

Homestay Tourism as Potential for Developing Rural Livelihood in Mizoram

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ABSTRACT: *Rural tourism, with focus on Homestay, is being considered a means to ensure sustainable livelihood. Homestay is a popular form of hospitality and lodging where visitors sleep at the residence of a local of the city or village to which they are travelling. The main aim of this paper is to get an insight into the newly incorporated Homestay scheme in Mizoram and to evaluate whether it has potential for developing rural livelihoods; and in the process suggests necessary measures for the future development of the scheme. SWOT analysis was done to find out the strengths and weaknesses of the scheme. This study concludes that Homestay tourism has a potential future in Mizoram; and acts as a means of achieving sustainable livelihoods, especially in the rural areas. By reviewing similar studies done by other researchers in other parts of the world, certain points have been suggested for the further development of the program.*

Keywords: *Homestay; sustainable livelihood; ecotourism; Mizoram.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism, with focus on Homestay, is being considered a means to ensure sustainable livelihood. Tourism has been an important sector of the modern day economy, generating income to the farthest rural areas.

Homestay concept in itself is not new to the people of Mizoram. The people have been receiving guests and friends from other states in their homes from time immemorial. The only difference was that it was not done for money or commercialism, but because of their hospitality. Mizo people are known for their beautiful trait called 'Tlawmngaihna'. The local people are very friendly and hospitable; the only problem is that sometimes they face communication problems. Homestay is a popular form of hospitality and lodging where visitors sleep at the residence of a local of the city or village to which they are travelling. The length of stay can vary from one night to over a year. Homestays are examples of collaborative consumption and sharing. This facility or program has been very popular in many countries, especially South-East Asian countries. It has helped the rural population in generating income and sustaining livelihoods for the rural poor. Homestays are generally located in rural areas, so the impact of Tourism which was limited to commercial areas will now reach the villages. Therefore, there is hope that development shall reach the remotest areas of the state.

There are many difficulties faced by Homestay tourism in Thailand. Although it has become a valuable source of domestic tourism in the country, homestay remains a neglected topic. The study made by Nick and his friends shows that success in Mae Kampong, a village in Thailand is still a double-edged sword. Even though communities succeed in operating a homestay program, success comes at the price of diminished authenticity, greater dependence on tourism instead of agricultural farming and increased social and economic inequalities. (Nick, K et al. 2015). In Malaysia, the homestay programs have been converted into a community-based program, and the Government promotes homestay as a means to develop the rural economy. Mariam and his friends studied the community-based homestay programs in Kg. Laklok Machang and Kg. Suri, Tumpat. In these two villages, the communities organized traditional games, cooking with the host family and other daily performances to give the tourists a traditional/local experience. However, the study found that the facilities provided need improvement to meet the needs of the diverse visitors (Mariam, J, et al., 2012). Syed and his friends made a study on Entrepreneurs choice in business venture to analyse the start-up motivation factors and business challenges for homestay accommodation business in Peninsular Malaysia. They found that the main motivations of homestay accommodation entrepreneurs are different from those of small and medium enterprises business in other sectors. Most of the entrepreneurs start their business with a strong economic motivation such as generating extra income (S.Z. Ahmad, et al., 2014).

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Objectives of the study

1. To understand the phenomenon or concept of the newly incorporated homestay program in Mizoram as potential for developing rural livelihood.

2. To suggest necessary measures for improvement of Homestay Program in the state.

2.2. Research Design

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on primary data. Primary data was collected through telephone interview. Among the 35 households, 1 household from each village were selected for telephone interview randomly. A set of questions regarding the homestay scheme was asked to these particular households, the answers of which formed the basis for this study. Although Tourism has been there for quite some time in Mizoram, it was confined mostly to the commercial sector without local participation. It was felt that the best way to enhance local participation could be through homestay program. This program is fairly new in Mizoram, with some of the rooms not yet completed. So there are many areas where the program is lagging, and this study aims to provide some insight into the homestay program and suggest necessary measures for improvement. The suggestions and recommendations from the study could help in making the homestay program better in the future.

III. DISCUSSION

3.1. Mizoram Homestay Scheme

The Homestay facility has been started in Mizoram as a pilot program, in 2017 under New Economic Development Policy. Pilot program was started since June 2017 and became fully incorporated since March 2018. Champhai district was selected for the pilot study. Champhai district has many interesting places of historical importance for tourist to visit. Now, under Champhai district, six (6) villages were selected for the pilot study. These villages are Chawngtlai, Dungtlang, Hnahlan, Vangchhia, Vaphai and Zokhawthar. Thirty five (35) families were selected for the first phase, where they were given Rs. 2.29 lacs each for constructing a room where visitors/travellers can stay during their visit.

There are two categories of homes:

Grade A:	Rs. 300 per night
Grade B:	Rs. 200 per night
Cost of food:	Rs. 130 (as per hotel prices)

Now, the houses are graded according to the facility they have. In all the villages, the village / NGO heads were first briefed and consulted before implementing this program. They were told to select 10-15 families who are interested in this scheme. The selection of families to participate in the homestay program was first done through the NGO called YMA, however after money was involved, it became a party decision. All advertisements and publications are taken care of by the concerned department. Under New Economic Development Policy, Rs. 100 lakhs was sanctioned for the implementation of this Homestay scheme. Out of this Rs. 100 lakhs, Rs. 10 lakhs was kept aside for advertisement and publications. So the homestay partners need not spend out of their own pockets for advertisement. Training has been given 3 times till now, twice in Champhai and once in Aizawl. Tourism Department, Government of Mizoram has collaborated with ICFAI University Mizoram in providing training and imparting food and nutrition and cleanliness awareness to the homestay partners.

Chawngtlai

The name of the Homestay partner contacted was Mr. HC Zoramhngaiha. He is a middle school teacher retired, and is also the Chairman of the Historical Village Committee, Chawngtlai. According to him, since the homestay program was introduced they have only received 8 guests till now. The reason has been attributed to the rainy season.

All the homes in Chawngtlai falls under grade A category. Tourists mostly take care of their own transportation, and when there is a need for a vehicle, the host makes an arrangement for them and they pay for their transportation. The community aims to develop homestay tourism in the future through participation of local NGO and a cultural group called the Sahlam Cultural Group to showcase traditional dance and lifestyle, whatever income they generate will belong to the cultural group.

Chawngtlai has been named a Historical village, and they have their own separate Historical Village Committee. There are many important historical sites to visit here, few to mention are Sahlam, Pasaltha Hranghleia thlan, Hranglung, Lal lungdawh etc. Suggestions given by the interviewee is that the government should conduct proper training and awareness program to the homestay partners; and sent some of them to other states like Sikkim to get exposure and gain knowledge and information on the working of homestay program.

Dungtlang

The name of the homestay partner interviewed was Mr. Lalrosanga. After completion of the room, they have received 2 groups of guests. Now, the room rent is charged according to the room per night, not per

person. All the homes in Dungtlang belongs to Grade B category. There is not much community participation as of now. The main tourist attraction in the village is Lianchhiari Lunglen Tlang.

Hnahlan

The name of the homestay partner interviewed was Mrs. C. Tlanliani. Since its completion, they have only received 3 guests till now. All the homes in Hnahlan falls under Grade B category. Most of them are 2 bedroom houses. Hnahlan is famous for its winery, which serves as the main tourist attraction. Most tourists visiting their village belong to the same state, and thus take care of their own transportation. The main complaint cited is that the grants they received from the government is limited, and so the houses are small and is not adequate to meet their requirements. The homestay partners want to display some items that can showcase the Mizo culture and identity, but due to limited grants could not afford it.

Vangchhia

The name of the homestay partner interviewed was Mr. F. Malsawmtluanga. He is the Village Council President. The houses in Vangchhia are not yet completed, and the size is of different categories. All the homes in Vangchhia falls under grade B category. The community has upgraded/improved their park called Khawlu Park, for tourist to relax. Vangchhia is famous for its Kawtchhuah ropui and Thlangtlak gate. Menhir stones were discovered in the village, which later became an archaeological site in 2012. Because of this archeological finding, the village has had a number of visitors, many from other states. The homestay facility is inadequate as of now. The suggestion given by them is that there should be more homestay partners in the villages so as to cater to the needs of the tourists visiting them. They also faced communication problem with the guests so proper training needs to be given to the homestay partners.

Vaphai

The name of the homestay partner is Mr. Vanlalluta. He mentioned that out of 5 houses, 3 are completed while 2 are not yet completed. Most of the homestay facilities are two-bed rooms. The entire house in Vaphai falls under Grade B category. The main tourist attraction of the village are Thlangtlak mual, Thasiama se no neihna tlang, Tan tlang etc. The homestay partner is happy with the progress that the village received even just by the implementation of the homestay facility in his village. He said that this in itself is already an improvement for the village.

Zokhawthar

The name of the homestay partner is Mr. Lalhmingliana. All the homes here falls under Grade A category, and they are all completed. Most of the guests they received are traders, who came to trade at the Indo-Myanmar border trade. The main tourist attraction is the border trade, along with the famous Rih Dil at Rihkhawdar. The interviewee suggested that in order to attract more tourists, it would be beneficial if Mizoram Government take necessary actions so that tourist can visit the border trade area freely.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1. Swot Analysis

SWOT simply stands for strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats. It is a simple framework for identifying and analyzing the internal and external factors that can have an impact on the viability of a project, product, place or person. It is mostly used by organizations to identify its internal strengths and weaknesses. Below is a simple SWOT analysis of the Homestay Program in Mizoram.

Table I: SWOT Analysis

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Aims to bring tourism benefits to rural areas	Does not promote reinvestment of revenues from homestay into village development	Create rural micro economies	Competition from other hill station states
Provide employment opportunities and supplementary income to rural poor	No special training was given to operators in soft skills, communication, management and marketing skills	Could become the hub of tourist attraction	Rural families shifting from agriculture farming to pursue tourism
Allows small households to avail the scheme benefits	Selection process based on politics	Great opportunity for ecotourism, community based tourism etc	Increased visitors could harm the mountain eco system
		Recordings and documenting the homestay experience could be used for global promotions	Can have irreparable cultural impacts

4.2: What we can emulate from other states/countries practices

In Thailand (Nick, K et al., 2015), homestay tourism has been transformed into a community based tourism, where the whole community participates and in the process earn livelihoods. This can be applied by the villages in Mizoram too.

Villagers can organize various activities involving cultural programs and traditional games where the tourists can participate and enjoy, as done in Laklok and Suri villages of Malaysia (Mariam, J et al., 2012). This can be adopted too, so as the visitors can enjoy themselves and learn our culture and traditions in the process. In Malaysian Homestay Program, the guests participate in the hosts' daily activities like eating with them, learning to cook traditional dish and engaging in other activities together with their adopted families. This helps them in experiencing the customs and traditions and the lifestyle of the local people. The villages too can adopt this technique and in this process expose the Mizo culture to the world.

In some countries, there are criterions to be met before a license is granted to the house owner. These criterions range from the accessibility of their house from the main road, the cleanliness and sanitation, no criminal records for the homestay partners etc. Such criteria can be set in Mizoram too.

V. CONCLUSION

Although Homestay scheme has been initiated by the Government, there is yet a lot to understand about the acceptance of this program by the local community as well as the tourists. If the community work together to improve the homestay tourism, it would benefit lots of the masses. There is a future for Homestay tourism in Mizoram. Local residents can make profit by selling locally-made products. Employment generated by tourism can prevent the younger generation from migrating to towns and cities.

From earlier studies, it can be seen that the biggest problem faced by most tourist in Malaysia was communication with the host family. So, proper training should be given to the homestay partners in Mizoram. The roads to these villages where homestay is being practiced should be repaired and maintained properly. The condition of the roads in Mizoram is very pathetic, especially in the rural areas. So, it is crucial that the roads are maintained properly.

The homestay partners should be given training in soft skills, management and marketing skills. The villagers should work together to make it more community based tourism, so as to enjoy the benefits it brings with it. Government should ensure the continuous and further development of rural tourism to increase employment to the local people.

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