

Prospects and Challenges in Developing Homestays in Ayodhya

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Abstract

Homestays are a form of tourism experience itself, which allows tourists to experience the real culture and traditions of the host community very closely and get the opportunity to get involved with some. Homestays provide a diverse range of activities to give tourists a unique opportunity to experience the unique culture and traditions of the local people. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the prospects and problems in developing homestays in Ayodhya. Ayodhya is progressing toward massive inclusive tourism development, which includes accommodation, and the government's focus is also on Ayodhya's tourism expansion, which will create many opportunities for local communities to develop homestays as one of the economic sources and which will be the best alternative for budget travelers. This will bring light to the prospects and problems of developing homestays.

Keywords– Ayodhya, Emerging opportunity, Homestays, Tourism, Development

Introduction

The tourism and hospitality industries have witnessed a major breakdown since the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic and are still facing many challenges in recovering from this. Many have lost their jobs or shut down their businesses in tourism and hospitality. Many professionals have shifted to other industries, and those who are still in the industry are struggling to run their businesses. But 2020–21 has seen the emergence of many new trends and concepts in the tourism and hospitality sector, like staycations, workcations, and homestays. This work-from-home concept has given rise to the development of homestays. Those who worked from home favoured taking a staycation to a hill station, booking homestays for a month, and relaxing in addition to doing office work.

As per the report of OYO's fourth year-end annual index – OYO Travelopedia 2021: - In India, 65% of people who answered the survey had travelled in the last six months. Most of them went to see family and friends, but others went to get away from their daily lives and have fun. Almost 27% took a month-long workcation. Hill stations were the most popular destinations

for these business and travel journeys, followed by numerous people who visited their hometowns and seaside destinations. According to ministry officials, the Tourism Ministry is adapting its promotional campaigns to emphasize staycations, emphasizing homestays that provide personal care and local experience to travellers post-COVID-19 pandemic.

Concept of Homestays

Homestays have risen in popularity among budget-conscious tourists who want to immerse themselves in the local culture, cuisine, and lifestyle. They prefer to stay with local families. Travelers are looking for new ways to interact with locals and learn about the culture of a country. ' Homestays are family-run establishments that have extra space and a financial need or desire to host tourists, often converting a portion of their home to be a homestay. The family provides meals, local recommendations, and the opportunity to learn about their culture.

The term 'homestays' means "a duration in which a traveller lives with a local family or communities".

Homestays are a part of someone's home that has been converted into lodging for visitors for a fee. Here, the host, who is usually a local family, offers visitors a place to sleep in their home. Depending on the owner of the homestay, the host may also offer meals, local travel arrangements, pick-up, and other services. For first-time travellers, a homestay will feel less intimidating than a large, impersonal hotel. Even for frequent travellers who are always on the go, a homestay is a great way to connect with new people and get a sense of a "home away from home." Nowadays, as the host's services become more personalized and within budget. If we discuss how homestays differ from hotels on various parameters, for example, most homestays are similar to a bed and breakfast concept, whereas hotels are an establishment that provides short-term accommodation. Most hotels are the same and provide similar services, but each homestay has a unique theme, and culture, and reflects its host's community culture, which hotels cannot provide. On the other hand, hotels provide certain luxuries that homestays may not be able to match, such as gyms, pools, and spas. However, in the end, it is up to the tourist to decide what he or she hopes to experience from their vacation.

Aspects of "Homestays"

Lynch (2005) has defined the different aspects of "homestays" which includes: -

- Family Cooperation
- Benefits to the Local Community
- Engagement of the tourists with the property
- Sharing space with guests and host
- The participation of owner-managers in the shaping of the accommodation product
- The participation of "lifestyle entrepreneurs"

- The importance of gender, personal networks, social values, and family life cycle

According to Lynch, culture and connection between host and guest are important aspects of homestay. Tourists can get a cultural experience through homestays while staying with local families. For tourists who are more curious about learning and experiencing the local traditions, staying with local people, is the best opportunity for them. They can learn the local language, local cuisines, and the history of the local community, and can also get a new insight into their religion and take part in local festivals and celebrations. The local community can also benefit economically by commercializing a portion of their home.

Positive Impacts of Homestays

Financial Impacts– Encourage the economy, and employment prospects for the local community, and promote foreign investment, which will raise locals' purchasing power and open up new opportunities for tourism-related entrepreneurship. Preserving and promoting regional culture, traditions, and handicrafts helps eradicate poverty, boost local businesses, enhance public infrastructure, lessen inequality, and raise living standards.

Social Impacts– The preservation of host culture, interaction with other cultures, preservation of historical sites, prevention of youth migration, improvement of communication and presentation skills, cross-cultural exchange, guest host interactions, youth retention by utilizing the local opportunities, improves relationships among different races and nationalities, and makes the locals more independent and tech-savvy

Environmental Impacts–Utilization of resources available, waste management, and aesthetic upkeep of the area.

Literature Review

Homestay tourism emerges as a crucial aspect of rural development and tourism sustainability across various regions, as depicted in several studies. Budhathoki (2013) delves into the ramifications of mass tourism on rural villages, highlighting Ghale Gaun in Nepal. The adoption of homestay tourism emerges as a sustainable solution, fostering community engagement and offering economic benefits. This sentiment resonates with the findings of Bhan and Singh (2014), who emphasize the potential of homestays as micro-entrepreneurship ventures in India's burgeoning tourism sector. Furthermore, the discussion expands to the broader implications of homestay tourism beyond economic gains. R. & H.V (2015) underscore its role in promoting rural tourism, nurturing local economies, and preserving cultural heritage. Similarly, V.G & J (2015) advocate for governmental initiatives to bridge the gap between homestay supply and demand, recognizing its significance in Kerala's tourism landscape. Despite the evident benefits, challenges persist, as highlighted by SOOD (2016). A SWOT analysis of homestays in Himachal Pradesh reveals both strengths, such as providing a unique, home-like experience, and weaknesses, including privacy concerns and organizational fragmentation. Nevertheless, the

consensus remains optimistic, emphasizing the need to leverage strengths and address weaknesses to realize the full potential of homestay tourism. Moreover, the cultural immersion facilitated by homestay accommodations emerges as a recurring theme. Navare & Mali (2016) emphasize its role in offering an authentic glimpse into local lifestyles, fostering cultural exchange, and enriching tourists' experiences. However, Yadav et al. (2018) shed light on the challenges faced by homestay owners and tourists alike, such as sanitation issues and cultural misunderstandings. Despite these challenges, homestays continue to provide valuable experiences for both hosts and guests, facilitating cross-cultural interactions and supplementing income for local communities. In essence, the literature underscores the multifaceted impact of homestay tourism, ranging from economic empowerment to cultural exchange. While challenges persist, the collective insights advocate for strategic interventions to harness its potential for sustainable rural development and enriching tourist experiences. (Agarwal, 2019) conducted a study in the Trithan Valley of Himachal Pradesh with the aim of understanding how the locals perceived the homestay program and analysing the financial impact of homestays on the community. The study's findings The Valley's tourism industry has raised residents' incomes and living standards, and homestays have created a market for regional products and alternative employment options. But issues like inadequate infrastructure and cultural influences on young people still exist, demanding collaboration between communities and authorities for sustainable growth over the long term. (Ruwindra Dias et al., 2022) analyzes The success factors of homestay businesses in Sri Lanka's cultural heritage sites were investigated through surveys of 200 homestay owners near Sigiriya, Polonnaruwa, and Anuradhapura. And The study showed that personal attributes, social capital, human capital, and strategic considerations significantly impact the success of homestay businesses. Individual traits were the most significant predictor of success, followed by social capital's impact on homestay quality and human capital's role in program efficacy. Strategic factors, such as risk-taking capacity, were critical for homestay businesses. Despite government funding and support, insufficient knowledge and training often lead to failure.

Objective of the study

The objective of this paper is to provide a detailed description of homestay and analyze the prospect of homestays and the challenges in developing homestays in *Ayodhya*

Research Methodology

A descriptive research approach is used in this study to methodically explain the prospects and challenges in developing homestays in *Ayodhya*. The research approach is based on the collection of secondary data from a variety of academic publications, including journals, essays, newspapers, and magazines.

Prospects and challenges in developing Homestays in Ayodhya

Available Resources

Availability of Cultural Legacy—As Lord Rama's birthplace and a major Hindu pilgrimage site, Ayodhya is deeply rooted in centuries-old cultural customs. The religious ceremonies, festivals, music, dancing, and cuisine of the city all demonstrate its cultural vibrancy. Ayodhya homestays will provide visitors with a unique opportunity to experience cultural events, take part in religious rituals, and enjoy real native cuisine. Tourists can learn about Ayodhya's cultural legacy and promote cross-cultural understanding by lodging with local communities.

Availability of Heritage Legacy - Ayodhya offers traditional Indian architecture, including historical temples, havelis (mansions), and historic properties. The city is home to ancient temples, ghats, and archaeological sites that bear testimony to its rich heritage. Homestays provide a gateway for tourists to explore Ayodhya's historical legacy up close, offering accommodations in traditional houses or heritage properties that have been preserved or restored. Guests can experience the architectural splendour of Ayodhya's heritage buildings, learn about its illustrious past through guided tours, and connect with the city's cultural heritage on a deeper level during their stay.

Local community – The local community might be interested in opening their homes to tourists for an additional source and building a relationship with local people can benefit tourists in understanding the cultural differences.

Availability of Manpower – Ayodhya has a skilled workforce capable of supporting homestay development, including artisans, and craftsmen. And this will also generate new job opportunities and income sources for the local community.

Availability of the government support and policies—Ayodhya is being promoted on an international level as a religious tourism destination by government and private tourism players. This concerted promotion has prompted the government to actively solicit investments from industries and hotel chains. To facilitate such investments, the government has instituted a suite of supportive policies aimed at both investment facilitation and business operations.

Prospects of Homestays as an Accommodation Opportunity

The prospects of homestays as an accommodation opportunity in Ayodhya are significant and hold promise for both tourists and residents.

Affordability: Homestays offer a cost-effective alternative to traditional hotels, making them an attractive option for budget-conscious visiting Ayodhya.

Authentic Experience: Staying in a homestay provides tourists with an authentic experience of Ayodhya's culture and hospitality. Guests have the opportunity to interact with local hosts, learn about the city's traditions, and immerse themselves in the local way of life.

Personalized Service: Unlike large hotels, homestays offer personalized service and attention to guests' needs. Hosts often go the extra mile to ensure that visitors feel welcome and comfortable, providing insights into the best places to visit, eat, and explore in Ayodhya.

Cultural Exchange: Homestays facilitate cultural exchange between guests and hosts, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation. Tourists get to experience firsthand the customs, rituals, and daily life of Ayodhya residents, creating meaningful connections and memories.

Supporting Local Economy: By choosing to stay in homestays, tourists directly contribute to the local economy of Ayodhya. The income generated from homestay operations benefits residents, encouraging entrepreneurship and sustainable tourism development.

Flexible Accommodation Option: Homestays come in various forms, ranging from private rooms within a family home to independent cottages or guesthouses. This flexibility allows tourists to choose accommodations that suit their preferences and budget while experiencing the warmth of Ayodhya's hospitality.

Overall, the scope of homestays as a budget accommodation opportunity in Ayodhya is vast, offering tourists an affordable and enriching way to explore the city while supporting the local community. With its cultural heritage, religious significance, and growing tourism infrastructure, Ayodhya presents ample opportunities for the success and expansion of the homestay sector

Challenges in developing homestays in Ayodhya

Regulatory Barrier:

Getting around the regulatory environment is one of the main problems. Homestay lodging establishments may encounter challenges related to zoning rules, building codes, and licensing requirements. It might be challenging to strike a balance between upholding these rules and maintaining the genuineness and cultural integrity of the homestay experience.

Infrastructure Restrictions:

Similar to numerous other heritage cities, Ayodhya might experience issues with its transit system, utilities, and facilities. These infrastructure issues must be resolved to give visitors a convenient and enjoyable stay. Improving infrastructure can assist get around these restrictions, but it might cost a lot of money and cooperation from both the public and private sectors.

Preservation of Cultural Legitimacy:

It might be difficult to uphold homestays' cultural authenticity while also adhering to contemporary hospitality standards. It might take considerable planning and tact to strike a

balance between the expectations of modern tourists and the preservation of historic activities, architecture, and customs. To attract and retain tourists, it is also crucial to make sure that the homestay experience embodies the true friendliness and way of life of the local community.

Community Acceptance and Engagement:

The success of homestay programs depends on interacting with and winning over the support of the local community. It can be difficult to persuade locals to welcome visitors into their homes, to resolve privacy and security issues, and to develop a sense of pride and ownership in boosting tourism. Overcoming these obstacles requires fostering strong ties with the community via open communication, reciprocal benefits, and cultural awareness.

Market Competition and Promotion:

Ayodhya has competition from many of other popular destinations for the interest and attention of travellers. To effectively promote homestays in Ayodhya, marketing strategies that highlight their unique selling characteristics and set them apart from other types of lodging are needed. Using Internet channels, joint ventures with tour operators, and focused advertising efforts can assist in publicizing and attracting visitors to Ayodhya's homestay accommodation.

Collaboration between governmental organizations, stakeholders in the private sector, local communities, and professionals in tourism will be necessary to address these issues. Overcoming these challenges will enable Ayodhya to fully realize the potential of homestay tourism, providing guests with a genuine and immersive experience while promoting the city's economic growth and cultural preservation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the tourism and hospitality sectors, leading to job losses and business closures. However, amidst these challenges, new trends like staycations, workcations, and homestays have emerged, reshaping the landscape of travel and accommodation. The concept of homestays, in particular, has gained popularity among budget-conscious tourists seeking authentic cultural experiences. Research indicates that homestays offer various benefits, including financial, social, and environmental advantages, contributing to local economies and fostering cultural exchange. Studies underscore the importance of homestay tourism in promoting rural development, preserving heritage, and enriching tourist experiences. Despite challenges such as regulatory hurdles, preserving cultural integrity, and competition with established accommodation, the potential of homestays in Ayodhya remains promising. The scope of homestays in Ayodhya as a budget-friendly stay is substantial, offering tourists an authentic glimpse into the city's culture while supporting the local economy. However, addressing challenges like regulatory compliance, community participation, and environmental sustainability requires collaborative efforts among stakeholders. By leveraging the unique cultural heritage of Ayodhya and promoting responsible tourism practices, homestays can play a significant role in the city's sustainable development and tourism growth.

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