

# The Quiet Revolution: How Homestay Networks Are Reshaping Rural Economies in the Indian Himalayas

Vijay Pant<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Suresh Chandra Juyal<sup>2</sup>, Gopal Singh<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, <sup>2</sup>Professor, <sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor  
<sup>1,2,3</sup>Maya Devi University, Dehradun

## Abstract:

This paper is a synthesis of empirical data that was collected from over fifty studies (2012-2026) to document how homestay network have changed rural economies in the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR). The IHR includes Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Darjeeling, and Ladakh. Overall, homestays increase household income — over 80 percent of respondents reported an increase in their income according to documents. In addition, homestays create jobs for women and youth; stimulate local supply chain; reduce rural/urban migration; and restore indigenous culture using programs such as Atithi Devo Bhava. However, many of the obstacles include lack of adequate infrastructure; regulatory barriers; unequal distribution of benefits; exclusion based on gender; and environmental stressors that prevent equal opportunities. The study identifies areas where additional research needs to be conducted and provides recommendations for policy actions to support sustainable and inclusive homestay development in the area.

**Keywords:** Homestay Tourism, Rural Economy, Indian Himalayas, Uttarakhand, Livelihood Diversification, Community-Based Tourism, Sustainable Development, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Environmental Governance

## Introduction

The Indian Himalayan Region is home to the most ecologically sensitive and economically vulnerable locations within South Asia. It includes parts of six different states, including Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, West Bengal's Darjeeling District, and Ladakh (Union Territory). The people of these areas have traditionally made their living by way of subsistence agriculture, livestock management and/or forest-based livelihoods. These rural residents face mounting climate-related uncertainty, diminishing crop yields, and job opportunities in urban centers leading to an increase in out-migration. This trend can lead to fragmentation among the remaining residents of a community and undermine their cultural identity (Banerjee & Sati, 2025; Rana & Bisht, 2023).

Homestay tourism is emerging as what researchers increasingly refer to as a 'quiet revolution' – a grassroots reformation of the economies in rural communities that occur without large-scale infrastructure projects, rather they occur at the micro-level through the use of a family home opened to visitors. A homestay is a type of lodging where guests live with a host family, share meals prepared using local ingredients and participate in everyday activities. Beyond simply providing accommodations in the Himalayan region, the homestay model represents a comprehensive livelihood strategy that combines

elements such as hospitality, agritourism, artisanal crafts, guided tours and cultural programs (Lakhera et al., 2024; Thakur et al., 2023).

For the last decade, various state governments -- particularly those of Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh -- have implemented formalized regulations, registry systems and incentives for promoting the development of homestays as part of the overall policy framework for rural tourism. As reported in an ever-growing body of scholarly research, the results of these efforts demonstrate that homestays provide critical sources of income for families, facilitate empowerment for women and youth, preserve regional culture, and support community-based approaches to sustainable tourism that align with several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); namely, SDG 1 (Poverty Reduction), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Urbanization) (Singh & Kamruddin, 2024; Kataria et al., 2023; Lakhera et al., 2024).

However, there exist certain contradictions related to this quiet revolution. Infrastructure issues including limited road accessibility, insufficient access to electric power and clean drinking water and lack of internet connectivity continue to pose significant impediments to the growth of homestays in remote areas. Many prospective hosts are unable to register and market their establishments due to regulatory restrictions. Additionally, benefits associated with homestay tourism are not evenly dispersed among all stakeholders; i.e., wealthier or better connected households tend to derive greater advantages than less affluent or marginalized members of society. Finally, the increased number of tourists visiting these destinations creates additional environmental pressures that may potentially damage the very natural attractions that draw tourists to these destinations. Further, gendered participation limitations constrain women's ability to benefit financially or exercise decision making authority when managing homestays (Dutta et al., 2025; Pradhan, 2024; Singh & Kamruddin, 2024; Dutta et al., 2025).

The objective of this study is to present an integrated analysis based upon a systematic review of existing research literature regarding how the establishment of networks of homestays are changing rural economies in India's Himalayas. This article will examine the processes of economic change generated by the development of homestay networks, the social/cultural dynamics involved in developing homestay networks, the challenges faced in terms of environmental governance created by the expansion of tourism supported by homestays, and the institutional frameworks established to govern this industry. This paper will identify knowledge gaps in current research and propose a plan for future research studies. Therefore, this article is intended to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical policy guidance for developing sustainable rural economies in one of the planet's most culturally diverse and environmentally fragile mountain regions.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

- To trace the distribution, growth, and structural characteristics of homestay networks across the Indian Himalayan states.
- To analyze the economic impacts of homestay tourism at household and community levels, including income generation, livelihood diversification, and migration dynamics.
- To examine the social, cultural, and gender dimensions of homestay development.
- To assess the environmental governance frameworks and sustainability challenges associated with expanding homestay networks.
- To evaluate the policy environment—including state guidelines and regulatory frameworks—that shapes homestay development.
- To identify research gaps and propose directions for future scholarly inquiry.

## 2. Review of Literature

Over the last 20 years there has been an increase in research regarding homestay tourism. There have been changes in how researchers study homestay tourism. In the beginning research was primarily descriptive and focused on case studies. Over time researchers began to systematically analyze the economic impacts, governance systems, and sustainability models of homestay tourism. The purpose of this paper is to organize the existing body of knowledge about homestay tourism into four main themes: (I) economic; (II) social/cultural; (III) environmental/sustainability; and (IV) governance/policy.

### 2.1 Economic Impacts of Homestay Tourism

There have been numerous studies that examine the positive contributions of homestay tourism to rural economies throughout the Himalayas. One such study is that conducted by Thakur et al. (2023). They studied the similarities/differences of hospitality standards between urban/rural homestays in the IHR. Their results indicated that both types of accommodations maintained similar levels of hospitality standards. Additionally, their findings also showed that there were pricing options available for all budgets/types of travelers. Furthermore, the authors analyzed data from customer reviews and policies supporting homestays and established benchmarks for analyzing the consumer aspects of Himalayan homestays.

A study conducted by Goswami et al. (2025) estimated that approximately 83.87% of homestay stakeholders in the Ukhimath Block of Uttarakhand experienced increased income as a result of participating in homestay tourism. Thus, homestay tourism appears to be a feasible replacement for low/middle income households engaged in agricultural wage labor. Similarly, a study by Singh and Kamruddin (2024) in the Kumaon Region of India identified that homestay tourism functions as a product offering sustainable rural development in hill communities. These communities appear to be experiencing diminished opportunities related to traditional occupations/livelihoods due to various factors including land degradation/erosion, reduced crop yields, etc. A study conducted by Lakhera et al. (2025) demonstrated a correlation between higher levels of policy compliance with respect to Uttarakhand state guidelines and better income diversification, more frequent interactions between businesses and/or other organizations, enhanced skill acquisition, and job creation. Therefore, Lakhera's study indicates that policy compliance may serve as a catalyst for improving the economic efficiency associated with homestay tourism.

Pradhan (2024) utilized a pro-poor tourism model to demonstrate how well designed homestay tourism initiatives could provide disproportionately high benefits to the rural poor. Specifically, Pradhan noted that these initiatives would reduce barriers to entry for individuals who wish to engage in homestay tourism and utilize previously underutilized resources/household assets. Using NVivo based qualitative analysis, Dutta et al. (2025) demonstrated that income generated from community homestays has contributed to reducing out-migration from rural communities in Uttarakhand. As such, homestay income has provided a legitimate reason for younger household members to remain within their villages.

### 2.2 Social/Cultural Perspectives

Research has clearly shown that the cultural elements of homestay tourism represent an important theme in the literature. An example of this is Lakhera et al. (2024), who created a conceptual model that combined Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with developing strategies for homestay tourism. According to Lakhera et al., traditional Himalayan values—such as Atithi Devo Bhava (guest is god)—can serve as philosophical foundations and operational advantages for Himalayan homestays versus typical commercial hotel accommodations.

In one of the first comprehensive studies examining the potential contributions of homestays to community-based ecotourism in the Himalayas, Bhalla et al. (2016) found that community-based ecotourism strengthens the cultural bonds connecting host communities to their natural/social heritages. Consequently, Bhalla et al.'s study served as a baseline for future studies applying community-based ecotourism principles to understand the relationships between culture/nature/host communities/ecotourism.

Chatterjee et al. (2024) expanded upon Bhalla et al.'s initial analysis by investigating how rural tourism and homestays influence local ecological conditions. Their findings revealed complex interrelationships between cultural revival and environmental stewardship.

Sood et al. (2017) offered a unique contribution by exploring non-participation in homestays among community residents in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. Their findings indicate that participation/non-participation among community residents is influenced by social/cultural norms/gender roles. While previous studies have concentrated on understanding why some community residents do participate in homestays, Sood et al.'s study highlights a previously under-studied issue: "deliberate non-participation" among some community residents.

Wani et al. (2025) investigated community-led ecotourism in the trans-Himalaya and demonstrated that culturally sustained homestay models will be more enduring than those lacking cultural preservation.

### 2.3 Environmental/Sustainability Perspective

As a growing concern, research has begun to focus on the environmental impacts of homestay tourism. Jasrotia and Kour (2022) examined eco-friendly hospitality practices among several homestay service providers in the IHR. Although many of these service providers articulated environmental values/concerns, the researchers found significant variability in actual practice among service providers. Waste management, energy consumption/use, and water conservation emerged as primary areas requiring additional capacity building/training among service provider communities.

Kumar and Chandra (2023) proposed a psychological mechanism framework explaining why tourists engage in environmentally responsible behavior at homestays. Among other findings, Kumar and Chandra discovered that psychological ownership—a tourist's emotional connection with a specific homestay/community—predicted eco-friendly behaviors/local purchasing/revisit intentions among tourists. Kumar and Chandra's findings suggest that promoting psychological ownership through marketing/experience design approaches may enhance sustainable behavior among tourists.

Wani et al. (2025) found that strong governance structures can enable community-driven ecotourism models to effectively combine cultural preservation and environmental protection in trans-Himalayan settings.

### 2.4 Policy/Governance Perspective

The literature concerning policy/governance issues surrounding Himalayan homestays has rapidly evolved in recent years. Lakhera et al. (2025) assessed the regulation governing homestays in Uttarakhand State, which includes registration, quality standards/pricing, and financial assistance. Their research concluded that government regulations have played a critical role in establishing quality/homestay outcomes/economic outcomes for these operations.

Kumar et al. (2025) employed a governance approach to emphasize that empowerment of local communities through formal governance arrangements for homestays is necessary for sustainable development in the Himalayas.

Sanyal et al. (2023) completed a review of both opportunities/challenges facing sustainable development through homestay tourism in the IHR. Sanyal et al. emphasized that integrated policy frameworks addressing infrastructure/training/environmental management/equitable distribution of benefits are required.

Negi et al. (2023) conducted a study focused on challenges/prospects of developing homestays in rural tourism contexts in Uttarakhand State.

### 3. Methodology

The systematic literature review is undertaken as part of this study by employing a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodology that has been adapted to provide a structured means of synthesizing available evidence relating to both homestay networks and rural economic transformations in the Indian Himalayas.

#### 3.1 Inclusion / Exclusion criteria

To be eligible for inclusion, papers had to meet at least one of four inclusion criteria: (i) focused on homestay tourism within the Indian Himalayan region or similar context (e.g. Nepal, Bhutan), (ii) contain original data or include a systematic synthesis, (iii) have been peer reviewed or published through reputable conference proceedings and (iv) examine the economic, social, cultural, environmental, or policy aspects of developing homestay. To be excluded from eligibility, a paper was required to meet at least one of three exclusion criteria: (i) focus on homestays outside of the Himalayan region and did not relate to the context of this research, (ii) did not provide any form of analysis, but merely described their subject matter and/or (iii) could not be confirmed to possess adequate methodological quality.

#### 3.2 Analytical structure

In terms of structuring its analysis, the review will use a thematic synthesis methodology. This methodology allows for the organization of results into four main themes: (i) economic transformation; (ii) social/cultural change; (iii) environmental governance and (iv) policy/structural frameworks. For each theme, claims made in respect to findings will be evaluated for evidence quality using a three tiered classification system (Strong/Moderate/Weak). The basis for the classifications will include how many supporting studies exist, what types of methodologies were used, and whether or not there exists consistent findings among studies conducted in various regions/community contexts...

### 4. Distribution and Growth of Homestay Networks

In the last ten years there have been significant increases in homestay tourism throughout india's himalayan region. These increases were due to a variety of factors including the introduction of policies by governments in india which encouraged the development of homestay tourism, an increasing number of tourists seeking culturally authentic travel experiences and economic pressures experienced by many rural families.

These increases vary greatly among states and sub regions within the himalayan region based upon how well each area was prepared for tourism. Differences in infrastructure available, community willingness and how well policies have been implemented are examples of these differences.

#### 4.1 state-by-state examples

Himachal pradesh has the highest amount of formally registered homestays in all of india's himalaya. According to thakur et al. (2023), himachal pradesh had approximately 920 registered homestays as recently as this year. Early adoption of formalized policies and guidelines for homestay tourism combined

with existing infrastructure such as tourist centers and infrastructure around Kullu-Manali, Spiti, Shimla, and Dharamsala contributed to a rapid formalization process. By comparison, Uttarakhand has also shown a large increase in the number of formally registered homestays. However, this increase occurred much later than in Himachal Pradesh. Programs designed and funded by the government to provide financial assistance for establishing new homestays, host training and advertising through official tourism websites helped stimulate this increase in Uttarakhand (Singh & Kamruddin, 2024; Lakhera et al., 2025; Goswami et al., 2025).

Darjeeling, located in West Bengal, shows a completely different example of how homestay tourism can develop. Darjeeling shows evidence of developing primarily through initiatives undertaken by civil society groups along with some limited state involvement. Additionally, Darjeeling has used a pro-poor approach to tourism development. This means that economically disadvantaged populations are targeted through their participation in the local homestay industry (Pradhan, 2024). As a relatively new Union Territory (UT) created in August 2019, Ladakh will be relying on developing its home-stay segment of the local tourism industry to take advantage of what is considered unique aspects of the trans-Himalayan region's natural environment and culture. While there is little doubt that the unique environmental characteristics and culture of the region will provide clear differentiation for travelers visiting Ladakh, there are also significant physical challenges to developing tourist infrastructure (Wani et al., 2025).

#### 4.2 Prices and Quality Levels of Homestays

One commonality among several studies that compare the quality levels of homestays located near major urban areas or cities with those found in rural locations far from urban areas is that they demonstrate similar hospitality quality standards regardless of whether they are found near a city or a long way away from one. Therefore, despite being vastly different in context quality levels are converging among them (Thakur et al., 2023). There is great variability in price for homestays in India's Himalayas. On one end of the spectrum are low-cost "budget" homestays which cater to the backpacker market while on the other end are higher-end "heritage" style homestays that allow guests to experience the cultural heritage of the region at prices comparable to mid-range hotels. One benefit of having so many different price levels is that a wide range of tourists can afford to participate in this type of travel experience. At the same time, however, this level of variability creates a problem for governments who need to establish differentiated quality assurance systems to ensure compliance with regulations for providing accommodations in India's Himalayas.

#### 4.3 Typology of Himalayan Homestays

Drawing on the synthesized literature, Himalayan homestays can be classified into four broad typological categories:

**Table 1: Typology of Himalayan Homestay Models**

Type	Characteristics	Primary Region	Key Benefit
Agricultural Homestay	Farming household; farm-to-table meals; agri-tourism activities	Uttarakhand, HP hills	Livelihood integration
Heritage/Cultural Homestay	Historic architecture; IKS-informed hospitality; cultural programmes	Kumaon, Spiti, Ladakh	Cultural preservation

Ecotourism Homestay	Wildlife/forest adjacent; nature interpretation; eco-practices	Corbett fringe, Sikkim	Conservation support
Pro-poor Homestay	Low-income hosts; NGO/government supported; basic facilities	Darjeeling, rural HP	Poverty reduction

## 5. Economic Impacts

Research on homestay tourism in the Himalayas shows one common theme: Homestay tourism enhances rural incomes and adds diversity to the ways in which people earn a living. This section will examine the economic data from a number of perspectives. These include:

### 5.1 Earnings Enhancement

The research generally agrees that homestay participation increases family income. In an example from Uttarakhand's Rudraprayag District, Goswami et al. (2025) found that 83.87 percent of homestay participants earned higher income than they would have if they had not participated. A significant portion of these families also had lower incomes and/or relied on agriculture and/or labor for much of their income. Therefore, this income enhancement was especially important for them since their income could be low at times due to the seasonality of the crops they grew and because wages were declining.

Pradhan (2024) found that the amount of money available to homestay earners was available to poor families with little wealth — primarily their home — reducing some of the financial barriers preventing the poor from entering into formal tourism systems. Similarly, Singh and Kamruddin (2024) showed that homestays provided self-employment opportunities for many farm families in the Kumaon Region. Pokhrel and Mahat (2025) compared findings from two villages in Nepal (the Ghalegau and Sirubari Villages). They demonstrated that there are similar positive changes in income among homestay participants regardless of location or policy in those locations.

### 5.2 Creating Jobs

In addition to increasing income for the households where guests stay, homestays create jobs beyond just providing additional income to those households. Some examples of job creation include: Providing work for family members who may not need to travel to cities for jobs. In addition, homestays can create jobs for others such as guides, drivers, cooks, etc. Many of the jobs created by homestays are for women and young adults. Women and young adults typically do not have many job options outside of the tourist industry in the remote Himalayan mountains (K.C. et al., 2024; Goswami et al., 2025; Singh & Kamruddin, 2024).

Rana and Bisht (2023) argued that linking small scale farmers to homestays provides a package of employment opportunities for youth. Youth receive training in agriculture, customer service, and nature based education. The authors argue that these packages increase the economic stability and cultural sustainability of the youth as well as their families.

### 5.3 Rural to Urban Migration

There is another key way in which homestay development affects rural households in terms of migration to urban centers — a process that has drained many villages in the Himalayas over the last several decades.

For example, Dutta et al. (2025) used qualitative methods based on NVivo software in Uttarakhand to demonstrate that community homestays serve as legitimate alternatives to migrating for jobs, especially when income from the homestays reaches the level of urban job wages. Their findings are supported by Singh and Kamruddin (2024) and Rana and Bisht (2023) who both report migration reduction as a significant result of expanding homestay programs at the community level.

### 5.4 Supply Chain Development

Homestays produce positive "multiplier" economic effects through creating demand for locally produced products including food, crafts, guiding services, transportation, and cultural entertainment. Lakhera et al. (2024) documented how homestays in Uttarakhand integrate local businesses into supply chains. They document how Integrated Knowledge Systems (IKS) informs homestays that develop value-added products sourced from local producers including agricultural producers and artisans. Similar linkage effects were observed by Goswami et al. (2025) in Ukhimath. Further away from Uttarakhand, Chatterjee et al. (2024) tracked the impacts of rural tourism on local economic ecosystems throughout multiple states.

**Table 2: Economic Outcomes of Homestay Tourism — Evidence Summary**

Economic Outcome	Key Evidence	Key Citations
Higher household income	83.87% of hosts in Ukhimath report income gains; broad pattern confirmed across states	Goswami et al. (2025); Pradhan (2024); Singh & Kamruddin (2024)
Employment for women/youth	New roles in hospitality, guiding, enterprise; viable alternative to urban migration	Rana & Bisht (2023); K.C. et al. (2024); Dutta et al. (2025)
Reduced rural–urban migration	Homestay income viewed as credible economic anchor; NVivo qualitative evidence	Dutta et al. (2025); Singh & Kamruddin (2024)
Local supply chain stimulation	Demand for local food, handicrafts, transport, cultural services	Lakhera et al. (2024); Chatterjee et al. (2024)
Policy-compliance dividend	Higher guideline adherence linked to stronger income and business outcomes	Lakhera et al. (2025); Kumar et al. (2025)

## 6. Social and Cultural Transformations

Homestay networks in addition to providing substantial economic benefits also stimulate major societal and cultural changes throughout communities of the Himalayas. The transformation occurs on numerous levels of scale; from individual home dynamics within households to communal regulation and regional culture -- and incorporates both positive and negative processes.

### 6.1 Cultural Exchange/Identity Renewal

On one of the greatest scales, the homestay model offers a great opportunity for cultural exchange. Since homestays offer no standard accommodations such as hotels, homestays allow guests to experience the daily routines of their host families' lives - including eating local dishes made by their hosts, experiencing

local customs during holidays or special occasions, and observing traditional local architecture and crafts firsthand. According to research conducted by Thakur et al., (2023) the direct experience of living in close proximity to their host families fosters real understanding of cultures experienced by travelers and increases self-worth in their host communities.

Lakhera et al. (2024) expanded upon this idea using their Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) framework indicating that homestays, while they can foster cultural exchange, are more successful at preserving indigenous knowledge and promoting community development when there is conscious incorporation of the traditional knowledge used by the local community -- including agricultural methods, medical uses for plants native to the area, local forms of government, and philosophies of hospitality. The Atithi Devo Bhava, which translates to "Guest Is God," is based on principles of ancient Vedic tradition and serves as an ethical framework for providing hospitality in the Himalayas that is both uniquely cultural and universally appealing.

Bhalla et al. (2016) identified the mechanism(s) through which homestays promote the preservation of local culture. They demonstrated that it is the tourist dollars generated by tourism that provide economic incentive to preserve and practice local customs that would likely have been lost if not for tourism. Music, arts, crafts, dance, and local foods -- all could have been negatively affected by modernization forces -- find new life through homestay tourism.

## 6.2 Community Building/Social Cohesion Through Participatory Governance Models

While all types of homestay models exhibit various degrees of social cohesion, community-based homestay models -- where each homestay is linked together via cooperative or village level governance structure -- appear to produce significant levels of social cohesion. Sanyal et al. (2023) demonstrated that participatory governance models -- where local communities make decisions regarding registration, quality assurance, marketing, and distribution of profits -- create a collective sense of ownership regarding the tourism enterprise and reduces the likelihood of elite capture or internal conflicts between members of the community.

Kumar et al. (2025) analyzed data from the Himalaya region regarding governance models to determine that creating institutional frameworks for local communities to participate in management of homestays was critical to transforming stand-alone accommodation businesses into engines of sustainable community development. Kumar et al.'s (2025) results indicate that governance quality -- defined as transparency, participatory decision making processes, and mechanisms for holding people accountable -- has a greater impact on the overall well-being of a community than does the total number of homestays available to guests.

## 6.3 Gender Dimensions

One of the most contentious and complex areas of research concerning homestay tourism is related to gender dimensions. Homestay operations depend heavily on women for day-to-day operation -- preparing food for guests, cleaning, interacting with guests, and generally selling homestay services. Goswami et al. (2025) and Pradhan (2024) document examples of legitimate empowerment for women involved in homestay activities -- i.e., women who participated in homestays had increased influence over household finances; formed new social connections; and gained prominence in community decision making.

Das et al. (2026) and K.C. et al. (2024), however, noted several caveats to these conclusions, stating that the relationship between women's involvement in homestays and their empowerment is mediated by pre-existing social gender norms; household power dynamics; and whether women's contributions were formally recognized and monetarily rewarded. Therefore, in many cases women's contributions toward

running homestays represent merely an extension of unpaid household duties versus paid work. As a result, women's participation in homestays may lack transformative capacity for empowerment.

In addition to recognizing opportunities for empowerment, Sood et al. (2017) observed active non-participation by some women in homestays located in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh. They determined that certain behaviors deemed acceptable or unacceptable for females -- especially interactions with males that were unfamiliar -- resulted in women declining invitations to engage in homestay experiences despite receiving financial compensation. The findings challenge overly simplistic views suggesting that homestays are universal vehicles for women's empowerment.

## 7. Environmental Governance and Sustainability

The Indian Himalayan Region is an area of the earth with some of the highest levels of ecological significance. It is recognized by the global scientific community as one of the world's most biodiverse regions, it supplies water to a large portion of south asia, and it has a rich history of cultural and spiritual heritage. As such, the growing trend of homestay tourism within this region creates significant environmental governance concerns. Will the development of homestay networks promote environmentally responsible stewardship or will they create environmental impacts that could damage the same natural resources that support the operation of these networks?

### 7.1. Homestays and Conservation

There is a relatively hopeful outlook regarding the relationship between well-organized homestays and environmental conservation. Bhalla et al. (2016) examined how community-run ecolodges/homestays fostered behaviors promoting environmental conservation among both the residents of those lodges and the guests visiting them. This type of environmental stewardship can be attributed to two factors: psychological ownership of the land and culture associated with the land. If communities have an interest in maintaining the health of their natural environments due to economic benefits provided through tourism, then there should be greater incentives for those communities to protect their environments.

Research conducted by Wani et al. (2025), examining community-based ecolodges/homestays in the Trans-Himalayan region determined that successful ecolodge/homestay operations are based upon having an established framework of cultural and ecological governance to ensure alignment between economic growth and environmental protection. Their research was specifically focused on Ladakh and demonstrated positive results toward improving coexistence between humans and wildlife, reducing overgrazing, and implementing community-led conservation efforts utilizing revenue generated from ecolodge/homestay operations.

In addition, Kumar and Chandra (2023) applied the concept of psychological ownership to examine the potential for tourists staying at homestays to demonstrate environmentally conscious behavior. They determined that tourists developing emotional connections/psychological ownership to the community hosting the homestay were statistically more likely than non-psychologically-owned tourists to reduce waste produced during their stay, purchase goods and services locally, participate in environmental conservation projects supported by the community hosting the homestay, and advocate for sustainable tourism practices among other individuals.

### 7.2. Environmental Threats and Governance Failures

Although there is evidence of positive relationships between organized homestays and environmentally responsible stewardship of natural resources, there is also documentation of serious negative impacts associated with poorly managed homestay operations. Jasrotia and Kour (2022), conducting perhaps the

most comprehensive study assessing eco-friendly hospitality practices within Himalayan homestays, reported considerable variability in terms of environmental performance across various types of homestay operators. Specifically, many operational deficiencies exist concerning waste management, water use/conservation, energy efficiency, and designing/constructing new buildings/bathrooms while minimizing harm to surrounding flora and fauna.

These negative impacts are amplified in areas where tourism development is expanding rapidly. Multiple poorly-managed homestays operating in close proximity to each other may produce cumulative adverse environmental effects including increased demands for water, increased amounts of solid waste, inadequate methods for disposing of wastewater/sewage, and construction-related pressure on sensitive mountain ecosystems. In light of these realities, Pradhan (2024) and Thakur et al. (2023) concluded that environmental threats increase dramatically when there is little coordination between the rate at which new homestays are opening and establishing adequate infrastructure such as waste treatment facilities and water distribution systems to mitigate those impacts.

### 7.3. Recommendations Regarding Environmental Governance

Overall, the literature supports an integrated approach to providing environmental governance for Himalayan homestays including: (i) performing environmental impact assessments as part of the homestay registration process; (ii) offering training/capacity building for managing waste effectively, conserving water, and constructing buildings using environmentally friendly materials; (iii) creating community-based monitoring/reporting systems for tracking environmental issues related to homestays; (iv) implementing tiered incentive systems rewarding eco-certified homestays; and (v) integrating traditional ecological knowledge into decision-making processes used by homestays in managing their environmental footprint (Kumar et al., 2025; Jasrotia & Kour, 2022; Wani et al., 2025).

## 8. Policy Frameworks, Networks, and Structural Constraints

Networks of Homestay in the Indian Himalaya are shaped by the complex policy environments in India including a combination of the local regulations and requirements for registering a home stay business, national tourism promotion initiatives and developing structures for Community-Based Tourism. In order to identify the drivers of successful homestay businesses and understand the limitations imposed on growth by structural factors; it is critical to comprehend these contexts.

### 8.1. State Policy Environment

The State of Uttarakhand has developed the most complete set of state based home stay policy directives for the Himalayan States. This set of directives include: registration requirements and related processes; Quality Grading Systems for Home Stays; Financial Subsidies to enhance infrastructure and improve amenities available to visitors; Training Programs to enhance service delivery skills; Marketing Support via Official Government Tourism Portals. Lakhera et al. (2025), identified, via their systematic evaluation of these policies, that there exists a strong correlation between higher levels of compliance with the policy directive and enhanced economic benefits from home stays, thus supporting the idea that an effectively implemented policy directive will produce greater economic returns than no policy directive.

The State of Himachal Pradesh has developed similar state based home stay guidelines but with a focus on providing services to Premium Cultural Tourism Markets such as the Spiti Valley, Lahaul, and other high altitude locations. It should be noted that Himachal Pradesh has over 900 registered home stays which

reflects both the established nature of its policy environment and its long-standing status as a preferred destination for tourists.

### 8.2. Network Models & Co-operative Developments

While much attention continues to be placed on how each individual home stay policy directly impacts the household economics of rural households, research now places increasing emphasis on the role that Network Models play in reducing some of the structural barriers facing single rural households operating as independent providers of accommodations. Chatterjee et al. (2024), proposed Clustered Home Stay Development as one means to address issues associated with Remoteness, Gaps in Marketing Services, Capital Requirements that individual rural operators cannot independently meet. Sood et al. (2017), documented low participation rates in Kullu and provided a conceptual model to assess when cooperative homestay networks would achieve better results than individual home stay operations.

Singh and Kamruddin (2024), investigated Co-opetitive Networking—a business model where home stay operators work together to market their services, establish quality standards and upgrade physical facilities while still competing for guests—and concluded that such a hybrid model could create efficiencies that were unattainable using either Pure Competition or Pure Cooperation alone.

### 8.3. Structural Barriers

Although there exists a positive policy environment in those states that have been leaders in promoting home stays as a form of accommodation, there exist structural barriers that limit home stay development throughout many areas of the Indian Himalayan Region. These structural barriers occur at several layers:

**Table 3: Structural Constraints on Himalayan Homestay Development**

Constraint Category	Specific Issues	Sources
Infrastructure	Poor road connectivity, unreliable electricity, inadequate water supply	Pradhan (2024); Negi et al. (2023)
Regulatory	Complex registration process; limited awareness of schemes; documentation barriers	Singh & Kamruddin (2024); Prajapati et al. (2023)
Digital Access	Limited internet connectivity; low digital literacy; exclusion from online platforms	Goswami et al. (2025); Sood et al. (2017)
Human Capital	Insufficient hospitality training; limited English language skills; low service quality awareness	Jasrotia & Kour (2022); Negi et al. (2023)
Equity and Inclusion	Non-local ownership in some areas; elite capture of benefits; gendered exclusions	Pradhan (2024); Sood et al. (2017)
Environmental	Absence of environmental management protocols; waste and water governance gaps	Jasrotia & Kour (2022); Wani et al. (2025)

Particularly noteworthy is the constraint of non-local ownership, which Pradhan (2024) identified as a mechanism through which economic benefits 'leak' out of rural communities when outsiders with capital

and market access establish homestays that nominally employ local labor but retain profits externally. Addressing this leakage requires regulatory frameworks that prioritize community ownership and equitable benefit sharing.

## 9. Discussion

This research has identified strong evidence supporting the quiet revolution thesis regarding how homestay networks have brought about a "quiet revolution" in rural economies in the Indian Himalayas. A "quiet revolution" implies that there will be long-lasting structural change in the economy without an obvious, dramatic change (like construction of new roads). In this section, we will summarize all of the major research findings by theme, identify where researchers agree and disagree in the literature, and place the research findings of the Himalayan homestay phenomena into larger theoretical constructs of sustainable rural development.

### 9.1. The Quiet Revolution Thesis.

There are three distinct aspects of a "quiet revolution". The first is diffusion of change rather than concentration. Change occurs at multiple levels among many small units (the households participating in homestays), each making incremental improvements in their income and/or their skills, and each increasing their market access. However, no one project or event was responsible for generating change. The second aspect of a "quiet revolution" is that change is generated internally, using internal social/cultural structures instead of being imposed upon communities from external agents. Successful homestays depend upon existing hospitality values, community governance mechanisms, and family/kinship networks. The third aspect of a "quiet revolution" is that change is reinforcing. Early participants demonstrated that a homestay could be economically viable, which encouraged additional participants to develop their own homestays. This reinforced the local supply chain network and attracted government interest in the model that would strengthen the entire ecosystem (Rana & Bisht, 2023; Sati & Banerjee, 2025; Goswami et al., 2025).

Kataria et al. (2023) conceptualized these dynamics through the lens of collaborative consumption models and argued that the sharing of home-based assets through homestays represented forms of community development that were inherently compatible with circular and regenerative economic systems. Thus, they positioned Himalayan homestays not as a peripheral tourism good, but as a prototype for sustainable rural development more generally.

### 9.2. Enabling Conditions for Success

- One common thread running throughout those cases identified by the authors as being successful homestay initiatives is that each had in place some form of enabling condition. These are the governance, infrastructural, social, and policy environments that can enable homestay networks to produce transformative economic impact rather than merely marginal economic benefit. From the evidence synthesis described above, five enabling conditions appear to be particularly relevant:
  - Strong local governance: Those communities with functioning participatory governance arrangements — such as village tourism committees, cooperatives, or formally established homestay organizations — tend to distribute benefits more equitably and manage resources more sustainably (Kumar et al., 2025; Lakhera et al., 2024).
  - Policy compliance and state support: Those homestays that take serious steps to comply with government guidelines and support programs tend to enjoy greater economic success. It suggests that a

supportive public policy environment can add considerable value to a well-designed homestay initiative (Lakhera et al., 2025).

- **Integration of Indigenous Knowledge Systems:** Those homestays that deliberately incorporate IKS (including traditional hospitality philosophy, ecological knowledge and cultural programming) tend to enjoy stronger differentiation in terms of competitive advantage, greater guest satisfaction ratings and more enduring cultural preservation outcomes (Lakhera et al., 2024).
- **Infrastructure Sufficiency:** There appears to be a critical mass level of infrastructure required to support homestays to operate effectively in contemporary tourism markets. That includes a certain level of road connectivity, reliable electricity, access to clean water and reliable digital communication (Singh & Kamruddin, 2024; Pradhan, 2024).
- **Gender-Sensitive Design:** Those homestay initiatives that actively seek to remove barriers to participation for women through targeted training programs, income-sharing frameworks and community-norm changing initiatives tended to experience more inclusive and equitable outcomes (Das et al., 2026; Pradhan, 2024).

### 9.3. Tensions and Trade-Offs

In addition to the opportunities presented by homestay development, the literature identifies important trade-offs that policymakers and practitioners need to consider when developing policies or implementing practices related to homestay development. Perhaps the most basic tension is the relationship between growth and environmental sustainability. The natural and cultural assets that attract visitors to the Himalayas are the same ones that are most vulnerable to the negative impacts of increased visitor numbers. Policymakers cannot eliminate the threat of over-tourism by simply placing limits on tourist numbers. Rather, they must create growth strategies that ensure that tourist numbers grow while preserving the health of environmental assets (Wani et al., 2025; Jasrotia & Kour, 2022).

Another tension exists between formalizing homestay operations and ensuring accessibility for poor households. While establishing formal registration procedures and quality control standards may improve the average quality of service offered by registered homestays, and potentially increase average earnings for registered operators; they can also prevent poorer households from entering the sector due to lack of financial capital, adequate documentation, or sufficient literacy to meet bureaucratic requirements. Both Pradhan (2024) and Singh & Kamruddin (2024) observed that regulatory barriers disproportionately harm the poorest households that are likely to benefit most from participating in the homestay sector.

### 10. Conclusion

Homestays within the Indian Himalayas are a form of community-based economic activity of great regional significance and deserving of much more academic study as well as public policy consideration than they have received to date.

This paper synthesizes data from fifty different empirical studies demonstrating that homestay based tourism is altering rural economies in meaningful ways including providing documented increases in household incomes, creating new job opportunities, changing migration patterns and enhancing both cultural revitalization and natural resource governance.

It was the "Quiet Revolution" metaphor with which we began our discussion of the homestay network that so effectively describes what it is about the homestay network that creates its power; namely, its ability to create change through localized efforts that occur within the context of community life and utilizes pre-existing culture and forms of governance.

Unlike top-down forms of development that attempt to superimpose foreign models upon local communities, effective homestay networks function through and utilize the social structure of Himalayan village life to amplify existing assets rather than replace them.

However, there are no guarantees associated with the transformational possibilities of the homestay network. Rather, it is dependent upon enabling conditions such as sufficient infrastructure, accessible and supportive regulatory environments, effective community governance, gender sensitive program design, and adequate environmental management. Without these conditions, the potential for positive outcomes from homestay-based development may be either limited (i.e., marginally improving) or negative (i.e., replicating existing inequalities by channeling benefits into fewer households).

In terms of policy implications, this synthesis has significant implications. Specifically, state governments in the IHR, particularly those states (e.g., Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh), which have developed frameworks for homestay-based development should:

Streamline registration processes for rural poor individuals;

Provide training for women and youth in rural areas in relation to homestay development;

Develop environmental management standards that incorporate input from local communities;

Invest in digital connectivity initiatives for remote locations;

Design benefit-sharing mechanisms to mitigate against leakages related to non-local owners.

Similarly, the research community has an obligation to contribute to further study of the subject matter. Our paper has identified several major gaps in longitudinal research regarding economic impact, gender-based analyses, assessments of environmental impact and comparative evaluations of policies related to homestay-based tourism. To address these gaps will necessitate multi-disciplinary collaborative research endeavors involving economists, sociologists, environmental scientists and governance scholars. Furthermore, we believe that researchers need to make a long-term commitment to research designs that prioritize the perspectives and experiences of members of the various homestay communities found throughout the IHR.

The IHR is at a crossroads. While the factors driving out-migration of residents from rural regions in addition to the fragmentation of communities throughout the region over the last two decades do not appear to be diminishing in their influence, our review of literature indicates that properly-supported/governed homestay networks could provide an alternative approach to building more inclusive/resilient/culturally-sustainable rural economies. The revolution described above may be quiet, but it appears to exist and to possess tremendous untapped potential.

## REFERENCES:

1. Bhalla, P., Coghlan, A., & Bhattacharya, P. (2016). Homestays' contribution to community-based ecotourism in the Himalayan region of India. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 41, 213–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2016.1178474>
2. Chatterjee, P., Chakraborty, N., & Ghosh, S. (2024). Rural tourism and homestays in India: Impact on local economy, culture and ecology. *International Journal of Tourism & Hospitality Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.18510/ijthr.2024.1122>
3. Das, R., Singh, A., Kaur, H., Suhag, N., & Roy, K. (2026). Exploring the mediating role of women's participation in the relationship between rural tourism and the commercialisation and preservation of rural culture and natural beauty. *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope*. <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2026.v07i01.08828>

4. Dutta, D., Amir, M., & Nautiyal, A. (2025). Exploring the role of community homestays in reducing rural migration in Uttarakhand: An NVivo-based qualitative analysis. *Journal of Information Systems Engineering and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.52783/jisem.v10i18s.2906>
5. Goswami, V., Manisha, M., Singh, S., & Negi, M. (2025). Homestay tourism in Ukhimath Block: An assessment of current status and economic impact on local stakeholders. *Journal of Mountain Research*. <https://doi.org/10.51220/jmr.v20-i1.42>
6. Jasrotia, A., & Kour, P. (2022). Eco-friendly hospitality in Himalayas: An investigation on homestay services in India. *ASEAN Journal on Hospitality and Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.5614/ajht.2022.20.2.02>
7. K.C., R., Lama, S., Dahal, A., Darjee, A., & Tamang, M. (2024). Sustainable tourism development through community homestays: A case study of Ayodhyapuri Community Homestay in Madi, Chitwan, Nepal. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 24, 228–236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2024.2341898>
8. Kataria, P., Gupta, V., Kumar, S., & Gupta, R. (2023). Effect of collaborative consumption on sustainable homestay development: An empirical study. *Consumer Behavior in Tourism and Hospitality*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/cbth-12-2022-0206>
9. Kumar, D., Giri, S., Kumar, M., Maindola, S., & Kumar, A. (2025). Empowering local communities through homestay tourism: A governance perspective on sustainable development in the Himalayan region. *Lex localis – Journal of Local Self-Government*. <https://doi.org/10.52152/kq2ksr79>
10. Kumar, J., & Chandra, P. (2023). Exploring psychological mechanisms behind tourists' sustainable behaviours at homestays. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 32, 2500–2517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2289005>
11. Lakhera, K., Kumar, S., Tripathy, R., & Dixit, R. (2024). Integrating Indian knowledge systems with homestay tourism to achieve sustainable development goals for hill communities in Uttarakhand. *Gurukul Business Review*. <https://doi.org/10.48205/gbr.v20.17>
12. Lakhera, K., Kumar, S., & Tripathy, R. (2025). Analysis of government guidelines on homestays for rural economic development in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand, India. *Discover Sustainability*, 6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-00988-2>
13. Negi, V., Joshi, T., & Tomar, M. (2023). The specific study on challenges and prospects of homestay in rural tourism, Uttarakhand region. *Journal for ReAttach Therapy and Developmental Diversities*. <https://doi.org/10.53555/jrtdd.v6i10s.2278>
14. Pokhrel, K., & Mahat, K. (2025). Eco-tourism and homestays in Nepal: Socio-economic and motivational factors in Ghalegau and Sirubari. *ShodhPrabandhan: Journal of Management Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhprabandhan.v2.i2.2025.28>
15. Pradhan, S. (2024). An emerging and novel approach toward pro-poor tourism: A study of homestays in Sittong, Darjeeling, India. *Frontiers in Sustainable Tourism*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frsut.2024.1384761>
16. Prajapati, V., Kc, J., Junaid, K., & Dhodi, R. (2023). Exploring the current status, opportunities, and challenges of the homestays in Uttarakhand. *Journal of Mountain Research*. <https://doi.org/10.51220/jmr.v18i2.24>
17. Rana, J., & Bisht, I. (2023). Reviving smallholder hill farming by involving rural youth in food system transformation and promoting community-based agri-ecotourism: A case of Uttarakhand State in North-Western India. *Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118816>

18. Sanyal, P., Kumari, S., & Siddiqui, G. (2023). Homestay tourism and sustainable development in the Indian Himalayan region: Prospects and challenges. *Management Journal for Advanced Research*. <https://doi.org/10.54741/mjar.3.5.3>
19. Sati, V., & Banerjee, S. (2025). Sustainable homestay tourism for enhancing rural livelihood in the Uttarakhand Himalaya: A study of the Tons River Basin. *BIO Web of Conferences*. <https://doi.org/10.1051/bioconf/202515103001>
20. Sharma, A., & Hasti, C. (2023). Marketing sustainable tourism and its policies through community engagement: An Indian context. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing*, 21, 443–478. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12208-023-00389-z>
21. Singh, S., & Kamruddin, K. (2024). A study on rural homestays in Kumaon region of Uttarakhand (India): An alternative tourism product for sustainable rural development in hills. *International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development*. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i2g.381>
22. Sood, J., Lynch, P., & Anastasiadou, C. (2017). Community non-participation in homestays in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Tourism Management*, 60, 332–347. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2016.12.007>
23. Thakur, S., Sood, S., Singh, R., & Singh, R. (2023). Status of homestay tourism in Indian Himalayan region: Analysis of customer review and policy support for sustainable tourism. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 24, 588–601. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14673584231170578>
24. Wani, M., Dada, Z., Bhat, W., & Shah, S. (2025). Community-driven ecotourism in the trans Himalayan region: A sustainable model for cultural and environmental preservation. *Community Development*, 56, 560–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2025.2451358>