

HOMESTAY TOURISM IN GARHWAL REGION OF UTTARAKHAND: A REVIEW ON TOURISTS' EXPECTATION AND SATISFACTION

Parveen Chand¹ and Dr. Manoj Kumar²

¹Research Scholar, Institute of Hotel & Tourism Management
Maharshi Dayanand University Rohtak, (Haryana), India.

²Associate Professor, Institute of Hotel & Tourism Management
Maharshi Dayanand University Rohtak, (Haryana), India.
Email: parveenchandihtm@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The homestay tourism model has emerged as a transformative force in rural destinations, especially in ecologically rich and culturally vibrant regions such as Garhwal in Uttarakhand, India. This review paper synthesizes findings from existing research, particularly the thesis titled "Homestays in Garhwal Region of Uttarakhand: A Gap Analysis of Tourists' Expectation and Satisfaction," to explore the evolution, performance, and challenges of the homestay sector. This paper critically examines themes such as service quality, authenticity, digital presence, socio-economic impacts, cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and the existing gap between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences. The insights drawn aim to inform practitioners, policymakers, and scholars seeking to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of homestay tourism in rural India.

Keywords: Homestay, Rural Tourism, Tourist Attributes, Tourists Experiences, Expectation, Satisfaction & Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Homestay tourism offers a unique blend of accommodation and cultural immersion, particularly appealing to travellers who seek off-the-beaten-path experiences. In India, the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand has become a pioneering destination for this model. Surrounded by the Himalayas and known for its spiritual and ecological richness, Garhwal offers not only scenic beauty but also a deeply rooted local culture. Homestays in this region allow visitors to experience daily life with host families, participate in local traditions, and contribute to the rural economy. However, significant challenges remain in aligning tourist expectations with actual service delivery.

2. EVOLUTION AND ROLE OF HOMESTAYS

The growth of homestays in Garhwal is aligned with global trends favoring authentic, personalized travel over mass tourism. As observed by Pandey (2018), this rise is driven by increasing interest in cultural tourism, eco-tourism, and rural development. Singh (2020) notes that homestays in Garhwal are not just places of lodging but are platforms for cultural exchange and community development. Their evolution has been organic, with minimal regulatory intervention, leading to both innovation and inconsistencies in quality.

3. TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS: AUTHENTICITY MEETS MODERNITY

Tourists visiting homestays in Garhwal typically expect a blend of rustic authenticity and basic modern comforts (Ghosh, 2017; Kumar, 2022). These include clean and hygienic facilities, locally cooked meals, cultural interactions, and connectivity (Wi-Fi, mobile networks). According to Chaudhary (2020), food experience plays a critical role, with tourists desiring traditional dishes prepared in a hygienic environment. Gupta and Negi (2021) further note that travelers seek unique experiences such as traditional storytelling, participation in rituals, and interaction with indigenous crafts and lifestyles.

4. SATISFACTION LEVELS AND EXPECTATION-REALITY GAP

Despite high expectations, studies consistently reveal a gap between what tourists anticipate and what is delivered (Tiwari, 2021; Thakur & Negi, 2023). Key reasons include underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of professional hospitality training, and inconsistent service quality. Rana and Kapoor (2023) highlight the misalignment between online portrayals and on-ground realities, leading to disappointment among first-time visitors. Many tourists appreciate the cultural immersion but express dissatisfaction with sanitation, bedding quality, and basic amenities.

5. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

Homestays are instrumental in driving rural development, particularly by empowering women and youth. Studies by Bhatia and Verma (2023) and Singh and Yadav (2020) underscore that women are increasingly managing homestays, gaining financial independence and breaking traditional gender roles. Bhatt and Rawat (2021) observed that well-connected villages earn

more, while remote areas struggle due to limited infrastructure. Therefore, equitable policy support and training programs are essential to ensure inclusive growth.

6. CULTURAL PRESERVATION AND STORYTELLING

Homestays are powerful tools for cultural preservation. Tourists are attracted by the promise of cultural immersion, and studies by Chopra (2021) and Sharma and Thakur (2022) show that storytelling and participation in cultural activities enhance satisfaction. However, commercialization can dilute authenticity. Dhyani and Verma (2021) caution against turning cultural practices into mere performances, urging a balanced, respectful approach that maintains the integrity of local traditions.

7. INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Infrastructure deficits—such as unreliable electricity, poor road conditions, and inadequate waste disposal—remain major barriers to improving the tourist experience (Negi & Chauhan, 2023; Kumar & Mehta, 2022). Environmental sustainability is another concern. Sharma and Negi (2020) and Verma and Negi (2020) emphasize the need for homestays to adopt eco-friendly practices like rainwater harvesting, waste segregation, and solar energy. Financial constraints and lack of awareness, however, hinder widespread adoption.

8. DIGITAL LITERACY AND MARKETING

With the rise of digital tourism, online visibility has become crucial. Studies by Verma and Singh (2020) and Joshi and Negi (2023) illustrate that tourists rely heavily on online reviews and social media. Yet, many homestay operators lack digital skills. Investment in digital training and marketing is essential to match traveler expectations and increase bookings.

9. SEASONALITY AND DIVERSIFICATION

Tourism in Garhwal is highly seasonal. Peak seasons correspond to summer and pilgrimage periods, while the off-season sees a sharp decline. Pandey and Mehta (2020) and Chauhan and Verma (2021) recommend product diversification—offering wellness retreats, winter trekking, and cultural workshops—to attract tourists year-round.

10. POLICY FRAMEWORK AND GOVERNANCE

Homestay operators often remain unaware of government schemes and lack support in navigating bureaucracy. Kohli and Mehta (2022) call for simplified procedures, tax incentives,

and certification programs to boost compliance and quality. Public-private partnerships and targeted training can bridge gaps and drive systematic development.

11. CONCLUSION

Homestay tourism in Garhwal reflects the aspirations and challenges of rural tourism across India. It presents a path to sustainable development, cultural preservation, and economic inclusion. However, to bridge the expectation-satisfaction gap, a coordinated approach involving government support, community participation, digital upskilling, and infrastructure development is essential. Future research may explore longitudinal impacts, post-pandemic recovery strategies, and innovative business models that ensure both authenticity and comfort.

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