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**Marketing Strategy For Homestay as an Alternative Tourism Product – A
Study on Local Community Involvement In Rural Odisha**

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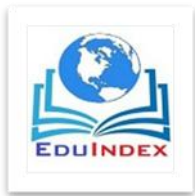
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Abstract

The significant contribution of tourism industry to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment has simply indicated how tourism industry works as the most powerful engine for economic development particularly in the developing countries where nations experience a rapid growth in the number of international tourists and tempting contribution of those arrivals to GDP, socio- economic development, and poverty reduction. Therefore, it wouldn't be surprising if many less developed countries have launched tourism projects in order to improve local communities' livelihoods most specifically in the remote rural areas. Home stay tourism is an emerging tourism concept evolved lately in the tourism world. India can be a model homestay for its multi-faceted potentialities. Natural gifts, man-made heritages ethno-cultural richness, innocent social settings, pleasant hospitality and many more unexplored treasures that are dreams for experts of tourism. Homestay tourism cannot prosper *sans* the convergence of needs of the affluent and the needy based on the premise of demand driven mechanism because it is a need base concept. India can harness the boon of tourist potentiality rampant at the rural areas where government has pro-poor programs. Promotion of tourism thus is highly dependent upon the active participation of the



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private sector and communities where the role of government becomes that of a facilitator. Rural Tourism has emerged as a new mantra for alternative tourism development. Rural Odisha has much more to offer to the tourists. However lack of accommodation facilities leave the tourists away from enjoying these rural tourism potential. The present study focuses on identifying issues and challenges in development of homestay in rural Odisha and the identifying the strategies for marketing it to the rural tourists.

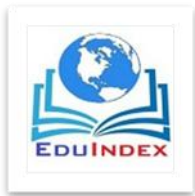
Keywords: Homestay, Local Community, Rural tourism, Accommodation & Marketing Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, Community-Based Tourism development has been attracting the attention of many researchers and governments in many countries. In the light of this, a considerable number of countries are attempting to apply homestay programs in rural areas for the development of tourism. Homestay tourism has been emerging as a form of sustainable tourism in many states of India as community development program. The rural communities or private house owners have been operating homestay programmes where guests are offered only basic facilities i.e. normal bed just as the host sleep in their own bed, local food as host normally eat, and unique traditional hospitality with different cultural and natural beauties of particular area. Local cultural activities, traditional lifestyle of host, local tests can be experienced by guests taking part in a homestay programme. Tourism in Orissa



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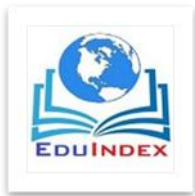
has grown considerably in recent years due to the various attractions of Orissa -- ranging from wildlife reserves and beaches to temples and monuments and the arts and festivals. However, no proper step taken by Orissa Government with regards to development and promotion of Homestay.

CONCEPT OF HOMESTAY

A homestay refers to private homes in which unused rooms are rented for the purpose of supplementing income and meeting people. Very often the owner of the home and the guest sleep under the same roof and share common spaces. Hosts carry on with day-to-day household activities while incorporating the guest where appropriate as part of their touristic experience. Guests who prefer to lodge with a family over a hotel can be understood as experiential tourists as they seek out authentic back-of-house knowledge that has not been treated for consumers. The homestay accommodation are located in places of tourist interest, which may be on beaches, hills, near lakes, or houses in the middle of coffee/tea plantations, usually places of scenic beauty. These are usually farmhouses, rural cottages, havelis and bungalows where families stay, and where they allocate rooms to guests for monetary consideration, accompanied by fresh home-cooked meals and local produce. The guests get to experience the local way of life, staying with the owners of the house.

Features of Homestay:

- Homestays are owned and managed by the host family, who extend their hospitality to the tourists. The facilities offered to the guests differ from those in a hotel in that they are more personal, as there are only a few guests staying there at one time, in comparison to a hotel. This ensures that the homestay owners have more scope to cater to the individual's requirements.



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- Moreover, the guests are able to stay in a homely environment, and can enjoy the luxury of having the entire space to move about. Also, if there are any infants or young children with them, it is a comfortable stay for them as well, since there is less fear of them disturbing the other guests during their play. Children are more comfortable in this environment, where there is less chance of the staff requesting their parents to keep them quiet.
- The kind of authentic food served to guests in Homestays cannot be found in hotels, which rarely offer the original local food. Very often travelers who visit far off destinations and stay in the hotels there end up ordering the familiar items offered on the menu and leave the destination without knowing what the local cuisine tastes like. It is in Homestays that guests can really experience the true flavors of the destination. At times, the host family may even permit the guest to enter the kitchen and pick up the nuances of the local cooking.
- Since the tourists are staying with a local family they are able to, with their advice, visit local places of interest that are not as well-known as the commercially popular ones and yet have something unique to offer. Thus in addition to the must-see places on planned itineraries; they can also experience ones that are off the beaten track.
- The guests at a Homestay are welcome to participate in the local activities which include harvesting fruit in the orchards, working in the plantations, accompanying a fishing boat as it goes into the sea to haul its daily catch home or even feeding and grooming the animals on the estate or plantation. This gives them a chance to glimpse the routine life there.



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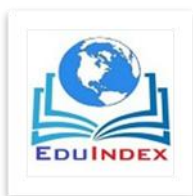
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HOMESTAY IN INDIA

There's a saying in India, "**Athithi Devo Bhava**", which means "the guest is God". Indians consider it a huge honor to have guests in their home, and go out of their way to please them. There's nothing like Indian hospitality. Sadly, most visitors who come to India and stay in hotels never get to experience true Indian hospitality. The good thing is that all this is changing as a result of the growing popularity of Homestays in India. Homestay is a newly adopted accommodation practice in India's tourism industry which means that the visitor enjoys the local cultural hospitality and a warm welcome from a host family in particular area. A homestay in India is similar in concept to that of a bed and breakfast. Guests are either accommodated in the family home, or in separate quarters nearby. Nowadays, most Homestays provide their guests with just as much comfort as a reputable hotel. It helps the tourist to explore the local cultural values, traditions on the one hand, languages and landscape settings on the other. Actually, the homestay programme is a new concept in the India's tourism industry for community development. This provides accommodation to visitors by offering local cultural hospitality and receives financial benefit in returns. It is acknowledged as a potential economic activity in tourism industry. Homestay programme has been popular among those tourists who desire to be a part of local traditions by interacting with the community and have experience of local culture.

There are several examples from around the world where homestays have been successfully developed. India has both cultural and natural resources and can provide more applicable insight into this structure (Homestay). India is one of those destinations found on every traveller's list. This is mostly because of its vast sprawling natural beauty, seasonal diversities, cultural richness and ethnicity & hospitality of its communities. Staying in some simply delightful Homestays, lodges, resorts and bungalows provides a delicate mix of



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experiences. In the northern part of country Himalayan homestay in Ladakh, Spiti (Jammu & Kashmir) are avenues for homestay tourists. Similarly in the state of Himachal Pradesh there are number of homestay registered under the tourism departments such as Kullu, Shimla, Chamba, Solan and so on. In the state of Uttarakhand the major Homestays were in the Nanda Devi Valley and Valley of Flower housed famous homestay sites. The NCR are of Delhi also spotted with beautiful homestay spots. Tikli Bottom situated in Gurgaon in Aravalli hills is one of them. In the north-east Sikkim, Nagaland, Assam registered exotic homestay with great natural, biological diversity for tourists. In the extreme east West Bengal with its Glenburg Tea Estate homestay in Darjeeling (West Bengal) marked its presence. In the western part of the country the colorful state Rajasthan has Dera Rawatsar and General's Retreat homestay in Jaipur are also attracting large numbers of tourists. The Ahilya Fort homestay in Maheshwar (Madhya Pradesh) is well known and a very unique experience for tourists visiting there. In the south India Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamilnadu share the homestay destinations. Honey Pot homestay of Karnataka is delightful homestay nestled in the sprawling 225 acre coffee and spice plantation in southern Karnataka. The Cardamom House homestay in Tamilnadu is a completely informal house and is tailored to accommodate guests where they can enjoy the stunning location on the edge of the monsoon season, depending on Kamarajar Lake in the western ghats of India. Kerala is the adobe for homestay in south India with its numerous spots such as Casa Del Fauno. There are also homestay opportunities in Allappuzha, Phillipkutty's Farm in Kumarakom, Fringe Ford in Mananthavadi and Tranquil Plantation Hideaway in Kolagapara and so on.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A Home-Stay, by its combined words (home stay) is staying in some one's home as a paying guest for short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by

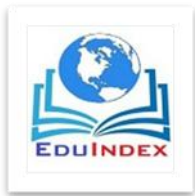


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individual family and community too. Therefore, the Home- Stay Regulation has accepted it as run (managed) by an individual or community (Timlasana, 2012). The Homestay “ seeks to draw tourists away from posh and crowded urban areas to the rural locality full of splendid natural surroundings, by providing them with clean, comfortable and budget-friendly accommodation and food. Thus, homestay offers the traveller a unique local experience and possibilities 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 alternative source of income to the rural folks (Gangotia, 2013). In homestay 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 make India one of the famous destinations for homestay tourism. In homestay tourism, both the environment and culture are commoditized; market value is created with the demand of visitors. This provides financial reward to the local indigenous community for conservation of the environment and their culture (Laurie et al, 2005). Home stay tourism is a major player when it comes to the reduction of rural poverty. It integrates all activities of tourism such as trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, and ecotourism (Devkota, 2010). It is a good source of earning foreign currency. It reduces the gap in the balance of payment, provides increased tax revenue, gives rise to economic development of the nation, and increases the employment opportunities. It may also provide new markets for local people to sell their products, such as agricultural products, livestock and others (Budhathoki, 2013). Community-based tourism approach (hereafter referred as CBT) is one of the most prominent tourism projects in rural areas supposed to make an equal distribution of economic opportunities amongst local communities (Blockstock, 2005; Tolkach & King, 2015). Simply, they are community owned and/or managed tourism businesses that are organized in the ways to deliver more community



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benefits (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). In the CBT approach as the bottom up community approach, local communities should be fully involved in decision making process, developing tourism products, and putting into practice a tourism strategy (Hall, 2007; Iorio & Corsale, 2013).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With the homestay revolution sweeping over India, the eastern belt of the country is slowly waking up and putting on offer their best properties to be a part of this travel trend. Odisha is a multi-destination state located in eastern region of India enriched with a variety of tourist attractions and facilities. Odisha's culture resides in villages and hence by the development of rural tourism, Odisha's life style, tradition, art, craft and natural heritage can be promoted. Tourism growth potential can be harnessed as a strategy for rural development. Rural tourism's greatest potential benefit is its ability to generate money which can translate in to numerous positive economic opportunities for locals and their communities. Development of Homestay is one of the components of rural tourism development which serves the accommodation needs of the tourists in rural areas through the participation of local communities. Even though rural tourism is emphasized by the Government for its development, no proper steps have been taken to meet the accommodation needs of the tourists in rural areas. Development and promotion of Homestays in rural Odisha could be one of the alternate tourism products to meet the accommodation need of tourists visiting rural areas.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study is confined to rural tourism destinations of Odisha. The study highlights how the homestay accommodation can be developed and marketed through



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involvement of local community for sustainable development of these destinations. Following rural tourism destinations are covered under the study:

- Raghurajpur
- Deulajhari
- Khiching
- Padmanavapur
- Hirapur

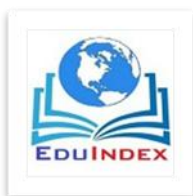
The above destinations were selected on the basis of their rural tourism potentials that necessitate development of homestay program to make these destinations more enjoyable for the tourists.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To become familiar with homestay tourism
- To identify the challenges faced in the development of homestay tourism by the local community.
- To offer valuable recommendations so as to make the homestay tourism more viable
- To recommend marketing strategies for promotion of homestay tourism in study areas

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Due to nature of the study, a qualitative research approach was used to examine the study. The study is basically exploratory in nature. The research methodology adopted is based on the secondary data from the reliable sources along with Primary data was collected in form of interviews with industry experts who comprised of Ministry of Tourism in Odisha and established Travel Agencies and tour operators in Odisha. All discussions were recorded during telephone conversation. Interactions were made with local community and rural tourist



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at the study areas. The data was then transferred to a Microsoft Word document in order to avoid omitting information or ambiguous errors. Extensive secondary data is collected through books, published government reports, related articles in journals, newspapers and electronic sources.

**OVERVIEW OF RURAL DESTINATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF HOMESTAY
TOURISM**

Raghurajpur

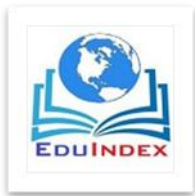
Raghurajpur, a small village near to Puri is the residence of thousand Oriya artisans who have mastered multiple skills be that of Pata Chitra, Applique works or Gotipua Dance forms or inscribing absolute poetry on pieces of treated cloth, dried palm leaf or paper. Raghurajpur draws a number of tourist both domestic and foreigners for its unique art and craft.

Deulajhari

Located 90 KM from Angul in Athmalik district, Deulajhari is the ancient citadel of Shaivism. Deulajhari is a special natural phenomenon in the sense that the hot water spring originates from below a Shivalinga. Siddheswar Baba (Lord Shiva) is the presiding deity of Deulajhari. As per records the Siddheswar Baba temple which is the main temple of Deulajhari, was built by the King Kishore Chandra Deo of Kadamba Dynasty in the year 1936. The other miracle of nature is the fact that almost half of the springs in the region are cold water springs which are attached to the hot springs.

Khiching

Khiching is a Village in Sukruli Tehsil in Mayurbhanj District of Odisha State. It is located 108 KM towards west from District head quarters Baripada. 6 KM from Sukruli, 215 KM from State capital Bhubaneswar. Khiching is a historical village that was once the capital of Bhanja rules. The star attraction of this beautiful place is a Maa Kichakeswari Temple which



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dates back to the 7th or 8th century Kichakeswari Temple is made up of chlorite slabs and boasts an impressive Kalinga architectural design. However, the temple is believed to be the first temple of Odisha and because of this Khiching is known as the town with a rich heritage history.

Padmanavapur

Padmanavapur is a small village located in Ganjam district of Odisha. The village is divided into three parts and 104 families are living in this village. All the families belong from Weaving Profession and most of the family members are engaged in different weaving activities. The main product of this village is saree which popularly known as Berhampuri Saree.

Hirapur

Hirapur village is located at a distance of 15 km southeast of Odisha capital Bhubaneswar in Khurda district of Odisha, Hirapur is best known worldwide for the famous 64-Yogini tantric temple. Though the smallest of nine such Yogini shrines discovered in India, this ninth century shrine has been the best preserved temple of its kind in the country for undertaking any study on tantra cult. For its proximity to the capital city apart from its historical, archaeological and cultural relevance, it received a large chunk of travellers and researchers from abroad.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Marketing in tourism should be seen as a means to achieve development of strategic goals of tourist destinations, such as long-term prosperity, guest satisfaction, profit maximisation,



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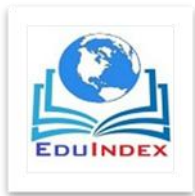
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extension of the tourist season, neutralising the negative social impacts, stabilisation of employment, support and further diversification of existing economic activity, temporal and spatial redistribution of tourist demand. Therefore, marketing cannot be understood simply as propaganda or simply as printing leaflets, but as a platform for defining business objectives and strategies, and creation of tourist products which deliver unique experience to consumers and generate profit for a tourist destination. Therefore, the Homestays in Odisha need to be developed properly before it is marketed as an alternative tourism product.

The analysis of data collected from various sources reveals that there are number of obstacles at present in rural tourism destinations of Odisha for the development of Homestay tourism which need an immediate attention:

- The local people at different rural tourism destinations are not aware about concept of homestay.
- The people are also not aware about the assistance extended by the Government for the development of Homestays in rural areas.
- The other reasons for which people don't participate at present at homestay programs are:
 - ✓ Lack of financial constraints
 - ✓ Non-availability of time for the women to participate in homestay program
 - ✓ Lack of Hospitality Business Skills
 - ✓ Psychological and Personal Barriers
 - ✓ Social constraints
 - ✓ Fear of loss of Cultural values.
 - ✓ Lack of language skills
 - ✓ Lack of proper infrastructure facilities like proper road facilities, transportation facilities, electricity facilities, sewage and sanitary.



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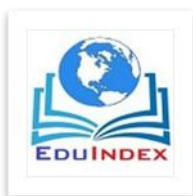
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Unless all these constraints has been taken care and removed, it would be difficult to develop and operate the homestay successfully in the study areas. Homestay as an alternative tourism product must be developed properly and then marketed through design of appropriate marketing strategies.

When it comes to establishing a tourism marketing strategy for a destination or product, there are a number of factors to keep in mind. Outside of promotions and campaigns, there is a larger conversation to be had about the overall branding and awareness of the product. The vision, goals, and objectives of destination marketing efforts need to be outlined in an official marketing plan. However, discoverability and branding must not be forgotten .Without a proper marketing strategy formulation and implementation, the needs of tourists might not be satisfied as they expect. It is also noted that whatever tourism product it may be, a strong strategic marketing strategy is needed in order to achieve competitive advantage. The richness of attraction/product does not necessarily generate the tourist's inflows, but an effective marketing strategy does. The marketing strategy for the study areas must be cantered around the following elements:

- Creating a homestay tourism brand for the study areas that will differentiate itself from the other types of accommodation offered in the state.
- Visitors often complain about the virtual absence of literature and information on local attractions of different destinations. The brochures and leaflets to be produced and made available with the tourist offices about rural tourism attractions and the homestay facilities available in such rural tourism destinations.
- The brochures and leaflets are also need to be available with the destination management companies both in India and abroad.
- Due to the growing use of electronic media for travel purposes, it is essential to develop a web presence for homestay tourism by the Odisha Tourism. The developed website must



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be linked to homestay tourism site of India. Homestay establishments often function in remote areas in the natural wilderness hence if the local community/Government have a website they need to give information on their location and direction to reach that place. Most of the sites must provide their contact details for reservation as well as their physical address. The websites must exhibit a location map as tourist to such Homestays need to know where the place is situated and just a physical address of the establishment will not ensure that the tourists will know how to reach that place. The websites must use background colours, images and pictures of the establishments, the rooms and other amenities, places for site seeing, adventure and nature activities and wildlife to market their offerings to the potential visitors. It is essential that the guests of these Homestays have a clear idea what they can expect when they are buying the tourism services. Hence the majority of the websites must give a clear description of the services they were offering.

- Promotion through social media in the form audio-visual content will also lead to faster dissemination of information. Digital marketing is definitely helping all the companies in the hospitality sector. Digital marketing is very much important for the sustainability of any business organization. Homestay business greatly depends on online portals and their websites more than they depend on other digital marketing tools. Social media must be utilized effectively by sharing live videos and interesting stories in order to create a better impact to the audience. The individuals who are having Homestays must be made aware of how to use the other digital marketing tools such as Email marketing and blogs. Since these tools will help to create a positive impact by reducing any negative situation.
- Familiarisation tours need to be organised for the travel agencies and tour operators to become familiar with homestay tourism products and evaluate them. Specific interest tour



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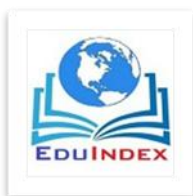
must be planned and operated by travel agencies and tour operators involving homestay accommodation.

- State tourism organisations must work with destination marketing organisations for marketing and promotion of homestay tourism.
- There should be a better coordination between the local community, local tourism sector, travel agencies and other stakeholders, in order to develop and market Homestays tourism as a rural tourism offering to the potential tourists.

CONCLUSION

The homestay program is not merely a tourism development program; it is also a strategy for rural development. However, the implementation demands high commitment and understanding among the local community. In order to design a successful homestay program a concerted effort is needed, particularly in terms of its planning & promotion. The development and marketing of the homestay program in rural tourism destinations can provide huge opportunities to the rural communities. Along with development of tourism, this program will be an added support to the rural socioeconomic development, social capital development, as well as contribution to conservation and enhancement of the rural areas by developing public understanding pertaining to life in rural areas and environmental issues generally. The homestay in rural areas can be an alternative tourism product to attract both international and domestic tourists. However, for the program to be successful, full commitment from the operators, a local community, Development support from the Government agencies and other related private agencies such as the tourist operators is very much needed.

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