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## Home-Stay Tourism in Uttarakhand: Opportunities and Challenges

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### Abstract

**The Home-stay concept has already been thriving in Uttarakhand. Home-stay has changed the old and established scenario of hospitality trade in the State.** This research emerged to study the opportunities & challenges of the home-stay tourism in Uttarakhand and to reveal how hospitality is being offered in this form of tourism. Uttarakhand can be a prototype home-stay as the state is full of natural treasure, holy pilgrimage sites, rich cultural heritage, distinct food habits, warmth hospitality, innocent social settings and many more.

Home-stay tourism offers sense of homeliness which is not found in any other form of accommodation. Home-stay in Uttarakhand has a unique opportunity to establish a sustainable form of tourism by using home grown resources, existing structures & natural settings etc. There is a need to look into this emerging form of tourism from different perspectives of various stakeholders like tourists, local community and policy makers. There are various constraints which can be resolved by active participation and engagement of communities.

**Keywords:** Home-stay, sustainable tourism, homeliness, local community

### Introduction

There's a saying in India, "*Athithi Devo Bhava*", which means "The Guest is God". All Indians take it a huge honor to have guests in their homes, and do as much as they can to please them. Sometimes most visitors who come to India and stay in hotels never get to experience true Indian hospitality. And the positive thing is that all this is changing as a result of the growing popularity of home-stays in India. Home-stay is a form of hospitality and lodging whereby visitors stay in a house or apartment of a local of the city to which they are travelling. The length of stay can vary from one night to even a year and can be free, in exchange for monetary compensation, in exchange for a stay at the guest's property either simultaneously or at another time ([home exchange](#)), or in exchange for help on the [host's](#) property. Home-stays are examples of [collaborative consumption](#) and [sharing](#).

A Home-Stay, by its combined words is staying in some one's home as a paying guest for short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by individual family and community too. Therefore, the Home-Stay Regulation has accepted it as run (managed) by an individual or community (Timlasana, 2012). The Home Stay seeks to draw tourists away from posh and crowded urban areas to the rural locality full of splendid natural surroundings, by providing them with clean, comfortable and budget-friendly accommodation and food. Thus, homestay offers the traveller a unique local experience and possibilities of interaction with the host family. It offers the chance to experience new and untapped places which has enabled the government to popularize new tourist destinations, and provide alternative source of income to the rural folks (Gangotia, 2013). In home

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stay tourism visitors get a chance to spend time with the family observing their customs, values and culture, which gives them the opportunity to feel the taste of rural life (Devkota, 2010).

**The Home-stay concept has already been thriving in Uttarakhand and now the State Tourism department is also plunging into this sector. The State Tourism department is planning to introduce clean and affordable home-stay for domestic and foreign tourists. This concept shall allow the tourists to live with the natives of the villages as they involve and see the social and cultural lives of the villagers. The Home-stay will bring the tourists closer to the rich culture and cuisine thriving for ages in those areas. The preferences of the tourists are changing and many of them get attracted to new concepts like Home-stay which provides rural surrounding, nature's touch, zero pollution & zero noise.**

In home-stay tourism, both the environment and culture are commoditized; market value is created with the demand of visitors. This provides financial reward to the local indigenous community for conservation of the environment and their culture (Laurie et al, 2005). Home stay tourism is a major player when it comes to the reduction of rural poverty. It integrates all activities of tourism such as trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, and ecotourism (Devkota, 2010). It is a good source of earning foreign currency. It reduces the gap in the balance of payment, provides increased tax revenue, gives rise to economic development of the nation, increases the employment opportunities. It may also provide new markets for local people to sell their products, such as agricultural products, livestock and others (Budhathoki, 2013).

The development of tourism at a particular place has positively influenced the livelihood of people of that place but on the other hand it has also had some negative impacts on the lifestyle of the local people, making them lose their own traditional culture and heritage (Pandey et al., 1995). Tourism is blamed for deforestation and degradation of the environment. This results in loss of benefits to the local community and loss of healthy environment, the loss incurred from such activities is high compared to the economic gains made from the tourism (Banskota & Sharma,1995). There are also other negative impacts of tourism in society such as increase in crime, increase in the sex trade among women, increase in consumption of alcohol, negative impacts on the lifestyles of local people, exploitation of local resources, impacts on religion and practices of local people. All these provide grounds for a negative attitude towards tourism (Bhan & Singh, 2014).

### **Objectives of the study**

- To study the status of Home- stay tourism in Uttarakhand
- To find out the opportunities available for Home- stay in Uttarakhand
- To find out the challenges for Home-stay tourism in Uttarakhand

### **Research Methodology**

The current paper seeks opportunities and challenges for Home-stay tourism in Uttarakhand. The study is based on secondary data sources. Secondary data is compiled from previous studies, reports, newsletters, journals, books, magazines, and online data sources.

### **Literature Review**

Home-stay as the term suggests means staying in someone's home. By definition, Homestay is a home of "a dwelling place together with a family unit that occupies it – household". Homestay provides a unique opportunity to experience the way of life of the local people of an area along with the

indigenous and traditional cultures within a comfortable homely setting (Boonratana, 2010; Kamisan, 2004; Kamisan et.al, 2007). Amran (2010) elaborated further by defining Homestay as a form of holiday itinerary which involves the tourist coming to stay with the family and interact with the local community. According to Wipada (2007), Homestay is defined as one type of lodging that tourists share with the homeowner with the intention to learn culture and lifestyle from the homeowner who is willing to transmit and share their culture. The homeowner is the one who prepares lodging and food for the tourists with reasonable pay. Paul Lynch (2009) gave a broader definition of Homestay by referring it as commercial homes whereby visitors or guests pay to stay in private homes where interaction take place with a host or family. It is a very unique characteristic as this concept promotes interaction between host families and tourists and acting as a development tool to raise awareness on the cultural exchange and respect for the host's culture (Jamilah et.al, 2007). In Uttarakhand context, this concept has great potential as it blends well with the Uttarakhand culture especially. Uttarakhand is one of the destinations usually found in a list of travellers. This is mostly because of its enchanting natural beauty, cultural heritage, seasonal diversities, organic food produces and warmth hospitality. In the state of Uttarakhand the major homestays were in the Nanda Devi Valley and Valley of Flower housed famous homestay sites (Macek, 2012). Homestays are distinct from other forms of development by offering the traveller a unique experience that combines ones basic needs (food, shelter) with the host's culture. Homestays directly empower and benefit the same community members with a vested interest in preserving their surrounding environment (Macek, 2012). As one of the largest industries across the globe, the multi-faceted tourism business is shown to be one of the biggest employers in the developing world (Moscardo, 2008). Previous researchers have pointed out that the homestay accommodation has numerous benefits to host families and the community. For instance, according to Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail and Islam (2011), homestays provide job opportunities for local communities and improves qualities of life of local people. Further, Chaiyatorn, Kaoses and Thitphat (2010) found that homestays can ensure economic, social and cultural benefits for local communities as well as sustainable development. Moscardo (2008) ideates that because the tourism industry offers job opportunities in rural areas, it decreases the amount of people that leave small communities to search for jobs in bigger cities. This not only keeps local intellectual capital in communities, but also helps to prevent overcrowding in major urban hubs.

**Table 1:** Home-stay Concept in different countries

Country	Concept
United States	Agricultural home stay, Educational Home stay
Canada	Cultural home-stay, Heritage home-stay
Australia	Farm stay, Academic stay with locals
South Korea	Educational Home-stay
South Africa	Leisure stay
New Zealand	Farm stay, Cottage Home stay
Philippine	Cultural Home stay
Thailand	Student Home stay, Volunteer Home stay
Indonesia	Cultural Home stay, Leisure Home stay

Source: Mohd Zaki et al. (2011)

### Home-Stay Tourism in Uttarakhand

“In those lovely valleys there is still the romance and poetry of life: each tree has its god, each bush its spirit”. It was written in 19th century by a British anthropologist and surveyor Charles A. Sherring, describing a fair part of Uttarakhand, in his great research ‘Western Tibet and British Borderland’.

Uttarakhand is a state in [North Indian](#) region of [Himalayas](#). The state is popularly known as Devbhumi (Land of Gods) due to the presence of numerous [Hindu](#) pilgrimage sites. A major portion of human history has been created by travels and historical accounts are filled with stories of men who travelled to conquer, to convert, to trade, to plunder and most importantly to quench their curiosity. Every mountain and ocean stimulated human curiosity to see and know beyond the mundane. When someone asks to define the simple word ‘Beauty’, Beauty is so inherent to almost all things Uttarakhand stands for – the magnanimous Himalayas, the holiest of the rivers, the spiritual mystery, stunning landscapes, a mesmerizing flora and fauna and the simplest of the people.

Numbers of tourist visit Uttarakhand every year and this makes it a worthy location to run a home-stay business. Travellers enjoy various advantages offered through home-stays. And such advantages are often missing in city centred luxury hotels. Such as:

- ✚ Tourists experience a homely environment. They interact with the owner and the natives of the place. This is the thing which one can’t get in a luxury hotel.
- ✚ The tourists are allowed to learn about the lifestyle of the local community.
- ✚ Home-stay resorts are located in remote areas away from the hustle- bustle of the luxuries of the city life.
- ✚ The home-stays are not only being preferred by tourists but also by families and business persons to have get-togethers.

Home-stays can be a profitable business as it offers a number of advantages to its owners, like:

- ✚ Home-stays can be easily started with minimal investment. Owners only need to invest in few utensils, common furnitures & electric equipments etc.
- ✚ There is no need to look for a specific location like other businesses, where the primary step is to look for a suitable location.

It is again a wonderful experience to interact with people from different parts of the world, with different cultures and different language.

- Home-stay business is flexible with its operations. During off season, an owner can cut down the business operations and resume it during peak business season accordingly.

Uttarakhand state has been in a process to take home-stay initiatives in unexplored towns and villages. In order to organise this emerging form of tourism, the state tourism board has launched Uttarakhand Home-stay Regulation-2015. The homes registered under Uttarakhand Home-stay scheme shall be divided into three different segments;

- Gold
- Silver
- Bronze

The state tourism board aims to emphasise on empowering villagers by allowing them to incorporate in home-stay tourism. Villagers can earn livelihood and avail various benefits. Currently there are numerous entrepreneurs incorporating in Home-stay business in different parts of Uttarakhand. Mallika Viridi, the Sarpanch of Sarmoli Village, near Munsiyari in Pithoragarh was among the pioneers of rural tourism around Munsiyari, Pithoragarh who started a Home-stay program in Sarmoli village in 2004. More than 15 local families happily opened their homes to travellers. Keanna village home is also a delightful home-stay situated in Mukteshwar (Nainital). This region of Kumaon promises to refresh your senses and enjoy the mountain valleys in the most authentic way. In the South Gola Range of the Himalayas a heavenly homestay “Jilling Terraces” is situated in amidst of untouched forests overlooking of the Nanda Devi and the surrounding peaks. There is an 80 year old house, a couple of hours away from Nainital, makes one’s stay wonderful. “Itmenan Estate” home-stay in Binsar allows the travellers to spend their stay in the lap of nature while involving with the local community in different activities like Farming, Gardening and Bee-Keeping etc.

In the state of Uttarakhand the major homestays are in the Nanda Devi Valley and Valley of Flower housed famous homestay sites (Macek, 2012). In Kanatal (Tehri Garhwal) “Pahadi House” home-stay is the host situated in a serene place with great natural diversity for tourists. In Uttarkashi district the “Kufon Basics” home-stay is a unique experience for the travellers visiting there. The peaceful location of the house gives a magical view of mountain ranges. Such homestay initiatives can help to conserve and protect abandoned village homes in hills of Uttarakhand.

**Table 2:** Homes registered under Uttarakhand Home-Stay Scheme (2016-17)

S.No.	Name of District	No. of Rooms available	No. of Beds available
1.	Almora	174	348
2.	Bageshwar	51	102
3.	Champawat	06	12
4.	Dehradun	47	94
5.	Haridwar	09	18
6.	Nainital	47	113
7.	Tehri	19	38

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Source: UTDB, Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of Uttarakhand

Travellers can experience a quiet and peaceful vacation in Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is now being considered a perfect land by many tourists for home-stay. There is a need to give an attention to this form of tourism by assessing its opportunities and challenges.

### **Opportunities for Home-stay Tourism in Uttarakhand**

- ✚ Home-stay could be a suitable platform for cultural exchange through Guest-host interaction.
- ✚ Youths of Uttarakhand can find livelihood opportunities in their own village or town by involving in home-stay activities.
- ✚ Locals may have an opportunity to learn new languages and skills.
- ✚ Home-stay business can make the locals independent and smart as well.
- ✚ It can help to reduce conflicts among different communities.
- ✚ Home-stay tourism can generate economic and employment opportunities in rural hilly areas of Uttarakhand.
- ✚ It can be a tool to reduce the poverty level of local community.
- ✚ It can attract local and other investors to incorporate in tourism practices.
- ✚ People can sale their traditional food items, handicrafts & souvenirs to the tourists visited.
- ✚ Home-stay tourism may result in developing modes of transportation to the villages for easy accessibility, training institutions for capacity building and improved healthcare services.

### **Challenges of Home-stay Tourism in Uttarakhand**

- ✚ One of the prime constraints for home-stay tourism is poor infrastructural facilities like better roads, supply of electricity, telecommunication and healthcare service. Without these facilitations one cannot take home-stay initiative successfully. Owner may face difficulty to establish better services for the tourist.
- ✚ There is a shortage of skilled human resources like service providers, entrepreneurs, guides etc. due to the unavailability of better training institutions. Peoples also lack in creativity and entrepreneurship skills.
- ✚ Peoples are not aware about the Govt. schemes, regulations, registration parameters and other policies related to home-stay business.
- ✚ Apart from this poor marketing network is also a challenge for home-stay tourism in Uttarakhand. It is very much necessary to promote Uttarakhand as a home-stay destination.
- ✚ Lack of coordination among entrepreneurs, government bodies, non-govt. bodies, intermediaries and others could be a major challenge for home-stay tourism.
- ✚ For the successful development of home-stays in Uttarakhand, it is necessary to conserve the natural resources and cultural heritage. The local peoples should be encouraged to take initiatives to conserve their traditions and resources.
- ✚ Safety & security of the travellers is an issue of prime concern. Uttarakhand needs to setup better safety measures for the tourist visited.

Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) has also suggested the Internal and External challenges faced by home-stay operators.

**Table 3:** Internal and External Challenges of Home-Stay

S.No.	Internal Challenges	External Challenges
1.	Unbalanced demography	Misconception of Home-stay programme
2.	Passive community	Method of payment
3.	Leadership Problems	Exploitation by external parties
4.	Informal organizational structure	Inefficient Networking
5.	Over-commercialization	-
6.	Conflicts in community	-
7.	Incompetent community leadership	-
8.	Lack of creativity and Entrepreneurship skills	-

Source: Ashikin & Kalsom (2010)

### Conclusion

Home-stay tourism has emerged as a community based concept with different themes in both developed and developing countries. The Home-stay can be a tool for the sustainable development of local community. It is a new concept adopted in Uttarakhand. Numbers of entrepreneurs are eager now to incorporate in this business. It is a form of tourism that generates less environmental and socio-cultural impacts as compare to mass tourism. Hence there is a need to plan well to extract the expected benefits. The Govt. needs to do lots of homework and make an effective plan & policy for the development of Home-stay in Uttarakhand.

However home-stay tourism in Uttarakhand, is facing different challenges due to the; misconception of home-stay, lack of entrepreneurship skills, poor community participation, lack of training, unbalanced demography, unwanted political involvement and lack of coordination among stakeholders. The countries like Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia practice the Homestay operations successfully due the strong relationship among the government, industry, community and the academics (Hashim, 2005).

The home-stay tourism is a potential segment for Uttarakhand. The State government should play the key role actively and honestly. Proper planning and management and the active involvement of all the key stakeholders is compulsory for the successful development of home-stay market. There is a need to develop a state level homestay association for the welfare of the operators and smooth functioning of the business.

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