

## Understanding Tourist Behaviour in Homestay Tourism: A Study in Darjeeling and Kalimpong Districts of West Bengal, India

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**Abstract:** The expansion of tourism sector worldwide is triggered by the factor that, it influences local economy and helps local residents by offering new dimensions of opportunities to earn revenue for their own as well as to incorporate in regional economic development. Understanding the social, demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of tourists is highly significant to prepare a quality assessment of tourism industry in the country and also promoting sustainable tourism development to make the tourism sector environment friendly and quality service provider. This paper focuses on the socio-behavioural and economic characteristics of tourists like social, demographic, cultural and economic factors in the way towards creating sustainable tourism in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal state. Through empirical research applied to a specific sample of potential tourists having diverse socio-demographic-economic characters, this study offers a scope to analyse the tourist satisfaction regarding the destination. The objectives of this study are to – (i) to understand the socio-demographic nature of tourists; (ii) to assess the socio-economic profile of tourists and (iii) to evaluate the tourist's preference of homestay tourism. This research was based on utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data. The respondents were tourists who have visited the study area of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal. Visitor's expectations and the available tourism resources of the destination should be maintained in a sustainable manner so that, all the stakeholders must experience a quality interaction between visitors and local organisers as well as the local residents.

**Keywords:** tourist, homestay, tourist behaviour, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, West Bengal

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### I. Introduction

The expansion of tourism sector worldwide is triggered by the factor that, it influences local economy and helps local residents by offering new dimensions of opportunities to earn revenue for their own as well as to incorporate in regional economic development. A report of UNTWO reveals that, about 1087 million international tourists were recorded all over the world during 2013, generating 9 percent of the world's GDP (The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2014). Understanding the social, demographic, economic and cultural characteristics of tourists is highly significant to prepare a quality assessment of tourism industry in the country and also promoting sustainable tourism development to make the tourism sector environment friendly and quality service provider. In this regard, satisfaction of visitors in terms of accessibility of regional resources, infrastructural facilities, balanced communication and eco-friendly environment along with regional cultural flavours- all play direct role in maintaining popularity of the destination. Visitor's expectations and the available tourism resources of the destination should be maintained in a sustainable manner so that, all the stakeholders must experience a quality interaction between visitors and local organisers as well as the local residents. (Pileliene&Grigaliūnaitė, 2016; Diane et. al., 2016). Visitor's experience regarding tourism destination depends on individual and personal characteristics like age, gender, marital status, education structure and employment status which directly and indirectly influence the assessment of tourism sustainability of the study region.

This paper focuses on the socio-behavioural and economic characteristics of tourists like social, demographic, cultural and economic factors in the way towards creating sustainable tourism in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal state. Through empirical research applied to a specific sample of potential tourists having diverse socio-demographic-economic characters, this study offers a scope to analyse the tourist satisfaction regarding the destination.

### II. Review Of Literature

The term tourist ideally can be defined as 'one who makes a tour or tours; especially one who does this for recreation; one who travels for pleasure or culture, visiting a number of places for their objects of interest,

scenery or the like' ( Oxford English Dictionary, p. 190 , 2000). On the basis of other major dictionaries, it was uniformly restated that the basic focus that a tourist is one who 'travels for pleasure'. According to Cohen(n.d) ,the tourist is a temporary traveller, possessing a fixed place of abode, with permanent address even during the travel. There is clear demarcation between tourists and the nomad, wanderer, hobo and other types of permanent travellers. The tourist is a voluntary traveller, who is driven by own free will for going to the destination. The tourist is free to terminate his trip whenever he wants to do it. They have the liberty to return to his permanent place of abode at any time. This circumstance differentiates him from involuntary or forced travellers, such as the exile, the refugee, the prisoner of war, etc. The tourist is attached to a relatively long journey, completely different from a short trip or excursion. Thus, circumstance differentiates the tourist from the day-tripper or mere excursionist. A 'tourist' is a voluntary, temporary traveller, travelling in the expectation of pleasure from the novelty and change experienced on a relatively long and non-recurrent round-trip.

In the writings of Plog (1974) , Dann, (1977) Crompton (1979), Ryan & Glendon, (1998) and Qiu & Lam( 1999) different approaches are discussed in relation to the motivations of the tourists. Heterogeneous nature of tourist motivation i.e multiple motivations were identified by many researchers. There is a typology of tourists based on the relationship between personality and tourism activity undertaken (Cohen, 1972; Plog, 1974; Dann, 1977). It is known to everyone that the motives of tourists are restricted. Pearce( 1993) pointed out that the motives of the tourists have changed over time period from one stage to another. For attracting the tourists, the tourist spots are attached to several products and allied services. To Crompton (1992) tourists are given all the alternatives of selection of their destination from the available set of destination. The significant influencing socio – cultural factors are age, income, personality, cost, distance, risk and motivation. In the writings of Crompton (1979) the push and pull factors played important role in shaping tourist motivations as well as in selecting vacation destinations.

Profiles of tourists can be coordinated with Preference sets and destination attributes. On the basis of observations of Moscardo, Morrison, Pearce, Lang, & O'leary (1996), Witt & Wright (1992) and Uysal & Hagan ( 1993), there was clear distinction between the preference of escape-relaxation group and social status group. Study showed that escape-relaxation group liked destinations where nightlife, entertainment and watersports were available whereas the social status group focused on golf, tennis, fishing, nightlife and entertainment, shopping and gambling. The meaning of tourist spots could be multipurpose as the places were related to relaxation or adventure on the basis of utilization of spaces. The concept of motivation is not static. To Uysal & Hagan (1993) and Witt & Wright (1992), the motivation varies from one person to another, from one destination to another on the basis of decision-making process.

### **III. Methodology**

The objectives of this study were to – (i) to understand the socio-demographic nature of tourists; (ii) to assess the socio-economic profile of tourists and (iii) to evaluate the tourist's preference of homestay tourism. This research was based on utilizing both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data was collected through the method of interview, utilizing a semi-structured interview schedule as the tool for data collection. As the nature of the respondents were characterized by a degree of mobility, the interviews were conducted either through face to face or telephonic. A total of 100 respondents were interviewed for this study, selected through the non-probability sampling technique of Purposive and Snowball sampling. The inclusion criteria for the selection of the sample were that the respondents were tourists who have visited the study area of Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal, either once or multiple times. The secondary sources of data included chapters from books, articles from peer-reviewed journals, government reports, etc. The data has been analysed using quantitative techniques of simple frequency percentage calculations, often depicted through diagrams like pie-chart or bar-graphs. Along with this, narratives of the respondents have also been used to add more depth to the responses provided.

### **IV. Theoretical Framework**

According to Horner and Swarbrooke (1996), tourist behaviour is understanding "why people buy the product they do, and how they make their decision". While assessing tourist behaviour it is therefore also important to understand 'tourist perception'. This is referred to as the conclusions that the tourists generates in relation to a physical and social environment that the concerned individual has visited. This perception is obviously subjective and is influenced by several factors – social, psychological, economical etc (Saarinen, 1976). Tourist motivation is the main factor through which tourists' satisfaction can be predicted (Chi & Qu, 2008). Tourists' motivation to visit a destination are different for different places. One of the most popular theories for understanding tourist behaviour is the 'Push-pull theoretical framework', earlier developed by Graham S. Dan in 1977 but further changes have been made by numerous theorists. This theory explains on how tourists decide on a destination and the related activities within it. The 'Push factors' are pervasive to the individual's own home environment or the psychological state of mind, which consist of the tourists' desires and

wants of the travellers like boredom, rest, relaxation, desire for escape, nostalgia, adventure, new experiences, and social interaction. The 'Pull factors' relates to the destination's attraction that motivate them to travel to these locations, pull factors include landscapes, climate, natural scenery, service, hospitality, accommodations, and local cultures (Dann, 1981). This can be used to assess the tourist motivation of incoming tourists in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts, especially in homestay tourism. This framework can then be extended to include Stanley Plog (1974), allocentricity and psychocentricity model. In this model Plog, classifies tourists into three categories – (i) Allocentric- someone who pursues new experiences and adventure through varied range of activities; (ii) Psychocentric - a tourist who is usually considered as non-adventurous, preferring familiar travel destinations and more 'safer' experiences; (iii) Midcentric – the in between of type (i) and (ii). Therefore, tourists' motivation of visit must be studied and understood so as to push towards sustainable tourism.

## V. Discussion And Findings

This section analyses the socio-demographic profile of the tourists. In order to collect and keep tourist-related information for various purposes including preparing report on tourists related statistics and to secure international compatibility, the Committee of Statistical Experts of the League of Nations defined the term 'tourists' in the year 1937. According to this definition, 'foreign tourist' is referred as: "Any person visiting a country, other than that in which he usually resides, for a period of at least 24 hours".

The important characteristics of tourists as per the above definition are-

- (i) Persons traveling for domestic purpose, for pleasure or for improvement in physical and mental health,
- (ii) Persons traveling for official reasons like to attend a meeting or to represent in a scientific, administrative, cultural or athletic program,
- (iii) Persons traveling for business purposes,
- (iv) Persons arriving in the course of a transit in their travel, though the stay may be for less than 24 hours.

**Sex Composition of Tourists:**The gender composition of tourists surveyed during the year 2025 in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal reveals that, the distribution is more or less equal, where a slight tilt of the curve is towards female as female tourists are 2 percent more than that of male tourists (Fig.1). Here, most of the females are accompanying their husbands and very few are solo traveler.

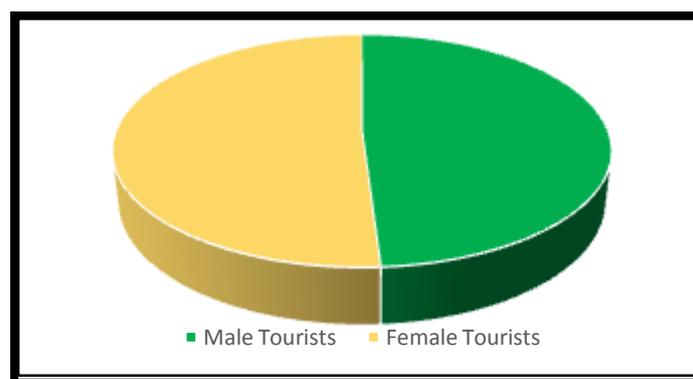


Fig.1: Sex Composition of Tourists (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Age Composition of Tourists:**Since early days, people are travelling from one place to another in search of food, employment, leisure, health, religious merit making and many more. But this travelling was restricted due to many reasons like- age and health condition of the traveler, condition of road and other infrastructural facilities between source and destination etc. Thus, age was always an important criteria for tourists as age-specific tourism is the most significant part of tourism development and management in recent years.

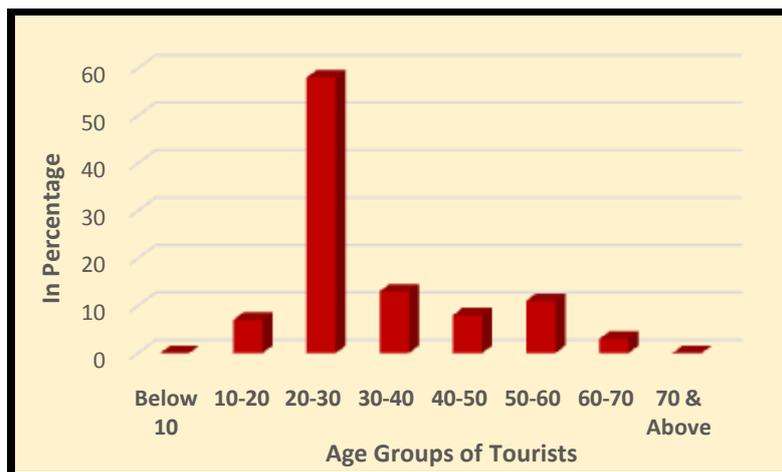


Fig.2: Age Composition of Tourists (Primary Survey, 2025)

The study reveals that, out of total respondents, more than 50 percent falls under the age group of 20-30 (Fig.2). These young tourists are more prone to enjoy every single facility offered by the region, including adventure, paragliding, river rafting etc. Travelling is a part of their identity creation for these young tourists and also to explore new cultures of new places. They enjoy travelling as a means of self-development, excitement and knowledge enhancement (Richards and Wilson, 2003). “More than any other market segment, youth and student travellers are leading with innovation and paving the way for responsible tourism as they take responsibility for the impact of their travel ambitions on climate change” (UNWTO & WYSE, 2011). As per Richards and Wilson (2003), the main motivations of the young travellers to travel are to explore new cultures, excitement and knowledge enhancement. As most of the young travellers are budget travellers, frequent travellers and often spend more days for desired destinations. Thus, they are attracted to homestay tourism for their connection to local cultures as well as for their pocket friendly environment, off-bit locations and challenging destinations.

**Educational Composition of Tourist:** The study reveals that, majority of travelers were highly educated and completed their post-graduation (44 percent), while out of remaining travelers, about 43 percent were completed their graduation degree (Fig.3). Travel in recent days, is regarded as an integral part of post-modern ‘new world order of mobility’ (Clifford, 1997).



Fig.3: Educational Composition of Tourists (Primary Survey, 2025)

### Socio-economic profile of tourists

The section assesses the socio-economic profile of tourists, aligning with the second objective of the study, taking into the variables of occupation, income and place of origin of the tourists.

Category	Category	Employed (%)
Employed	Government	27%
	Private	25%
	Self	17%
	Others (specify)	5%
Unemployed		26%
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>

Table. 1: Occupation of the respondents (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Occupation:** On the basis of above table.1, it can be said that in the distribution of tourist in this area there are employed as well as unemployed people. 26 percent unemployed tourists are there where 74 percent employed people are there as tourists. Among the employed people 27 percent are from government sector and 25 percent come from private sector. So, the place is preferred for many tourists irrespective of their economic status and engagements.

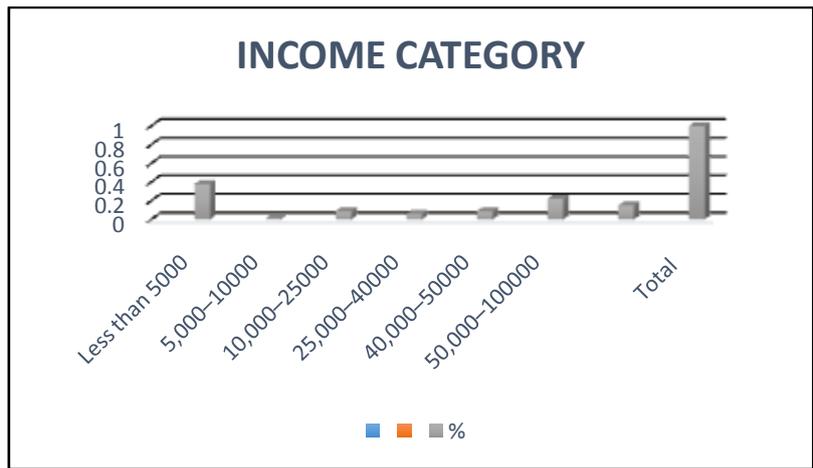


Fig. 4: Income of the respondents (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Income:**The study showed that the income category of the tourists reflected varied results (Fig.4). About 38 percent of the tourists come under the income category of less than Rs 5000/. It implies that income category can't be a hindrance for the tourist here. The possible reason behind this is this kind of travel is economically reasonable. About 22 percent of the tourists are linked with the income category 50,000 – 1,00,000. 15 percent tourists have the income category 1,00,000 and above. So, it can be said that the accommodation and other facilities are not that high cost oriented. Hence the affordability of the facilities are the features of the place.

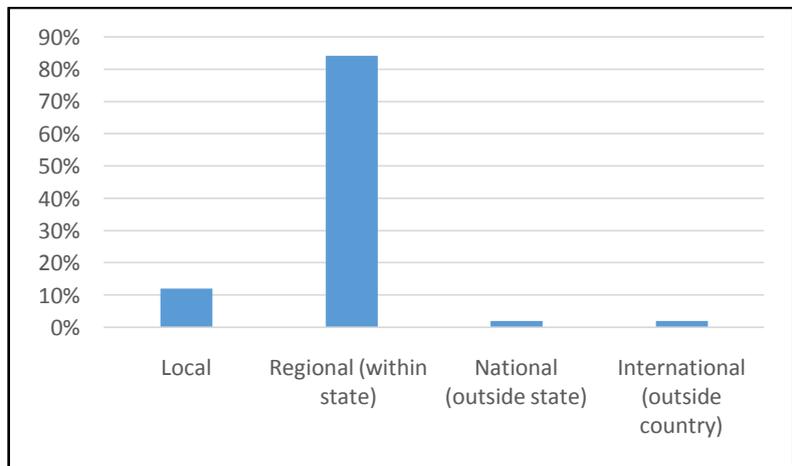


Fig. 5: Place of origin of the respondents (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Place of origin:** The place of origin of the tourists showed a clear skewness in the distribution. Most of the tourists come from the state West Bengal (Fig.5). This regional specificity is reflected in the structure of tourist distribution. 84 percent tourists come from the state of West Bengal; local tourists are also there (12%). Only 2

percent tourists come from international level. Hence it can be said that the tourists from international level are not coming in this region now.

### **Tourist behaviour and homestay tourism**

This section assesses the nature of tourist's behaviour and its interrelationship with homestay tourism in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts of West Bengal.

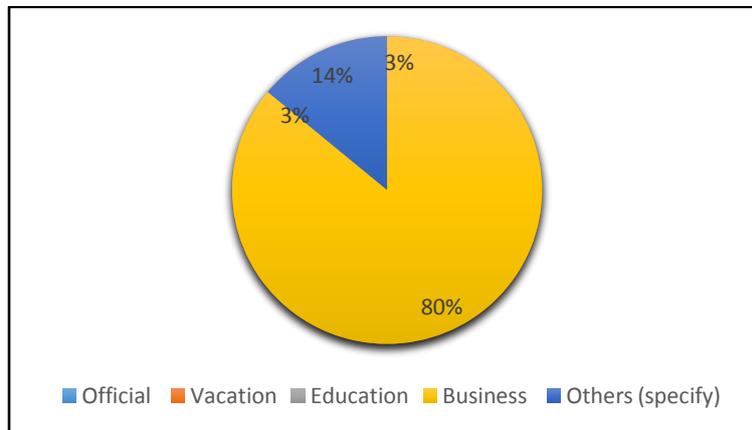


Fig.6: Pie chart showing purpose of visit of tourists in the study area (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Purpose of visit:** The above Fig. 6, reveals that a huge majority of the tourists i.e., 80 percent come for vacation, while 3 percent come for official visits, 3 percent for educational purposes, and 14 percent for other purposes. This indicates that the majority of tourists visits the study area primarily for recreational and vacation purposes, with few instances of others motivations (official, education). Tourist narratives suggest that a short trip to a homestay function as a 'reboot or a silent retreat', facilitating a deeper connection with themselves and their lives with the benefit of minimal disturbance and intervention.

There is a frequent influx of regional tourists to the hills due to the pleasant weather, especially during the summer months. The Darjeeling and Kalimpong hilly areas have been viewed as a vacation place since the time of the British Raj, and was one of the earliest tourist spots. Over the decades, this industry has grown to an extent that it has become the main mode of income of the area. Most local businesses rely on tourism to maintain themselves and support their livelihood.

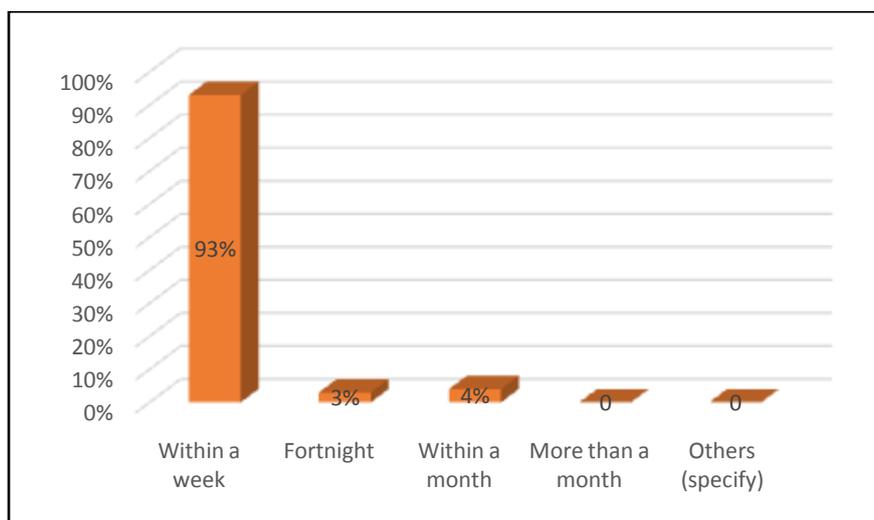


Fig.7: Bar-graph showing period of visits (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Duration of stay:** Data relating to the 'duration of stay' of the tourists interviewed revealed that 93 percent of the tourists come for a week or less, while 4 percent of the tourists come to stay for a month or less, and 3 percent come to stay for 2 weeks or less (Fig.7). The duration of stay varies widely, from one-day visit to a monthly stay. Most tourists plan a stay of 3 -4 days, typically over a weekend. These group of tourists primarily seeks short-term escapism that fits easily into their busy professional schedules, making the trip more accessible and budget friendly. On the contrary, those who travel for longer durations (such as 15 days, 3 weeks, or a

month) are often national (outside state) and international travellers moving between locations to explore culture, language and community. This segment of tourist tends to be less bothered about amenities of homestay, focusing instead on authentic experience and sustainable ethical tourism. Duration of stay is a fundamental aspect of the tourists' travel planning process. Travel destinations must adapt to the time allocated by the tourists for travel, and the economic impact of tourism depends largely on the duration of stay. (Martinez-Garcia and Raya, 2008). This preference lies on the kind of tourism business the destination has. Several factors affect the duration of stay of tourists', like socio-demographic characteristics of the tourists, economic level etc. The socio-environmental impacts that are either positive or negative, of such a duration are then varied depending on the duration of stay of these tourists.

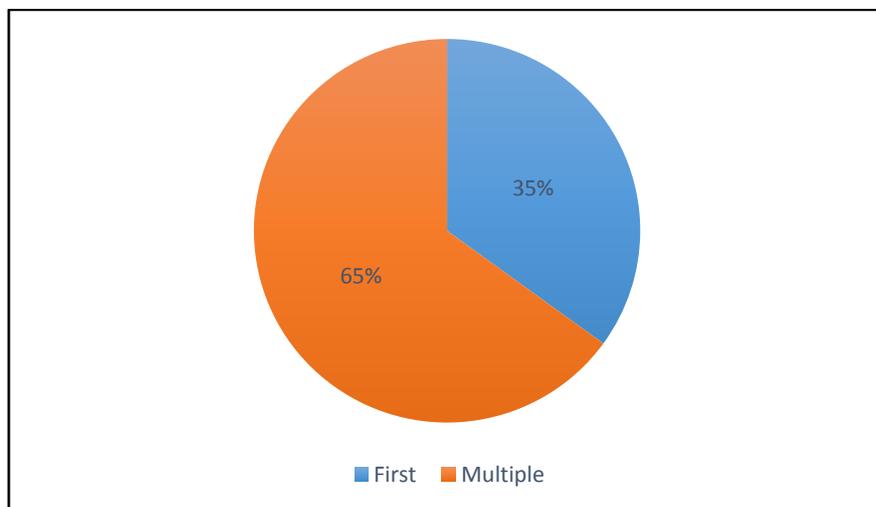


Fig.8: Pie chart showing the frequency of visits to the study area (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Visits:** Fig. 8 displays the data about the tourists' frequency of visit, of which 35 percent of the tourists interviewed were traveling to the area for the first time, while the other half consisting of 65 percent of the tourists interviewed had visited multiple times.

Majority of tourist highlight a trend of repeated visitation. For many tourists, visiting homestays is not a one-time experience but a recurrent phenomenon. Multiple visits allow tourist to explore beyond the traditional tourist sites and focus on deeper engagement. Tourist often return to experience the location during different seasons. Moreover, various activities held during different months, such as local festivals and cultural programmes, attract tourist effectively increasing repeated guest rates, providing an authentic, immersive experience that goes beyond standard sightseeing. Along with this, the emotional and personal connection with the host and local life drives tourist to opt for multiple visits. Destination loyalty is greatly affected by tourist satisfaction (Osman, 2014). Darjeeling and Kalimpong have garnered tourist loyalty gradually with the passing decades, and maintaining tourist loyalty is very important for sustainability of tourism and for sustainability of homestay businesses. However, sustaining tourist loyalty cannot just be held by service and experience of stay but also relates to better infrastructure, ease of accessibility, especially the road conditions in the hills which remain a major concern for all homestay owners.

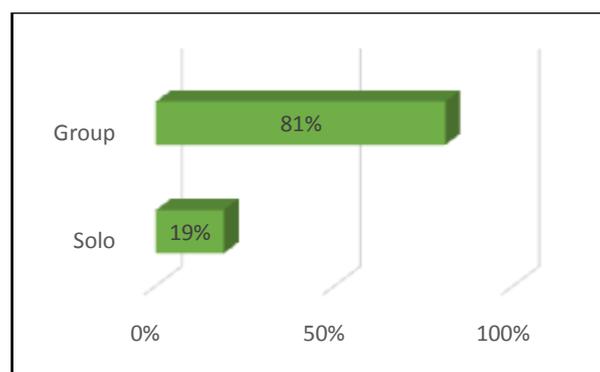


Fig.9: Nature of traveller (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Nature of traveller:** The above Fig.9 shows the data on whether the interviewed tourists were solo or group travellers. Group travellers make up 81 percent of the total tourists interviewed while only 19 percent were solo travellers. Most travellers prefer travelling in groups than solo travelling while visiting a homestay. This preference is primarily rooted in the unique social atmosphere homestays provide. Homestays are typically homely, creating a warm and welcoming environment that facilitates intimate groups to travel together. Spending quality times with one's close circle, low per-person cost, shared experiences, often encourage travellers to opt for group travelling over solo travelling. Usually, homestays are designed to accommodate multiple guests, making it ideal for group travellers. Additionally travelling in groups provide a sense of security and companionship in unfamiliar land, the presence of other member in the group offers mutual support to one another. However, it is also important to point out that in the recent years solo travelling has gained popularity due to social and lifestyle changes (Yang, 2021).

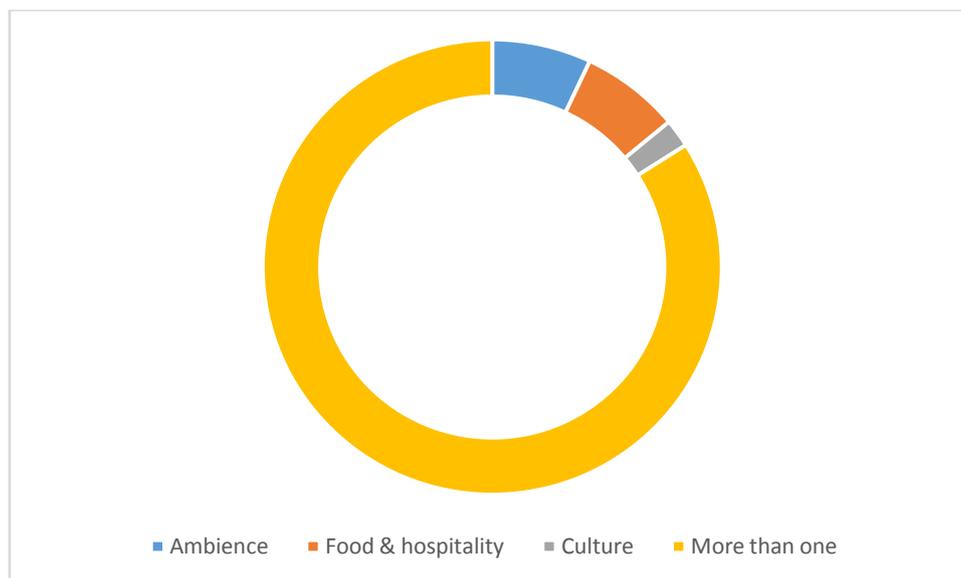


Fig. 10: Reasons for tourists choosing a homestay (Primary Survey, 2025)

**Reason for choosing homestay:** The above Fig. 10., indicates the tourists' 'reason for choosing homestay' where 7 percent chose ambience of the homestay, 7 percent chose food and hospitality, 2 percent chose culture, while 84 percent chose more than one reason.

The data indicate most tourists choose homestays based on multiple factors. Good food and hospitality, the relaxed ambience of the stay and exposure to unique culture with pleasant weather and scenic views foster a deep sense of environmental and cultural immersion. Additionally, the reasonable cost of homestays allows tourists to travel on budget. For them these offbeat locations are often the getaway to adventure activities; while for others it is the nature, weather, homely and peaceful environment of the stay that draw them into this location. Tourist motivation is the main factor through which tourists' satisfaction can be predicted. (Chi & Qu, 2008) Therefore, tourists' motivation of visit must be studied and understood so as to push towards sustainable tourism. Tourists' motivation to visit a destination are different for different places. Specific marketing strategies must be used catered to the targeted market to focus on tourist satisfaction. Tourists in the study area then range from the 'Allocentric' to 'Psychocentric' and also the 'Midcentric' type (Plog, 1974).

While digital platforms, such as websites, social media serve as an initial source of information regarding a homestay, majority of the respondents revealed that word-of-mouth communication remains the predominant influence on the final decision-making process. This phenomenon suggests that prospective visitors tend to prioritise recommendations and suggestions provided directly by individuals who have experienced the homestay atmosphere first hand, favouring personal insight over generalised online content. However, because direct personal recommendation from people is not always readily available, the homestay's digital presence becomes equally essential factor in the tourist's decision- making process.

## VI. Conclusion

Tourist satisfaction relating to any destination generally depends on variety of factors including the number of activities offered by the place, purity of nature, any specific scenic viewpoint, eco-friendly amenities, relation with local cultures, variety of accommodation (ranging from budget homestays to star hotels) and many more. Thus, to assess the service provided by the organisers of any tourist destination, analysis of visitor's satisfaction is highly significant. The repeat visitors generally return to the same place, if the place creates a

good experience to the visitor and the level of satisfaction with their most recent visit is high. Thus, contemporary researchers are continuously engaged in assessing the tourists experience regarding their visit to a destination by analysing their experience according to their socio-demographic, cultural and economic characters. This study reveals that, homestays are coming out with new possibilities to create sustainable tourism in the study region. It helps in developing variety of experiences to the visitors based on their demographic, social, cultural and economic characters and also offers wide scope to expand the local tourism industry in a more vibrant way. The study region also offering diverse facilities and amenities according to the taste of every visitor maintaining the eco-friendly nature of the region. Tourist satisfaction is important in order to maintain continuous tourist influx to the destination, encouraging repeat visits and recommendations to family and friends to come to the place. This would automatically boost up the local economy, where homestays are offering more scope to provide eco-friendly services to visitors and keep the tourism sector sustainable.

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