

HOMESTAYS PROMOTING ECOTOURISM IN COFFEE FARMS OF WESTERN GHATS, INDIA: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the socio-economic situation of the homestays operating in coffee farms in Kodagu district, located in Western Ghats of Karnataka in India, one of the mega hotspot of biodiversity. Homestay offering ecotourism along with coffee farming have recorded an impressive growth rate of 25 percent during 2005-15 period in the Kodagu district. A total of 45 homestay operating farmers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The result revealed that in terms of land size holding; nearly two third of homestays were operated by small coffee farmers (less than 10 ha) as compared to large farmers. In managing homestays, our results indicated that 54.6 percent of total variable cost is spent on labour followed by maintenance (42 %). Only, 3.4 percent was incurred on promotion of homestays. The homestay operating farmers were found to diversify their income, generate employment for locals and market ecotourism making use of the agro ecological landscapes of Kodagu district. The outcome of the study points that with proper planning, promotion, and policy support from the state government, homestays are able to promote sustainable ecotourism and development in the Western Ghats region.

Keywords: Homestay, ecotourism, community, coffee-farming

1. INTRODUCTION

Growing concerns about the possibilities that tourism activities may degrade the environment and society has led to urgency among decision-makers, managers, practitioners, and academicians in the field of tourism to think about a more sustainable approach for its development. In the wake of increased incomes, improved standard of living and traffic network, stressed people particularly in cities search for new leisure activities, as such the

demand for recreational activities has increased across the country. The added pressures from work have made travelling the best way to relieve stress in a society pursuing high efficiency (Rong 2002). In India, traditional treatment of a visitor (guest) is traced to the ancient mythology -"Atidhi Devo Bhavah" literally meaning that 'Guest is God'. The Tourism Ministry, Government of India has launched the "Atithi Devo Bhavah" campaign under an ambitious programme to attract more tourists (Government of India, 2009). The concept is aimed at capacity building for service providers and stakeholders in the tourism sector to make the tourists aware of the benefits in visiting India and the need to treat them with traditional care and utmost courtesy.

Ecotourism has become an alternative approach to overcome the problems of traditional tourism with the assumption that there will be minimum negative impacts and maximum benefits for the local people and their environment (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2004). Ecotourism contributes to sustainability of all dimensions, namely; socio-cultural, economic, political and environmental (Anitha & Muraleedharan, 2006). A key criterion of ecotourism is the optimal use of natural resources while simultaneously maintaining ecological processes and conserving natural heritage and biodiversity (Gurung & Scholz, 2008). With the growing global awareness and new initiatives to preserve the environment in tourism, conservation and rural development sectors, ecotourism is being promoted as a low impact, environmentally sensitive way to travel (Anand et al., 2012). Many ecotourism sites, such as national parks and protected areas, are located in remote areas such as Western Ghats which have rich ecological and biological diversity and indigenous cultures (Nepal, 2000). Ecotourism forges new relationships between people and environment, and between people with different lifestyles (Wall, 1996). It creates forces for both change and stability. Ecotourism has emerged under the rubric of sustainable tourism as a solution to protect the ecological and cultural resources of tourism sites, provide local economic opportunity and give travelers greater environmental awareness (Fallon & Kriwoken, 2003). Nepal (2002) argues that ecotourism is open to various interpretations. It includes criteria such as benefits for local people, support for conservation, low-scale development, low tourist volume and educational experience. This suggests that many mountain tourism destinations may not qualify as ecotourism ventures though they increasingly use the prefix "eco" in their promotion. The qualitative aspects of homestay are well documented mainly in Asian countries of Malaysia, Thailand (Bhuiyan et al., 2013; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Jamal et al., 2011), Nepal (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Hardly, a few studies have been conducted in India (Bhatt 2001; Anand et al., 2012) particularly in the Western Ghat region known for its mega biodiversity.

In this paper, the main focus is given to provide an overview of socio-economics of homestay operating farms and their contribution to ecotourism development in the Western Ghats of India.

2. THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL REVIEW

The concept of homestays centers on the local community which welcomes tourists. The availability of sufficient space, the security of the home structure and level of quality, safety and suitability are important elements for a homestay operation (Bhuiyan et al., 2011). Homestay, as the term suggests means staying in someone's home. Amirruding (2009) defined homestay as an "alternative form of accommodation that involves tourist stay with selected families where they can interact and experience the daily life of these families as well as experience the host country's culture". From a broader perspective, homestay represents the process of materialising one's home in order to utilize residential space for profitable purposes (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015). During the early stage of development it was based exclusively on lodgings: rooms rented in the owner's private home, independent lodgings, or rural campsites, though under different labels. Different countries in the world have similar concept of homestay which are usually known as farm stay, home visit system, agricultural homestay or bed and breakfast, in which the tourists are offered accommodation and breakfast by the hosts. However, the context and definition of homestay vary in undertone and importance from various countries. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the homestay concept is similar to bed and breakfast kind in which a host offers accommodation for tourists to stay in consideration for payment. In Australia, homestay is related with farmhouse accommodation where students acquiring a place to stay for their studies (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). In homestays, the tourists have the opportunities to interact, gain knowledge, and experience the life style and culture of the host family as well as the local community. Some necessary components for homestay are entertainment facilities, providing local, proper arrangement of accommodation and hospitality (Levitt, 1986). Moreover, it can be argued that entrepreneurial activity has long occurred in people's homes, it can't be ruled out that working from home is not quite the same as hosting strangers in one's home, because one involves engaging in commercial activities within the space of the home while the other transforms the very notion of "home" into a commercial space (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015).

Homestay in our study is seen as a type of accommodation in Kodagu district, in which the tourists stay with selected families, interact and experience the daily life of these families. The homestays in addition offer recreation and education on ecotourism by making use of the serene ecological landscapes of Kodagu district. Homestays are successful in some developing countries such as Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand (Acharya & Halpenny 2013; Ahmad et al., 2014; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2015). They are often located in rural areas which are actively owned, managed and operated by the communities.

A community-based approach recognizes the need to promote both the quality of life and the conservation of resources (Scheyvens, 1999). Jamaludin et al., 2012 describes community based tourism mean individuals by some collective responsibilities and abilities to make collective decisions by representative bodies. Scheyvens (1999) noted that the members of the host community should be involved in tourism planning because they have an historical understanding of how the region adapts to change, and they will be the ones most closely affected by tourism. Bhuiyan et al. (2013) pointed out that homestays have increased employment opportunities influencing local people's living standard and public private investments. In a case study, Ahmad et al.(2014) argued that the primary motivation to start homestays is not only for generating extra income but for personal satisfaction and ability to make own decisions. Moreover, it ensures economic, social and cultural benefits for local communities as well as supports the sustainable development of the region (Chaiyatorn et al., 2010). In line with this, Liu (2006) argued that homestay businesses provide not only an alternative choice for cheaper accommodation to the tourists but also a supplementary source of income to the operators.

In India, very few systematic studies have been conducted on homestays. Anand et al., (2012) explored a case in Ladakh from north India. This study revealed that homestays help in the pro-environment sustainable mountain tourism enterprises and provides equitable development in spite of inadequate infrastructure, skills, and meager income-generating opportunities. Lama (2012) explored a village homestay in Sikkim, and found that since the introduction of homestay programme many cultural activities have resurged, including knowledge and practice of traditional songs, dance, and cooking which have maintained cultural importance to community.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kodagu district located in Karnataka state, India. It is a small district in the southern region of the Indian sub-continent covering an area of 4102 sq km. Kodagu is located on the slopes of Western Ghats, which is one of the 34 global biodiversity hotspots in the world because of high levels of endemism and endangered flora and fauna. Since Kodagu comes under the "hot-spot" of biodiversity, state tourism department has classified Kodagu under the eco-sensitive zone (Government of Karnataka, 2009). The arrival of the British in the early 19th century introduced the concept 'Hill Stations' where they developed select places in the hills as resorts to escape the summer heat (Bhatt, 2001). Kodagu is one such hill station famous for touristic sites like wild life sanctuaries, mountain trekking and rafting. In Kodagu there are three wild life sanctuaries and one national park. The number of tourists visiting Kodagu have increased since 2012 compared to other hill stations like Munnar in Kerala state (Chaitanya, 2013).

There are three taluks in Kodagu: Madikeri, Virajpet and Somarpet. The sample for our study consisted of 45 homestay operating farmers drawn at random from all the three taluks. The Coorg Homestay Association (CHSA) has registered 200 homestays in Kodagu as its members. Out of these, 45 homestay operating farmers were interviewed using a structured and pretested questionnaire. The information on socio-economic profile of the farmer, cropping pattern and detailed information on the cost and returns in managing the homestay were elicited from the selected respondents. The recreation and educational activities promoting ecotourism were also elicited. The survey was conducted over a three month period from January to March 2015.

As per the tourism guidelines of the Government of Karnataka (2009), a homestay in Kodagu, shall have to adhere to the specifications such as: number of rooms has to be below 5, the owner of the homestay unit should be physically residing with his/her family in the same homestay unit, or within the premises in close proximity, it should have easy access from the road, at least one of the family members residing in homestay units should be able to communicate in English, the minimum floor area of each room in the homestay should be at least 120 sq ft for a double bedroom and 100 sq ft for a single bedroom. Any homestay owner who fulfils the aforesaid criteria can submit an application for registration to the Director, Department of Tourism, Government of Karnataka. Based on the inspection, each homestay is classified as gold and silver class following the norms. The application and registration fee for each category are: for gold category application fee is INR 3000 and registration fee is INR 15000; and for silver category INR 2000 and INR 10000, respectively. The registration has to be renewed annually.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Growth of Homestays in Kodagu District

Homestays started to emerge in a random and disorganized way in the late 90s; it was purely a local initiative started by a few entrepreneurs to promote both the quality of environment and the conservation of nature. There was no proper organization to guide and take forward the local initiative. In 2006, the local community set up an association called Coorg Homestay Association (CHSA). Initially CHSA started with 50 members has increased to 200 in 2014. The involvement in homestay tourism by coffee growers can be traced back to late 90's when the coffee price saw a drastic decline and Kodagu witnessing high tourist footprint. In the peak season, tourists were facing accommodation problems which provided a real push for the local communities to venture in for homestays. Subsequently, homestays started picking up, especially, after 2006. CHSA is a registered entity, an autonomous body which has been recognized by the Government of Karnataka. The initiation of 'Athithi scheme' in the state tourism policy in 2007 has provided a boost to homestays. During the initial stage homestay

started to increasing steadily but after 2008, it is growing at an increasing rate. Overall, home stays have recorded an impressive growth rate of 25 percent during 2000-15 period.

4.2 Homestay: types and promotion

In Kodagu, the concept of homestays started with renting the rooms in the houses of coffee farmers to the tourists. Type of homestay differs with respect to the house built by the coffee grower and the facilities prevail within their house. Distinctly five different types of homestays were observed in Kodagu, namely; a) few rooms within the home b) rooms adjacent to the house that are attached with the main house, c) tented cottages d) old house that have been renovated into homestays and/or e) separated cottages. About 51.11 percent of farmers have homestays adjacent to their house. This is because in most of the houses during initial days, extra rooms were rented to tourists, and gradually formalized by getting registration. Farmers having cottages as homestays in the coffee farm formed 35.56 percent. The farmers who accommodated tourists in their homes accounted for 4.44 percent and another 6.67 percent of farmers have renovated their old home into homestays. The remaining 2.22 percent of people have tented cottages. In Kodagu, promotions of homestays have occurred mainly through word of mouth (51 percent). This is due to fact that farmers are not very keen and willing to make homestays as too commercial as they do wish to have limited number of quality tourists. By making use of internet and websites 38 percent of homestay operators attracted tourists. Around 11 percent of homestay operators used agents such trip advisor, make my trip and agents in local market for promoting their homestays.

4.3 Socio-economic profile of homestay operating coffee farmers

As seen in Table 1, the mean age of homestay operating coffee farmers is 51 years; the actual age ranging from 27 to 76 years. This shows that both young and old farmers are undertaking homestays. About 74 percent of homestays were operated by males and the remaining 26 percent is managed by women providing them avenue for income generation and involving in mainstream development (Acharya & Halpenny, 2013). Interestingly, the year of schooling of farmers was high, 14.6 years which shows that the homestay operators were mostly graduates. Average family size was 3 with a maximum up to 6 members. It is observed that on an average a homestay employed more than two labours throughout the year for managing the activities in the homestay. It is to be noted that the average number of person involved in farming from a family ranged between 1 to 3. Overall, homestay provided additional employment to labours and utilization of spare time of family members.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of homestay operating coffee farmers

Variable	Mean	Std.dev	Minimum	Maximum
Average age	51	13.17	27	76
Gender (male=0;female=1)	0.26	0.44	-	-
Number of Schooling years	14.6	2.07	10	20
Average Family size	3.42	1.11	1	6
Average number of labours employed for Homestays	2.17	1.28	0	5
Average number of persons from family involved in farming	1.17	0.44	1	3

The classification of sample homestay operating farms by land holding size presented in Table 2 indicated that 64.44 percent of homestays were operated by small coffee holders having area under coffee ranging between <2 ha to 10 ha and 35.56 percent of homestays were large farmers holding coffee area of greater than 10 ha. The average net income of farmers from homestays ranged from INR 2,08,386 to INR 7, 12,518. It is interesting to note that small land holders particularly <2 ha coffee farmers generated equal proportion of income from homestays (49.14 %) and coffee farming (50.86 %). The net income earned by large farmers particularly in 10-25 ha category from homestays was considerably high at INR 7,12,518 forming 37.80 percent of the average total net income. In the size group of above 25 ha the average net income generated from coffee crop formed 88.15 percent. Overall, the net income generated from coffee dominated (68.48%) in the total net income. The efforts of coffee farmers to generate substantial additional amount of alternative income from diversification to homestays have been successful, particularly by the small farmers.

Table 2: Classification of homestay operating coffee farmers based on their size of holding.

Size of land holding (in ha)	Sample size	Average net Income from homestay (INR)*	Average net income from coffee farming (INR)**	Average net income from others (INR)***	Average total net income (INR)
Small Holdings					
< 2	2 (4.44%)	2,33,050 (49.14)	2,41,187.5 (50.86)	0	4,74,237 (100)
2- 4	10 (22.22%)	2,47,420 (37.47)	3,41,450 (51.71)	71,500 (10.82)	6,60,370 (100)
4 - 10	17 (37.78%)	2,08,386 (17.59)	9,18,678 (77.52)	58,000 (4.89)	11,85,064 (100)
Large Holdings					
10 - 25	14 (31.11%)	7,12,518 (37.80)	11,72,652 (62.20)	0	18,85,170 (100)
> 25	2 (4.44%)	2,72,250 (9.63)	24,91,250 (88.15)	62,500 (2.22)	28,26,000 (100)
Total	45 (100.00)	3,77,835.87 (28.46)	9,09,200.64 (68.48)	40577.78 (3.06)	13,27,614.29 (100)

Note: Coffee Board of India considers coffee holding <10 ha as small and >10 ha as large holding.

1 US \$ = 67 INR during data collection period.

*Figures in the parentheses indicate homestay net income in percent to total net income

**Figures in the parenthesis indicate coffee net income in percent to total net income

*** Figures in the parentheses indicate other net income in percent to total net income, from other income that includes selling home made products such as wine, honey, coffee powder and black pepper.

We elicited the reasons to start homestay by the sample homestay operating coffee farmers and the results are presented in table 3. Majority (63.27 percent) of the respondents mentioned that earning an alternative income as the major reason for starting the homestay which was amply demonstrated in the previous section. During our interview, the coffee farmers indicated that they had lot of spare time during the off season and starting of homestay provided them an opportunity to engage them fully, besides earning additional income. In fact, during main crop season, especially, during harvesting and irrigation operations, farmers rarely entertain tourists to their homestays as it disturbs their farming activity. During our discussion, it was also indicated that coffee prices were low during the eighties and hence they were forced to diversify in to homestay business to earn additional income. In addition, marketing the environmental value and landscape was indicated as the reason to start the homestay business by 36.37 percent of homestay operators. Most coffee farmers are of the opinion that their coffee farms provide a

good and clean environment with high diversity of crops and shade trees, water bodies, variety of birds and natural landscape. The coffee farmers felt that the tourists are interested in enjoying such environment and hence were motivated to start the homestays. Similar observations were made by Ahmad et al. (2014) in Malaysia for entrepreneurs in choosing home-stay accommodation businesses in Peninsular Malaysia. Kodagu representing a hilly landscape is isolated as such, 18 percent of sample homestay operators stated that starting a homestay provides them an opportunity to meet diverse people and thus engaging themselves in the business.

Table 3: Reasons to start homestay by the sample homestay operating farmers

Reason	Mean (%)
Earn alternative income	63.27
Marketing environmental value and landscape	36.73
To meet diverse people	18.37
Others	2.04

Note: the responses do not add up to 100 percent since the respondents indicated more than one reason

4.4 Average cost, number of rooms, occupancy rate and tariff of homestays

The cost involved in registration of a homestay ranged from INR 1200 to INR 5000 (Table 4). This variation is due to the fact that there is only one registration office located in the district headquarter, Madikeri. The time required for registration of a homestay was found to vary from 1 month to a maximum of 3 years depending on the location. Homestay operators located near to Madikeri get their registration done within a month, whereas; for the homestay operators located in distant areas needed to visit several times for processing of their application. As such, transportation cost and incentives created wide range in cost structure for registration. As a part of the registration process, government officials inspect the homestay to verify whether they are as per the guidelines (indicated earlier). As per the guidelines provided by the Tourism Department of the Government of Karnataka, the number of rooms in a homestay should be less than 5. Because of this restriction, homestays in Kodagu are considered as non-commercial activity. In our sample, the average number of rooms per homestay was found to be three. The average occupancy rate was 88 days in a year. The reason for low occupancy rate is attributed to the fact that during main crop (coffee) season farmers are busy with their farming operations as such they rarely entertain any tourist to their homestay. The low tourist visitation to the district in monsoon season also contributed to low occupancy rate. There are homestays with occupancy rate as high as 275 days in a year. In such cases, they employed more labours specifically for homestay. The peak months of homestay occupation are April to June and

October to December coinciding with season (other than monsoon period) and student vacation. The tariff of a homestay differed on the facilities at the homestay and type of tourists they received. The charge ranged from INR 500 to INR 3000 per person (Table 4). The average tariff for each person worked out to INR 1562. For a family visit (which includes 2 adult and children below 15 years old) the average tariff was INR 2436. This is inclusive of accommodation, breakfast and dinner. Few homestay operators entertained group visit: group of students, researchers, Information Technology (IT) employees and like. The size of group varied from 4 to 8 members. The average tariff for a group visit was found to be INR 746 per person.

Table 4: Average cost of registration, number of rooms, occupancy rate and tariff in homestays in Kodagu.

Particulars	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
Average cost incurred for homestay application and registration (in Rs)	2431.11	1200	5000
Average number of rooms per homestay (No.)	3	1	5
Occupancy rate (number of days in year)	88.31	16	275
Amount charged to tourists (in Rs):			
Per person	1562.06	500	3000
Per family	2436.53	1000	5000
Group (per person)	746.42	450	1200

Note: 1 US \$ = 67 Rs during data collection period.

4.5 Cost of Management of Homestays

We considered only the variable cost incurred in management of homestays that included mainly the maintenance cost of building, electricity and water charges, labour cost and promotion. The maintenance cost per homestay was estimated at INR 92555 per annum which formed 42.30 percent of total variable cost (table 5). Labour cost worked to INR 118608 which accounted for 54.20 percent of total variable cost. The expenditure on promotion was low at INR 7553.50 forming a meagre 3.50 percent of total variable cost. Fixed cost was not considered in our analysis as it was found that most farmers started homestays as a part of their house wherein few rooms in their house were used which are not specifically built for homestays. In such a situation it is too difficult to apportion the cost for personal and homestay use. As such, it was prudent not to take fixed costs into account. The average total variable cost per homestay amounted to INR 2,18,717 per year.

Table 5: Variable cost of homestay

Items	Variable cost (in Rs)	Percent
Maintenance	92,555.56	42.30
Labour	1,18,607.8	54.20
Promotion	7553.53	3.50
Total (Rs)	2,18,717	

Note: 1 US \$ = 67 Rs during data collection period.

4.6 Role of homestays for promoting sustainable ecotourism in Kodagu

Homestays in Kodagu are new type of accommodation provided for the tourists. This type of accommodation is gaining importance, because of its homely environment, reasonable budget as compared to resorts and hotels. Moreover, it offers tourists an opportunity to have the feel of ecotourism. It is important to point that the Kodagu homestays depending on their location offered varied ecotourism activities like visits to national parks, sanctuaries, elephant camp, trekking, mountaineering and rafting besides providing a taste of Kodagu's culture, tradition and cuisine.

Sustainable tourism in kodagu is promoted by CHSA by adopting: (i) use of green, efficient and renewable energy source: the onsite energy usage is very low. These homestays provide the necessities required for a comfortable stay and do not consume huge amounts of energy as do hotels or resorts. (ii) management of cultural heritage and promotion of intercultural understanding: tourists get a good experience of people's lifestyle, enjoy traditional cuisine, and gain knowledge of the material and spiritual culture of kodagu; (iii) shared knowledge and diffusion of ideas: the host share their ideas and knowledge about their culture and environment with the tourists. CHSA organizes meetings, which provides the homestay operators with an opportunity to share their experience and to tackle problems through these associations. Thus, a community action is witnessed in sustaining ecotourism in the region.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides an insight into and understanding of the socioeconomic characters such as size of the farm, age, education, gender, income and employment of homestay operating coffee farmers in Western Ghat region in India. From our results, it is evident that nearly 2/3 of homestay operating coffee farmers are small sized and they ventured into homestay business to earn additional income due to falling coffee prices. This has been achieved to a great extent as seen from the average income realized by coffee farmers from homestays which varied from INR 2,08,386 to INR 7,12,518 across various size groups. The high educational level of coffee

farmers seem to have contributed to the success of homestays business. The coffee farmers irrespective of age accorded high priority to homestay operation so as to generate substantial amount of alternative income. It is interesting to note that small coffee farmers particularly <2 ha farmers generated almost equal proportion of income from homestays. The average net income earned by large farmers (>25 ha) from homestays were substantially higher as compared to small farmers but in terms of proportion it formed only 28.46 percent of total net income. Thus, income from coffee crop still remained as the main source of income for the homestay operators whose farm size was more than 4 ha. The farmers concentrated on coffee, being the major source of income and as such did not entertain tourists during the main crop season, especially, during the harvest period. From, yet another economic point of view, homestays contributed in creation of employment. Each homestay employed over 2 laborers throughout the year, providing them gainful employment during the off season of coffee.

We examined the type of homestay accommodation and management of homestay. The average number of rooms in homestays was found to be three and average occupancy rate was 88 days per year. In homestays, labour costs (54%) and maintenance costs (42%) formed the major components of total variable cost. The unregistered homestays particularly in towns, who are neither part of the homestay association nor have registered with the state department are posing a threat to homestays in rural areas as they offer unhealthy competition by not paying the stipulated charges. Moreover, they have least concern for ecotourism.

Homestay operators improved their economic condition by earning additional income, encouraged sustainable ecotourism and created additional employment contributing to the development of the region. Promotional efforts and policy support from the state government, are key catalysts for promoting sustainable ecotourism by the homestays in the Western Ghats region. The promotional efforts for marketing homestays are currently at a low key level which needs to be undertaken aggressively at the generic level - "Kodagu Homestays" by the CHSA by targeting the appropriate market segment. The future implication of the research could be estimation of ecotourism benefits to local farmers and region.

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