

PLAYING A HOMESTAY HOST: DRIVERS AND BARRIERS

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Abstract

This review paper makes an effort to briefly discuss the conceptual framework and emergence of homestays and the global & Indian trends in homestays. Focused reviews of existing literature has 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.

Keywords: Homestay, Homestay Operator/Host, Motivation and Challenges, Emerging Trend, Tourism and Hospitality

INTRODUCTION

Demand for homestays is one of the top emerging tourism trends. It is fuelled by the growth in the number of tourists and more so of the discerning travellers looking for an experiential accommodation with greater local and personal exposure. ("Why It's Ideal Time", 2016). Reports have pointed out that, in India, there is a lot of scope for the homestays as they can help make up for the massive shortage of 1.9 lakh hotel rooms in the country (Sharma, 2016; "Why It's Ideal Time", 2016). There are studies focusing on international/domestic tourists' motivations to choose home stays and also the problems and challenges they find at this home away from home (Biswakarma, 2015; Seubsamarn, 2009). However, it is very important to examine the challenges and motivations faced by host/service providers who operate the homestay programs. Also, highlighting the motivational factors in this business is essential as it will determine the sustainability of the homestays (Mohamed & Aminudin, 2016). The findings will have relevance for the government or policy makers to come up with appropriate supportive measures that will help promote the home-style accommodation.

The potential entrepreneurs can benefit from varied & researched experiences. This review paper makes an effort to briefly discuss the concept and emergence of homestays and the global & Indian trends in homestays. Further, this paper investigates different studies to understand the primary drivers (motivations) and barriers (challenges) faced by homestay owners in different countries of the world. In addition, if one looks from the academic angle, it is clear that the students going for hotel management must also learn about the concept of Homestay. This should also be included in the curriculum of the course. Or else this may also be

included as one of the specialisations at the master's level. The students may also be asked to do some case studies and then discuss at any forum. This will add to and enhance the knowledge of the students as well as this will also open new entrepreneurship opportunities for them.

CONCEPT AND EMERGENCE OF HOMESTAYS

Homestays are a form of accommodation where the tourists stay with a local family in their home. These are affordable, informal and experiential lodgings, that are available even in the remotest of the destinations. By staying with a local family, they not only visit a destination but get to live that place like a local. The most crucial aspect of a homestay is the host. According to Richardson (2004), Homestay as an industry is new, but the concept of travellers residing with a local family other than their own has always been there. Home stays emerged as an experiential lodging choice among the foreign students, who while studying abroad, would stay with a local family (Homestay.com, 2014). Richardson (2003) stated that in Australia the concept is associated more with international students. It is also popular with language learners who preferred to stay with a local family to hone their language skills (Rivers, 1998).

In United Kingdom, Ireland and America, it is similar to bed and breakfast kind wherein host offer accommodation for guests in return for payment (Arneson, 2018). According to Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary a B&B is "a small hotel or a private house that rents room and provides a morning meal". Choudhary and Rai (2007) opine that theoretically, B&B's are budget accommodations where the guests are offered only bed and breakfast. So, it appears that a

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B&B may be operational in a private house or any other type of accommodation where a room and morning breakfast is provided. A B&B in private house where the host is present may be called a homestay. The term B&B and Homestays is used interchangeably in India (Choudhary & Rai, 2007). The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India classifies them as “Incredible India Bed and Breakfast (IIB&B)/Homestay Establishments” in its guidelines.

In the last few years, the online marketplaces have widely promoted homestays as an alternative form of accommodation. They have well connected the guests and hosts, leading to a change in profile of typical home stay traveller. While students still account for 29% of home stay guests, globally, nearly 50% of them are guests who travel for leisure (Homestay.com, 2014).

GLOBAL TRENDS IN HOMESTAY TOURISM

In most developing countries tourism is seen as the promoter of small scale enterprises that ultimately accounts for community development (Honey, 1999). Today, homestay tourism, due to its inherent features, is widely hailed as a rural community development program that contributes greatly to sustainable form of tourism. In fact, in countries like Malaysia and Nepal homestay tourism is generally referred to as Rural tourism (Yusnita, Shaladdin, Aziz and Ibrahim, 2013; Ibrahim and Razzaq, 2010; Kayat, 2011). In India, The Kerala Homestay and Tourism Society, that has been promoting rural tourism and responsible tourism in Kerala since 2008, organizes international homestay and rural tourism travel meet. Rural home stays have been in focus in many of the researches in various countries like Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal and Thailand.

Craig (2017) opines, that the credit for the growth of commercial homes, to a large extent, goes to the digital advancement of the era which has brought transparency to the whole setting. Travelers are no more sceptical in staying at a stranger’s house because they can view photographs of the place, check out the host profiles and read reviews of fellow travellers before booking it online. Homeowners, too, are now more comfortable in renting/sharing their space as they can also check guest profiles on social media sites. Also, the process of marketing has become relatively easier.

HOMESTAYS IN INDIA

Homestay is an established concept abroad but in India it is in a nascent stage as indicated by, Sharat Dhall, the Yatra COO (B2C). According to reports, people are reluctant to open their home for the tourists and also hesitant to stay in

a homestay. Both the hosts and guests need to be educated on the model of homestays (Banerjee J, 2017). The Ministry of Tourism is encouraging home stays. It is urging the States as well to make it more lucrative (Sharma A, 2016). The Online Travel Agents (Make My Trip, Yatra, AirBnB etc) are offering strong distribution channel. Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) tied up with AirBnB (Jain,2017), Odisha Tourism Development Corporation with Yatra (Singhal, 2017), and the state tourism departments in Assam and Kumaun are working with Rightstay of make my trip to promote homestays (Press Trust of India, 2017). Organisations like SEWA (self-employed women’s association) in Gujarat are being roped in by AirBnB to give travellers a unique and authentic experience of rural India and helping SEWA members becoming powerful micro entrepreneurs (Cowen, 2016).

In India, the term Homestay and B&B are used interchangeably (Choudhary & Rai, 2007). The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has established guidelines to classify fully operational Bed and Breakfast/Homestay facilities as “Incredible India Bed and Breakfast (IIB&B)/Homestay Establishments”. Depending upon the facilities offered the homestays are divided into various categories that differ from State to State. The government duly publicizes and prepares a directory of all such approved establishments to facilitate the tourists. However, a report by Centre for Public Policy Research states that in Kochi, only 20% of the homestays are classified or government recognized. The homestay owners do not go for classification because it requires them to shell extra money on licence formalities and pay commercial rates for water and electricity. The guests especially foreigners come by visitor rating and not by government recognition (“Functioning without a Classification”, 2018).

According to a report by online travel community Holiday IQ homestays have witnessed 130 folds increase. As against 17 Homestays in 2004 there were 2281 registered homestays in India in 2016 (Mitra, 2016). According to Holiday IQ report of 2014, 72% homestays were located in south while share of north was only 17%. 65% of the homestays were available for INR 2000/night or below. 31% of them range between INR 2000 to 5000. Holiday IQ (2016) Mega Trends report again confirms the establishment of homestays as an important part of Indian Hospitality Industry especially in the budget segment. It says the spread of homestays still remains limited to a few places. Kerala and Karnataka are still the leaders with 40% and 27% of homestays in India. In Northern India, Himachal Pradesh leads with 10% of Indian homestays. Also, it is important to note that as per the report, the guest satisfaction in Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh has been higher in homestays as compared to other forms of accommodations and this trend is expected to continue.

By 2021, the hospitality sector in India will need 180,000 additional rooms, \$25.5 billion for constructing these rooms and about 211,000 people to operate them. (HVS - Global Hospitality Services, March 2012). Homestays offer a more economical alternative to the above challenge, with available inventory and educated volunteers to facilitate the huge & varied demand that is to come from the projected 15.3 million International Arrivals by 2025 as forecasted by World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2015) and 1,735 million Domestic tourists by 2021 as forecasted by HVS Global Hospitality.

DRIVERS/MOTIVATIONS FOR THE HOSTS IN HOMESTAYS

The motivations or the drivers for becoming a homestay host are myriad. Many choose to run homestays because they find it to be a unique and interesting business. It gives an opportunity to meet new people and many a times there is a possibility that this relationship between hosts and guests matures into a great friendship (Korir, J., Kiprutto, N., and Rop, W., 2013; Kayat, 2011). One's own desire along with the support from the family, community, Homestay associations and government incentives are identified as other motivating factors by Salleh, M., Hanim, N., Othman, R., Nordin, N., Idris, M., Hajar, S., & hukor, M. S. (2014).

Korir et al. (2013) are of the view that for homestay the cost of investment and risk is relatively low, barriers at entry level are not many and most importantly one works from home. This makes it a platform for the local women to develop their entrepreneurial skills, earn and become self-dependent (Ibrahim, Y. & Razzaq, A.R., 2010). Monetary gains, is an evident motivation, driving people to open their house for commercial accommodation. Bhalla, Coghlan and Bhattacharya (2016) reported that the Binsar villagers in India perceived Homestay program positively for the direct income opportunities it offers. Besides the direct income i.e. price of homestay, the hosts sometimes receive tips which occasionally are even more than the accommodation cost. Also, additional money can be made by selling cultural artifacts (Ole Petenya, 2016). However, many researchers insist that finance is not the primary motive. Richardson (2004) and Salleh et al (2014) briefs that for only few of the hosts initial motivation was purely financial.

Culturally, homestay tourism has been regarded to be instrumental in preservation of the identity and lifestyle of host community. Biswakarma (2015) insists that cultural performances and local lifestyle significantly affects tourist satisfaction. Even the hosts are surprised to see the extent of admiration the guests show for the residents' culture. Hosts' culture needs to be conserved not only for the tourists but also for their own future generations. According to

Gangotia (2013) Homestay program strengthens the sense of pride local people have for their culture and lifestyle. In Kullu Manali, it has revitalized the interest of the youth in traditional dance forms of the area. In their study, Sharon and MohdNor (2015) state that homestay has encouraged the young Malaysian people to wear their traditional clothes and learn to play the Gong. Homestay is an opportunity for authentic cultural exchange between the guest and host (Richardson 2004). The extent of it however depends on the willingness of both the parties.

Since hosting an outside visitor requires a concerted effort from each and every family member, it strengthens the family as a social unit (Petenya, 2016; Salleh et al, 2014) and inculcates a spirit of teamwork. The family as a whole enriches in its knowledge and communication skills. But this can be a real challenge for many of the hosts who are unable to solicit the wholehearted approval of all the family members. Making utilization of unoccupied portion of the house and spending leisure time are other factors that prompt people into the business of commercial homes (Paul, 2014). Welcoming guests may help ease the transition for parents when their own children leave home for business or further studies. It gives a family environment to both the lonely hosts and the guests (Richardson, 2004).

Engel, 2012 suggests homestay is an opportunity to meet new people that brings youthful energy, fun and companionship. One of the respondents in her study said 'the guests cheer her up, give her hope. They make her feel fulfilled and happy in spite of getting older. She feels like a woman that is not wasting away.' The main motivation in homestay is 'feel good' and educational factor (Lynch, 1999). Richardson (2004) opines that many hosts open their homes for guests for the benefit of their own children. Meeting new people may improve their chance for scholarships and employment and may as well create a chance to send them to the visitors' country in future (Korir et al, 2013).

In order to attract tourists, not only the Homestay but its surroundings also need to be scenic, clean and refreshing. Homestay owners feel motivated and responsible to conserve their environment, beautify and make it pleasant (Bhalla, Coghlan and Bhattacharya, 2016; Salleh et al, 2014). A reason good enough for the entire society to motivate and co-operate in running of Homestay business in their vicinity. Motivated hosts can give impetus to 'Swachh Bharat Mission'.

BARRIERS/CHALLENGES FOR THE HOSTS IN HOMESTAYS

Motivations are many and so are the challenges that concern the homestay operators and sometimes lead to their exit

from the business or deter the potential entrepreneurs from entering the realm of homestays. The most common challenge that appears in most of the studies done relates to culture. Korir et al (2013) point the possibility of “cultural degradation” due to introduction of unhealthy cultures. Most of the homestay hosts, at some point of time, experience some kind of “cultural shock” though the degree of it may vary (Richardson 2004). Indian culture is very different from the western culture. Indians are not okay with the backpackers smoking marijuana and women being scantily clad. They fear their children emulating them. Young couples from abroad who have little regard for local culture is a real challenge to a family driven business like the homestays. Richardson (2004) observed that some hosts were irritated by the guests’ eating habits, tendency of taking long showers and leaving electric appliances switched on after use.

Some female hosts in his study reported to have felt like a servant in their own house. Instances of misbehavior and rough handling of home appliances have been recorded by Paul (2014) in her study conducted in Thrissur district of Kerala, India. However, the cultural difference does not appear to be a shock for the hosts who are curious as they are found to be more interested in understanding the same. Ole Peterson (2016) has made a very important observation in this context that the chances of cultural shock are high during the initial moments or introduction between the Hosts and guests and this shock lasts mostly for a day. Confirming to the above problem, Engel (2012) indicates that the hosts sometimes bear with the inappropriate behavior of the guests in order to maintain their jobs. They act as “cultural mediators” understanding the guests’ culture and explaining them their own.

Though some people become homestay operators to spend their leisure time, many report it to disturb their entire daily schedule. Even if the social interaction with the guests is not much, then also preparing food and catering to their demands needs a lot of time that disrupts their normal routines (Lama, 2013). Homestay business takes away the family time and privacy from the hosts (Engel, 2012; Korir et al, 2013). Overlapping spaces in the houses were also raised as issue and cause of distress in their study.

Korir et. al (2013) and Kumar, Gill & Kunasekaran (2012) observe that meeting the expectation of the guests, providing comforts, food that is palatable to westerners and foreign language guide often becomes a challenge for hosts. However, it must be noted here that both these researchers report this on the basis of their studies conducted in rural areas. Urban hosts may also have similar difficulty but in all likelihood the degree of this challenge may vary depending upon the personal exposure of the hosts and their families. Another

problem that looks related more to the rural homestays is the language barrier mainly because of the limited opportunity of education for villagers. Urban hosts are likely to be well versed in English, a language that is now a global lingua franca.

Exposure to the outside world, may influence the youngsters in rural areas to move to urban dwellings in search of glossier jobs and lifestyle (Kumar et.al, 2012). In fact, this has created a vacuum of future entrepreneurs as found by Lama (2013) in his study of community homestay program in rural areas of Nepal. Most of the homestay operators there are women and people from older generation. The biggest challenge before them was the lack of youngsters to shoulder the responsibility and continue the business. This again seems to be a problem associated with the rural homestay program.

As per Korir et al (2013) insecurity from visitors on one hand and the accountability of visitors’ security on the other, is a huge problem for the hosts. Most of the respondents in his study felt insecure in hosting people from a different ethnicity, especially the male guests. They feel comparatively secure in hosting visitors from their ethnic community, or if it was a female or a male guest accompanied by a female. Paul (2014) in her study found the problem of hosts feeling cheated at the hands of the tourists. But, she also pointed out that about 64% her respondents did not have any problem in hosting because the homestay providers duly checked the identity proofs of domestic tourists and reported the nearby police station for international tourists.

The most practical and obvious challenge in homestay business like any other business is to maintain a decent profit. The other benefits somehow become secondary if the homestay operations do not bring in a minimum amount of money to sustain. Though, the amount of profit expected by the hosts may vary depending upon their motivations to venture into the homestay program. This is exactly what has been postulated by Yusofa, Mudab, Salleha, Ibrahim, & Mohd Amine (2015) that the motivation in homestay program depends more on the attitude of the host.

Pursian and Xiao (2013) in their case study of Homestay in Malaysia have reviewed the challenges faced by homestay operators. The study suggests that the potential of homestay in providing additional income and employment have catapulted the number of homestays in Malaysia. The total percentage of tourist arrivals to the homestay programme has steadily increased from 0.08% in 2006 to 0.19% in 2010. They pointed out that seeing the potential of homestays it is essential to study the challenges faced by the homestay owners to ensure the sustainability of the homestay program. The internal and external challenges have been summarised by them as in the below table:

Table 1

Internal Deficiencies	External Deficiencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incompetent community leadership & operators commitment ● Inexperienced, lacking of knowledge and understanding of the industry ● Dependability syndrome ● Lack of creativity and entrepreneurship skills ● Generation Y commitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Misuse of Homestay term by opportunist ● Exploitation by external parties ● Inefficient networking

Source: Pusiran and Xiao, 2013

According to the case study of Pusiran and Xiao, Homestay program failed because of lack of local participation, poor planning and community structure. In the initial stages of homestay, the operators are inexperienced and lack in knowledge. Hence, the authorities need to impart knowledge through appropriate trainings. However, the homestay operator and community should not totally depend on the government or other bodies for funds and supervision at every occasion. They must fight the odds and keep the homestay running even if they are not able to make money initially.

An ideal homestay would be one that will have tourist attractions in its vicinity. But the homestay operators with their creativity and entrepreneurial skills can make their homestays attractive enough to pull the tourists. They can promote the good qualities of their community to attract tourists, like, perform cultural dance and music or display a mock Malay wedding. Pusiran and Xiao emphasize that the authorities should make effort to stop the migration of younger generation to cities by providing them opportunities in villages to ensure sustainability of homestay programmes. The government should also come up with a mechanism so that a low budget non-homestay accommodation cannot advertise itself as a homestay. When tourists stay at such accommodations and do not get to experience as they expected in a true homestay they are left disappointed and disillusioned. Pusiran and Xiao in their study have pointed out that the challenges to a homestay vary according to the location of the homestay. Hence, the challenges need to be tackled on case by case basis.

CONCLUSION

Homestay is a relatively new concept in India, hence, not many studies are available. In worldwide researches, it was found that money and reputation are an evident motivation (Bhalla et al, 2016 & Petenya 2016) but they are not the sole drivers in this business (Richardson, 2004 & Salleh et al, 2014). Besides the economic factor, socio-cultural factors significantly motivate the homestay hosts (Engel 2012; Gangotia, 2013; Kayat, 2011; Korir et al, 2013; Richardson,

2004; Sharon & MohdNor 2015). Most of the research work done in this field has been to investigate the role of home stays in community development (Bhalla, Coghlan & Bhattacharya, 2016; Gangotia, 2013; Ibrahim and Razzaq, 2010) & sustainable development (Lama, 2013) in rural areas and eradication of poverty in rural areas (Kumar, Gill & Kunasekaran, 2012).

The urban homestay hosts have been studied in countries where the homestay is associated more with concept of study abroad (Richardson, 2003 & 2004) and language learning program (Rivers, 1998), but not where it is more concerned with leisure tourists. Understandably, there are differences in the motivations and challenges faced by rural and urban hosts. Urban hosts are likely to have more exposure of the world and be better educated saving them from the problems faced by rural hosts. For example, serving food to the westerners and communicating with them would not be a challenge for them. While studying the impact of homestays, the motivations and challenges to the homestay host do surface. But there are not many researches that focus particularly on the hosts' understanding of the homestay business. The main limitation of this paper is that only research papers in English language could be reviewed and incorporated. It is important to conduct more studies on the homestay hosts in urban areas to understand the motivations and problems encountered by them.

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