

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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HOMESTAYS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN THRISSUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Hospitality has always been one of the most valued service areas of Indian culture in general and Kerala, in particular. Hospitality becomes more homely when the guests stay at home and this belief was utilized to the full by the Keralites as Kerala was one of the first states in India to initiate and develop the concept of homestays. In a homestay, the tourist lives with the family for some part of his or her journey and enjoy the culture and tradition of the land. Even though homestay is regarded as a home away from sweet home, tourist stay in hotels by paying high rates for rooms. This makes some kind of problems for the homestay providers because for some it's the only livelihood. By conducting census method of data collection through telephone interview, study concludes about different problems of homestay owners and suggests some solution.

KEYWORDS

Homestays, tourism.

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the few countries in the world blessed with the tremendous variety of tourist sources. India recognised the economic significance of tourism soon after independence and established full fledged Department of tourism as early as 1958. In fact India was one of the first countries among newly independent Asian nations to under take the promotion of international tourism in a professional way. And it was the first Asian country, to open overseas tourist offices in USA and UK as early as 1952. In 1966 India molded ITDC to make the tourism industry a flourishing one. The India Tourism Development Corporation Limited (ITDC) is a hospitality, retail and education company owned by Government of India, under Ministry of Tourism. It was incorporated with the objective of developing and expanding tourism infrastructure in the country and thereby promoting India as a tourist destination. Now, in 2010, India witnessed a growth of 10.7% in domestic tourist visits over the year 2009 and that of foreign tourists was 24.2%. In 2010, foreign tourist visits registered an increase of about 18.31 percent, and the growth in domestic tourist visits was near to 8.0 percent.

The tourism industry has taken the state of Kerala to the global map with its branding. The brand name of Kerala, 'God's Own Country' has become popular around the world. Kerala has an active tourism industry which has been accepted as one of the most suited industries for Kerala. The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC), a public sector undertaking conducts and regulates the tourism activities. It is one of the most profitable ventures of the Kerala government. There is District Tourism Promotion Council also, which mainly concentrates on tourism promotion activities like marketing products through public/private participation, improvement of quality/standard or evolving procedure for certification of all tourism products, improvement of signages, sanitation etc by working through local government, heritage conservation and preservation, coordination of tourism clubs, creation of tourism awareness and preparation of host community, promotion of paying guest scheme information dissemination and local infrastructure projects.

As mentioned, the number of tourist is increasing so their accommodation becomes a question during the peak seasons. In Kerala there is a need for twenty thousand classified rooms in a tourist season. But the luxury five star hotels and resorts can provide with about ten thousand rooms only. The rest of the tourists find accommodation in other hotels and homestays. So the importance of homestays had increased in the recent years. With travel becoming more about experimental holidays, homestays are more apt accommodation for the alert and independent traveller. They present a bright, affordable and secure accommodation option for today's enlighten tourists. Not only will homestays bridge the gap of quality of accommodation in the state, but also paves the way for unique cultural exchange and penetration of the benefits of tourism directly to the common man.

HOMESTAYS

Hospitality has always been one of the most valued traditions of Indian culture in general and Kerala, in particular. The centuries old adage, 'Atithi Devo Bhava' - the guest is always considered to be a representative of God, is practiced in Kerala to the core. Hospitality becomes more homely when the guests stay at home and this belief was utilized to the full by the Keralites as Kerala was one of the first states in India to initiate and develop the concept of homestays. In a homestay, the tourist lives with the family for some part of his or her journey and enjoy the culture and tradition of the land.

There are so many exclusive homestays in Kerala and most of them are located in the midst of coconut palms and natural beauty, also quite away from the crowded cities and heavy traffic. From budget tourists and backpackers to the rich, homestays in Kerala are available for all and offer a place to relax and dream in, with loving care. They not only showcase the rural life but also the warmth and care of the rural folks. Another high point of homestays in Kerala is the traditional Kerala cuisine. And since strict guidelines have been implemented by the government, most of them are safe to put up with supreme maintenance. Couples and families looking for a private holiday in the laps of nature are invited to experience and share the unique hospitality of Kerala Homestays

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HOMESTAYS OR BED AND BREAKFASTS

The bed and breakfast concept has existed in one form or another since the beginning of man. Monasteries served as bed and breakfasts for travelers, and in some cases still do. Bed and breakfasts have been very popular with the traveling public in Europe for years. It was in England, Scotland and Ireland that the term "B&B" first came into use. Tourists will see B&B signs in many windows there. The term "bed and breakfast" is not used in many other countries. Terms such as paradors, pensions, gasthaus, minskukus, shukukos and pousados are used to describe what Americans and English-speaking Europeans think of as a bed and breakfast. The United States also has a history of bed and breakfasts dating back to the time of early settlers. As the pioneers traveled the trails and roads across this county, they sought a safe refuge in homes, inns and taverns. In fact, some of those historic accommodations now serve as B&Bs. During the Great Depression, many people opened their homes to travelers to bring in some additional money for the family. The term "boarding house" was used at this time. After the Depression, this type of lodging declined and many people had the idea they were just for low-income travelers or drifters. In the early fifties, people may remember the term "tourist home" being used. This too was essentially a form of bed and breakfast. Once motels were built on the new highways, they were soon forgotten.

In large part because of the number of Americans traveling to Europe in recent years and rediscovering B&Bs, there has been an exponential increase in interest in the U.S. Today, the B&B is not viewed as a low-cost lodging facility but as an attractive alternative to the typical standard chain hotel or motel room. Today, some bed and breakfasts offer amenities not unlike those found at the most upscale hotels in the world.

A homestay in India concept is as similar as a bed and breakfast concept. Guests are stay in the family home or in divided sections close by. At the present time lots of homestays providing comfortable stay their guests than a reputable hotel. We may have experienced the advantages of staying at home with services that equal to the finest hotels.

HOMESTAY ACTIVITIES

A homestay isn't simply somewhere to stay; many homestay offer a range of activities which give guests the unique opportunity to experience the specific culture of the area. Depending on the location, homestay can offer anything from adventure pursuits, artistic activities and experiencing local culture such as dance and music. The activities include;

1. **Cooking Classes:** These are informal and a friendly way to get to know your host and the Indian culture of food! In all towns there are excellent restaurants, and some of the best regional delicacies will probably be cooked by the hosts. Meals are cultural experiences in themselves and learning some of your favorites is a must.
2. **Yoga and Ayurveda:** Hosts arrange private classes at the homestay or guide the tourist to a nearby centre for long term courses.
3. **Plantation tour:** These tours can be by jeep or by foot. Tours of plantations can be offered by Homestay owners themselves, if they run a plantation, or by local tourist companies.
4. **Hikes and treks:** Long, tough treks into the mountains are offered and lighter treks to see the surrounding landscape, such as the sheer rock faces and cultivated fields. Short treks, day long treks and longer treks including camping can be organized.
5. **Local tours:** Local tours within a destination can be much more hassle free if tourists were provided the right information. Homestay hosts will always be there to help tourists.
6. **Bird Watching:** Bird watching is especially good in the Kuttanad backwaters and plantation areas of Kerala.
7. **Fishing:** Many homestays are more than happy to cook the fish that their guests have caught, so tourists can enjoy a delicious home-caught fish curry.
8. **Elephant safaris:** Elephants are sacred animals in India and are found in temples, and working in plantations. Homestay hosts can arrange for elephant safaris tickets in a wildlife sanctuary or general joy rides in certain destinations.
9. **Backwater cruise:** A trip on a fully staffed houseboat with living areas, visiting different areas of the backwaters in Kerala for 1-3 days is the best way to get into the narrow canals to see traditional villages which live mainly on farming.
10. **Wildlife safaris:** Homestay hosts can put guests in contact with tourist companies who can arrange wildlife safaris.
11. **Cycling / biking:** Cycles and scooters can be hired, or host may have a spare one that tourists can use and with a map in hand or directions from host, ride into narrow lanes and discover little hidden treasures that are not open for all to see.
12. **Access to local events:** With the help of homestay hosts tourists can get to exclusive private events or weddings or celebrations within families that a regular tourist can never see.
13. **Visit to local mark:** Hosts explain to all about life in India, spices, fresh produce, Indian fabrics and much more. There is also the advantage of getting a locals recommendation on the best places to buy specific items and also getting the best bargain.

TYPES OF HOMESTAYS

There are different types of homestays and it varies with location, facilities, and building types. Different types of homestays are as follows:

- a) **Heritage homestay** A surprisingly large number of homes and hence homestays in India are ancestral properties. Many of them going back over 100 years and are filled with artifacts collected over generations. There are great museums of an unknown history.
- b) **Modern homestay** Big cities in India have numerous homestays with all these traits like, modern conveniences, international décor, and families with a global outlook. Clubbed together with Indian hospitality, these urban Indian homestays serve as wonderful homes away from home for travelers.
- c) **Plantation homestay** A lot of homestays in India are nestled in over 100 acres of lush greens where tea, spices and much more are grown. These homestays allow people an experience where nature comes to them.
- d) **Rural homestay** Some of the most memorable homestays in India are located in villages. These homestays are the hub of lost culture and traditions as well as natural beauty.
- e) **Eco homestay** Many homestays have adopted the practice of ecotourism to supplement their income while preserving their region's fragile ecosystem.
- f) **Palaces** All over India there are many palaces, forts and castles, which have opened their doors to guests. These incomparable homestays are often destinations in themselves.

KERALA STATE HOMESTAY AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION (KERALAHATS)

Kerala State Homestay and Tourism Association (KeralaHATS) has been formed basically to serve as a consortium of homestay providers and tourism promoters for the effective co-ordination of tourism activities in Kerala and also to ensure qualitative and competitive service. KeralaHATS while striving to enhance the working conditions of homestay providers and tourism providers would also join hands with the government and organizations of it to promote tourism activities in Kerala. It would also among the objectives of KeralaHATS to carry out research programs in the hospitality sector of Kerala and be actively involved in conservation of natural resources and environment, upkeep of heritage structures and monuments. Promotion of rainwater harvesting, organic farming and zero waste management system would also occupy a prominent place in the activities of KeralaHATS.

HOMESTAY CLASSIFICATION

Homestays were classified on the basis of score gained during the unexpected physical verification by 'The Classification Committee', constituted by the government. The committee gives scores on the basis of following criteria: Location, Exterior and Surroundings, Type of Building, Guest rooms, Bathrooms, Public area, Food, Kitchen, Cleanliness, Hygiene, Safety and Security, Communication and Eco – friendly Practices. Those homestay units, scoring seventy five and above marks are classified as Diamond House, scoring between seventy four and sixty marks are classified as Gold House and scoring between fifty nine and fifty as Silver House. If the score is less than fifty it is not qualified for classification.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As a part of study the following literature has been reviewed:

The purpose of the study "Tourist motivation to use homestays in Thailand" by Kanoknon Seubsmrn was to explore demographic characteristics, tourist motivation, cultural and heritage attributes and identify the relationship between them and tourist. The result of study revealed that although three factors, location, attraction and information, have significant relationship with tourist's overall satisfaction, attraction was more important.

S. Anil Radhakrishnan in his report says that the roping in of 50 reputed home-stay families in different areas of the State has come as a relief to the tourism industry which is facing severe shortage of hotel rooms during the season. Even though the State has 50,000 rooms for tourist accommodation in different categories, it has been found that there are only less than 10,000 rooms of good quality. It is estimated that the tourism industry is facing a shortage of 20,000 rooms during the tourist season. Official sources said there is a need for 6,000 more rooms in the home-stay sector in the next five years to cater to arrivals during peak season.

In the study "Tourist's perception about homestay in Subah" Clotilde Lugman goes through reactions for preferring homestay by tourist. He classified the reasons as push factors and pull factors. He suggests the methods of attracting tourists to homestay. The pull factors include learning the local culture, connections with people, experience and local food and push factors include privacy, comfort, and hygiene, afraid of dirty toilets, of being bored, discretion, problems of communication etc. He concludes that pull factors are existential and push factors are immaterial. Also improving communication, training, networking and homestay itself would bring more tourists.

Krish Mahar of Time India reported India may have moved yet another rung down the ladder of desirable destinations for female travelers. Reports surfaced on British woman injured after trying to escape out a window from the unwanted advances of a hotel manager in Agra, home of the Taj Mahal and the nation's biggest tourists draw.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Homestays have its own specialties to attract foreign as well as domestic tourists, but only 0.14% of the total tourists stayed in homestays functioning in Thrissur district. Moreover only 613 homestays are functioning in Kerala and of them only 19 are situated in Thrissur district. Hence it is proposed to study the problems of the homestay providers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out the factors influencing the homestay providers for providing the service.
2. To find out the problems of homestay providers while rendering the services.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary data were collected through telephone interview with help of structured questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from various text books, Journals, Newspapers and Internet

SELECTION OF DISTRICT FOR THE STUDY

Multiple stage sampling is used for selecting the district where study is to be conducted. For this purpose districts of Kerala are classified on the basis of number of homestays. The numbers of homestays varies from 118 to 0 and were grouped into 3 categories.

1st category consists of districts having more than 100 homestays and it includes Ernakulam and Alappuzha.

2nd category consists of districts having homestays between 100 and 50 and it includes Kottayam, Idukki and Trivandrum.

3rd category consist of districts having less than 50 homestays and it includes Kollam, Palakkad, Wayanad, Thrissur, Pathanamthitta, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Kasargode.

Lottery method was used for selecting the district, where study is to be conducted. From the nine districts having less than 50 homestays, Thrissur district was selected.

SAMPLE SIZE

All the 19 (100%) licensed homestays were interviewed for collecting primary data

TOOLS FOR ANALYSIS

Percentage calculations and pie diagrams were used for analysis and interpretation of data.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Data were collected through telephone interview. All the limitations of telephone interview had affected this study.
2. Homestays included in the District Tourism Co-operation website were considered only. The websites were not updated.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

- Among the 19 homestay providers of Thrissur district only 15 were available in the telephone.
- All the 15 were responded to the structures questionnaire except one.
- In the balance fourteen, only 10 (71%) were functioning and rest stopped their homestay service due to several reasons.
- Only one of the homestay providers is female.
- Most of the homestay providers were between 30 and 50 years old.
- Majority (57%) of the homestay providers were graduates.

THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY ON HOMESTAYS IN THRISSUR DISTRICT ARE

TABLE 1: FACTORS INSPIRED TO START HOMESTAY

Factors	No: of respondents	In Percent
Interested in homestay	6	43
Successful story of friends	0	0
Increased no: of tourist	5	36
To earn more income	0	0
To get engaged after retirement	0	0
Make use of unoccupied portion of home	6	43
Other reasons	0	0

Source: Primary Data

- 43% of the existing providers started homestay business due to their interest in this unique kind of service. Another 43% started the homestays to make use of the unoccupied portion of their home. Only 36% was influenced by increased number of tourist. No one is treating the monetary benefit as a reason to start homestay. Some homestay providers were inspired by multiple reasons.

TABLE 2: PROBLEMS FACED BY THE HOMESTAY PROVIDERS WHILE DOING THE BUSINESS

Problems	In numbers	In percent
High maintenance and promotion cost	0	0
Acquiring homestay license	4	28
Lack of infrastructural facilities in locality	0	0
Cheating by tourist	1	7
Misbehavior to family members	2	15
Rough handling of home appliances	2	15
Other problems	1	7
No problems	9	64

Source: Primary Data

- 64% of the respondents have no problem in doing homestay business. Acquiring homestay license is the problem for 28% of homestay providers. 15% faced misbehavior to family members, another 15% faced rough handling of homestay appliances and 7% faced cheating from tourists. The reason for not having the problem for the 64% of homestay providers were checking of identity proofs of domestic tourists, ensuring their marital status, checking passports, identity cards and reporting the nearby police station for international tourists.

TABLE 3: TYPES OF TOURIST, HOMESTAY PROVIDERS WERE ACCOMMODATING

Type of tourists	No: of respondents	In percent
Domestic Tourists only	6	46
Foreign Tourists Only	2	15
Both Domestic and Foreign tourist	5	38
Total	13	100

Source: Primary Data

- 46% of homestay providers accommodates only domestic tourists, 15 % accommodates foreign tourists only while 38% of them accommodates both domestic and foreign tourists.

SUGGESTIONS

- 29% of homestays are not functioning, but their details are still in the tourism websites and are like to be functioning. This may mislead the tourists. So the authorities may remove the names from their websites.
- Diamond house is Class A house in homestay classification. It is necessary to ensure that the services and the facilities of the Diamond house should be on par with international standards.
- Homestays were chosen more by domestic tourists. It would be more beneficial to the tourism industry to fix the charges which are affordable to the domestic tourists.
- At present renewal of licensing is done once in two years. But frequent inspection would be more helpful for ensuring the standard of homestays.
- Authorities need to take more steps to attract tourists to Thrissur district with the help of advertisements. There is also a need to conduct awareness programs so that more and more tourists came to know about homestays.
- There is need to design innovative, attractive and economical tour packages with the help of local self governments.
- Homestays would be the better option for women tourists who travel in solo.
- Hartals and strikes affect the tourism industry adversely. To overcome such challenges special transportation and security arrangements should be provided for the tourists.

CONCLUSION

The tourism industry in India is substantial and vibrant, and the country is fast becoming a major global destination. India's travel and tourism industry is one of them most profitable industries in the country. Homestay is a new trend in the tourism industry to attract foreign as well s domestic tourists. But the number of homestays in Thrissur district is only 3% of the total homestays in Kerala. So there is need to increase the number of homestays in the district through mass publicity. Thus both tourists and the new homestay providers can be attracted and can realize this programme as potential to the tourism industry.

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