

Understanding Homstays Success In Rural Dajeeing: A Comparative Study Between Lepchajagat And Sittong In Darjeeling Using Garrett Ranking

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify, rank, and compare the factors contributing to the success of homestays in the villages of Lepchajagat and Sittong in Darjeeling, West Bengal. Garrett ranking method was used for both the destinations and data was collected through convenience sampling from homestay owners and staff to assess the importance of various factors such as facilities available near the homestay, cultural attractions, homestay accessibility, food and lodging facilities, biodiversity and natural landscape, activities available, promotion and advertisement of the homestay which were condensed from relevant literatures. These ranks were further compared between the two homestay destinations. The analysis revealed significant similarities and differences in the priorities of each village. It also highlights the unique characteristics and tourism dynamics of each location, suggesting that homestay strategies should be tailored to the specific strengths and needs of each village. The findings provide valuable insights for homestay owners, local tourism boards, and policymakers in developing targeted approaches to enhance the success of homestays in these picturesque destinations. However the study is limited to the hills of Darjeeling.

Keywords: Homestays, Facilities, Factors; Garrett; Ranking

Introduction

As key aspect of Community based tourism (CBT), Rural tourism and Ecotourism, Homestays is characterized by visitors lodging in a residence of host community (Ghimire & Neupane, 2022; Pasanchay & Schott, 2021). Homestays dates back to the Iron Age (1200–550 B.C.), among Celtic culture governed by Brehon Law in Europe where visitors were provided with food, drink, and shelter. With the advent of trade and grand tour in middle age this concept persisted and further improved in 19th and 20th centuries due to industrialization and expansion of accessibility (Yasami et al., 2017). In Majorca, a Spanish Island, the first rural tourism; "Vocation Village" involving homestays was set up by Club Mediterranean in 1950. In India, the concept came noticeably in 2008, when the Incredible India Bed and Breakfast Scheme were introduced by the Ministry of Tourism and the State Government was urged to promote the same with appropriate changes. In 2012, the Indian Planning Commission estimated that there would be a severe lack of mid market hotel rooms by 2016 emphasising the onset of homestays. In Darjeeling, West Bengal, the homestay tourism is a growing niche market capturing tremendous attention (Bhutia et al., 2022; Dutta & Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Dutta & Mukhopadhyay, 2024; Sagar Sharma & Risha Chettri, 2023). Homestays facilitates alternate means of livelihood, economic development, enhanced standard of living, cultural exchange, sustainable tourism and employment generation which has caused the industry to multiply enhancing its prominence (Dutta & Mukhopadhyay, 2023).

Literature Review

Various studies suggest different factors that influence the success of homestays. Some scholars have focused on ATM, parking facilities, shopping, travel agencies and tour operators availability (Daud et al., 2014; Sood et al., 2017). Cultural attractions like fairs and festivals, dances, music, folk programs, oral literatures, handicraft items and craftsmen skills have also been marked essential (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Ramli et al., 2015). Ease mode

of transportation and all round connectivity (Daud et al., 2015; Korten, 1980), fooding and lodging facilities (Daud et al., 2014) and promotion and advertisement of the homestays has also been highlighted (Long et al., 2018; Sutheshna Babu S & Dripto Mukhopadhyay, 2020). Biodiversity and natural landscape around the homestay like scenic beauty, waterfalls, riverside areas, unique flora and fauna is also another crucial factor described by some researchers (Anand et al., 2012; Udaya Mohan Devadas & Sachini Jayasooriya, 2021). Activities available around the homestays like angling, rafting, boating, trekking, hiking, rock climbing, bird watching, sunrise sunset points, horse riding and fisheries are also regarded important (Daud et al., 2014; Deep Jyoti Gurung & Dr. Chandan Goswami, 2015). Various methods have been used to conclude essential factors by different scholars. Garrett ranking, a statistical ranking technique is used to evaluate different factors according to the respondent's opinions. It is most suitable and helpful for research involving subjective assessments, such as ranking the essential factors of homestays (Gautam & Jha, 2022). These factors enhance the scope of homestays, attracting more visitors which lead to success of homestays. Comparing these factors among two homestay destination gives more emphasis, making the factors reliable. Though there are various comparative studies that assess the homestays (Dutta & Mukhopadhyay, 2023; Mohamad & Nasir, 2019; Ramele & Yamazaki, 2020), there is lack of detailed study that ranks these factors and compares it among two prominent homestay destinations situated in same geographical, topographical and cultural destination in Darjeeling thereby this paper fulfils the research gap.

Objective

- To identify and rank the key factors contributing to the success of homestays in the study area
- To compare the ranked factors between the study area

Study Area Profile

Sittong, known for cinchona plantation, orange cultivation, tea gardens and agriculture is located in the Kurseong subdivision of Darjeeling district, at an average altitude of 4000 ft. Among the three gram panchayats of the area, Sittong III was chosen for the study due to the population and popularity for homestays as per the investigation. According to the information provided by the President of Sittong Homestay Owner's Welfare Association, Sittong III has seventy homestays where the first homestay was established with two rooms in 2012, to cater the students of Institute of Zoological Survey of India.

Situated at an elevation of 6,956 feet and located 19kms from Darjeeling, Lepchajagat is well-known for offering breathtaking views especially of Mount Kanchenjunga. The resident of the village whose livelihood has shifted from carpentering and animal husbandry to homestays tourism has thirty two homestays. As per the investigation with the members of Lepchajagat Homestay Tourism Association the first homestay in this region was established in 2015.

Methodology

The homestay owners and the employees of homestays were primary respondents for the study. Convenience sampling was adopted and data was collected from 110 respondents (55 homestay owners and 55 employees) in Sittong and 56 respondents (28 homestay owners and 28 employees) in Lepchajagat, the number of respondents varied due to the number of homestays in each village, i.e, seventy in Sittong and thirty two in Lepchajagat. A questionnaire was developed based on the seven factors of homestays which were adopted from relevant literatures namely facilities available near the homestay, cultural attractions, homestay accessibility, food and lodging facilities, biodiversity and natural landscape, activities available, promotion and advertisement of the homestay (Daud et al., 2014; Sood et al., 2017; Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Ramli et al., 2015; Daud et al., 2015; Korten, 1980; Long et al., 2018; Sutheshna Babu S & Dripto Mukhopadhyay, 2020; Anand et al., 2012; Udaya Mohan Devadas & Sachini Jayasooriya, 2021; Deep Jyoti Gurung & Dr. Chandan Goswami, 2015). These factors were ranked by the respondents based on their discretion of importance on a scale of one to seven, where one represented the highest and seven the lowest. The data was then converted into percent positions and the method used for that was:

$$\text{Percentage position} = \frac{100(R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

Where, R_{ij} denotes the rank given for the i^{th} factor by the j^{th} respondent, N_j number of factors ranked by the j^{th} respondent. The percent positions attained for each rank were converted into scores by referring to the table provided by Garrett and Woodworth (1969). After the identification of important factors in each village, they were compared to assess the similarity and difference in the significant factors affecting homestays for their success.

Results

Sittong: After analyzing the data the seven factors accumulated their mean value which was mapped with the Garrett's ranking score as provided by Garrett and Woodworth (1969) and depicted in table I.

Table I: Factors of Homestays with Garrett's mean score and rank in Sittong

Sl	Factors	Garretts Mean Score	Rank
1	Facilities available near the homestay	34.76	VI
2	Cultural attractions in and around homestay	38.99	V
3	Homestay Accessibility	64.26	II
4	Food and Lodging facilities in and round homestay	43.12	IV
5	Biodiversity and natural landscape in and round homestay	70.81	I
6	Activities available in and around homestay	60.23	III
7	Promotion and Advertisement of the homestay	28.84	VII

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The first rank and highest mean score of 70.81 were recorded by Biodiversity and natural landscape. Sittong has been popular for orange orchards, residential birds like Rufus necked hornbill, great hornbill, oriental pied hornbill, green magpie, broadbill and trogon, sightseeing spots like Namthing lake, Lepcha monastery, Lepchafalls, Jogighat Falls and Ahaldara. The second highest mean score i.e, 64.25 was scored by Homestay Accessibility and ranked second. Sittong is easily accessible from nearby areas like Darjeeling, Siliguri and Gangtok. As informed by the secretary of Sittong Homestay Owner's Welfare Association there are currently two hundred taxi drivers which makes the destination comfortable and attracts visitors. Activities like bird watching, trekking, guided tour, bonfire, rock climbing, niche butterfly watching, macro photography, sunrise and sunset watching are provided to tourist as informed by the respondents which makes it third important factor with mean score 60.23. These three factors were prioritised by the respondents due to its scope for making homestay successful.

The local foods like momo, chowmein, thukpa, Nepali thali is popular foods savoured by tourists and cooked by locals. This factor scored the mean value of 43.12 ranking it as fourth significant factor. The culture depicted by the people of Sittong scored 38.00 ranking it as fifth factor. The Sittong Homestay Owner's Welfare Association has recently grasped the potential of culture and organised its first ever, Rural Ecotourism festival in December 2023. This caught the attention and support of local administration, Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA), who partially funded the event as informed by the respondents. The destination could tap the potential of these two factors to further improve its position as homestay destination.

Facilities available near the homestay scored means value of 34.76 making it sixth factor. The homestays of Sittong are humble with all the basic facilities however they lack facilities like convenient ATM's, restaurants, shopping and entertainment. The factor of promotion and advertisement of homestay scored the minimum mean value of 28.84, ranking it as seventh factor. This was because the homestays were popular through word of mouth advertisement and the owners spend little time in marketing. Very few participated in Travel Trade Fair and Orange Festival in Kolkata for advertisement. The respondents believed that the destination had natural advantages which automatically attracted visitors, making facilities and promotion as least ranked factors.

Lepchajagat: The mean value of seven factors accumulated in Lepchajagat was mapped with the Garrett's ranking

score as provided by Garrett and Woodworth (1969) and depicted in table II.

Table II: Factors of Homestays with Garrett's mean score and rank in Lepchajagat

SI	Factors	Garretts Mean Score	Rank
1	Facilities available near the homestay	27.67	VII
2	Cultural attractions in and around homestay	30.60	VI
3	Homestay Accessibility	57.76	IV
4	Food and Lodging facilities in and round homestay	41.71	V
5	Biodiversity and natural landscape in and round homestay	67.60	I
6	Activities available in and around homestay	66.17	II
7	Promotion and Advertisement of the homestay	59.44	III

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The highest mean score was obtained by Biodiversity and natural landscape in and around homestay with mean score 67.60. Lepchajagat administered by the forest department; makes it pristine with less commercial developments that the tourists often compare it with picturesque foreign destination as informed by a respondent. Activities available in and around homestay scored 66.17 ranking it as second essential factor. The sunrise and sunset view points, trek to Hawa Ghar built in 1986, unique birds like Fire-tailed Sunbird and Rufus Sibia are popular in Lepchajagat that plays major role in attracting leisure tourists. Promotion and Advertisement of homestays ranked third and scored 59.44. The respondents weighted this factor and emphasised that promotion through newspapers, social media, marketing agencies and website were essential for success of homestays.

Homestay accessibility scored the mean value of 57.56, the fact that the destination was situated in the highway, with well connectivity made the respondents rank it as fourth essential factor. Food and Lodging facilities in and round homestay ranked as fifth significant factor and scored 41.71. The respondents informed that the visitors were more nature oriented and demanded less culinary experience which made the respondents rank this factor as less essential.

Cultural attractions in and around homestay ranked sixth factor and scored 30.60, the destination hardly made any endeavour in showcasing their culture, they did not organise any festivals, neither was there any craftsmanship skills thus ranking the factor second last. Facilities available near the homestay ranked seventh and scored 27.67. The destination had occasional mobile ATM's; there were hardly any restaurants and shopping centres nearby. A respondent informed, since Lepchajagat had picturesque surroundings, opulent amenities were not necessary ranking it as least significant factor.

Comparative Analysis

Table III: Comparing the ranks of Sittong and Lepchajagat

SI	Factors	Sittong	Lepchajagat
		Ranks	Ranks
1	Facilities available near the homestay	VI	VII
2	Cultural attractions in and around homestay	V	VI
3	Homestay Accessibility	II	IV
4	Food and Lodging facilities in and round homestay	IV	V
5	Biodiversity and natural landscape in and round homestay	I	I
6	Activities available in and around homestay	III	II

7	Promotion and Advertisement of the homestay	VII	III
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Source: Fieldwork 2024

Table III depicts similarities and differences in the ranks for each of the seven factors. The most prominent observation is that Biodiversity and natural landscape ranks first in both the villages of Sittong and Lepchajagat. This shows that the respondents add maximum weight age to this factor and rely heavily on it for the success of homestays. The rankings in rest of the factors differ in both the villages like accessibility scored second in Sittong while it scored fourth in Lepchajagat. This might be because Sittong is more drawn towards accessibility for the success of homestays than Lepchajagat. Activities available in and around the homestay scored third in Sittong, while it scored second in Lepchajagat. Food and lodging facilities scored fourth in Sittong and fifth in Lepchajagat. Cultural attractions scored fifth in Sittong and sixth in Lepchajagat. Facilities available near the homestay scored sixth in Sittong and seventh in Lepchajagat. This shows that there is not much difference in the ranking of Activities available in and around the homestays, Food and lodging facilities, Cultural attractions and facilities available near the homestays. Promotion and Advertisement of the homestays scored seventh in Sittong and third in Lepchajagat. This is the most striking difference amongst all the ranks. The difference as observed by the researcher is because the respondents of Lepchajagat believed that promotion and advertisement of homestays is crucial for the success of homestays while respondents of Sittong believe more in word of mouth which brought vast difference in the rank.

This clearly shows that though there are differences in ranking of significant factors in both villages of Sittong and Lepchajagat, biodiversity and natural landscape ranks as first factor for both the villages. Homestay accessibility and activities available ranks second and third essential factors in Sittong while activities available in and around homestay and promotion and advertisement of the homestay ranks second and third essential factors in Lepchajagat respectively.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to identify, rank and compare the factors responsible for success of homestays in Lepchajagat and Sittong using Garrett ranking. The study revealed unique preference providing limelight to both common and distinct factors in each of these villages. As discussed previously, both the village's ranked biodiversity and landscape as first factor while there was slight difference in ranking of other factors like activities available in and around the homestays, homestay accessibility, fooding and lodging facilities, cultural attractions and facilities available near the homestays. The analysis depicted vast difference in ranking of promotion and advertisement, as it was ranked seventh factor in Sittong and third essential factor in Lepchajagat.

Based on the findings, homestay's strategies must be personalized to each village's unique requirements and capabilities. While in both the villages maintaining the beauty of the area, enhancing the activities provided and building strong and convenient accessibility would be beneficial, in Lepchajagat adopting realistic marketing approaches and attracting the tourist would be advantageous. However, this study is limited to two villages of Darjeeling sharing same, topography, climate, geography, culture, customs and values. The comparative analysis of these villages however, confirms the essential factors for the success of homestays. This study could also be valuable to homestay industry, policymakers and researchers.

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