

Homestay Development in Kumaun: A SWOT Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: The Uttarakhand government is promoting community-based tourism by encouraging homestay development in rural regions through various schemes. Its main objective is to generate employment and check migration. **Purpose:** This study sheds light on the SWOT analysis of mushrooming homestays in the Kumaun region of Uttarakhand. It identifies the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of homestay development and proposes strategies for its sustainable growth. **Methodology:** This paper is exploratory in nature and is based on secondary data collected from government reports, research journals, magazines and newspapers. **Originality/Value:** The present study offers a fresh SWOT assessment of Kumaun homestays following the government's intervention in recent years.

Keywords: Homestays, Tourism, Kumaun, Sustainability, Growth

Introduction

The Government of Uttarakhand has encouraged the growth of homestays by launching two schemes: the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grah Awas Vikas Yojana and Atithi Uttarakhand Grah Awas Yojana in 2018. The former scheme has provisions to provide financial subsidies and bank loans to spur the construction of homestays in remote rural villages. The latter scheme aims to scale up the homestay registration system and accommodation standards in both urban and rural tourist destinations. Further, the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy of 2018 promotes homestay development. Homestay tourism is being promoted by the government to support sustainable tourism, which benefits local residents and protects the environment while satisfying tourists' needs. Homestays are sustainable and appealing tourism products in rural regions, as they offer a win-win proposition for both locals and tourists (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013; Walter et al., 2018) [7]. Beyond tourism, they also promote environmental conservation, improve healthcare, and enhance the socio-economic status of host communities and reduce the financial burden on tourists staying in homestays (Basak et al., 2021) [6].

According to the 2011 Census, approximately 72.14% of the Kumaun population lives in rural areas. Agriculture is the main occupation of the rural population, and despite the increasing trend in tourist footfall in Kumaun, the region has not economically benefited from this growing industry. Rural poverty, migration and village abandonment, often called ghost villages, are common problems. The government's role in promoting homestays is paramount

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in addressing these issues. According to data available on the Uttarakhand Tourism Board Development (UTBD) website, an increasing trend in homestay registration was observed in the Kumaun region between 2017 and 2019. The highest growth was registered in Nainital, where homestay registrations grew from 40 in 2017 to 149 in 2019. Similarly, in Pithoragarh, the increase was from 6 to 141 during the same period. Consistent growth was observed in Almora, Bageshwar and Champawat, while homestay registration in Udham Singh Nagar, an industrial district, remained constant. The growth in the number of homestays received a fillip, especially after the launch of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grah Awas Vikas Yojana in 2018. The present study aims to assess the principal strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of homestay development in the Kumaun region. It will help in understanding the socio-cultural and economic impacts of homestay development in the region and the way forward for future action to realise the untapped potential of homestay tourism and promote its sustainable growth.

Objectives

1. To assess the advantages of homestay development in the Kumaun region.
2. To examine weaknesses, opportunities, and threats faced by Kumaun homestays.
3. To propose strategies for sustainable growth of homestays in the Kumaun region.

Research Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative approach. The assessment is based on secondary data obtained from various reliable sources and is also supported by government data. Data were obtained from government statistical reports, economic surveys, and publications available on the website of the Uttarakhand Tourism Board, Kumaun Mandal Vikas Nigam (KMVN), and district websites. Additionally, suitable data and information were drawn from books, magazines, and around 50 research articles written on homestay tourism to provide an extensive and across-the-board understanding.

Literature Review

The term homestay was coined by Lynch in 2003. In 2004, Lynch redefined the concept and pioneered the term “Commercial Home”, which refers to small inns or bed-and-breakfast establishments that provide accommodation within family homes [16]. Homestays are a type of residential accommodation in which hosts provide vacant rooms in their homes to guests in exchange for monetary benefits (Semwal, 2022) [15]. According to the ASEAN Homestay Standard (2016), homestays are accommodations offered by local residents that provide an opportunity for tourists to experience the daily lives of host families, which in turn broadens the horizons of tourists, as they gain real-time experience of the socio-cultural aspects of host families while exploring other tourist attractions.

Homestays provide an attractive accommodation option for tourists seeking a more conventional and personalized vacation experience than commercial tourism packages. They offer visitors the freedom to choose their accommodation while allowing greater flexibility in planning their travel activities (Chan et al., 2004) [13]. Another advantage of homestays is that

they help reduce lodging expenses, making travel more affordable for tourists (Hanafiah et al., 2016) [15].

Foreign tourists who are often interested in experiencing local indigenous lifestyles, originality, customized services, and purposeful interactions with host communities (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015; Mura, 2015; Wang, 2007) find homestays to be ideal accommodation options, particularly in rural and remote regions. Apart from enhancing visitors' experiences, homestays are also favorable for local communities. Tourists' interactions with local residents and artisans, along with recognition of traditional cuisine and indigenous arts and crafts, contribute to local economic development, generate employment opportunities, harness local capabilities, promote cultural development, and help preserve cultural heritage. As such, homestays expand employment opportunities for rural communities (Dutta, 2012) [4]. Homestays also give a boost to community-based tourism by encouraging cooperation among village households to host tourists, make financial gains, and support sustainable tourism development. Homestays serve as important interaction zones between hosts and guests (Walter et al., 2018), contributing to the three core objectives of community-based tourism: environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and local economic development (Reimer & Walter, 2013) [7].

Study Area

The Kumaun Himalaya extends from $28^{\circ} 38'37''\text{N}$ to $30^{\circ} 44'33''\text{N}$ latitude and from $78^{\circ} 44'10''\text{E}$ to $81^{\circ} 3'28''\text{E}$ longitude. Kumaun is one of the divisions of Uttarakhand State, the other being Garhwal. The northern international boundary of the Kumaun region is formed by the Great Himalayas along the border with China (Tibet), while to the east, south, and southwest, the Kali River forms its border with Nepal.

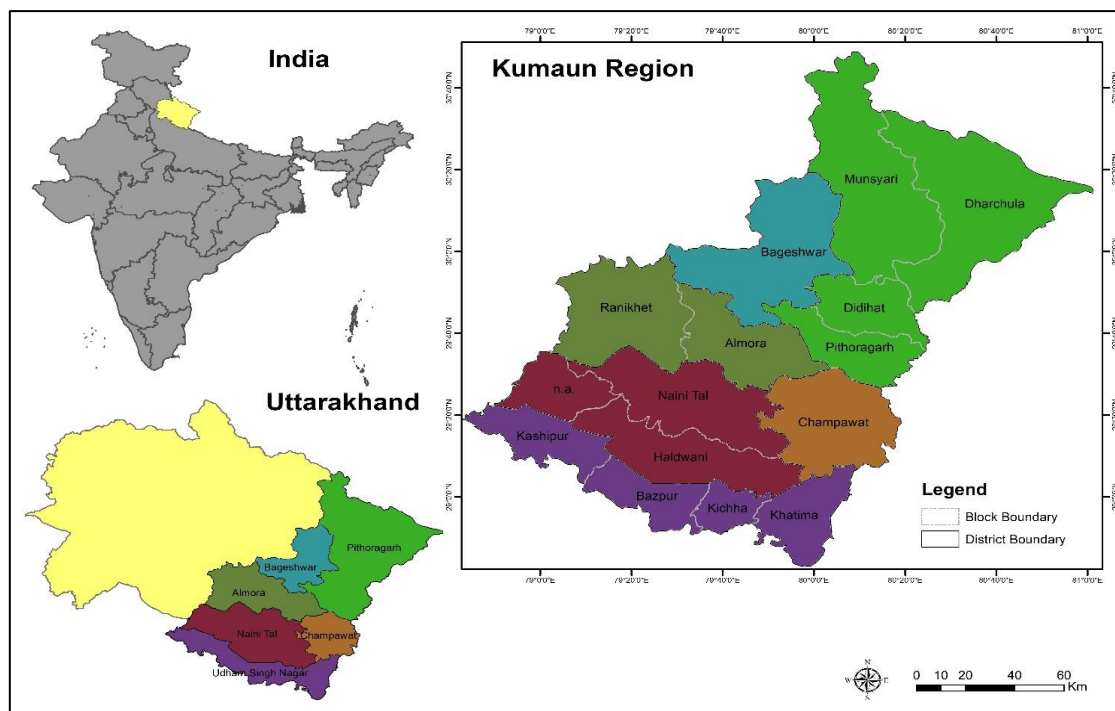


Fig. 1. Location of the Study Area

The Kumaun region is bordered by the districts of Chamoli and Pauri of the Garhwal region in the northwest, while on the southern and southeastern sides, it is bordered by the districts of Uttar Pradesh, namely, Bijnor, Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly, and Pilibhit. The total area occupied by the Kumaun region is about 21,034 sq. km, with a north-south extent of 225 km and an east-west extent of 65 km. There are six districts in the Kumaon division, namely, Pithoragarh, Champawat, Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital, Almora, and Bageshwar.

Kumaun, often known as the jewel of the Central Himalayas, is a significant tourist destination in North India and attracts travelers from across India and the world over. Nestled amidst the mighty Himalayas, Kumaun offers a wide range of tourism products (Table 1), ranging from religious and nature tourism to adventure sports and wildlife tourism. Furthermore, its cultural richness in the form of beautiful attire, delicious local foods, folk art, handicrafts, and fairs and festivals (Table 2) gives visitors an authentic experience of the Kumauni society. Attracted by these diverse tourist products, tourist arrivals in Kumaun are increasing every year, creating a sustained demand for accommodation. Therefore, homestays appear to be impressive accommodation options that offer authentic experiences to tourists and help in community participation, employment generation, and preservation of culture.

Table 1. Major Tourism Products in Kumaun

S. No.	District	Religious Attraction	Natural Attraction	Adventure Tourism	Wildlife Tourism
1	Nainital	Naina Devi Temple, Kainchi Dham, Hanuman Garhi	Naini Lake, Snow Viewpoint, Bhimtal, Sattal, Naukuchiatal	Trekking, Paragliding, Camping, Rock Climbing	Jim Corbett National Park, Pangot and Kilbury Bird Sanctuary
2	Almora	Jageshwar Dham, Kasar Devi Temple, Chitai Golu Devta Temple	Binsar, Bright End Corner, Kausani	Trekking, nature walk, mountain biking	Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary
3	Pithoragarh	Patal Bhuvneshwar, Cave Temple, Dhawaj Temple, Narayan Ashram	Munsiyari, Birthi Fall, Milam Glacier	High-altitude Trekking, Mountaineering, Skiing, Camping	Askot Wildlife Sanctuary

4	Bageshwar	Bagnath Temple, Baijnath Temple	Pindari Glacier, Kafni Glacier, Sunderdhunga Glacier	Glacier Trekking, Camping, Mountaineering	Himalayan Wildlife Around Pindari-Kafni Region
5	Champawat	Baleshwar Temple, Kranteshwar Temple	Lohaghat, Abbott Mount, Mayawati Ashram	Trekking, Nature Walk, Camping	Bhingrara Nature Reserve
6	Udham Singh Nagar	Atariya Temple, Giri Temple	Nanak Sagar Dam, Tumaria Dam	Boating, Birdwatching, Angling	Nanak Sagar Bird Sanctuary

Table 2. Cultural Richness of Kumaun

<i>Traditional attire and jewellery</i>	<i>Local cuisine</i>	<i>Fairs and festivals</i>	<i>Arts and crafts</i>
• <i>Ghaghara (skirt)</i> • <i>Angra (blouse)</i> • <i>Pichhora (scarf)</i> • <i>Traditional jewellery, such as</i> • <i>Sheehphool</i> • <i>Chandראהaar</i> • <i>Gulban</i> • <i>Tilhari</i> • <i>bulak</i>	• <i>Chulkani</i> • <i>Dubka</i> • <i>Jaula and Ras</i> • <i>Jholi</i> • <i>Kaapa</i> • <i>Jhangore ki Kheer</i> • <i>Bal Mithai,</i> • <i>Khenchua,</i> • <i>Singauri.</i>	• <i>Nanda Devi Fair</i> • <i>Uttarayani Fair,</i> • <i>Chaiti Fair,</i> • <i>Purnagiri Fair,</i> • <i>Harela Phool-Dhayi Festival</i> • <i>Ghugutia,</i> • <i>Ghee-Sankranti</i>	• <i>Aipan art</i> • <i>Bar Boond</i> • <i>Patta and Jyoti,</i>

SWOT ANALYSIS:

Strength:

The Kumaun region has a wide range of tourist attractions in the form of religious sites, scenic

beauty, adventure sports, and wildlife tourism (Table 1). These attractions are important for homestay development. The growing popularity of yoga and naturopathy also increases tourist footfall in the region. As large metropolitan firms adopt work-from-home practices, many employees stay longer at homestays to maintain work-life balance and enjoy unique experiences. People living in the Delhi NCR, which is close to the Kumaun region, enjoy staycations that support tourism activities in the region. Further, there is a surge of tourists during holidays and weekends in the Kumaun region. With the growing affluence of nearby regions, groups of bikers and trekking enthusiasts also visit the region frequently. To experience traditional Kumauni culture, which is very rich and vibrant and consists of folk dances (Jhora, Cholia) and festivals (Nanda Devi Fair, Harela), and local cuisine, homestays provide an organic form of accommodation that hotels cannot offer. Homestays offer a direct experience of the day-to-day lives of local residents; as such, guests discover traditional cultures and customs and engage in cultural interaction, wherein both guests and hosts get to know each other's cultures. They also help in cultural preservation as they motivate local people to express and own their traditional culture in the form of art, festivals, local foods, language, and lifestyle while earning a livelihood through tourism. The hilly regions of Kumaun face the problem of out-migration. According to the 2011 Census, migration in Uttarakhand was quite high, with around 1,053 villages having been completely abandoned and turned into ghost villages. Rural tourism is cited by many as a solution to curb out-migration [10]. In this direction, homestays can play a vital role in providing employment opportunities in remote villages and preventing out-migration. Unemployment is one of the main reasons for migration in rural regions, as more than 50% of out-migration is for employment (Sati, 2021). Homestays provide diverse economic opportunities through direct and indirect employment. They also promote women's participation, as many women from self-help groups are mobilized to run homestays and local eateries and to sell handicrafts.

Weakness:

Limited privacy is one of the major shortcomings of homestays, and many visitors are inhibited from sharing common spaces, such as the living room, dining area, and sometimes the washroom. It affects tourist satisfaction and restricts the appeal of homestays compared to hotels. It also compromises the privacy of hosts, thereby curbing the up-scaling of homestay culture in the region. Many well-facilitated homestay villages in hilly regions, such as Munsiyari, Charkori, Pithoragarh, and the interiors of Bageshwar, have poor road connectivity. Additionally, the area is landslide-prone, and irregular supplies of electricity and water in remote villages further negatively affect tourist satisfaction. The problem of solid waste disposal and management is common in Kumaun, posing a challenge for homestay development. Another weakness is the seasonality of tourism in the region. Tourist arrivals are significantly higher during summer (April to June) and drop during the monsoon season (July to September) and the winter season, leading to a lower frequency of visitors and a loss of income for homestay owners. Also, there is an uneven distribution of tourism, as tourist traffic is heavy around Nainital because of its proximity to regions such as Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, leaving other attractions in Kumaun, such as Munsiyari, Chaukori, and Berinag, under-visited. Many homestays in Kumaun operate in fragments and silos. Place branding is needed, as Kerala and Himachal Pradesh benefit greatly from promoting their local specialties and

uniqueness. Moreover, the limited use of digital media by homestay owners is a challenge, as tourists are often unaware of the homestays' presence at the destination. In addition, local residents are not well aware of the homestay registration process; as a result, many unregistered homestays operate outside government schemes and do not receive the benefits and subsidies. The digital divide and lack of awareness among local homestay operators are among the biggest factors that dampen homestay development and the associated economies of scale in the region.

Opportunities:

Many tourists, both domestic and international, prefer offbeat tourist destinations, especially after COVID-19. Homestays in Kumaun offer diverse tourism products in the form of nature, culture, wildlife, and eco-tourism away from city crowds and could be preferred accommodation choices for tourists. The Uttarakhand government's push to support the rural economy and curb migration can be witnessed through various homestay schemes and policies, such as the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Awas (homestay) Vikas Yojana (2018), the Uttarakhand Tourism Policy (2018), and the Atithi Uttarakhand Grah Awas Yojana. Their objectives are to promote rural and eco-tourism and generate employment. For this purpose, subsidies for the construction of homestays and bank loans are provided to local residents. Digital platforms such as MakeMyTrip, Homestay, Gostay, the Uttarakhand Tourism Homestay Portal, Instagram, and YouTube can widen the reach of homestays. With new-age tourists heavily relying on social media platforms for tour planning, itineraries, and lodging options, digital promotion of homestays and associated offbeat vibes could fast-track the acceptability and growth of homestays in the region. Homestay circuits such as Kausani-Bairnath-Bageshwar-Chaukori-Munsiyari could be developed to improve tourist accessibility and cover multiple destinations. It would also help in dispersing heavy tourist traffic near Nainital and Bhimtal.

Threats:

The Kumaun region lies in a seismically active zone, and landslides are common, especially during the monsoon. Any unplanned infrastructure development adds to the disaster risk. Poor sanitation, lack of waste management, and disproportionate distribution of economic benefits are still challenges for many homestays, and rising tourism further exacerbates the problem of waste disposal and poses a challenge to rural infrastructure. According to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Uttarakhand fares poorly in solid waste management. It has a very small number of solid waste management plants and landfills. According to the CPCB report (2017), Nainital and Pithoragarh generate around 15,000 kg/day of municipal solid waste. However, there are no waste disposal facilities. Similar situations are found in other districts, such as Almora and Bageshwar.

Uneven tourism puts further pressure on infrastructure. During the peak season in May and June, Nainital and surrounding areas face heavy traffic, parking shortages, and accommodation scarcity, creating problems for tourists and residents. Conversely, places with attractive homestays such as Jageshwar, Hartola, Lohaghat, and Patel Bhubaneswar remain relatively untapped. Competition from hotels, resorts, and guest houses in Nainital, Mukteshwar, and Ranikhet poses a major challenge to homestays. Hotel facilities such as swimming pools, spas, and digital booking also affect tourists' accommodation choices. Kumaun also faces

competition from the Garhwal belt and neighbouring Himalayan regions such as Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, and Kashmir. Cultural degradation is another risk because commercialising cultural products and commodifying festivals, arts, handicrafts, and local cuisines for tourists diminishes traditional authenticity. Cross-cultural interactions also have adverse effects, including erosion of the local language, drug abuse, and human trafficking.

Table 3. SWOT Summary of Homestay Development in Kumaun

<i>Strength</i>	<i>Weakness</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Threats</i>
• <i>Tourist attractions</i> • <i>Direct experience</i> • <i>Affordability</i> • <i>Cultural interaction</i> • <i>Curbing Migration</i> • <i>Employment Opportunities</i> • <i>Women's Empowerment</i>	• <i>Privacy</i> • <i>Infrastructure Challenges</i> • <i>Seasonality</i> • <i>Demand Variability</i> • <i>Limited marketing</i> • <i>Paucity of skilled workforce</i>	• <i>Rising demand for experiential tourism</i> • <i>Policy support</i> • <i>Digital promotion</i> • <i>Developing a homestay circuit</i>	• <i>Geographic fragility</i> • <i>Market competition</i> • <i>Uneven tourism</i> • <i>Socio-cultural degradation</i>

Strategies:

1. *Infrastructure Improvement*: Road connectivity, drinking water, healthcare, electricity, internet access, and medical staffing need improvement in the remote rural regions of Kumaun.
2. *Skilled Workforce*: Capacity-building programs and training in hospitality management and language skills will help in providing tourist-friendly services.
3. *Development Of Niche Tourism Products*: Homestay owners can be encouraged to showcase the uniqueness of their area and thereby develop niche tourism products. For example, healthy local cuisines, arts, and crafts could play a pivotal role in the promotion of niche products.
4. *Digital Literacy And Promotion*: Promoting digital literacy among homestay owners will help them reach out to a large market and register their presence on online booking systems and social media. Overall, digital promotion improves homestay visibility and promotes sustainable growth.

5. *Environmental Safeguard*: All planning and policies for the development of homestays must take into consideration local geological and physiographic conditions so that growth does not exceed the region's ecological carrying capacity. Sustainable organic growth plans must be charted, giving due recognition to environmental rejuvenation and carrying capacity.

CONCLUSION

Homestays have great potential to turn Kumaun's natural beauty and cultural richness into livelihoods for rural communities by generating direct household income and curbing migration. Affordability, cultural authenticity, and scenic beauty are their core strengths, which give them a real edge over regular hotels. At the same time, inadequate infrastructure, limited marketing, seasonality, and service quality issues are some of their weaknesses that require proper policy intervention. Geographical fragility, difficult terrain, seismic activity, and natural hazards, such as earthquakes and landslides, are common physiographic characteristics of Kumaun that cannot be overlooked while pushing for homestay development. This necessitates proper planning, which includes all stakeholders. Growth should be accompanied by quality standards as well as environmental safeguards for Kumaun, which cannot be overlooked while pushing for homestay development. Therefore, proper planning, which includes all stakeholders, is required. Growth should be accompanied by quality standards as well as environmental safeguards.

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