

HOMESTAYS IN KERALA - AN INNOVATIVE TOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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This paper introduces home stay as an innovative approach to managing sustainable tourism objectives. The home stays add authentic socio-cultural richness to the tourists' experience. Economic growth with protection of the environment is a challenge, which compelled to achieve development with focusing on the sustainable tourism. In Kerala, tourists mainly come to enjoy the exotic beaches, breathtaking hill stations, enchanting waterfalls, lagoons, houseboats, traditional festivals and feasts etc. These natural and cultural attributes can be showcased best through home stays. The Local cultural activities, traditional lifestyle; local tests can be experienced by guests in a homestay programme.

This paper explores the concept of sustainable tourism development through homestays in Alappuzza, Kerala using a thorough literature review and primary data on first hand experiences generated through observations and semi-structured interviews. Homestays are an attractive tourism product. The Homestay management and sustainable tourism development considers various aspects like economic growth balanced with various ecological parameters, the interaction between tourism and other sectors, life quality improvement, environment deterioration, deforestation, soil erosion, water pollution, and interruption to quiet life. Thus, this research paper aims at the importance of the sustainable tourism development through homestays. It addresses the potentiality, scope and future trends of homestay tourism in Kerala.

Keywords: Homestay, Sustainable Tourism, Environment, Development, Kerala

INTRODUCTION

'Athiti Devo Bhawa' (Guest is god) is the value and belief of Indian Culture. The people of India welcome their guests as a god and treat them with warm hospitable manner. This paper discusses home stays as a potential for sustainable tourism in the Alapuzza region of the Southern state of Kerala. Homestays are successful in some developing countries such as Malaysia, Costa Rica, Thailand etc. They are often located in rural areas actively owned, managed and operated by the communities where tourists reside and enjoy the local traditional activities and cultural performances (Jamal, Othman, & Muhammad, 2011). Tucker and

Lynch (2004) characterized homestays as the buying and selling of more than “just a bed” where the host would consider hosting as a lifestyle choice.

Kerala has projected that tourism sector would contribute almost 20 per cent to the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in the next five years. Currently, tourism accounts for roughly 12 per cent of the GSDP, the tourism and Information Technology (IT) sectors were the two major services sectors making maximum contribution to the state economy. About five years back, tourism sector contribution to the Kerala economy was just 6-7 per cent, today the state government had been taking several measures to boost tourism.

The state has been acting as a catalyst in creating and expanding the vital infrastructure for tourism such as roads, power, water etc. The state provides subsidy and various other assistances, apart from quicker clearances to proposals from the private sector related to tourism. The Homestay tourism programmes are extremely popular among the foreigners who are visiting Kerala.

Total tourism revenue (both direct and indirect) during 2015 was Rs 26,689 crore, showing a rise of 7.25 per cent over last year. Uttar Pradesh accounts for about 8 per cent of the domestic tourist inflow to Kerala, which is estimated at over 12.46 million. Over the last few years, Kerala tourism has been proactively holding promotional meets and events at various tier II and III towns in the country, which has paid rich dividends in the form of higher tourist inflow and revenue.

The growth in domestic air traffic and direct and indirect air connectivity with several Kerala towns has also spurred the state tourism sector.

This paper argues that homestays are tools for strengthening social and economic capacities. Tourism can affect community development; it may impact local population structure, transform the forms and types of occupation, change values, influence traditional lifestyle, and modify consumption patterns (Beeton, 2006; Gangte, 2011; Guo & Huang, 2011; Kerstetter & Bricker, 2009; Pizam & Milman, 1986; Scheyvens, 2002; Sebastian & Rajagopalan, 2009). On a positive note, tourism can also encourage communities to engage in development interventions by empowering them (Sofield, 2003; Tefler & Sharpley, 2008); homestays require low capital outlay, thus increasing access to tourism for the poor (Rea, 2000).

In this paper, homestay, as a tourism product operated by local in the Alapuzza area of Kerala, is described as a vehicle for community development through sustainable tourism initiatives. The notion of sustainable tourism development is discussed in relation to the development and well-being through an examination of various social outcomes derived through community-based tourism development. Butler (1999) argues that there is no universally accepted definition of “sustainable tourism” except that the form of tourism can maintain its viability in an area for an indefinite period of time. “Sustainability” in this paper is assessed by determining whether or not the Barpaki communities have gained achievements in social status, economic gain, gender equity and capacity of institutionalizing accomplishments (Baros & David, 2007; Butler, 1999;

Kauppila, Saarinen, & Leinonen, 2009; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Well-being does not only depend on material endowments but also on the capabilities of the individuals (Sen, 1999); a particular capability is the outcome of the interaction of a person's capacities and their position in society (Kwaramba et al., 2012). Rural communities in developing countries are often entrenched with powerlessness, injustice, disparity and exclusion; women and minorities are more victimized than others in this case. A way to eliminate such malpractices is to encourage interaction of such communities with the outside world through tourism; this is facilitated by modern tourists' attraction to distinct ways of life and culture in rural landscapes (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009). Engagement of local people in community-based local level tourism enterprise is important for achieving economic, environmental and social development

This paper presents a study of homestay tourism as an innovative tool for sustainable tourism and its potential, the study covers the homestays in the Alapuzza region of Kerala. The progress achieved by the local community in this region along with the conservation of environment and providing an opportunity of employment can be analysed by Individual identity and recognition, Institutionalization: System, procedure and accountability, Motivation, benefits and incentives

LITERATURE REVIEW

Homestay tourism in rural communities mainly offers the available natural and cultural attractions to tourists (Anand, Chandan, & Singh, 2012; Gu & Wong, 2006;). This creates pressure on the environment and sociocultural fabric which can be kept intact by sensible management and operational modalities.

In many successful rural homestay destinations of Thailand, Malaysia and India, community level codes of conduct together with cooperation of stakeholders and regulations of government authorities have helped in this regard. The growing global awareness and initiatives about preserving the environment have also helped in promotion of community-based rural tourism as a low-impact and environmentally sensitive way of travel (Anand et al., 2012; Jones, 2005;)The case study attempts to explore the role of homestay tourism in sustainable development of the rural communities

The homestay tourism emphasized to encourage the micro-economic sector in the rural areas; preserve the ecological sustainability; generate self-employment and economic growth in the rural communities. Similarly, it addressed to build up the quality life of indigenous people of the village area and make capable to access the benefit through the tourism industry, to increase the use of natural and human resources of the rural areas for rural development; to expose the rural culture and nature to the outside world; to protect environmental degradation; to decentralize the national income and centralize the local resources in the national economy; and to promote and improve local agricultural and other industries (Devkota 2008.)

While primarily a nature-based tourism product, the definitions and practices of sustainable tourism often include a social dimension (Fennell, 2015). The direct or indirect involvement of local people in community-based sustainable tourism is considered desirable, as locals can play an important role in achieving the goals of sustainable tourism to protect the natural environment (Regmi & Walter, 2016; Reimer & Walter, 2013; Stone, 2015).

The homestay tourism product development represents an interesting case of local resident-based community involvement within an area which is considered of high conservation value. The tourism initiative aimed at encouraging employment and revenue for villagers, providing an alternative to extractive or consumptive activities (Drumm & Moore, 2005) and reduce outward migration (Chaturvedi, 2002). Our study explores whether the inclusion of homestays within the sustainable tourism strategy stimulates local guardianship of natural resources and provides support for sustainable tourism objectives through changes in local communities' attitudes and behaviours towards conservation and sustainable tourism initiatives in the Alapuzza region of Kerala.

Homestays may not represent a new form of tourism accommodation but they are arguably gaining increasing attention in academic literature as means to provide either direct/supplementary/alternative income to local communities, support local empowerment, alleviate poverty, attract (eco)tourists, showcase local cultural and natural heritage and interpersonally rich experience to visitors (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Coghlan, 2015; Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Knight & Cottrell, 2016; Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2015; Regmi & Walter, 2016; Tran & Walter, 2014; Truong, Hall, & Garry, 2014). Lynch (2005, p. 528) defines homestays as follows:

a specialist term referring to types of accommodation where tourists or guests pay to stay in private homes, where interaction takes place with a host and/or family usually living upon the premises, and with whom public space is, to a degree, shared.

Homestays appeal more often to international tourists searching for local lifestyle experience, novelty, personalized service and authentic/genuine social interactions with hosts (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Mura, 2015; Wang, 2007), thus preferring local type of accommodation particularly in small, and often remote, rural communities. Singh (1991) suggested that by maintaining an indigenous touch, traditional settings and a vernacular architecture, host can offer an enjoyable experience for the guest.

To be successful in providing a viable income to local communities and create rich and rewarding interpersonal and cultural experiences, the homestay programmes are often combined with other community based tourism activities like camping, trekking, bird watching, the showcasing of traditional culture and festivals and so forth, either within the village or in adjoining areas. Like in Alapuzza, Kerala, where

homestay guests can enjoy cooking, yoga and ayurveda classes, plantation tours, hiking and treks, cultural tours, bird watching, wildlife safaris, cycling, access to local events and visits to local market (Paul, 2013). Homestays thus diversify the income opportunities for the villagers (Dutta, 2012) and generate interest in sustaining such nature-based activities. Regmi and Walter (2016) further emphasize on 'practice-based' learning process by locals while hosting homestay-based activities. Other studies show how linking traditional customs such as the sanctity of pilgrimage routes can also assist in preserving local cultural and natural heritage (e.g. Kaur, 1985; Singh & Kaur, 1983). Precedents for the successful establishment of homestays are documented in the Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Kerala states of India. The development of these homestays have been linked to a range of local cultural activities; heritage and the natural capital component of a region; guiding and interpretation; forest patrols; development of promotional materials; equitable access for households across economic classes; crucial role of communities as tourism stakeholders; and towards conservation of natural resources and the environment (Paul, 2013; Regmi & Walter, 2016; Sarkar & Sinha, 2015; Singh, Mal, & Kala, 2009). Regmi and Walter (2016) further highlight the connection between host's learning to cook a homestay meal to its local natural environment. Given these previous studies linking local support for sustainable tourism and conservation with perceived community benefits and the role of homestays as a direct community benefit from tourism, we might ask how homestay development affects the attitudes and behaviours of local communities towards sustainable tourism initiatives. Homestay owners or employers and various government organizations and nongovernmental organizations, women self help groups are providing employees and trainers involved in implementing an environment friendly sustainable tourism plan, without training, the full benefits of such programme are not likely to be obtained, to be properly trained homestay employees (managers, supervisors, operational staff) must understand the practical implications of sustainable tourism plans, initiatives and gain practical skills and knowledge for implementation, understand the continuous development and harmonization of sustainable tourism.

The study provides two hypotheses in order to study and analyse the implementation and importance of sustainable practices in Homestays in Alapuzza, Kerala.

H1: There is a set of sustainable tourism practices which is most significant in Homestay industry.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the importance and uses of sustainable tourism model.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

For the present study both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data were collected with the help of questionnaire from the selected homestays, located in Alapuzza district of Kerala. They will represent a mix of industry, size, operation, and technology. Respondents consisted of Homestays' owners, operation heads, staff, rural area council heads.

A structured questionnaire developed consisting of various questions such as demographic profile of respondents, sustainable tourism variables. These variables were drawn from the review of literature. The secondary data were obtained from previous works in the field of study, Books, journals, and case studies. Sample of Homestays were taken randomly from Alapuzza Region's divisions Chengannur, Cherthala, Haripad, Kayankulaum, Mavelikara, Ambalapuzza, and Kuttanad.

Data were collected using questionnaires during the period of December 2018. The questionnaires were addressed to Homestays' owners, operation heads, staff of 30 organizations (having permits of KTDC) i.e. five questionnaires per homestays, a total of 150 questionnaires of which 68.67 % returned the questionnaires.

Total number of filled questionnaires received 103. The Data were analysed using SPSS. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and internal consistency using Cronbach α . This test calculates the reliability coefficient (α). The test helps determine coefficient (α) as 0.82.

Measures

Sustainable tourism practices: We used existence of sustainable tourism practices based on literature review and measured on a Likert-type 5-point scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree.

Profile of the Respondents		Frequency
Age	Below 20	10
	20-30	37
	30-40	28
	40-50	16
	50 and Above	12
Education Qualification	10+2	21
	Diploma	27
	Graduation	44
	Post Graduation	11
Marital Status	Single	30
	Married	73
Gender	Male	67
	Female	36
Designation in the Homestay Organisation	Owner/Representative	20
	Homestays' Operation Head	18
	Supervisory Staff	19
	Core Employees	31
	Other Staff Members	15
Work Experience in the Travel & Tourism Sector Jobs	0-2 Years	31
	2-4 Years	46
	5 Years and Above	26
Years of Working With Same Homestay Unit	1 Years	25
	2 Years	33
	3 Years	18
	4 Years	15
	5 Year and Above	12
Location of Homestays	Semi-Urban	11
	Rural area	19

RESULTS

To find out the extent to which Homestays applied Sustainable tourism practices, respondent were asked to indicate importance and usage of sustainable tourism practices. The respondents strongly believed that environment friendly practices are vital for a homestay organization in Kerala. There are a number of reasons cited in the research as to why sustainable tourism practices are important. The study found that training and development of a system in sustainable tourism through Homestay is essentially a potential tool and the increased level of process control can result in providing environment friendly, sustainable model of development with consistency and improvements, with beneficial cost implications for organizations as access to some markets is increased and more customers are attracted, especially after the recent floods in Kerala. The development of a Sustainable tourism through Homestay system can be a valuable team-building exercise for any community, it can lead to improved education and awareness of staff towards sustainable tourism goals in the state of Kerala

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study contributed to the current knowledge in Sustainable tourism practices in Homestays. It has provided additional insights into area relating to factors influencing the adoption of best practices. This study found significant differences in the usage and importance of practices among the Homestays in Alapuzza (Region of Kerala). The result indicates that there is a positive relationship between sustainable tourism practices variables and homestay types, however the result are somewhat different with regard to sustainable tourism practices variables and homestays operating years and homestays employees.

Future research should consider incorporating other important item that have not been considered or omitted from other studies and are likely to influences the adoption of sustainable practices in Homestays such as management support, employee's satisfaction and attitudes, perceived benefits and problems in implementation and the cross-comparison

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