

# An Analytical Study on The Growth of Home Stays in Darjeeling Hills

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## Abstract

This paper analyses on the growth of Home Stays and its effect on Tourism Business in Darjeeling Hills which has lead to economic development of the region. It has also emerged as an alternative way of generating revenues for disguisedly unemployed people. Home stay business is not a new concept but it has witnessed a rapid growth in the recent years. Today home stays have become the alternative accommodation for tourists. In India where people love to travel around, home stays have become more popular. This trend is highly seen in the hills where people have limited scope for earning revenues. At present there are more than 3000 home stays in the region and more than 400 home stays in Darjeeling town alone which are run simply by having a trade licence. The major reason for the growth of home stays in Darjeeling is the cost of accommodation, homely ambience, traditional food, greenery, location, fresh air, etc. This study tries to identify the exact growth, tourist's perception, future growth prospects and suggestions for better operation of the home stays in Darjeeling Hills.

**Key Words:** Home Stay, Disguisedly unemployed, Accommodation, Trade Licence, Ambience.

## Introduction

Home Stay business has shown a massive growth in the last couple of years all over India. Talking about tourism business in Darjeeling Hills, Home Stays have emerged as the best alternative tourist package. The increasing demand for home stays over the last few years and its preference by tourists as it explains cultural heritage, lifestyle, etc has lead to increasing number of home stays in the region. It is observed that since 2015 there has been a massive growth in the number of home stays. Home Stays not only provide attractive accommodation facilities to the tourists but also provide livelihood to thousands of local people in the hills. Hilly communities still depend on agriculture due to scarcity of jobs. This make them more susceptible to climate change and other natural calamities such as landslides, soil erosion, etc. In the initial phase of the home stay business in Darjeeling, it was seen that local people having more income and property were indulged in the home stay business to earn more income. They employed other jobless local people to work as the staff in their home stays. Gradually, this business gained so much popularity that many people in the hills started to divide a portion of their houses and converted into home stays. Home stay business provides a huge amount of income to the owners as the cost of maintenance is quite low as compared to hotels and also the family members can easily run the business by employing a minimum number of additional staff.

There are several infrastructural and operational difficulties in the hills, even the poverty is wide spread, people migrate to nearby cities in search for jobs. As such if the rich entrepreneurs and government

would make some efforts and initiatives then there is a chance of vast development to boost up the growth of home stays ultimately leading to the growth of tourism. Without adequate facilities, the local people who have started their own business of running home stays at a very low pace will face several difficulties. If the tourists find that even in the long run the older home stays have not updated their workings, then in future these home stays might shut down. The point here is that, the local government must provide better transportation and infrastructural facilities for the growth of these home stays so that the individuals engaged in this business can provide more add on facilities to attract more tourist and expose their rich culture.

Home stays add more authentic richness for the tourist as they experience exposure of varied socio-cultural richness. For a region like Darjeeling which does not have better investment and job opportunities but on the other side possess high degree of traditional, social and cultural richness, home stays are the best options to upgrade the area. Today in Darjeeling District, we see numerous home stays in different towns and villages due to socio- economic benefits it has provided to the people living there. The tourist who visit there, not only get the sightseeing experience but also get to understand the richness of the culture and heritage of the Darjeeling Hills..

In this article, an analytical study has been conducted to understand the actual growth of the home stays in Darjeeling Hills since the last decade and its effect on the socio- economic environment therein. Since 2012, the number of home stays there has tremendously increased in every small towns and villages leading to wide number of employment opportunities to its local people, better revenue generation, exposure of rich social culture and heritage, growth in tourism, etc.

### **Literature Review**

The topics on the growth of Home Stays and its impact on the economy, etc have been investigated by researchers in the literature from last decade.

Home stay is the alternative accommodation facilities available in tourism destinations. Home stay business today is familiar at global level. According to Homestay.com, the global level market for home stay is estimated to be valued at Rs. 15 billion (Kumaran et al., 2019).

Home-stay is an emerging concept in tourism & hospitality industry which is also considered to be the best alternative to hotel accommodation. Home stay helps you come across land, people, culture and cuisine of any place in its perfect aspect unlike hotel accommodation.

Different types of houses like ancestral homes are converted to home-stay so that the tourist find an experience of being a member of local community.

The Darjeeling Himalayan region (including hilly parts of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts) is located in the north-western section of West Bengal and the north-eastern part of India It is a noteworthy example of India's booming home stay tourism market (Kannegieser, 2015).

It is to be understood that the home stay market in Darjeeling Hills is having a massive improvement since 2015. The number of home stays have increased in almost every surrounding villages and towns. The major reason is the global level demand for Darjeeling as a preferred tourist destination due to its natural beauty, Himalayas, World heritage toy train, tea plantations, etc.

Home stays are nothing new, but it is only recently that the concept is flourishing as a business opportunity. The state has also promised to incentivize and promote home stays. However, owners are in a dilemma over the government's home stay policies to operate it as a business (Gazmer Deep, 2018). A similar study

completed by Acharya and Halpenny (2013) in the rural Western Nepalese community of Barpak found home stay tourism to be an important tool for strengthening the social and economic capacities of women in lower-income communities by providing them with “a form of economic stability and independence”.(Roy, 2022)

Therefore, Home stay tourism has been the most flourishing development in Darjeeling’s rural tourism sector. Over the last decade, Home stay in Darjeeling’s rural areas has recognized the potential as an effective instrument for individual and community empowerment and tourism generates a significant amount of revenue in almost all of Darjeeling’s key locations.

Apart from traditional tourist attractions, tourism activity in the form of “home stay” has expanded in popularity in recent years (DCHB report, 2011). According to the West Bengal Interim Report, Darjeeling district (excluding Siliguri sub-division), as a part of the Darjeeling Himalayan region, is “the most highly frequented tourist destination in all of West Bengal” with more than 500,000 domestic and 50,000 international visitors per annum (Rawat, 2020)

A three days Incredible India Mega Home stay Development & Training Workshop was held in Darjeeling from February 22 to 24, 2021 to enrich the hospitality skills of the Home stay owners of the region and to ensure a better experience for the tourists. The Workshop was inaugurated on February 22 by Union Minister of State for Tourism and Culture, Prahlad Singh where he said, “Development of home stays through hospitality skill upgradation will make local communities Atmanirbhar.” (*New Govt Norms Irk Darjeeling Homestays / Kolkata News - Times of India*, n.d.)

According to the West Bengal Tourism Department, rural and adventure tourism accounted for about 42% of visitors in Darjeeling Himalayas, and the majority of them “seeking to experience the rural and raw beauty of Northeast India.” Therefore, tourists who visit Darjeeling Himalayas are mainly in pursuit of ‘an authentic Indian experience’ and to learn more about the people, society, and culture of Darjeeling. (Green, 2009).

Home Stay business can smoothly flourish in coming years in Darjeeling if more attention is paid towards its growth and development in every possible aspect by the individuals as well as the local authority.

### **Research Gap**

Home stay Business has become a growing business in the Darjeeling Hills. From the literature review it is clear that almost every researcher in this particular field have pointed out few things like Home Stay business in Darjeeling District have wider growth prospects in coming years, better infrastructure is needed for its development, beauty of the Hills attract more tourist ,etc. The increasing demand for home stays may be explained by recent global social and cultural changes resulting in greater interest and appreciation in cultural heritage, lifestyles and environmental concerns. However it is not possible to maintain this unless the tourist are satisfied. There has been limited survey and talk about the satisfaction of tourist for the success of home stays. This paper will focus on such things like improvement of the surroundings and environment for better tourist satisfaction. Authors have talked about case study, survey, etc. but the cultural background has not been considered to a much extent and even the number of respondents is quite small. In fact, there is limited report on the revenue generation of individual owners as well as total revenue from this field.

The infrastructure in the hills has to be improvised in every possible aspect. What is the Government doing to provide better infrastructural facilities? There has been a limited review over this question. It is found that home stays of Darjeeling are still developing. As in the peak season all the hotels are filled due to over congestion of tourists, home stays have only been the solution. Although numerous researches have been done on the home stays in the Hills but there is limited survey on social upliftment, impact over the existing hotels, etc.

More or less, in every research same things are uplifted like, the beauty of hills will attract more tourist and has lead to the growth of the home stays but is it the only factor? The overall promoters for its growth are not discussed properly. Previous researches have also not highlighted the reaction of the local authority over the growth of the home stays which shall be discussed in this article.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- To find out the exact growth of Home stay business in Darjeeling Hills over the last couple of years.
- To understand its economic impact on the revenue of Darjeeling and also towards local people.
- To find out its impact on the hotel business in Darjeeling.
- To understand the viewpoint and initiatives taken by the local authority for its growth.

### **Methodology**

This research is based on primary and secondary data as well. About 50 home stays were randomly selected in Darjeeling town and surrounding areas like Kurseong, Sonada, Sukhia, Mirik, Jorebunglow, Ghoom, Lebong, Dali, lamahatta, Tukdah, Dudhia and Tinchuley. Structured interviews were conducted by providing questionnaire with MCQ and Yes/No type questions to the home stay owners. Personal interviews and likert scale survey was conducted with the tourists/guests for sharing their experiences and overall views. Two Case Studies were also conducted to understand the background, socio economic benefits and success of home stay business owners. For secondary information we have reviewed the journals, articles, local newspapers, websites, etc.

### **Findings and Analysis**

The study collected responses from several home stays in Darjeeling District from both rural and urban areas. We visited about 50 home stays in total from the places as mentioned earlier. We started with brief introduction of ourselves to the home stay owners and then proceeded with our work only with them who accepted our request for research. The respondents preferred to keep their names and data provided confidential. In some places, we were refused by the owners straight away. Once we started with the personal interviews we divided our respondents in three categories viz. Home stay owners, tourists (guests) and employees (workers).

Firstly, conversational personal interviews were conducted with the owners of every home stay about their history, date of opening, total number of rooms, rate of the rooms per night, number of staff, etc. On an average, in urban areas it was found that almost almost every owner started the home stay as an alternative source of income with 4-5 rooms and expanded to 6-8 rooms after 5 years time span. Rate per night varies from Rs. 400- Rs. 800 in rural areas and Rs. 600- Rs. 1200 in urban areas. Some home stays are totally run by the family members while some were having 2-3 local workers. On an average in rural areas the annual income of the home stays varied from Rs. 360000- Rs. 450000 while in urban areas the

annual income varied from Rs. 800000- Rs. 1500000. The owners added that this income represented their total profits and they made expenses for maintenance, salary for staff, etc. out of this income. It was found that the owners provided other benefits to their staff like incentives for better service, additional payments for extra hours, security, 3 time food, etc.

Secondly, the tourists/guests of these home stays were approached for some informal interviews. The respondents were provided with a questionnaire with MCQ and Y/N type questions and also 5 point likert scale to share their experience. On an average, the study found that the tourist got the information of the home stay from the website/apps and also from friends and relatives. Some guests were extremely happy with the ambience while some were complaining about the quality of rooms. They also responded that they got a totally new experience to be a member of a family which they don't even know and learned many things about the traditional Nepali culture and life styles.

Thirdly, the study also conducted personal interviews with the employees/staff in certain home stays. It was very fascinating to see that they were very happy to help for this research and were very supporting. However, even they requested to keep their names and data confidential and were reluctant to answer certain questions that were put forth. It was found that for 70% of them it was their primary source of income as there was no other alternative of job while for 30% it was their secondary source. Some added that they are less educated and were jobless so they had to work in those home stays. In most of the home stays, male staff is found while in some there were female staff as well. The study found that the workers were happy because they got a job which was most important for them. They added that they could have better standard of living, sustain their livelihood and also provide education to their children. On an average, the study found that every employee was having a monthly income or Rs. 7000- 12000 plus incentives and tips.

So we can summarise the findings as below:

- There are about 145 registered home stays in Darjeeling District and more than 400 unregistered home stays.
- The State Government has declared to give Rs. 1.5 lakh to every owner for getting themselves registered.
- The owners are extremely happy to have a cultural and local exposure with the tourists.
- The exact growth in the number of home stays actually started from 2011 and is continuously rising at a higher pace. In 2012, there were about 200 home stays in total which have increased to 550 in 2021.
- About 43% of home stays have been leased out to outsiders which is a threat to destroy the essence of village.
- Bread and Breakfast model was replaced with fire and food model by Mr.Raj Basu, convener, Association for Conservation & Tourism (ACT)(*New Govt Norms Irk Darjeeling Homestays / Kolkata News - Times of India*, n.d.)
- The total revenue of home stay owners on an average have increased from Rs. 150000- 200000 in 2012 to Rs. 360000- Rs. 450000 in 2021 (for rural areas) and from Rs. 300000- Rs. 400000 in 2012 to Rs. 800000- Rs. 1500000 in 2021 (for urban areas).

- The workers of the home stays have highly benefitted in areas like hygiene, health, education for children, etc.
- The hotel business is not affected by the growth in home stays as the number of hotels in Darjeeling have increased. The number of tourist visiting the place have rather increased every year. Nearly 600000 Indian Tourist and 30000 foreign nationals visit Darjeeling District every year at present(*Darjeeling Tourism*, n.d.).
- The total number of Home Stays in Darjeeling are continuously growing every year and have better growth prospects in future.
- The State Government still need to work for the betterment of the Home stays by providing required infrastructure, concessional loans and training to the Home stay owners.
- Home stays are simply run by having a trade license.
- Most of the home stays in urban areas of Darjeeling have adopted the hotel culture and the concept of home stay is missing which is a big threat.
- Businessmen are getting into home stays because of the benefits the government is giving this sector. “Since many commercial taxes are not levied on home stays, outsiders want to circumvent taxes through home stays. Some of them are building seven to eight rooms and passing them off as home stays.
- State Government Tourism Department has been organising workshops, training camps, etc for to enrich the hospitality skills of the Home stay owners of the region and to ensure a better experience for the tourists.

The following Case Studies have been conducted in this study concerning the three major sides viz. owners, workers and tourist. The case studies are based on the primary data collected from informal interviews, questionnaire, etc. These case studies give a clear review and conclusion to our questions and findings .

### **Case Study I ( Story of Mr. P Chamling, Owner of a Home stay)**

Mr. Chamling is a resident of Dali, Darjeeling. He is the owner of a home stay in Darjeeling. An interview was conducted with him to understand his background, experience and views. He is 48 years old and live with his wife and two sons. He is basically from Sukhia, Darjeeling and has studied in St. Roberts School, Darjeeling and Govt. College Darjeeling. After Graduation in 1995 he became a teacher in nearby School and continued till 2002. His salary was very nominal and it was difficult for him to fulfil all the needs of his family. He left his job and opened a shop in Dali Faatak. He used to sell groceries in which his wife supported him. He is a renowned person in Dali. In the year 2012, he understood that a new concept of home stays is rapidly growing in Darjeeling. He had built his small house there with 3 rooms, kitchen, washroom and balcony. He decided with his wife to convert their house to a homestay for extra income. They made good contacts with local drivers and told them to bring tourists by giving commission. Initially , every month they got more than 10 parties. They had a good way of dealing with the guests, provided good food and also guided them regarding sight seeing. That time in 2012, the room charge per night was Rs. 600 per guest and they made an average revenue of Rs. 6000 per month after deducting maintenance, meal charges, etc. Mr. Chamling added that this was a turning point for them. Their revenue was increasing every year and in 2016, they added 3 more rooms and 2 washrooms. They could welcome 2 parties at a time by separating the rooms. He added, their

revenue in 2016 had increased to Rs. 50000- Rs. 60000 per month. Today their home stay is very popular and revenue have increased even more.

Mr. Chamling expressed that Darjeeling is having a very rich culture, best scenic beauty, delicious food, large variety of flora and fauna which attracts more tourists every year. He said that job opportunities are quite less and people have to be self reliant. Running a home stay is a very good business and it has higher growth prospects in future. He hopes that the State Government takes better initiatives to improve the roads and other requirements.

### **Case Study II ( Story of Mr. R Subba, worker in a home stay)**

Mr. Subba is a resident of Tukdah, Darjeeling. He has a family of 4 members and has done his Higher Secondary from Government School in 2013. He was having some financial problems and could not continue with his studies. He could not find a suitable job so finally had the option to work as a manager in a home stay in Tukdah in 2014 which is located 7 kms below the main road. He added that due to his family problems he had no option but to work in that home stay so that he could be with his family as he was the only son. He had to meet the expenses for his family, send his younger sister to school and so on. When interviewed, he answered that he was working there from last 8 years and was having a monthly salary of Rs.12000 today. He added he also makes extra income from the home stay and is highly supported by the owner. According to him, this is the story of majority of youth from Darjeeling who belongs to poor families as there are no good job opportunities.

### **Case Study III ( Story of Mrs. R Bhattacharjee, a tourist)**

Mrs. Bhattacharjee was a guest in one of the home stay in Kurseong. When having an informal interview with her, she shared her experiences. She had come with her husband and 2 children to visit Darjeeling for the second time. They had stayed in Darjeeling town for 2 days and were staying in Kurseong for 1 day. She was generous enough to give us her time for this short interview. She said that she loved the beauty of Darjeeling and was very much impressed with the hospitality of the home stay. She said that it was the first time that she stayed in a home stay and was totally having a different experience. They had stayed in a hotel in Darjeeling town the previous day. She added that the food was far better, the homely atmosphere was totally different and the staff treated them like family members. She wishes to visit the same home stay again in future.

(For ethical and confidential purpose, as requested to us, the full name of the parties and the name of the home stays are not disclosed)

### **Limitations and Recommendations of the Study**

More or less in every research there are certain limitations which can be used as recommendations for further study. Some of the major limitations of this study are as under:

- Only about 50 home stays in total have been considered for survey and analysis which can be increased in future.
- Only a qualitative approach has been used to identify the growth of home stays.
- The research is based on case studies, questionnaire and informal interviews which might change from time to time.

- A proper statistical test has not been conducted to find out the acceptance/rejection of hypothesis which can be done in future.

### Conclusion

Home stay is a micro tourism business which is spreading to every rural and urban areas of Darjeeling. It is not a totally new concept today but still is in its growing phase. The number of home stays in Darjeeling Hills are growing every year. The owners have expressed that the home stays should not be compared with hotels. Their primary motive is to earn a livelihood and provide better hospitality to their guests each time. Also they are able to contribute for the community and for social welfare like donations to schools, charity, etc. Home stay business in Darjeeling is one of the leading business in there today. As Darjeeling is known for its natural beauty, tea gardens, toy train, etc. it is having numerous number of visitors every year from India itself and other countries. Home Stay is regarded as the best alternative for the tourist to stay during their vacations which gives them a totally new experience, peace and comfort.

Benefits like family atmosphere , better locations, lesser room rates, delicious homely food, etc. is loved by the tourists and home stays are gaining more importance day by day. Moreover, the increasing number of home stays in Darjeeling are able to generate a large number of jobs for the local people of the place. For a place like Darjeeling which is rich in natural resources, but cannot make extensive investment in infrastructure, home stays are best alternatives for attracting more tourist. Home Stays also lead to the exposure of Nepali culture, traditions, lifestyle and heritage. The increasing number of home stays in Darjeeling since 2015-2016 explains that there is more scope for its expansion in near future and can provide ample of benefits to the local people of Darjeeling.

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