteristics cannot be supported without determining the environmental management as a major element of the economic feature of tourism (Muhanna, 2006). Mahony and van Zyl (2002) considered that the economic development process of a local region should be followed up with a sustainable development for maintaining life quality of life local community, poverty reduction, transformation of political, cultural and economic structure that may help in development of income generation and economy modernization.

The implication of eco-friendly practices comprises a wide range of elements and links not just to social associations in the local community but also economic concerns related to service exchanges with tourists and additional stakeholders (Siti-Nabiha et al., 2014; Kartika et. al., 2020). Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2012) explained that sustainability is associated with quality of life of community people covering social, economic, and environmental structure so as to provide the community with a healthy and productive life style for a longer time period. Extending to this, the home-stay concept has been initialized as a practice to provide the local community with job opportunities along with improving their overall life quality (Bhuiyan et al., 2011). According to Yassin et al. (2010) such kind of tourism practices that supports the earning has the strength to support the local economy and bringing the economic benefits to the destination(s) only if the policies and strategies are framed for sustainable development. Such kind of tourism activity is much popular among the tourists who have

the curiosity to interact and be familiar with the local community, their culture and ecosystem (LTSN Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism, 2003).

According to Dearden (1997), the tourism impacts on the destination ecology should also involve the overall development and more specifically determine the sustainable development issues considering the both socio-economic development and benefits (Ott, 2003). However, the lack of awareness amongst home-stay operators in sub-urban areas (Tzschenke et al, 2008), the execution of green practices in home-stay is quite challenging (Hillary, 1998). In terms of retaining the benefits through tourism services, environmentally concerned community could be led to work for their economic interests or benefits of the hospitality services while suppressing their eco-centric values in the absence of proper environmental arrangements and awareness (Dief & Font, 2012). In fact, such service providers still operate in regular manner and cannot exactly relate the environmental benefits to their business and services (Butler, 2008). According to Bender, (2013) and Slevitch et al. (2013) the tourists are more attracted towards eco-friendly accommodations and are more satisfactory. Authors like Bohdanowicz (2005); Chan, et al., (2009) and Webster, (2000) explained sustainable tourism practices as a combination of energy management; water preservation and waste management. Similarly, the adaptability of green practices relies upon water conservation, waste management and energy conservation with high visibility and familiarity to the customers (Levy & Duverger, 2010) thus defining a defining commitment to offer efficient techniques to minimize the harmful environmental (Manaktola & Jauhari, 2007).

### 3. Problem Statement

Homestay has now become extremely popular concept amongst tourists under aegis of eco-tourism and has been found in almost all Himalayan destinations like Jammu and Kashmir (particularly Ladakh), Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim (Bhatt, 2012). All these are promoted under signature of Himalayan Homestays (Himalayan Homestays.com, 2004). Despite its linkage to eco-tourism the management practices are considered tricky and in fact questioned by Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2015) for explaining the positive results for local communities as it is also supposed to develop numerous issues including spatial, environmental, and social impacts like loss of privacy and anxiety etc. (Oranratmanee, 2011). According to Lai and Nepal (2006) the attitude of local people towards the major dimensions of ecotourism development may assist the destination authorities to understand the community perception about developing ecotourism as a source to balance development and conservation process. Since the protecting environment has turned into social issue; tourists' preferences are transferred towards purchasing eco-friendly services and products while selecting a destination accommodation (Laroche et al., 2001), there emerges the requirement for the home stay operators to adopt sustainable practice in their services in Himalayan destinations.

The three destinations of Himalayas i.e. Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim have also drafted the rules to regulate the homestay services and most of them are state specific like in homestays in Himachal Pradesh are majorly located in rural vicinity whereas Sikkim authorizes both urban and home-stays. Uttarakhand has a distinct set of guidelines for urban and rural homestays (About Best Himalayan Adventures (ABHA) Magazine, 2016) (Table 1).

The plans for home stays displayed the variations in the definitions for all the three Himalayan destinations and on the other hand there is no strategic follow-up in Ladakh for such concept. Moreover, such guidelines do not clarify the contribution of home stay of operations in Himalayan regions which depict the weaknesses for home stays development, sustainability issues. Hence, this study aims to investigate that practices or services in Homestays that are really in accordance with sustainability concern in Indian Himalayan regions and the contribution of homestay in local economic development of selected areas.

**Table 1.** Overview of Homestay rules in three Himalayan destinations

Features	Himachal Pradesh	Uttarakhand	Sikkim
Rules/Scheme Name	Himachal Pradesh Home Stay Scheme-2008	Uttarakhand Atithi House Lodging (Homestay) Rules-2015 (1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment Rules-2016)	Sikkim Registration of Home Stay Establishment Rules- 2013
Validity	Five years validity and have been extended up to July 2018	No time limit for rules validity of rules	No time limit for rules validity.
Definition	Any private residence situated in rural vicinity of the state which is in a good condition and can be easily accessible in the landscape like Farm House, Tea-Gardens etc. will principally be eligible under the scheme.	Any private residential which is situated preferably in rural areas of the state where the families are also residing in or around the premises/campus and assign some rooms completely for the tourists' use and provide basic minimum standards of service standards as prescribed in the guidelines.	Any personal residence situated in the rural/urban vicinity where the owner or his/her families are residing in the entity and some rooms are exclusively prepared with basic minimum service and eligibility criteria for the use of tourists.

*Source:* About Best Himalayan Adventures (ABHA) Magazine, (2016).

#### 4. Research Methodology

The research has been conducted using the qualitative data retained through various sources like books, journals, and the records of the targeted entities. Whereas the quantitative data has been gathered by the retaining the responses from the stakeholders of the targeted destination through structured questionnaire. The study has been conducted in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand areas of Himalayan ranges. The respondents consisted of the owners, employees and community members who are engaged with Homestay services in Himalayan destinations.

Questions pertaining to the green or eco-friendly practices and local socio-economic benefits sponsored by sustainable practices were asked. Since the population for the study was unknown, the 500 sample was targeted for the study as according to Lomax and Schumacher (2004) the sample size of 250-500 respondents is adequate for the research, whereas only 344 were found reliable for the study, whereas in terms of tourists only 271 were found relevant and reliable for further analysis process.

For analyzing the eco-friendly hospitality service practices the variables were selected from the study conducted by Park (2009) after certain modifications as required by the study. The scale for local economy development was further prepared with the reference of previous qualitative studies and industry experts. All the attributes were analyzed using the five-point likert scale (where 1=strongly disagree and 5 =strongly agree).

#### 5. Results and Discussion

Most of the responses were retrieved from Himachal Pradesh (110 in number) and Ladakh (Jammu and Kashmir) (92 in number). About 78 were retained from Uttarakhand and only 64 were received from Sikkim. Most of the responses have been retrieved from the homstays located in rural areas (201 in numbers) and only 143 were from urban areas of the targeted destinations. About 92 have been working from last 3 years in this particular aspect. 72 homstays are working from last 1 year; 67 are operating from last 2 years, 62 from last 5 years and only 51 revealed that they are working in

this field from last four years. In terms of tourists, out of 271 respondents were 162 were male and 109 were female. When asked about their travel frequency to the destinations, about 130 mentioned it their first visit to the destination, 82 as second time and 59 as more than two times.

### 5.1. *Benefits of Homestay operations in Local Economy Development*

Since the study aims to analyze eco-friendly practices in homestays in numerous destinations of Himalayas, the homestay staff was requested to provide response to all the closed-ended questions. The test for internal reliability of all the 12 items of local economic development indicated the alpha value .80 and for eco-friendly tourism practices indicated a Cronbach alpha of .832 and hence are acceptable as according to Hair et al. (1998) the alpha value above .60 is acceptable for exploratory study.

Table 2: Benefits of Homestay operations in Local Economy Development

Variable	Mean	S.D
It has helped to improve the destination image to the tourists and the local communities	3.10	1.21
It has helped in providing a healthy environment for tourists and employees	3.07	1.16
Homestays has enhanced tourists' satisfaction and motivation	3.11	1.15
It has ensured a sustained future for the local community	4.17	1.07
It has improved our revenue generation	4.08	1.13
Relationship between tourist and the local communities has improved	4.00	1.17
Operational cost has been reduced through waste management	3.01	1.19
Operational cost has been reduced through water consumption	3.06	1.17
Home stays has supported the environmental quality enhancement	3.07	1.17
It has now become a major public relations source for tourism sector	4.03	.097
Such practices has given the destination with marketing benefit over the competitors	3.33	.920
It has also increased our tourist destination loyalty	3.40	.884

The benefits for homestays in terms of Local economic development were analyzed by 12 items on the basis of five-point Likert-type scale (Table 1). Findings revealed that the homestay practices have ensured a sustained future for the local community with the highest mean score of 4.17 (SD=1.07), has improved our revenue generation (mean score 4.08) and in fact has become a major public relations source for tourism sector (mean score 4.03) along with improving the relationship between tourist and the local communities of the Himalayan destinations (Mean score 4.00). Whereas the analysis for benefits in terms of cost reduction for environment, water and waste management services have been acquired lesser of concentration. This may all because of the reason that such practices have not been adopted or implemented in home stays as explained in table 1, whereas the green or eco-friendly concept is supposed to be operated in a responsible way considering its local community, employees, the local culture and the local ecology simultaneously (Kasim, 2004).

### 5.2. *Homestay Ecotourism Practices in Himalayas*

Table 3 displays the level of services inclined with ecotourism tourism practices including energy management, waste management and water management. On the other hand, when tourists visiting these home stays are asked to mark their level of agreement with the numerous practices, they found satisfactory/available in terms of sustainability, comparatively low mean score was obtained for all the practices like for Energy Management (Mean difference=1.56), Waste Management (Mean difference =1.4) and for Water Conservation (Mean difference=1.26) (table 2).

For obtaining more clarity towards the approach t-test was applied assuming the difference/variance among the available and actual received services. The analysis revealed that there is a significant difference between the perceived and actual service by the tourists opting home stays at targeted destinations as the calculated t-value for all the dimensions i.e. Energy Management ( $t=0.016$ ), Waste Management ( $t=1.059$ ) and Water Conservation ( $t=1.49$ ) are less than the table value (1.49). In other words, there appears a difference between the services that are actually important and the actual services received by the tourists by homestay operators for being called as eco-friendly.

Table 3: Analysis for eco-friendly hospitality practices in homestays

Attributes	Mean (Perceived Services)	Mean (Actual services)	Mean Difference	Variance (t-test)	
<b>Energy Management</b>	<b>3.85</b>	<b>2.29</b>	<b>1.56</b>		
Electricity saving equipments	3.60	2.43	1.17	0.016	
Energy efficient equipments	3.59	2.11	1.48		
Renovation of facilities	4.36	2.35	2.01		
<b>Waste Management</b>	<b>3.71</b>	<b>2.31</b>	<b>1.4</b>		
Availability of refillable soap and shampoo dispenser	4.07	2.34	1.73	1.059	
The use of reusable items of cloth napkins and glass cup	3.86	2.32	1.54		
Availability of environmentally friendly cleaners/detergents	3.60	2.32	1.28		
Availability of recycle bins in front and back-of house areas	3.46	2.21	1.25		
Bulk purchase of food items and cleaning agents	3.98	2.47	1.51		
Composting of kitchen waste	3.46	2.34	1.12		
Grinding of guest soap as laundry detergent	3.56	2.22	1.34		
Treated waste water for garden irrigation	3.70	2.30	1.40		
<b>Water Conservation</b>	<b>3.60</b>	<b>2.34</b>	<b>1.26</b>		
Reuse linens and towels	3.94	2.38	1.56		1.49
Low-water-volume toilets	3.50	2.33	1.17		
The use of dual piping system	3.48	2.31	1.17		
Water saving system in the kitchen	3.59	2.44	1.15		
Water meters in the guestroom	3.53	2.28	1.25		

(Five-point likert type scale: 1=strongly disagree, and 5=strongly agree)

## 6. Discussion and Implication

Homestay has been considered as efficient source of providing benefits to local community by making them indulge in tourism service. The efficiency of Homestay services is led by the local community who encourages and support traditional culture to be presented to others (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Khan et. al., 2018). Along with this the homestay operations were setup with ecofriendly tourism for not only making tourists aware of local traditions but also to understand the environment setup of the destinations thus making them aware of eco-friendly development. Thus, it is essential to for the authorities to increase the level of awareness among these homestay operators since most of these accommodations are located in rural areas to support the requirement for eco tourist, which is increasing at fastest rate in Himalayas. There is a requirement for providing the statues and guidelines for maintaining the eco-friendly or environmental practices as the present services are observed to be meant for increasing the accommodation options only while the environment management practices are being by the authorities neglected which could also enhance their local economic development with sustained development approach. The results depict the difference

among the actual and perceived services for eco-friendly hospitality services practices as claimed by the homestay operators which may not only divert the tourists to other better options but also influence the economic development of the destinations. Hence the authorities are required to get a channelized approach towards adopting the eco-services practices in their services so as to sustain for a longer term.

This research has considered a generalized approach towards homestay operations while no differentiation has been made on the basis of urban and rural areas and the results may vary in both the segments and the future research is recommended to analyze this aspect. Furthermore, the concept of eco-tourism practices is limited to hotel sectors. Hence this study may help in providing industry practitioners and homestay operators to realize the actual status of homestays which are supposed to support the eco-friendly tourism in Himalayan destinations that whether such homestay operations are actually practicing the concept of sustainability or not. This study also helps to provide the overview about the actual level of economic benefits retained by the local community who are operating the homestays in Himalayan destinations thus making the authorities to reconsider the concept and make people aware about their contribution to sustainable tourism development. This study may help to define sustainable avenues through community development by facilitating widespread adoption of this eco-friendly tourism practices among home-stay operators and other local accommodation service providers in Himalayan destinations. Thus, may help to determine their knowledge and contribution towards the sustainable destination development.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study investigated the present state of environment management practices in homestays. Based on the results retrieved, it can be analyzed that the majority of the homestay service providers in Himalayan regions do not practice the basic eco-friendly service activities regularly. Majority of the practices inclined with waste, water or energy management have been found neglected or very less considered in regular homestay service. The results also indicate that they still practice the green activities like renovating the facilities and reusing the linens and towels, buying food items and washing agents in bulk by refillable soap and shampoo dispenser and reusing the cloth napkins and glass cups etc. On the other hand, the homestay service providers in Himalayan destinations are still inexperienced in some aspects of environment friendly practices like saving electricity, composting of kitchen waste, installation of recycle bins surrounding areas, installation of low-water-volume toilets etc. This may be due to the less knowledge or awareness of the service providers that they have not considered such environmental or sustainability practices on regular grounds. No proper guidelines and considerations have been given by the government authorities for homestay establishments in Himalayan destination like Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim, whereas the proper level of knowledge and awareness of educators and environmentalist is significant in shaping the environmental responsible behavior (Aini et al., 2003).

This research paper also analyzed the perceived local economic benefits retained from homestay operations. The homestay community agreed that such tourism services have ensured a sustained future for the local community along with improving the revenue generation process. Accordingly, the homestay has become a major public relations source for tourism sector and has improved the relationship between tourist and the local communities. It has increased the tourist loyalty and also provided the destination with marketing benefits over the competitors. However, the operational cost benefits over water, waste and overall environment quality management is scarcely supported by the respondents. Providing a healthy environment for tourists and employees is less considered aspect in homestays of Himalayan destinations. Conclusively, the present level of local economic development through homestays in Himalayas is at nascent stage as there requires to concentrate on sustained economic results like improved destination image that further influences the tourists' visit intention (Melo, 2017). Therefore, homestay operators are required extend regular service practices

towards waste, water conservation and energy management. Also, the awareness and training programs should be offered to the local community (Dangi, 2006) for implementing sustainable tourism practices so as to create a positive impacts homestay operations by creating a knowledge-based system that could help to sustain the environment and work (Borobia & Waddington, 2012).

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