

**“A Study on Acceptance of Homestays as an Emerging Trend in
Alternate Travel Accommodation in India: A Case Study of Heritage
House in Ahmedabad”**

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Abstract

Tourism is an exponentially growing industry. According to United Nation’s statistics, it will continue to boom in the near future also. With this tremendous scope for accommodation needs of the discerning global traveler, other alternate travel accommodations apart from hotels will witness a magnificent rise. Homestays have turned out to be a very popular accommodation option, as it enhances the guest experience by making the stay very warm, offering traditional, local, authentic gastronomic delights and providing a home away from home. The proximity with the local culture further enhances the guest satisfaction, helping in sustaining the rich heritage of the country. This study examines the reasons for the gaining popularity of these establishments, and its future scope. Recommendations have been made based on the survey findings to further strengthen the presence of Homestays in India.

Keywords: Tourism, Homestay, Local culture, Guest experience

Introduction

The history and evolution of Tourism is well documented. From the Indus valley civilization to the present era of B2B & B2C marketing, travel & tourism has been omnipresent and has been the backbone of all the growth and development. Tourism today contributes to about 10% of the GDP globally according to the World Tourism Organization of the United Nation.

Accommodation has been the supreme stanchion and component of the Tourism product. The accommodation sector is of utmost importance as it is the major revenue. With more than hundred years of history of existence for hotels in India, today the hospitality sector is expected to grow at 16.1% to reach 2796.9 thousand crore in 2022. These numbers are expected to increase manifold over the years to come.

With Tourism becoming the major driving force behind the development of the Indian economy the scope for alternate accommodation is increasing exponentially. By 2016, according to the India Tourism statistics, India had 1459 approved hotels with 79879 rooms.

According to the Ministry of Tourism guidelines for approval and registration of this has been as “Incredible India Bed & Breakfast / Homestay Establishments. The primary purpose of these establishments is to provide an opportunity for both domestic and International tourists to stay with an Indian family and to experience Indian local customs & traditions. The Incredible India Bed & Breakfast / Homestay Establishments facilities are categorized as silver and gold with each having its own exquisite features. About 500 establishments have already been registered as B & B properties.

Gujarat is a land of culture, tradition, peace blessed with rich flora, fauna with the enterprising business spirit dwelling in the heart of every local. By 2016 Gujarat had 58 classified hotels with 42252909 domestic tourists and 343752 foreign tourists where the growth rate of Foreign Tourism at a whopping 20.63%. To meet this exponential growth of Tourism there is a requirement of accommodation facilities which cater to the needs of the discerning traveler.

The concept of Homestay is to provide a home away from home, providing the pleasure of home and family. Clean, comfortable accommodations in a traditional cultural ambience, authentic food with warm hospitality are the key components of a homestay. According to the Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited, only residential houses which exist before 31st March 2014 are eligible for applying. The owner with his /her family needs to reside in the same premises. The owner can rent out minimum one room to not more than six rooms accommodating 12 guests in all. The facility further needs to match all the necessary criteria for overall maintenance and safety. In order to boost this growing industry the state government has exempted the homestay establishment from luxury tax etc. Domestic rates for electricity, water and municipal property tax are applicable.

Research Objectives:

- To study the acceptance of Homestays as an alternate accommodation
- To compare the guest preferences on basic offerings of Homestays and hotels
- To identify the reasons for popularity of Homestays
- To study the scope for homestays in future

Research Design:

Sample Size: the study is based on a convenience sampling of 45 respondents from various parts of the country.

Sampling Method: Non-probability sampling method: Convenience sampling

Data Collection: The study was conducted by the means of an online questionnaire and information was directly collected in the cloud.

Collection Technique:

- Primary data- Questionnaire method
- Secondary data- existing reports, books/e journals / magazines, websites

Data Analysis Methods:

- Chi- Square test of association between two variables
- Correlation tabulation
- Factor Analysis

Field visit was conducted at the first official homestay of the state: Heritage House, a structured interview was held with the owner. Details about the inception, architecture, design, operational model, guest preferences, suggestions, challenges etc., were collected.

Data Analysis

- Out of the 45 respondents, 27 were males and 18 females
- Out of the 45 respondents, 12 were in the age group of 20-30 years, 16 were in the age group of 31-40 years, 7 were in the age group of 41-50 years, 10 were in the age group of 51 & above
- The majority of the homestay locations were found to be in Northern and Western India.
- Almost 98% of the respondents feel safe staying in a homestay.
- About 85% of the guests were offered entertainment and recreation during their stay.
- 93% of the respondents believe that Homestays offer a true flavor of the local culture.
- 88% of them find the interiors of homestays very interesting and attractive.
- About 97 % of the guests feel that the homestays should advertise more.
- Almost all respondents feel that the number of homestay facilities should increase.

- About 95% of felt that staying at the homestay resulted in great learning of local culture and social traditions.
- 86% of the respondents found their host as a trustable guide delivering excellent services.
- 93 % of the guests felt special with the undivided attention and hospitality offered.
- About 86% of the respondents feel that hotels have a formal and cold environment in comparison to homestays.
- About 80% of the guests believe that hotels offer standard monotonous interiors
- Homestays offer more value in the accommodation experience in comparison to hotels was agreed upon by 95% of the respondents.
- The feeling of staying at home away from home is very comforting to about 95% of the guests.
- 90% of the respondents agreed that the booking process for homestays was easy.

Chi-Square test for Hypothesis 1

H0: There is no significant association between the age group of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility

H1: There is significant association between the age group of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility

Test Output:

Age * Primary reason to choose homestay Cross tabulation						
		Primary reason to choose homestay				Total
		For a closer feel of the local culture	Economic value	Warmth of the facility	Privacy offered	
Age	20 - 30 years	7	2	2	1	12
	31 - 40 years	5	6	5	0	16
	41 - 50 years	4	2	1	0	7
	51 and above	7	1	2	0	10
Total		23	11	10	1	45

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.144 ^a	9	.520
Likelihood Ratio	8.263	9	.508

Linear-by-Linear Association	.953	1	.329
N of Valid Cases	45		
a. 13 cells (81.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .16.			

Conclusion:

We can see that the chi-square calculated comes out to be more than chi-square tabulated [0.520 > 0.05]. Hence we reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis. Which means, there is no significant association between the age group of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility

Chi-Square test for Hypothesis 2

H0: There is no significant association between the gender of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility

H1: There is significant association between the gender of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility

Test Output:

Gender * Primary reason to choose homestay Cross tabulation						
		Primary reason to choose homestay				
		For a closer feel of the local culture	Economic value	Warmth of the facility	Privacy offered	Total
Gender	Male	12	10	4	1	27
	Female	11	1	6	0	18
Total		23	11	10	1	45

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.299 ^a	3	.063
Likelihood Ratio	8.568	3	.036
Linear-by-Linear Association	.043	1	.836
N of Valid Cases	45		

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.299 ^a	3	.063
Likelihood Ratio	8.568	3	.036
Linear-by-Linear Association	.043	1	.836
a. 4 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .40.			

We can see that the chi-square calculated comes out to be more than chi-square tabulated [$0.063 > 0.05$]. Hence we reject the alternative hypothesis and accept the null hypothesis, which means there is no significant association between the gender of respondents and them mentioning the primary reasons for opting for homestay facility.

Factor analysis interpretation

Factor Analysis: Factor analysis is used to find factors among observed variables. Factor analysis groups variables with similar characteristics together.

There are three stages in factor analysis:

- First, a correlation matrix is generated for all the variables. A correlation matrix is a rectangular array of the correlation coefficients of the variables with each other.
- Second, factors are extracted from the correlation matrix based on the correlation coefficients of the variables.
- Third, the factors are rotated in order to maximize the relationship between the variables and some of the factors.

Descriptive Statistics

The first output from the analysis is a table of descriptive statistics for all the variables under investigation. Looking at the mean, one can conclude that “*During my stay, I did not feel unsafe or insecure during any moment in time*” is the most important variable that influences customers to buy the product. It has the highest mean of 1.7333.

The Correlation matrix

The next output from the analysis is the correlation coefficient. A correlation matrix is simply a rectangular array of numbers which gives the correlation coefficients between a single variable and every other variable in the investigation. The correlation coefficient between a variable and itself is always 1, hence the principal diagonal of the correlation matrix contains

1s. The correlation coefficients above and below the principal diagonal are the same.

- Homestays offer creative, offbeat interiors and Hotels offer monotonous interiors have a correlation factor of 0.742
- Homestays offer creative, offbeat interiors and Adequate medical facility was also available have a correlation of 0.764

- Undivided attention offered made me feel special and My host catered to my entertainment and recreation have a correlation of 0.79

Factor Groups

Rotation helps to reduce the number of factors on which the variables under investigation have high loadings. From the table below, we can see

Rotated Component Matrix ^a					
	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
Better stay options than hotels		.724			
Homestay booking channeled through internet				.878	
Hotels have formal cold environment compared to homestay	.600				
Homestay offer concentrated flavor of local culture	.535				
Booking process easy than hotels				.564	
Hotels offer monotonous interiors	.761				
Homestays offer creative intelligent offbeat interiors	.532				
Pantry offers great facility in homestay		.876			
Food quality and Variety is high in homestay		.596			
Feeling of staying away from home is comforting					.581
Homestay offer more value in accommodation			.605		
Hosts are extremely warm	.833				
Family of the host was extremely warm	.625				
Undivided attention offered made me feel special			.686		
Staying resulted in learning local culture and traditions				.617	
My host catered to my entertainment and recreation			.860		
Adequate medical facility was also available		.616			

I did not feel safe or insecure during my stay		.569			
I feel number of homestay options should increase					.768
Homestay facility should advertise more about themselves					.842
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					
a. Rotation converged in 6 iterations.					

The 20 factors under consideration are grouped into 5 main groups. The groups are mentioned below

Factor 1 [Hospitalityculture driven]

Hotels have formal cold environment compared to homestay

Homestay offer concentrated flavor of local culture

Hotels offer monotonous interiors

Homestays offer creative interesting offbeat interiors

Hosts are extremely warm

Family of the host was extremely warm

Factor 2 [Tangible Service Value]

Adequate medical facility was also available

I did not feel safe or insecure during my stay

Pantry offers great facility in homestay

Food quality and Variety is high in homestay

Better stay options than hotels

Factor 3 [IntangibleService Value]

Undivided attention offered made me feel special

My host catered to my entertainment and recreation

Homestay offer more value in accommodation

Factor 4 [Technology driven]

Homestay booking channeled through internet

Booking process easy than hotels

Staying resulted in learning local culture and traditions

Factor 5 [ProHomeStay]

Feeling of staying away from home is comforting

I feel number of homestay options should increase

Homestay facility should advertise more about themselves

The case of “Heritage House”

Gujarat's first homestay is the Heritage House, spread over 100 square meter ground cover and 260 square meters built up area. This unique heritage property is owned by Mr. Jagdip A Mehta, who resides in joint family in the same house. This first real homestay is more than 200 years old and today accommodates the 4 generations of the Mehta family. The growth curve of the homestays is still in nascent stage in our country. Mr Mehta endured several challenges to take this homestay to this level today. He took six years for him to get an official permission for the heritage house to be legal. The financial assistance from HUDCO, AMC and French government helped to perform the restoration work of the house. The building has a typical courtyard with Italian flooring and Belgian glass windows. The wooden interiors are strengthened with steel and traditional Gujarati furniture, accessories and artifacts further accentuates the interiors. The traditional rain water harvesting system with about 1500 liters underground tank not only suffices the water needs but also provides natural cooling to the house. Although located in the heart of old Ahmedabad with old traditional buildings in the vicinity, yet there is a charming yet serene silence in the house. No room service, no television, no locks, no alcoholic beverages and no non vegetarian food are the unique characteristic features of this house. Mehta family provides entertainment like musical instruments of all kinds etc. The Heritage House is also a home to various visitors, students, research scholars and celebrities. The Heritage House has provided accommodation to around 2000 guests so far and the revenue generated is used entirely for the maintenance of this heritage property. The Heritage house has received many awards to its credit and offers warm hospitality wrapped up in the traditional Gujarati culture.

Challenges and Recommendations

The major challenge faced by these Homestay owners is the poor marketing of these homestays. Awareness amongst the local citizens and at a national level has to increase. The popularity of these units if enhanced will not only boost the concept, increasing the sale but also help to sustain the culture and tradition of our country. Sufficient advertising campaigns, hoardings at airports, railway stations, major tourist hubs etc., should be displayed to familiarize the tourist with the concept.

Once the concept is well understood, the mindset challenges of staying in the house of a stranger with his family will also be automatically addressed. The host of the homestay facility also might have apprehensions about the visiting guest. Social acceptance and security also need to increase.

These Homestay units have guests mostly in a specific time of the year. This seasonality of business is the third biggest challenge. As these buildings are old, they need special maintenance in order to retain their glory, aura and charisma. Professional guidance and training has to be imparted to these homestay owners to make their business flourish round the year. This way the revenue targets will also be achieved and the Tourists will also be able to relish their stay all through.

The support of the host's family plays a significant role in the success of homestay. The warmth, genuineness and the empathy offered to the guest helped in achieving guest satisfaction and ultimately lead to the popularity of these homes.

Conclusion

As per the survey findings also we can conclude that the reasons for selection of homestays are independent of both age and gender. Better promotion and advertising should be done in order to further popularize the concept. Homestays should train all their family members to receive guests at home. They can offer more interesting offers and deals. The number of rooms offered in each facility may be increased and overall the number of homestays specially the heritage homes should be increased. Guest Safety and security should be of prime concern and hence the homestay providers should have more of safety features, gadgets and devices for better security. Although the people who have experienced a Homestay, mostly loved their experience though some of them feel that the rooms could be more spacious, food variety could be extended, serving all cuisines if need be. All meals should be included in the tariff and rates should be on American Plan.

It is also observed that Homestays are truly emerging as an alternate travel accommodation in India. With the increasing demand for rooms and the changing mindset of the millennial traveler, Homestays have a great scope if the concept is promoted well. The Homestay concept is a testament to the belief of “VasudhaivaKutumbkam”. This Sanskrit phrase originates in the Hitopadesha, which simply means that the World is one family. It is a philosophy which has been a part of the Indian culture since hundreds of years and we truly are the brand ambassadors of “Atithidevobhava”.

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