

# **The Role of Tourism Marketing in Showcasing Homestay of North Bengal**

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## **Abstract**

Homestays have become increasingly popular as a type of accommodation for travellers seeking authentic and unique experiences. In the tourism sector of North Bengal, homestays offer an opportunity for tourists to experience the local culture, cuisine, and lifestyle first-hand. They provide an opportunity for tourists to interact with the local community, learn about their customs and traditions, and gain a deeper understanding of the local way of life. Homestays are also an important source of income for the local community, as they allow for the direct participation of local residents in the tourism industry. This can have a positive impact on the local economy, as homestays create jobs and support local businesses. In addition, homestays often have a lower environmental impact than traditional hotels, as they are typically smaller in scale and use fewer resources. The article looks forward to explore the impact of homestays in the tourism sector of North Bengal.

Keywords: Homestay, Tourism, North Bengal

## **Introduction**

North Bengal, located in the northern part of the Indian state of West Bengal, offers a unique and authentic rural tourism experience through its homestays. The homestays are situated in picturesque locations amidst lush green forests, rolling hills, and serene tea gardens. The hosts of these homestays are warm, welcoming, and eager to showcase their local culture, customs, and cuisine to tourists. Visitors can engage in a variety of activities such as bird watching, nature walks, trekking, and fishing. They can also experience the traditional lifestyle of the local people by participating in farming activities and cultural events. Overall, rural tourism in North Bengal homestays provides an excellent opportunity for tourists to unwind, explore and connect with the local community while enjoying a peaceful stay in the lap of nature.

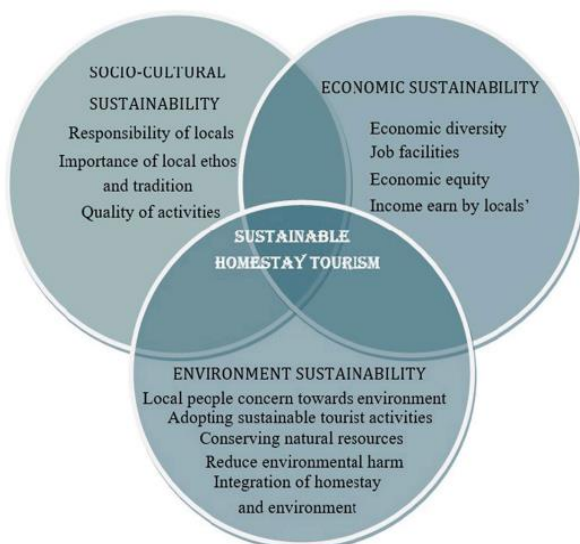
## **Home Stays - An Elixir for Tourism Sector**

A Home-Stay, by its combined words (homestay) is staying in someone's home as a paying guest for a short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by individual families and communities too. Therefore, the Home-Stay Regulation has accepted it as run (managed) by an individual

or community (Timlasana, 2012). The „Home Stay“ seeks to draw tourists away from posh and crowded urban areas to the rural locality full of splendid natural surroundings, by providing them with clean, comfortable and budget-friendly accommodations and food. Thus, the homestay offers the traveller a unique local experience and the possibility of interaction with the host family. It offers the chance to experience new and untapped places which has enabled the government to popularize new tourist destinations and provide an alternative source of income to rural people (Gangotia, 2013).

In home stay tourism visitors get a chance to spend time with the family observing their customs, values and culture, which gives them the opportunity to feel the taste of rural life (Devkota, 2010). Cultural-heritage and its geographical structure makes India one of the famous destinations for homestay tourism. Homestay tourism is a unique tourism product where the guests and the hosts establish the relation for years and keep in touch through emails, phone calls, and letters as found out by the researcher. This encourages the community to preserve local culture and provide knowledge of local customs and culture to enhance tourist's experience.

An article published in the Times of India dt. 23/1/23 claims that currently, the state has 1,963 homestays registered with the tourism department and there are financial aid and incentives too for them. The number of registered homestays is likely to cross 2,500 soon, said an official. As the plan for the app under homestay tourism is taking a final shape, tourism minister Babul Supriyo has already held a series of meetings regarding this project.



Sustainable Homestay Tourism Model. The three-dimension model showing how three domains (i.e. Economic, Socio-cultural and Environmental sustainability) are interlinked with each other for sustainable homestay tourism development. (Debanjan Basak a , Arghadeep Bose a , Subham Roy et al.)

## Literature Review

Ahmadi et al., (2017) Unique geographic features, flora diversity, and a suitable climate, according to some, make up the region's strength. Lack of planning, a lack of recreational and residential areas, a lack of facilities, environment pollution from desert dust transported from elsewhere, and destruction of existing flora are weaknesses and threats noted by the researcher in the study.

In SWOT analysis, all internal aspects covering the strengths as well as external constraints are taken into consideration (Snelling, 2012). Even the tiny homestay operators need to understand in their own way the strengths and weaknesses so that they can make the venture sustainable.

Garyfallos and Grigoroudis (2010) The management authority must focus on improvement measures as the natural characteristics, the level of service, and the suitability of the lodging facilities are the factors taken for visitor satisfaction levels. These elements could be referred to as a microbusiness's strengths.

As the eco-tourism development is concerned, researchers identify the various Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats in the area (Bhattacharya and Kumari, 2004) .

In one of the study areas, the indigenous people have kept the environmental and cultural value intact and work for eco-tourism development collectively without harming nature are regarded as strength for that destination.

Bhatia (2013) Price, facilities, attraction and natural resources, and safety are examples of the strengths. The crucial elements that should be taken into account as weaknesses include security, internet accessibility, infrastructure, cleanliness, and locals' behaviour.

Sayyed (2013) et al., When sustainability in tha/t area was investigated using the SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) framework, it was discovered that the natural attractions, distinctive culture, and ancient culture of the locals are the destination's strengths. The primary weakness of the location is considered to be the lack of basic infrastructure and amenities.

Ghaderi and Henderson (2012) study the viability of village tourism and its effects, both good and bad. The socioeconomic and financial viability of the village are assessed by researchers. Based on the analysis, the destination has adequate infrastructure and tourist facilities. Unfortunately, as determined by the researchers, the upgrade effort is not practical..

The results of finding through factor analysis show that the Natural attraction, Infrastructural facilities, and culture being the most important mechanism of Rural Tourism Development in the destination (Arayesh and Sabouri, 2015).

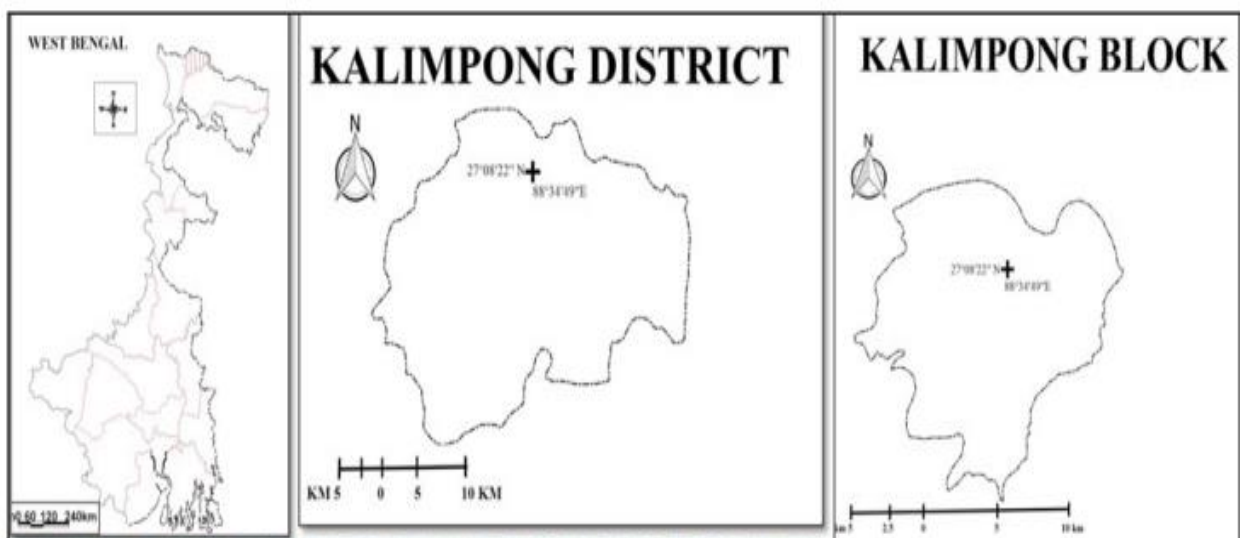
MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) conducted a case study on the value of rural cultural tourism in the French Acadian region on an island in eastern Canada and its potential to benefit rural communities economically

in the short and long terms. This type of tourism enlightens visitors about the indigenous culture while also entertaining and enriching them..

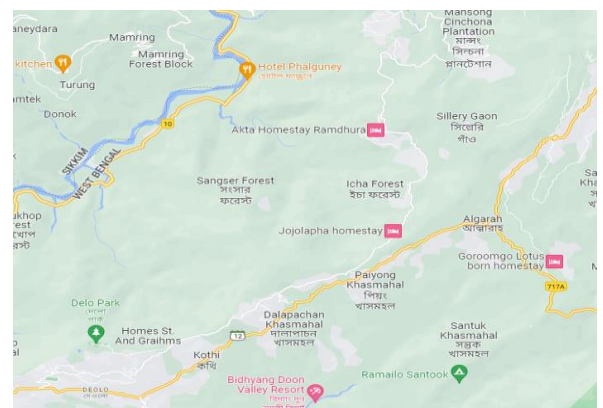
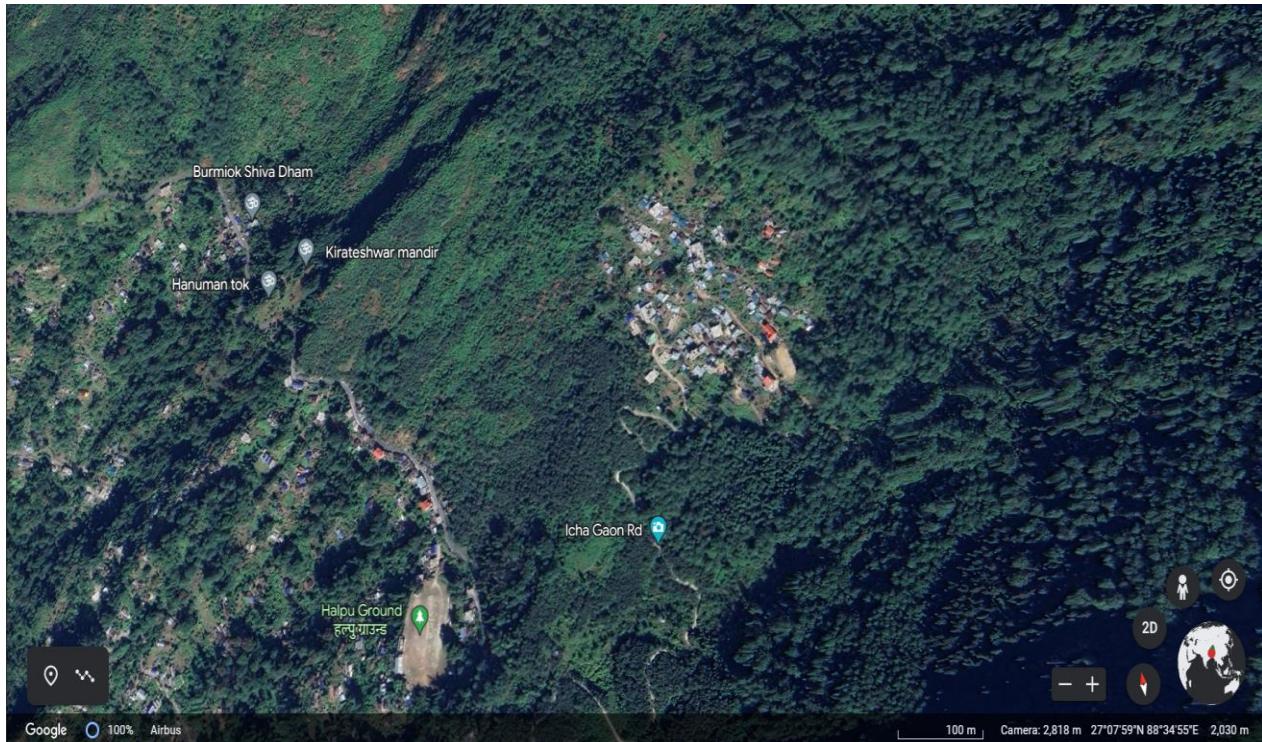
Kayat (2010) studies the cultural impact of community-based homestays on both tourists and guests in Malaysia's homestay programme. The primary product element, which provides guests with education, entertainment, and enrichment, is the community's living culture.

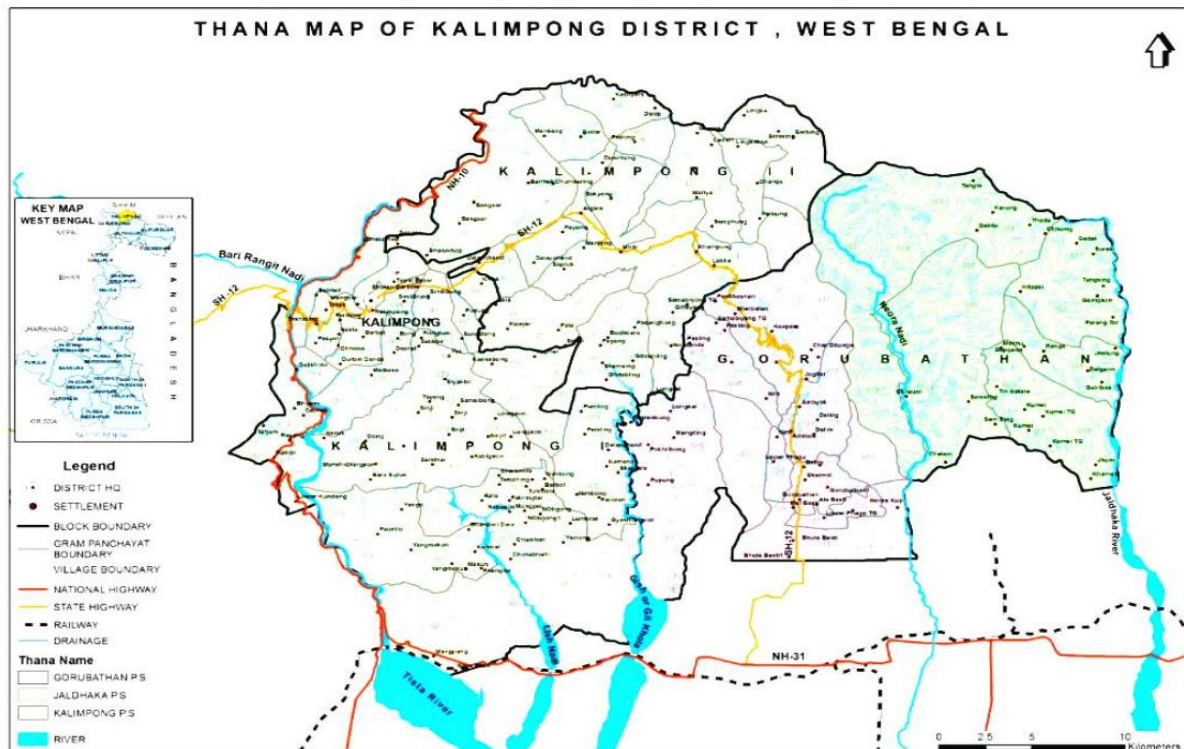
### **Brief about the Area of Study:**

The district of Kalimpong, which was formerly a division of the Darjeeling district, has emerged as a popular tourist attraction. Kalimpong, also referred to as "Darjeeling's calm cousin" or "sleepy town," is situated at the foot of the Himalayas but is significantly lower in elevation than Darjeeling, therefore the climate is much milder and more pleasant all year round. The heart of unique culture and history for the Bhutias, Lepchas, ethnic tribal tribes of the Nepalese, or the Gorkha community is Kalimpong, which is recognised for its beauty and world-famous flora.









Source: Google map & Google Earth

Icche Gaon is located at  $27^{\circ}08'01''\text{N}$   $88^{\circ}34'32''\text{E}$ , situated at 5800 ft above mean sea level, has a view of Mount Kangchenjunga and nearby peaks. Icche Gaon is located 89 km from New Jalpaiguri. Physiographically, this area forms the Kalimpong Range, with the average elevation varying from 300 to 3,000 metres (980 to 9,840 ft). This region is characterized by abruptly rising hills and numerous small streams. It is a predominantly rural area with 77.67% of the population living in rural areas and only 22.23% living in urban areas. While Kalimpong is the only municipality, Dungra is the sole census town in the entire area. The economy is agro-based and there are 6 tea gardens in the Gorubathan CD block. In 2011, Kalimpong subdivision had a literacy rate of 81.85%, comparable with the highest levels of literacy in the districts of the state while the first-degree college in the subdivision was established at Kalimpong in 1962. The entire subdivision (and now the entire district), other than the head-quarters, had to wait till as late as 2015 (more than half a century) to have their first-degree colleges at Pedong and Gorubathan. (Wikipedia)

There are two types of tourism in the North Bengal hills: urban tourist and rural tourism. Rural tourism is a relatively new phenomenon that focuses on giving visitors an authentic local experience, as opposed to urban tourism, which caters to tourists in the town area. The beautiful Mountains, world-famous tea, lush vegetation, and other factors have made North Bengal Hills a popular tourist destination for years. It has been functioning as a mountain refuge for Europeans throughout the colonial era and still being a popular tourist destination in the twenty-first century.



Tourists are slowly but steadily making their way to rural areas to spend their vacations and stay in homes or homestays among the inhabitants, as has been seen. introducing the idea of homestay tourism in the process.

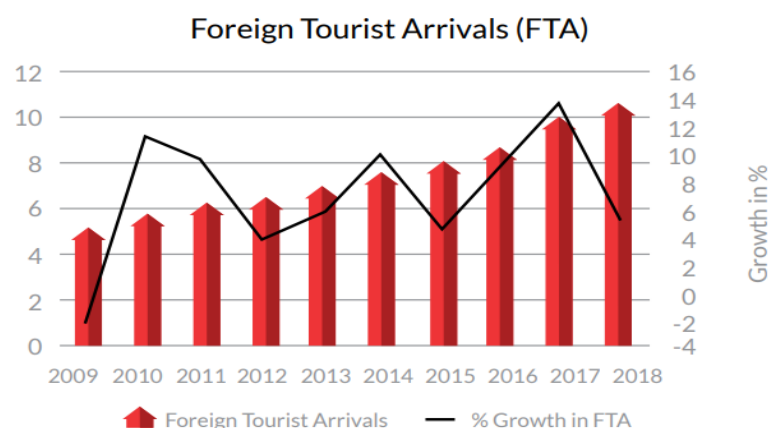
According to the West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy of 2017, homestay tourism is a type of travel where visitors can stay with family members and engage in social and cultural activities while also visiting different tourist locations. The richness of the local culture and the surrounding natural beauty make homestays an alluring alternative tourism product, especially for rural places where large-scale infrastructure investments are not feasible. Although Kalimpong's homestay tourism is still in its infancy, it has the potential to be a cynosure of tourism of West Bengal.

### District-At a Glance

Basic Administrative Parameters					
Parameters	Kalimpong-I Dev. Block	Kalimpong-II Dev. Block	Gorubathan Dev. Block	Kalimpong Municipality	Total
No of GPs / Wards	18	13	11	23	65
No of Gram Sansads	138	92	94		324
No of Block Sansads	50	1	1		52
No of households	15338	13172	12662	10113	51285
Total population	74746	66830	60663	49403	251642
No of Police Stations (within jurisdiction)	0	0	2	1	3
No of Revenue Mouzas	25	17	13	1	56
No of Forest Mouzas	0	18	19	0	37
Total area under jurisdiction (sq km)	321.16	303.00	443	9.17	1075.92
Tea Gardens	0	0	6	0	6
Other Plantations	0	4	1	0	5

### Data Analysis

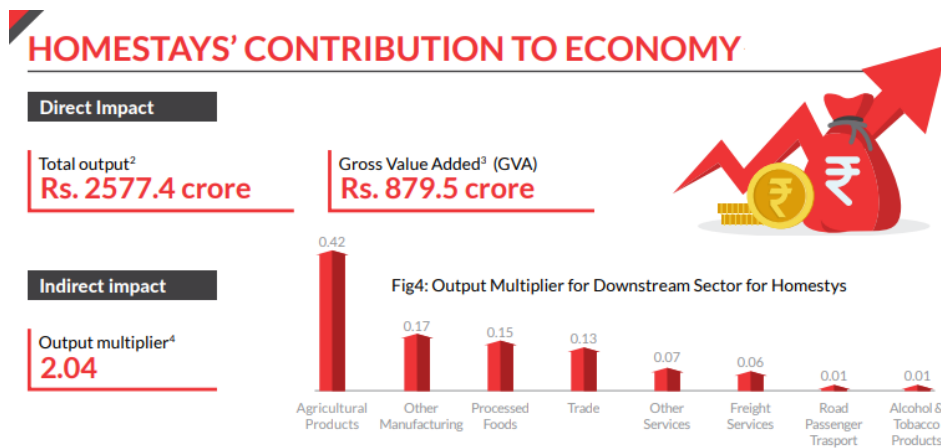
- Foreign Tourist Arrival in India



From the above-depicted data, we can infer that there was a sustainable growth of FTAs in India before the worldwide pandemic. Due to COVID -19, tourism industry faced a brutal effect and suffered the most adverse conditions among all other industries.

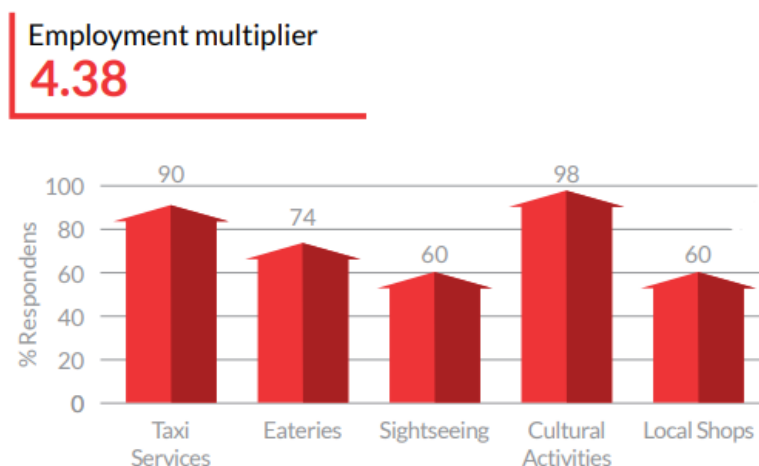
FTAs in March, 2022 were 3,42,308 with a positive growth rate of 177.9% as compared to 1,23,179 in March, 2021. FTAs during the period January- March, 2022 were 7,84,750 as compared to 3,06,641 in March, 2021 registering a positive growth of 155.9% as reported by Ministry of Tourism from compilation of monthly Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) on the basis of information received from Bureau of Immigration (BOI).

Therefore, we can say that the tourism industry has slowly recovered from the brutal effect of COVID and trying to regain its position in the global arena of tourism.



Source: Ascension Centre for Research and Analytics (ACRA)

The output of the agriculture sector increases by 0.42 units when the output of the homestay sector increases by 1, demonstrating the largest backward connection for this industry. Thus, homestays may significantly boost the rural economy, and the government should offer unique incentives to encourage them there.



Source: Ascension Centre for Research and Analytics (ACRA)



Interestingly, homestay as an accommodation providing sector within tourism industry, shows higher output and employment multiplier compared to overall tourism industry which is a combination of several other sectors. The Output multiplier of overall tourism industry is 1.83 and employment multiplier of the same is 2.29 as estimated by Tourism Satellite Account of India

The expansion of the homestay industry has a big impact on other manufacturing, processed food, and trade industries as well. From the above-mentioned data, we can opine that Home stays are enhancing the growth of other related sectors and has a positive impact on the economy.

The "Incredible India" bed-and-homestay programme, according to an annual report (2017-2018) of the Ministry of Tourism, provides a singular opportunity for Indian and foreign tourists to stay with a family. The vast majority of homestays in India are currently located in the north or the south, particularly in the states of Delhi, Rajasthan, Kerala, and Uttarakhand. Homestays are becoming more accepted in other states as well, in part because they are seen as a means for tourists to contribute to the advancement and preservation of the environment, culture, and tourist spots.

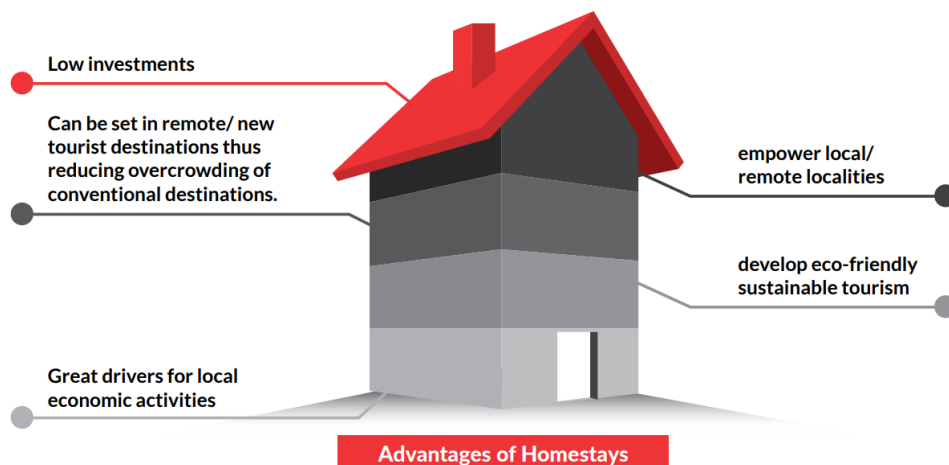
### **Discussion**

With the goal of promoting homestays as a significant factor in fair growth and prosperity, the West Bengal Homestay Tourism Policy of 2017 has been put into effect. The homestay operators were given motivation by the fact that it provides an alternative source of income, development and growth in rural areas, preservation of local skills, and enterprise development at the micro level hence providing inclusive growth, and sustainable environment management. This strategy insured that the proprietors of homestays would receive professional assistance from the West Bengal Government's Technical Education and Training Department in conjunction with the tourist department. With the purpose of enhancing skills and capacity, the department regularly schedules training for owners and young people.

Homestays have contributed to some degree of economic stability and led to the reverse migration of young people in Kalimpong's rural districts. Local youngsters are being retained and involved in the industry; many of them work as tour guides or as nature walkers, for example. There is a demand for the right communication, leading to some development in the roads, to make these homestays easily accessible. Roads are routinely maintained by the responsible department as a result of local residents' insistence; even side roads are taken into account. Due to the ability to send their children to towns and cities to pursue higher education, families and communities have been able to maintain their financial security through homestay tourism.

According to OCED (Office for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2000), from the early 1980s, women have become more entrepreneurial in rural areas around the world. In the context of India, women's roles in rural areas are typically limited to being housewives. The long-standing custom that "men are the breadwinners and women are the homemakers" does not give rural women many opportunities to develop their business talents. Yet, same cannot be stated of the rural communities in Kalimpong or Darjeeling District. In rural settings, these social limitations that hinder women's entrepreneurial success are almost, but not entirely, absent. We must admit that these limits and limitations on women do exist, albeit to a limited extent.

The social structure of the towns in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong district gives women in both the rural and urban sectors many possibilities to be independent and self-sufficient. Homestays have frequently shown to be particularly advantageous for rural women as it enables them to engage in home-based self-employment and earn a living without having to travel long distances. Homestays, which Sharma refers to as "micro enterprises," assist rural women achieve economic independence as well as personal and social capabilities. They also increase national production and provide jobs. The free engagement with the tourists has aided in the development of the women's social abilities. Homestays provide as a means of revenue for the family as well as a means of fostering self-confidence.



Homestays are an emerging economic sector that has attracted significant attention for its ability to help the economy, create employment opportunities for all facets of society, and promote social harmony. Homestays offer a forum for intercultural contact between the hosts and the guests, fostering cultural understanding on the sociocultural front. Although tourism is a key part of the North Bengal Hills' economy, homestays are still in their infancy. Its vast potential is yet largely unrealized for a variety of reasons. One of the primary issues is poor infrastructure. The local government and administration must give prompt attention to communication and poor transit connectivity to some of the villages, including Sangsey,

Tinchuley, Tanek Busty, Sillery Goan, etc. Emergency medical treatment, energy, and water availability are becoming obstacles to promote better service to existing as well as potential homestay visitors.

### **ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES OF HOMESTAY**

- Transforming economic and employment opportunities to rural areas and thus alleviating poverty.
- Encouraging local and foreign investment in tourism.
- Direct economic benefits consumption of food, accommodation and purchase of souvenirs.
- Conservations of indigenous skills such as handicrafts and artisan works.

### **SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES OF HOMESTAY**

- Reducing conflict among different races and nationalities.
- Retention of youth by involving them in local opportunities.
- Learning new languages, skills and builds confidence among locals.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES OF HOMESTAY**

- Would be very helpful in reducing common sanitation related diseases since training would be conducted.
- Persuading the locals to keep the premises, kitchens and toilets etc. neat and clean.
- Increasing awareness on environmental conservation among host areas.

### **TOURISM RELATED OPPORTUNITIES**

- Tourists get a chance to witness natural and cultural diversity.
- Increase in accommodation supply capability of the destination.
- Removing the problem of seasonality by promoting the destination all year round.

### **INFRASTRUCTURAL OPPORTUNITIES**

- Increasing accessibility to villages by linking them with easily accessible roads.
- Increasing the number of education and training centers for capacity building.
- Increasing safety and security of locals as well tourists at the destinations in question.

## **Conclusion**

Homestays should be viewed as a crucial small business that can help the residents of the Kalimpong district improve their economic well-being. Homestays and rural tourism produce modest but consistent income that helps the local economy and community grow. Authentic social connections, local culture, local cuisine, and natural resources can all be experienced through homestays, a popular alternative tourism product. Thus, it is important to educate and encourage the locals to take action to preserve the environment and cultural history in order to support the growth of homestays in the Kalimpong District. In order to grow and develop qualified human resources, there needs to be framework in place to promote rural tourism, homestays, and additional community and governmental activities.

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