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Homestay tourism is a recently-evolved fast-emerging tourism concept. Our country can be a classical homestay model for the variety of its potentialities - natural grandeur, a plethora of heritages, ethno-cultural richness, ingenious social settings, agreeable hospitality and many more unexplored reserves that are aspirations for experts of tourism and travellers alike.

Homestay tourism is based on three major features namely service, facility and charm. A Homestay is staying in someone’s home as a paying guest for short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by individual family and the local community. Homestay seeks to pull tourists away from grand and teeming urban areas to the rural locality full of splendid natural surroundings, by providing them with clean, comfortable and budget-friendly accommodation and food. Thus, homestay offers the traveller a unique local experience and possibilities of interaction with the host family. It offers the chance to experience new and untapped places and provide alternative source of income to the rural folks. In homestay tourism visitors get a chance to spend time with the family observing their customs, values and culture, which gives them the opportunity to feel the taste of rural life.

Cultural heritage and its geographical structure makes Kumaon one of the most suitable destinations for homestay tourism. In this concept, the environment and culture are both commoditized; market value is created with the demand of visitors. This provides financial reward to the local indigenous community for conservation of the environment and their culture. Under this approach tourism is considered to be a component of development, giving emphasis to explore ways of expanding positive impacts and reducing negative impacts.

Home stay tourism is a major player when it comes to the reduction of rural poverty. It integrates all activities of tourism such as trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, and eco tourism. It is a good source of income as well and increases employment opportunities. It may also provide new markets for local people to sell their products, such as agricultural products, livestock and others.

Tourism must always preserve culture and promote it so as to use local resources and manpower to promote the economy of a place. Hence, there is need to focus on sustainable development of tourism. Homestay tourism will serve as a momentous tool to the development of rural areas in very sphere including the economic, cultural, social and environmental spheres.
A First-of-Its-Kind by Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam

The Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Ltd. has initiated the novel homestay project in the tourism sector to meet the demands of the rapidly growing hospitality industry.

All around the world, from cities to off the beaten path locations, homestays are a type of accommodation that define the phrase ‘home away from home’. In a homestay you book to stay with locals in their homes. They are your ‘hosts’ during your stay.

Staying in a homestay you not only get to visit a destination, you get to really live it too. You see how the locals live their lives – something that is almost impossible to do when staying in other types of accommodation. What make homestays different to other types of accommodation are the hosts. No matter where you’re staying, be it a remote village in Darma valley or the magnificent closeness to the Mount Adi Kailash, you’ll never be in a on your own. Your host will be there during your stay, to welcome you and make it as enjoyable as possible.

Residents of remote villages of Kumaon are encouraged to engage in the tourism sector on professional basis. The visitors are offered a new way of living with the land and people.
Why Home-stay

Home-stay has become tremendously popular among tourists in the last few years.

A home-stay is after all someone's home.

The tourist gets authentic home cooked food.

A home stay lets the tourist come closer to culturally richer experiences.

The tourist doesn’t feel like a loner in a new place.

Living with locals lets the tourist become familiar with a place on an altogether different level.
For last three years, the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam has been offering home-stay services to tourists in some of the remote trekking routes of Kumaon.

We have chosen some of the most charming villages in the remote valleys of Vyans, Darma and Chaundas in the Pithoragarh district of Kumaon for the initial phase of the homestay scheme.

The Vyans valley is one of the most important homes of the Rangs or Shaukas, ethnic people that have inhabited the highest livable altitudes of the Kumaon Himalayas since centuries. The Vyans valley is situated in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand along the river Kali, marking the Indo-Nepal border. To its west is the Johar valley formed by Gori, Kali’s tributary. Johar valley is also home to another branch of the Shaukas. To the east fall the Vyans and Chaudans pattis on the upper and lower reaches of the valley along the Kali river respectively. Along the Dhauli river, another tributary of the Kali that confluences at Tawaghat, to the west is another beautiful valley called Darma. The people of Vyans, Chaudans and Darma together form the Rang or the Shauka community.

From times immemorial, the Himalayan expanse situated to the south of the holy Mount Kailash has been known for its natural splendor and spiritual stimulation. Extensive descriptions of this land are to be found in spiritual classics such as Kailash Khand Mahatmya, Nepal Khand Mahatmya, Uttarakhand Mahatmya and Skand Purana. Falling on the most frequented route to the Kailash-Mansarovar, this region falls in the Dharchula sub-division located in the north-eastern part of the Pithoragarh district. The small town of Dharchula forms the gateway to the land of the Rangs. The uppermost and western valley of Kali river and the valley formed by Kuti river that confluences with Kali at village Gunji together form the Vyans valley.

The land of the Rangs is spread between the altitudes of 2500 feet to 22600 feet in the central Himalayan region of Kumaon. The villages namely Budi, Garbyang, Gunji, Napalchyu, Rongkong, Nabi and Kuti are the summer residences of these people, who for centuries monopolized the Indo-Tibetan trade via this route. The Rangs have their winter settlements in and around Dharchula, with some of them being parts of Nepal falling to the other side of the river Kali.

The Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam organizes the Adi-Kailash pilgrimage-cum-trek every year. The tourists get to come across some of the remotest villages of the country in the Vyans Valley of Pithoragarh District. One of these is Kuti, the last village on the Indian territory.
Kuti – The First Destination

The picturesque Kuti village was taken up by the KMVN as the first location for home-stay. Several old houses were renovated and were handed over to the locals for this purpose.

Managed by the local people, these home-stays have proved to be immensely popular among the tourists, pilgrims and trekkers. The tourists were enthralled by this new experience since it opened several new horizons to them including local cuisine and culture.
The Nabi Home-stay scheme turned out to be a super hit as the tourists unanimously rated their stay in Nabi as the best during the Adi-Kailash trek. The KMVN provided beddings, utensils, cutlery, toilets, bathrooms and other necessary items to the households taking part in the home-stay scheme.

The Nabi village falls adjacent to Kuti and from the year 2017, the home-stay facility was started in this village too. The KMVN managed to generate resources to provide free beddings and other necessary stock to the locals for this purpose, without incurring any government expenses.
The KMVN took up Darma Valley too in the loop. KMVN sent a team of experts to explore the possibilities of beginning the home-stay project. The people of the valley showed keen interest in the home-stay scheme. Encouraged by the response the KMVN decided to adopt some households for the purpose. A team of workers was sent to the Darma valley to do the necessary repair and painting work.

100 sets of beddings and other necessary items of hospitality were distributed to the residents of villages Baling, Dugtu, Nangling and Dantu.

Several major activities are planned for enhancing the future of home-stay in the Darma valley.
Homestay and the Holy Kailash-Mansarovar Yatra

The Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam has been organizing the holy pilgrimage to the sacred Kailash-Mansarovar (situated currently in the China-occupied Tibet) for several decades now. Starting 2018, we are planning to incorporate one homestay in the official itinerary.

After their arrival in Gunji village, the travellers would be provided a day of sightseeing and local exploration in the neighbouring villages of Rongkong and Napalchu. A subsequent homestay at Nabi village would help the travellers grasp the local people, their culture and traditions in a more intimate manner.
Currently, almost a hundred households are officially registered in the three valleys under the homestay scheme. The KMVN has brought several villages of Vyans, Chaundas and Darma valleys under this scheme. This has paved the way for developing a first-of-its-kind Tribal Circuit for tourists in Uttarakhand.

These valleys have been linked completely or partially through motor road in 2017. As a result, the tourist influx has increased in the region. Unfortunately, there are no proper guesthouses or other means of accommodation in these valleys. This is a major problem for the enthusiastic tourists.

The KMVN has brought all the accessible villages of these valleys under the home-stay umbrella for a dual objective:

1. The home-stay scheme would open the doors for opening a new Tribal-circuit tourism in the Darma valley.

2. Trekking and mountaineering can be taken to a new level through this scheme by encouraging more and more trekking enthusiasts to visit the Darma valley that hosts the base-camp of the Panchchuli Glacier.
KMVN's TRIBAL CIRCUIT HOMESTAY ITINERARIES

Chaundas Valley:

Darma Valley:
Dharchula – Baling – Dugtu – Panchachuli Base Camp – Daantu – Nangling – Dharchula (4-days)

Vyans Valley:
Homestay would be provided initially in the Nabi and Kuti villages falling on the Adi-Kailash trek-cum pilgrimage. Tourists would get homestay facilities in the Rongkong village of the Vyans valley from 2018 onwards.

The Sin-La Experience through Darma and Vyans Valleys:

Note: This trek is recommended only for people who are willing to take up extremely physically challenging conditions.
Core Benefits of Home-stay

1. Generation of employment for the local people.
2. Check on migration.
3. Spread of local culture, cuisine and customs.
4. Increase in tourist influx.
5. Awareness for responsible and sustainable tourism.
1. Staying in people’s homes:
You get a chance to mingle with the hosts and their families and share experiences to broaden each other’s horizons. Savouring the local cuisine is always a bonus of course!

2. Exploring the cultural heritage of the region:
One can learn about the traditional ways of living of the people and have close encounters with their rich cultural legacy.

3. Discovering the natural heritage:
The local people are better equipped than most nature and wildlife guides. In their company, you can discover all the secret charms of the place.

4. Adventure and trekking:
All the homestay-villages undertaken by the KMVN fall on important trekking trails. You can visit some of the most unexplored terrains of these villages eg. the Base Camp of the Panchchuli from Dantu or the famous meadow-glacier of Nangling village in the Darma valley.

5. Responsible Tourism:
KMVN wishes to propagate its vision of responsible tourism that incorporates ethical approach towards ecology and the local culture, effective management of garbage and self-sustenance of the local tourism.
The Rang Tribal Museum in Dharchula

The Rang Tribal Museum in Dharchula has been the result of hard work, persistence and cooperation of the people from the Rang tribe of the region. Rang Kalyan Sanstha (R.K.S.) is a leading social organization of the region that has for decades actively worked towards the social-economic and cultural development of people living in harsh natural conditions. This organization has played a pivotal role in bringing the dream of the Rang Tribal Museum into reality.

The Rang Tribal Museum offers an extensive view into the lives, customs and culture of the people residing in the region comprising the Vyans, Darma and Chaundas valleys – the region frequented by trekkers, pilgrims and tourists from India and abroad.

The KMVN has made provisions that a visit to the Rang Tribal Museum is made mandatory for all the tourists participating in its tour-itineraries. This helps the tourists understand the region more deeply and encourages them to behave as responsible visitors.
A Rang would come to the native village every summer and shift to a winter settlement near Dharchula in winters. Most of the Rangs thus have two homes. Technically they are semi-nomads. The upper villages get covered in snow during the winters. All summers they live in their villages and grow one crop. One remarkable thing about their winter homes is that most of them are in Nepal where they not only own land but also have the right of franchise. And they vote in India as well. It definitely is a rare privilege to be able to participate in forming the governments of two countries. We were told later that some Rangs during good old days used to hold land and property in Tibet as well. The loss of their homeland is certainly a huge tragedy for all the Tibetans, but travelling in these valleys we realize that Rangs have also suffered because of this. They used to monopolize the Indo-Tibet trade from this area and Rangs were known all through Kumaon as those little-eyed gypsies, who appeared in winters travelling with herds of goats and sheep and selling herbs, spices, wool and most importantly salt. Generations of Kumaonis have been fed on the salt from the Tibetan mines, supplied by them. Before the 1962 war they were immensely prosperous and everyone was in some way or the other associated with trade from Tibet. Old Rangs still have vivid memories of the Tibetan official, called jongpen, coming all the way from Lhasa to collect tax that the Rangs had to pay for doing business in Tibet. All Rang traders had a friend trader in two of the main Tibetan market towns of Taklakot or Gyanima. This friend trader was called Mitra. A strong emotional and economic bond joined generations of these Mitras. The Mitras through an official document, called Gamgya, were obliged to trade with each other only.

A typical marketplace scene in Taklakot market would have various sets of the two Mitra traders dealing secretly, fixing various prices with their fingertips; their hands joined under the cover of a holy cloth. Whenever a new trade relation was established between two parties, a gold or silver coin would be placed in a silver bowl filled with sacred wine as good omen. The two Mitras would then break a holy stone or wood into two pieces and keep one each. Later in case of the absence of one Mitra, his representative could do business showing that holy piece to the Tibetan Mitra. The bitter Sino-Indian relations in the aftermath of the war brought an end to this age-old trade. This came as a shock to the Rangs as their very roots had been shaken and they had to find new means to live off. Soon they were fortunately declared a scheduled tribe by the government. Being inherently hardworking they saw that their only chance was to grab the government jobs for which they got special reservation because of the above enlistment. Today we have Rangs at top official posts in almost all government departments in almost every corner of the country. For a community whose population is limited to several thousand only, it has been a great achievement.
Traditional jewellery of the Rang women

The stunningly pretty traditional dress worn by the Rang women is called Chyung-Bhala. This fabulously feminine attire is complemented by the various gorgeous ornaments. The local name for these ornaments is Lahyarsya. These are donned by all Rang women and girls on all the festive occasions, which are many.

Both silver and gold are used for making these conventional ornaments. Some of the most popularly used ornaments include –

**Bali** – for the head

**Beera and Lakchhyab** – for the ears and nose respectively

**Khongle** – a necklace meant to be worn on the upper part of the neck

**Kanthi** – a long, beaded necklace especially for girls

**Champakali, Chyungch, Chandrahaar, Baldang** – types of necklaces

**Nang-Bahan** – thick bracelets

**Chhyu-Dibra-Rachkunya** – to be worn on the neck and left part of the chest

Of these only Beera and Lakchhyab are traditionally made of gold although new experiments are frequently done these days and it is common for the women to put on gold necklaces as well.
Traditional male attire

The traditional male attire includes a Ranga (a white woolen coat), a byanthlo (a white turban) and a jyujyang (a thin white cloth used as belt). Sometimes the Ranga is decorated with specific silver ornaments.
The story of Jasuli Datal

There also is a statue of Jasuli Datal in Daantu. Jasuli Datal known popularly as Jasuli Buri (Jasuli, the old woman) was a rich and generous woman of Daantu. She lived around 175 years back. All kinds of legends are to be heard about her wealth and generosity. She had no children and this made her life very depressing and cheerless. The most popular version of her story tells us that during the last days of her life she became so desperate with her ample wealth that she decided to drown all that she had, in the Dhauli. As she was about to commit the deed, some rare British official happened to pass by.

He asked her the reason for what she was doing. On coming to know of her plight and desperation, the British official requested her to put the money to better use for the benefit of her own people. It is narrated that several ponies and goats carrying Jasuli Buri’s riches followed the British official, who with that money built dharamshalas for the Shauka traders and pilgrims at several places in Kumaon, Garhwal and even Nepal. Remnants of these dharamshalas are still found. One comes across these lying abandoned next to the roads mainly in Majkhali, Almora and Suyalbari of Kumaon. These dharamshalas are small hut like stone structures with quite a few tiny rooms inside. It saddens one to see these historical monuments in such dilapidated state.
Homestay is here to stay.
Homestay is the future of Tourism.