

National Strategy
for
Promotion of Rural Homestays

An initiative towards Aatmanirbhar Bharat



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Government of India
Ministry of Tourism

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1. Travel is increasingly becoming ‘experiential’

There is an increasing trend of ‘*experiential tourism*’ to know new things and experiencing cultures, cuisine, traditions, etc. Today, the discerning traveller is prepared to go great distances and to previously unknown places to get the unique experience. The tourist is also looking at being a responsible traveller and about giving back to the host communities.

1.2. Rural tourism is an enriching experience with culture and nature

The slow pace of life in the village, far away from the hustle and bustle of the big city, is an experience that will rejuvenate the visitor. The villages and the rural economies also have practitioners of unique arts and crafts in their original forms that are hard to come by in the cities. Rural Tourism focuses on the visitor travelling to rural areas and actively participating in rural lifestyle. The tourist also gets a chance to imbibe the traditions and culture of the area.

1.3. Rural Homestays provide authentic rural experience

The ‘Homestay’ provides the tourist with an accommodation and authentic local experience and interaction with the local host community. It opens the possibilities to understand a new and untapped place. The visitor also gets to know the unique lifestyle of the village at much closer quarters. The homestay may offer various activities for the guests to exclusively experience the cultural nuances of the area.

1.4. Rural Homestays provide opportunities for variety of activities

Depending on geographic location and cultural ethos of the place, Rural Homestays provide tourists opportunities for variety of activities such as to take a tour of the village to know local history and insights, participate in nature tours, trekking, learning how to weave silk or cotton cloth, participating in farm activities, learn a specialized local skill such as cooking local cuisine, serene experiences of houseboat sailing around backwaters, safaris by jeep or camel rides into the countryside, interact with tribes and to face-off with wildlife. It may broadly include varied experiences such as:

- (i). Heritage & Culture (Ethnic Tourism),
- (ii). Learning and education from the natural environment about rural lifestyle, art and culture (Ecotourism)
- (iii). Scenic Value (Nature Tourism),
- (iv). Religious (Pilgrim tourism),
- (v). Adventure/ sports-based activities (Adventure tourism)
- (vi). Agrarian lifestyle (Agro Tourism)

1.5. Rural Homestay and community development

Rural Homestays and communities are complementary to each other's progress and development of one accelerates the development of others. The development of the community attracts increased turnover of guests, and guest turnover generates income for the community. Rural homestays can revitalize local art and crafts, redevelop rural areas and rejuvenate rural life. The interaction with the visitors will also expand the knowledge and horizons of local people.

1.6. Rural Homestays to promote rural and sustainable tourism

Rural homestays can thus give a big push to rural tourism, benefit rural communities and reduce adverse environment impact of tourism. Rural homestays are a great opportunity to promote rural and sustainable tourism. In contrast to mass tourism, Rural Homestays is low scale, low density, flexible and spontaneous. It provides an alternative source of income to the rural host population. It is owned and operated by the local communities and economic benefits go directly to them.

1.7. National Strategy for Promotion of Rural Homestays

Ministry of Tourism has already notified National Strategy and Roadmap for Rural Tourism in the Country and Rural Homestays are crucial for the growth of Rural Tourism. The Ministry has also prepared a National Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in the country. The National strategy for promotion Rural Homestays is in line with the national strategies for rural tourism and sustainable tourism. The strategy aims at recognizing the role of rural homestays in promoting rural and sustainable tourism and strengthening the support system for rural homestays.

Chapter 2 – Vision, Mission and Goals

2.1. Vision

To develop Rural Homestays as an experiential tourism product, which can give boost to rural tourism, provide entrepreneurial opportunities to rural people and lead to community development.

2.2. Mission

To provide necessary financial, technical and marketing support to promote rural homestays in the country.

2.3. Strategic Objectives

- (i). To cater to the increasing needs of visitors for experiential tourism
- (ii). To create entrepreneurial and job opportunities in rural areas
- (iii). To promote sustainable, responsible and inclusive tourism through promotion of rural homestays
- (iv). To promote rural art and craft, culture, eco-tourism and other forms of nature tourism

2.4. Key Strategic Pillars

In order to develop rural tourism in the country, the strategy focuses on the following key pillars:

- (i). Incentives for Rural Homestays
- (ii). State Assessment and Ranking on Rural Homestays
- (iii). Digital technologies for Rural Homestays
- (iv). Developing clusters for Rural Homestays
- (v). Marketing support for Rural Homestays
- (vi). Capacity building for Rural Homestays
- (vii). Governance and Institutional Framework

2.5. Stakeholders

2.5.1. Key Stakeholders

Promotion and development of rural homestays will involve a diverse set of stakeholders, whose role will be crucial for the success of the Strategy. The key stakeholders are:

- (vii). Central Ministries
- (viii). State Governments

- (ix). Panchayati Raj Institutions
- (x). Industry
- (xi). Non-government organizations
- (xii). Local community

The role and responsibilities of the stakeholders are given below.

2.5.2. Central Ministries

Rural Homestays and Rural Tourism should be seen as Integrated Rural Development with tourism as a component rather than merely tourism activities going to rural areas. In order to develop tourism potential of rural areas through Rural Homestays, various Central and State Schemes must be converged and synergy created for major impact. Programs and initiatives of the following Ministries need to be studied in detail and utilized for development of Rural Homestays:

(i). Ministry of Tourism

Ministry of Tourism is responsible for promotion of Tourism in the Country. The Ministry implements various schemes for creation of infrastructure, marketing and promotion and skill development initiatives for tourism, which can be leveraged for promotion and development of Rural Homestays. The Ministry will coordinate and spearhead the strategy at the National level.

(ii). Ministry of Rural Development

The Ministry of Rural Development is working towards sustainable and inclusive growth of rural India through a multipronged strategy for eradication of poverty by increasing livelihoods opportunities, providing social safety net and developing infrastructure for growth. The Ministry of Rural Development is an important stakeholder in the development of Rural Homestays in the Country and contribute towards the objective through various schemes being implemented by the Ministry including self-help groups for women.

(iii). Ministry of Environment and Forests

The Ministry is responsible for implementation of policies and programs relating to conservation of the country's natural resources including its lakes and rivers, its biodiversity, forests and wildlife. Ministry of Environment can provide guidance and support to the Rural Homestays particularly in areas such as eco- tourism, wild life tourism, national parks and other related areas.

(iv). Ministry of Culture

Ministry of Culture is responsible to preserve, promote and disseminate all forms of art and culture in the Country and has a large number of Institutions and organization involved in the field of art and culture. The Ministry can contribute in the promotion of culture and heritage in rural areas and help in attracting tourists.

(v). Ministry of Development of North East Region

The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region is responsible for the matters relating to the planning, execution and monitoring of development schemes and projects in the North Eastern Region. Its vision is to accelerate the pace of socio-economic development of the Region so that it may enjoy growth parity with the rest of the country. Ministry can help development of Rural Tourism in north east region.

(vi). Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is responsible for providing and facilitating skill training initiatives. The Ministry and National Skill Development Council can help with various skill development initiatives for Rural Homestays.

(vii). Ministry of Textiles

Ministry of Textiles is responsible for promotion of handicrafts and handlooms and these activities are concentrated in rural areas. The Ministry aims to develop ten craft and handloom villages in the country so that tourists from across the globe can visit them and learn the rich legacy of Indian weavers, and lend support to the Make in India initiative.

(viii). Department of Panchayati Raj

Department of Panchayati Raj being the nodal department for Panchayati Raj institutions can assist in alignment of Panchayats with the objectives of rural tourism through various schemes and initiatives of the Department.

(ix). Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare

Department of Agriculture is responsible for agriculture, cooperation and farmers welfare. The Department implements various schemes, which impact the farming activities and communities in rural areas. The Department may facilitate linking of existing organic areas developed under Paramparagat Krish Vikas Yojna (PKVY) and Mission Organic Value Chain Development in North East Region (MOVCDNER). Tourists will be demonstrated organic practices and they

can buy authentic organic products also. Department may provide support for developing Model Organic Agro-Tourism Clusters.

(x). Department of Youth Affairs

Department of Youth Affairs pursues the twin objectives of personality building and nation building, i.e. developing the personality of youth and involving them in various nation-building activities to channelize the constructive and creative energies of the youth. The Department can help mobilizing youth for Rural Homestays.

2.5.3. State Governments

State Governments and UT Administrations have a number of schemes for development of rural areas including tourism related infrastructure, rural culture, heritage and handicraft. State Governments have also framed schemes for promotion of Rural Tourism and Rural Homestays. The State Governments have the primary role in creating momentum for Rural Homestays by formulating suitable policies and supporting rural tourism projects.

2.5.4. Panchayati Raj Institutions

Panchayati Raj Institutions have a strong influence on local communities and their support is vital to the success of rural tourism. Village Panchayats and other institutions have to be consulted and involved in the preparation of plans for developing Rural Homestays in their villages. Panchayats can help in coordination and facilitation, protection of natural resources, promotion of socio-economic development and provision of infrastructure.

2.5.5. Industry

Industry players, who specialize in rural tourism and tour operators are important stakeholders in the promotion of Rural Homestays. Hotels can also mentor some of the Homestays in nearby areas. Industry players providing digital platforms also have crucial role in promoting Rural Homestays.

2.5.6. Non-Government Organizations

Non-Government Organizations involved in the areas of sustainable and responsible tourism, integrated rural development, livelihood promotion in rural areas, community development in rural areas can play a great role in forging community linkages with Rural Homestays.

2.5.7. Local Community

Local community is a key stakeholder and has to be taken on board. The Community has to be made aware of the benefits of Rural Homestays, their apprehensions, if any have to be allayed and they have to be encouraged to participate and be part of the value chain. In order to ensure inclusive and responsible tourism, most of the supplies and services must be sourced from local providers. Their capacity building will have to be done to ensure they become part of the supply chain.

Chapter 3 – Salient Features of Rural Homestays

3.1. Location

The Rural Homestays will be located in rural areas. There will usually be natural and cultural attractions in the surrounding areas.

3.2. The Village and Community

Village and Community support will be crucial for the success of Rural Homestays. The Rural Homestays in a village should be organized and have the support of Village Panchayat. There should be common facilities in the village for welcoming the guests, performing art and cultural events and other such activities for guests to experience. The local community should support in various activities including provision of guides, souvenirs etc.

3.3. Host

The host of the Homestay will usually be staying at the property and be responsible for providing hospitality to the guests. The host may have some support staff and tie up for various cultural and other activities for the guests. The host shall be in good health and free of criminal record.

3.4. Accommodation

3.4.1. The House

The house shall be in good, stable and safe condition. There should be provision of electricity and clean water supply. The design and building materials shall reflect the vernacular architecture and local identity.

3.4.2. The Guestrooms

Provide basic amenities, furnishing in the guestrooms and ensure that they are properly ventilated and well lit. Keeping in view that these are residential properties, there will be a limit on number of rooms to be let out.

3.4.3. The Toilet

Provide preferably western type of toilet/ bathroom attached to the guestroom with basic toilet and bathroom facilities including. The guest should be provided with cold and hot water for bathing.

3.4.4. Kitchen

Kitchen shall be in good, clean condition and well ventilated. Kitchen utensils shall be in good condition, clean, and kept in a dry place.

3.5. Cuisines

Meals form a very integral part of stay in homestays. The local cuisine should be preferably served to the guests. At times delicious organic food should be picked fresh and cooked straight from the garden or farm.

3.6. Hygiene and Safety

The host family should maintain their personal hygiene well. Family members and others involved in food preparation or service shall have good personal hygiene and be properly attired. Guests shall only be served safe drinking water. All rooms, kitchen and toilets shall be kept clean and free of odour, dirt, dust, cobwebs etc. Toilet shall be regularly cleaned and kept free from dirt, stains and odour.

3.7. Waste Management

Dustbins should be kept in rooms, toilets, common areas and outside the homestay. Collect all Dry Waste like plastics, glass, papers, etc. and put it into the street dustbins.

3.8. Local Activities

Homestays and local community should organize various activities as per the geographic location and socio-cultural milieu of the place. The involvement of local community and other training local youths will be crucial.

3.9. Basic communication with the Guest

The Host must be polite and greet the guests with warmth and provide best form of traditional hospitality. Host must wear decent & clean clothes and should respect the cultural ethos of travellers. Host should not take any action or use any words, which make the guest uncomfortable.

Chapter 4 – Incentives for Rural Homestays

4.1. States to exempt Rural Homestays from licensing

The State Governments will provide necessary exemptions, wherever feasible, to the Rural Homestays from the provisions of Sarai's Act, 1867 or any other Act relevant to the subject, for the time being in force. Rural Homestays shall not be required to obtain a licence from any authority under any such Act, for the purpose of providing food or lodging services to the guests.

4.2. Benefits under schemes for self-employment and enterprise development

Rural Homestays should be considered eligible projects under schemes such as PMEGP to promote self-employment, village industries and other schemes for promotion and development of MSME service enterprises under Central and State Governments. Rural Homestays should accordingly be eligible to get benefits under these schemes.

4.3. Dedicated State Schemes for financial support to Rural Homestays

The State Governments should also frame dedicated schemes to provide support to Rural Homestays. The Scheme may provide

(i) Subsidy for setting up Homestays

Subsidy of 30% of the fixed capital invested subject to a ceiling of INR 1 lac per lettable room with a maximum of six rooms in convergence with other schemes such as PMEGP.

(ii) Operational Support

The State Governments may provide that Rural Homestays shall not be treated as commercial entities and shall be entitled to power and water tariff as applicable to domestic or residential use. No entertainment or other commercial tax will be imposed on Rural Homestays in connection with food, lodging or cultural activities.

(iii) Performance Based Support

The State Governments may provide performance-based incentives to Rural Homestays on the successful completion of the establishment as below:

- (a) INR 15,000 for completing 50 days of guest accommodation in 1st year
- (b) INR 20,000 for completing 75 days guest accommodation in 2nd year
- (c) INR 25,000 for completing 100 days guest accommodation in 3rd year

4.4. Assistance for Common facilities

Rural Homestays to succeed require community and public infrastructure in the village. The State Government should provide requisite support under various schemes for setting up common facilities and public infrastructure such as Community Centres, Open Air Theatre, Souvenir shop etc. to enhance engagement of visitor with the local community and visitor experience.

4.5. Partnership with Industry

Industries in the field of travel, hospitality and tourism can help develop Rural Homestays in a cluster. The Ministry of Tourism and State Governments may identify such Industries for partnership in developing Rural Homestays. Such an Industry should preferably have a booking platform to generate demand for the Homestays. The industry may identify Clusters and prospective Rural Homestays and undertake their development, capacity building and marketing. The Government will support them in following activities:

- (i) Administrative support through Department of Tourism at the State level and District Administration at the district level. A dedicated officer at the district level may be designated for coordination with the Industry in addressing the challenges of Rural Homestays.
- (ii) Facilitating support for setting up Rural Homestay under various schemes
- (iii) Facilitating support for setting up common facilities in the selected clusters and villages
- (iv) Facilitating training support for Rural Homestays
- (v) Facilitating support for quality accreditation

4.6. Role of Self-Help Groups for Women in running Rural Homestays

Women can play a significant role in setting up Rural Homestays. Local Women Self-Help Groups (SHG) can encourage their members to take up Rural Homestay to supplement their incomes. SHGs can provide larger support to individual homestays in making it a success. SHGs can be provided financial and institutional support by the Government for promoting Rural Homestays. SHGs may be provided training to run the Homestays.

4.7. Development of Model Homestay Clusters by Ministry of Tourism

Ministry of Tourism will develop one Model Homestays Cluster in each State in partnership with Industry. Ministry of Tourism will select an Industry Partner for development of model homestay cluster and will provide necessary institutional and financial support along with support from State Government, Panchayat and NGOs to promote and develop Rural Homestay Cluster.

Chapter 5 – State Assessment and Ranking on Rural Homestays

5.1. State Assessment and Ranking as a tool for Capacity Building

The Ministry of Tourism will conduct ranking of the States on Rural Homestays, with the key objective to foster competitiveness and encourage States to work proactively towards developing rural Homestays. It will be implemented as a capacity development exercise to encourage mutual learning among all states and to provide support in policy formulation and implementation.

5.2. State Ranking through professional and independent experts

The ranking exercise will be carried out with professional support and through independent experts from various Institutions both Government and Private. The Ministry of tourism will provide necessary training to the officials and other stakeholders and handhold the States for their participation in the exercise.

5.3. State specific report for Homestays

The assessment and ranking will also help prepare a State Specific Report containing analysis of respective ecosystems for promotion of rural Homestays, strengths and priority areas for future and best practices adopted by the States.

5.4. National and Global best practices for Homestays

There are several success stories in rural Homestays in the country, which will be documented as part of the State Assessment and Ranking. Many other countries have also developed successful rural Homestay models. The Ministry will study and benchmark these models and practices and prepare a tool kit for replication and adoption of such practices by various States.

5.5. Public, Private and Community Partnership Models

There is need to develop effective models for public private and community partnerships for rural Homestays based on successful case studies in the country and globally. Community Partnership is key to promote and develop Rural Homestays.

Chapter 6 – Digital Technologies for Rural Homestays

6.1. Digital Platforms offer both marketplace and payment system

Digital platforms make it simpler and cheaper for individuals to offer accommodation and other services to a global marketplace of consumers without setting up a website or needing to formalize their business. Digital platforms now offer both the marketplace and payment systems, making it possible for individuals to offer rooms or entire homes as tourist accommodation directly to consumers without needing to build a website or collect payments directly.

6.2. Digital Platforms are key for the success of Rural Homestays

Unlike hotels, the challenge that is usually faced by homestays is the low connectivity and problems in reservation due to minimal computerization. Additionally, their location in remote corners of scenic tourist spots becomes a disadvantage in disguise and limits their scope of reaching out to tourists. Digital Platforms are now widely providing the services of centralized reservation systems and have proven to be a boon for Rural Homestays. These platforms have successfully overcome technical hurdles and seamlessly integrate multiple parties, ranging from the multi-currency payment gateways to CRMs, that are involved in the availability of homestays on portals.

6.3. NIDHI Portal – One India One Registration

Ministry of Tourism has developed a National System of Registration of Homestays through National Integrated Database of Hospitality Units (NIDHI), which will provide a unique identity to each homestay. This will help other digital marketing platforms for Homestays to discover the Rural Homestays and also access the data from National registration system. This will ease onboarding of these Homestays on various platforms a great deal. The platform will provide full access to all the States for registration and verification of units. The system may also provide a default booking system for those Homestays, who don't have any other options.

6.4. Facilitating Adoption of Digital Technologies for Rural Tourism

Rural communities have limited knowledge on how to take advantage of digital platforms and mitigate risks. Either constrained by the lack of understanding or knowhow and resources, they are not able to leverage digital tools to grow their tourism. The Government will facilitate adoption of digital technologies and platforms for Rural Homestays through various measures:

- (i). Enabling broadband internet infrastructure to rural areas having tourism potential,

- (ii). Capacity Building of Homestays
- (iii). State governments / UTs would help to make database of all Rural Homestays, who can then be promoted through digital platforms.

Chapter 7 – Developing Clusters for Rural Homestays

7.1. Need for Clusters for rural Homestays

There is need to identify suitable clusters of villages in close vicinity for promoting rural Homestays. Homestays in any village must have community support and participation. The clusters can also converge other programs for skills, capacity building, marketing etc.

7.2. Identification of Clusters for rural Homestays

The States should identify clusters of villages having high potential for tourism development. The process of identification of clusters should be broad based involving Stakeholders from Government, Industry, NGOs, Rural Community and local businesses. The themes can broadly include:

- (i). Local crafts and cuisines
- (ii). Folk music, dance, puppet shows, theatre/street dramas,
- (iii). Agri tourism, Organic farming, Fam stays, herbal products, tea estates
- (iv). Yoga and meditation centers,
- (v). Eco zones within or around the village,
- (vi). Rural sports and cultural events
- (vii). National parks, wildlife sanctuaries
- (viii). Unique tribal culture
- (ix). Proximity to existing tourism circuits

7.3. Tourism Development Plans for the Cluster

Identified cluster for Homestays may be provided with requisite physical infrastructure, digital infrastructure, social infrastructure, development of tourism products, marketing and promotion support. Apart from the existing Central and State schemes, which can be used in convergence to meet the requirement of implementation of development plans for rural homestays, new schemes will also be framed. Suitable public private partnership models will also be developed to encourage private sector to join hands for development of rural homestays.

Chapter 8 – Marketing support for Rural Homestays

8.1. Digital Marketing

Tourists are increasingly being influenced by online and social media platforms. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on social media and other online portals for popularizing Rural Homestays as a tourism product. Incredible India digital platform can be utilized for promoting Rural Homestays. In addition, digital platforms for listing Rural Homestays for booking and discovery by tourists will be utilized.

8.2. Overseas Marketing

Apart from digital marketing, Rural Homestays Product will also be promoted under incredible India campaign and through India Tourism offices in overseas markets to generate awareness. States may also highlight rural homestays product in their campaigns.

8.3. Market Development Assistance

Market development assistance schemes may be prepared specially focused on supporting rural homestay promoters. It may support both domestic marketing and overseas marketing. It may also provide support for digital marketing of the cluster and individual Rural Homestay.

8.4. Partnership with Industry Stakeholders and Online Platforms

Marketing must be in partnership with the travel trade and online platforms, to benefit from their network and marketing expertise.

8.5. Fam Tours

Familiarization Tours to be hosted inviting tour operators, travel partners and famous travel writers / journalists to various rural homestays clusters to create awareness and subsequent publicity about rural homestay products.

Chapter 9 – Capacity Building for Rural Homestays

9.1. Resource Centre for Capacity Building of the Stakeholders

National Strategy on Rural Tourism has proposed setting up of Resource centres for capacity building of the Stakeholders. The same should also be used for capacity building of rural homestays. The Resource centre will prepare requisite IEC material, training material and master trainers to provide impetus to the capacity building activities.

9.2. Conduct of Community Training and Workshops

The concept of Homestay is getting popular in many States. Involvement of the local community is crucial for success of Rural Homestays. Most of the Homestays lack professional training of Hospitality etc. which would impact their success in the long run. Ministry of Tourism in partnership with the State Governments will organise training workshops to enrich the hospitality skills of the Homestay owners and local communities of the region to ensure a better experience for the tourists.

9.3. Training of local guides

The State Government may encourage training of local youths as trained guides about the local cultural and natural offerings. These local tourist guides will play an important role in the success of the program. The guides may also be encouraged to learn foreign languages.

9.4. Digital Platform for Quality Certification for Rural Homestays

While most of the digital platforms have their own quality checks for listing homestays, Ministry of Tourism in partnership with the State Governments will promote a nation-wide accreditation system for Rural Homestays. Ministry of Tourism will bring out revised guidelines for classification and reclassification of Rural Homestays in partnership with State Governments. While the platform will be created at national level, the operationalization will happen at the State level. All the accredited units will further be aggressively promoting through branding and marketing by the Ministry of Tourism and State Governments.

9.5. Awards to Rural Homestays at National and State level

The Ministry of Tourism will launch a scheme for awards to the successful rural homestays in various categories. These awards will be publicised by the Ministry to create awareness for participation. The Ministry will showcase the awardees on various platforms.

9.6. Need to organize the Rural Homestay Community

In order to develop Rural Homestays on scale, there is need to organize the rural Homestay Community, who can take up their issue and concerns at various level. The Ministry and the State Governments may help in organizing Rural Homestays organizations.

Chapter 10 – Governance and Institutional Framework

10.1. Governance

The Governance and Institutional Framework laid down for Rural Tourism will also be applicable to Rural Homestays.

10.2. National Nodal Agency

National Nodal Agency for Rural Tourism will also be the nodal agency for Rural Homestays.

10.3. State Nodal Agency

State Nodal Agency for Rural Tourism will also be the nodal agency for Rural Homestays.

10.4. Action Plan

Ministry of Tourism will prepare a detailed National Action Plan in consultation with relevant Ministries, State Governments and Industry Stakeholders for implementation of the Strategy.
