

Opportunities of Homestay Tourism in Nepal: Study of Annapurna Rural Municipality-10, Ghandruk

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Abstract

This study explores the potential of homestay tourism in Ghandruk, a picturesque village in the Annapurna region of Nepal, with the objective of facilitating meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities. By focusing on the sharing of local traditions and customs, the survey aims to assess the viability of homestays as a sustainable tourism model that promotes cultural exchange and economic benefits for the host community. The nature of the study is mixed, using purposive sampling method which is under the non-probability sampling. In this study 15 respondents were carried out in total. Ghandruk faces many challenges in homestay tourism but there are also great opportunities. Through a combination of surveys, interviews, and questionnaire with local families. The findings highlight Ghandruk's rich cultural heritage, which presents a strong foundation for developing homestay tourism, providing both visitors and locals with unique opportunities to engage in authentic, immersive experiences. The paper concludes with recommendations for fostering community involvement, enhancing tourist experiences, and ensuring sustainable growth in Ghandruk's homestay tourism sector.

Keywords: Homestay tourism, Ghandruk, Gurung community, culture, tradition, sustainable tourism

Introduction

Tourism is the activity of traveling to different destinations for leisure, recreation, business, or other purposes, often involving the exploration of new places, cultures, and experiences. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including sightseeing, adventure, relaxation, cultural exploration, and educational pursuits. Tourism is a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. (UNWTO). There are different tourism in Nepal among them homestay tourism is most popular among tourists.

Tourism is very important for Nepal's economy because of its rich culture, beautiful nature, and famous landmarks like Mount Everest. It contributes around 6.7% to the country's GDP and provides jobs for over 1 million people. In 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal welcomed 1.17 million international tourists. Many tourists come for activities like trekking and mountaineering. Popular trekking routes, such as the Everest Base Camp and Annapurna Circuit, are famous worldwide for their stunning views and cultural experiences.

Homestay tourism refers to a form of accommodation where visitors stay with local families in their homes while travelling to a particular destination. (Bhattarai, 2022). Homestay is a system of taking guests to their homes and paying them for staying and eating. (Sunuwar, 2019). Homestay tourism allows tourists to immerse themselves in the local culture, customs, and traditions, offering a more authentic and enriching travel experience. It also provides an opportunity to interact closely with locals, fostering cross-cultural understanding and friendship. Homestays often contribute to the local economy by directly benefiting the host families and supporting small-scale tourism enterprises (Dhakal et al., 2020).

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Homestay tourism has been a tradition in Nepal for a long time because people in Nepal believe that guests are like gods, following the saying "*Atithi Devo Bhava*." The homestay program was officially introduced in Nepal in 2067 B.S., although it started in 2054 B.S. in Sirubari, Syangja. Sirubari is considered the first homestay village in Nepal. The homestay program is a type of rural, cultural and community-based tourism. Homestay tourism is a type of travel where guests stay with local families in their homes. It's a way for travelers to experience the local culture, traditions, and hospitality. Homestay tourism has become a prominent form of sustainable tourism in Nepal, offering travelers a unique opportunity to experience the rich cultural diversity, traditional lifestyles, and natural beauty of the country. By staying with local families, visitors are immersed in authentic cultural practices while supporting the local economy. This form of tourism has gained traction in rural areas, where it has not only provided economic benefits but also contributed to the preservation of indigenous cultures and ecosystems (Bhandari & Sapkota, 2020).

The popularity of homestays in Nepal is especially evident in regions like the Annapurna and Langtang areas, where tourists seek more intimate and community-based experiences (Sharma & Gurung, 2018). This article delves into the growth of homestay tourism in Nepal, its socioeconomic impact on rural communities, and the ways in which it fosters sustainable development while enriching the overall travel experience.

Ghandruk is a picturesque village located in the Annapurna region of Nepal, offering stunning views of the Annapurna mountain range. It is situated at an altitude of approximately 1,940 meters (6,365 feet) and is a popular destination for trekkers on the Annapurna Circuit and Ghorepani Poon Hill trek (Nepal Tourism Board, 2020). The village is predominantly inhabited by the Gurung ethnic group, known for their rich cultural traditions and history (Shrestha, 2013). Ghandruk's unique stone-built houses and slate roofs add to its charm, attracting visitors who are keen to experience the local lifestyle and architecture. In addition to its cultural significance, Ghandruk offers spectacular views of mountains such as Annapurna South, Machapuchare (Fishtail), and Hiunchuli, making it an ideal spot for nature lovers and photographers. The village also provides opportunities for visitors to engage with the local community through homestays, where they can enjoy authentic Nepali hospitality (Shrestha, 2013).

Homestay tourism in Ghandruk is an important aspect of the village's tourism industry, offering visitors the chance to experience authentic Nepali culture while staying with local families. This form of tourism allows travelers to immerse themselves in the daily life of the Gurung community, providing a unique cultural exchange that goes beyond traditional hotel accommodations. Visitors can enjoy local meals, participate in traditional activities, and learn about the customs and lifestyle of the people who call Ghandruk home. The homestay program in Ghandruk is part of a broader effort to promote sustainable, community-based tourism in rural Nepal. It allows tourists to contribute directly to the local economy while minimizing environmental impact (Nepal Tourism Board, 2020). The Ghandruk homestays offer simple, yet comfortable, accommodations, typically in stone-built houses with slate roofs, maintaining the village's traditional architecture (Shrestha, 2013). Through this program, the local community benefits economically and culturally, as it fosters the preservation of traditional practices and crafts while providing visitors with a memorable experience. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opportunities for homestay tourism in rural settings, as well as to identify and analyse the challenges. Furthermore, the study will make recommendations to promote opportunities and measures to address the challenges that urban homestays face.

- To determine the potentiality for homestay tourism in the study area.
- To identify differences in traditions and customs between tourists and local communities.

Methods and Material

This study was conducted at Annapurna Rural Municipality-10, Ghandruk of Kaski district. Among total respondents 15 households were selected, purposive under non-probability sampling technique is used to identify required respondents. The study is based on primary and secondary sources of information. Mixed methods have been used to address qualitative and quantitative data. The information from different books, articles, and internet websites are taken to explore secondary data. The central aim of this study is to explore the opportunity of homestay tourism in the study area. Semi structured questionnaire, survey is done for collecting the primary. Field visits and direct observations in Ghandruk allow for firsthand insights into how homestays operate, the interaction between tourists and locals, and the impact on the community. Additionally, the research incorporates observation, where the researcher engages in homestay activities to understand the cultural exchange aspect more deeply. Data analysis tools are used to evaluate the economic benefits and social changes brought about by tourism. Visual documentation through photography and video helps capture the authenticity of the experience, while tourist feedback, both online and through direct surveys, provides a more comprehensive understanding of visitor satisfaction and areas for improvement.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in the theory of sustainable tourism, which advocates tourism development that balances economic, environmental and socio cultural dimensions (UNWTO, 2012). It also draws on community participation theory which emphasizes the inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes for equitable benefit-sharing. Within this theoretical framework, homestay tourism is viewed as a form of alternative tourism which contrast with mass tourism by promoting small scale, locally owned and culturally integrated tourism models. These theoretical lenses helps to evaluate the effectiveness of Nepal's homestay model introduced through the homestay working procedure 2010 in achieving inclusive and sustainable rural development.

Sustainable Tourism

All forms of tourism, such as vacations, business trips, conferences, adventure travel, and ecotourism need to be sustainable. UNESCO (2010) defines sustainable tourism as travel that respects both local communities and visitors, as well as cultural traditions and the natural environment. When tourism follows sustainable practices, it can help improve the standard of living in mountain regions. Sustainability involves environmental protection, economic growth, and social well-being. Ecotourism should not only focus on preserving natural resources but should also consider fairness, community growth, and social harmony. Sustainable tourism in mountain areas should address three key goals: conserving local nature, enhancing the lives of local residents, and ensuring tourist satisfaction (Nepal, 2002).

Tourism development cannot happen without taking care of the environment. Key sectors like tourism management, transportation, lodging, and sightseeing all need to operate in sustainable ways (Himalaya Holiday, 2013).

The Sustainable Tourism Network (STN) in Nepal is an informal group of individuals and organizations that support responsible tourism. STN serves as a platform for people in the tourism field to exchange knowledge, collaborate, and promote best practices in sustainable tourism (STN, 2009). Despite efforts, Nepal's tourism sector faces many obstacles. One of the biggest is weak infrastructure, especially transportation. The country depends a lot on air travel, but its main international airport is old and inadequate (Ellis-Lemma, 2013). Nepal's tough terrain makes building roads and railways in the northern regions very difficult due to steep landscapes, high energy costs, and limited resources.

Additionally, there is disagreement among local communities—some want development projects like roads, while others want to protect the environment. While road construction can benefit individuals, it also damages nature and trekking paths. This has sparked a debate between promoting ecotourism or mass tourism. Climate change has added more problems, causing natural disasters like floods and landslides that harm infrastructure and increase pollution (Ellis–Lemma, 2013). Government services like transport, healthcare, safety, and job opportunities are mostly centered in urban areas. This causes overcrowding and pollution in cities, which negatively affects the tourism industry in Nepal.

Challenges of Homestay Tourism

Global warming is having significant impacts on Ghandruk’s environment, which directly affects tourism. Melting glaciers and reduced snowfall have altered the landscape, reducing the flow of freshwater from glaciers and impacting trekking routes that attract visitors. Additionally, warmer temperatures are increasing the risk of natural disasters such as landslides and floods, which threaten both locals and tourists. Climate change has also disrupted local agriculture, affecting crop yields due to changing rainfall patterns and temperatures, leading to food shortages and a reliance on imports (Lama et al., 2021), which further challenges the homestay tourism model.

Alongside environmental issues, Ghandruk faces social and cultural pressures related to tourism. The growing number of visitors risks diluting the village's traditional practices and cultural heritage, blending them with outside influences, which can compromise the authenticity of the homestay experience. Over-tourism may also strain local infrastructure, diminish the quality of tourism, and cause environmental degradation, creating tensions within the community. Infrastructure challenges, such as poor transportation and limited access to utilities like electricity and clean water, also hinder tourism growth. Moreover, economic disparities are evident, as some families benefit greatly from tourism while others struggle, leading to inequality (Sharma et al., 2020). Inflation from increased tourism can make goods and services more expensive for locals, adding to the economic challenges. Additionally, there is a need for professional training and the adoption of sustainable tourism practices to ensure long-term viability (Tiwari, 2018). As global warming impacts agriculture and living conditions, younger generations may migrate to urban areas, causing labor shortages that strain the homestay sector (Regmi & Paudel, 2020).

Table No. 1 Challenges for Homestay

The data of Challenges of Homestay is based on the homestay operator’s responses by filling up the questionnaire. The responses have been shown in the following table:

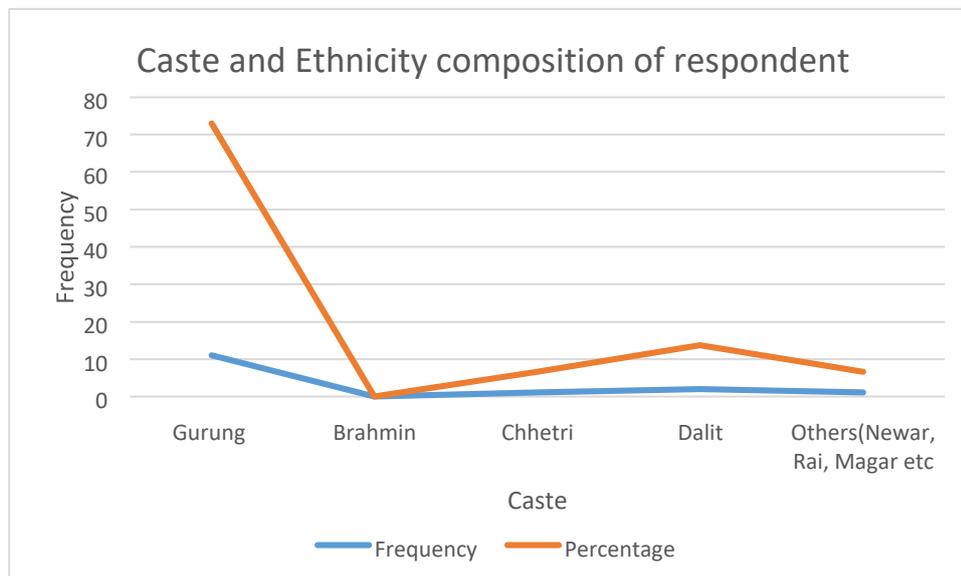
Factors	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of proper transportation	7	47
Lack of publicity and marketing	2	13
Individualism and lack of solidarity	1	7
Lack of homestay tourism awareness among locals	1	7
Crowd and lack of sanitation in the area	2	13
Presence of hotels and lodges	2	13
Total	15	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

As in table, 47 per cent of Respondent from Tantiing village think that due to lack of proper transportation there is challenges of home and 13 per cent respondents think that due to lack of publicity and marketing it became challenges for homestay to grow up. Major problem is proper transportation due to its geographical region.

Figure 1: Caste and Ethnicity composition of respondent

Understanding the caste or ethnic background of the people responding is important to see how different social groups view and are impacted by tourism. It helps us understand the cultural diversity of the area and how tourism affects their daily lives and sources of income.

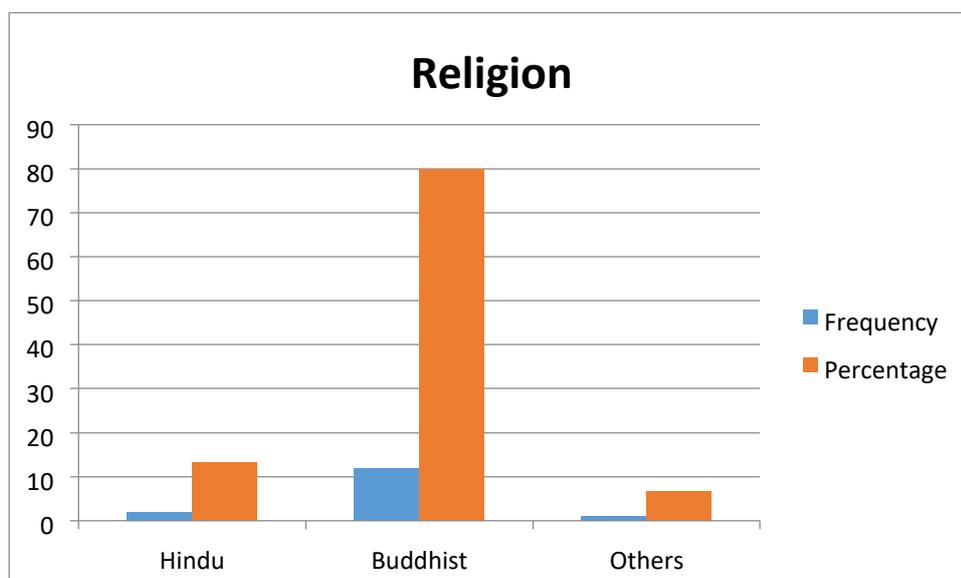


Source: Field Survey, 2024

The data shows that Ghandruk is culturally rich, with the Gurung community making up the largest group (73%). Other groups like Chhetri, Dalit, and others also play an important role in the tourism industry in Ghandruk.

Figure 2: Religion

Understanding the religion status of respondents is valuable in assessing how different religious groups in Ghandruk may have distinct views or practices related to tourism, the environment, and sustainability. Religion can play a role in shaping attitudes towards nature conservation, traditional values and impacts of tourism.

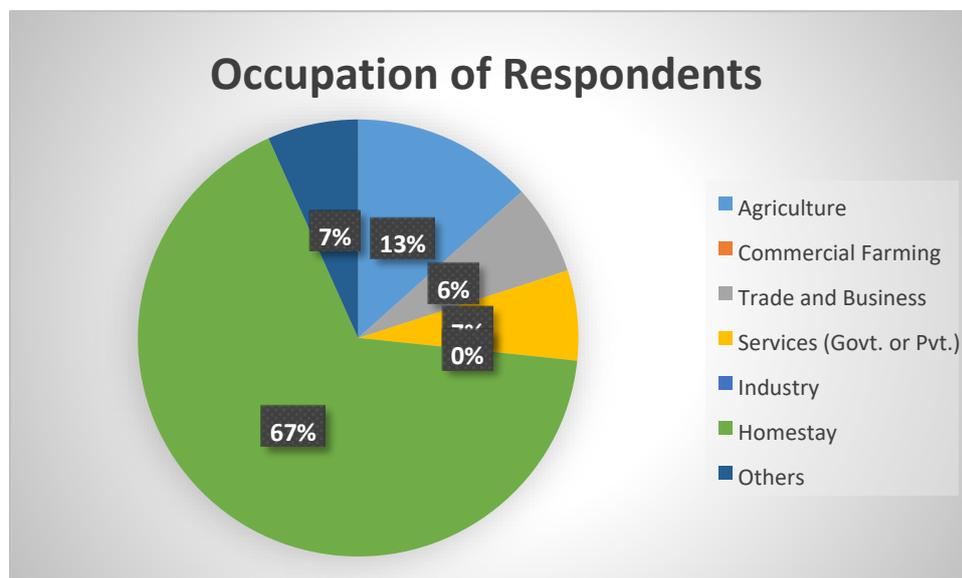


Source: Field Survey, 2024

According to the survey done in Annapurna Rural Municipality 80 per cent of the people are Buddhist, 13.33 per cent are Hindu and people following other religion are 6.67 per cent.

Figure 3: Occupation Status

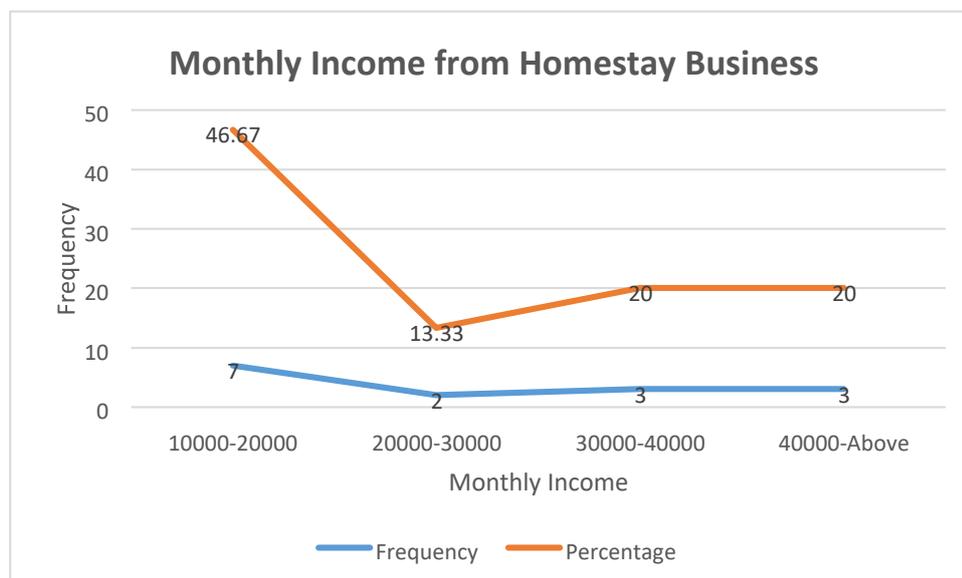
The occupation status of the respondents is important for understanding how different work groups are impacted by and involved in tourism. It helps to see how tourism affects their livelihoods, both positively and negatively.



Source: Field Survey, 2024

The above data clearly shows that most of the residents of Ghandruk village is engaged in Homestay Tourism (67 percent) than other occupations.

Figure 4: Monthly Income from Homestay Business



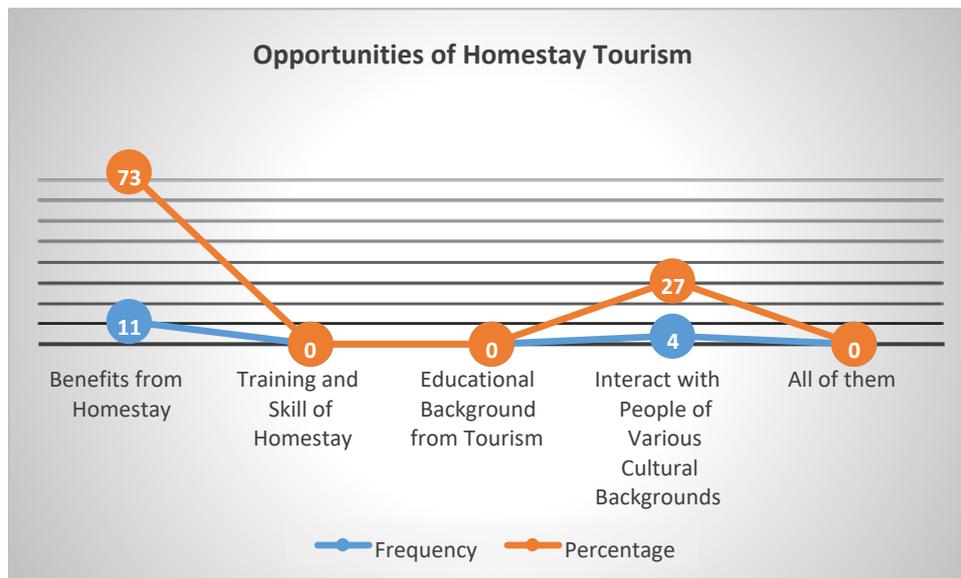
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Most of the people in the sample had a monthly income of over Rs 40,000 that is 20% of respondents. Another 20% earned between Rs 30,000 and Rs 40,000 per month. 13.33% of respondents had a monthly income between Rs 20,000 and Rs 30,000, while the largest group, 46.67%, earned between Rs 10,000 and Rs 20,000.

From this data, we can say that the majority 20% of the respondents earned a good monthly income of more than Rs 40,000, which is a positive factor for their livelihoods. These respondents were also fully dedicated to their work in the homestay industry.

Figure 5: Opportunity of Homestay tourism

The data of opportunities of homestay tourism is based on homestay operators themselves and by the inflow and in growth of tourists and tourism



Source: Field Survey, 2024

According to the table, 73% of the respondents believe they can benefit from homestay and see it as an opportunity. On the other hand, 27% think that homestay allows them to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Possibilities of Homestay Tourism

Homestay tourism in Ghandruk offers a unique opportunity to combine cultural immersion with sustainable tourism, benefiting both visitors and the local community. Located in the picturesque Annapurna region of Nepal, Ghandruk is known for its rich Gurung culture, stunning landscapes, and its position along popular trekking routes like the Annapurna Circuit and Annapurna Base Camp (Chhetri, 2017). Homestay accommodations allow travelers to experience authentic local life by staying with families, enjoying traditional food, and participating in cultural activities, all while minimizing the environmental impact of large-scale tourism. This model of tourism promotes eco-friendly practices and offers visitors a more personal, intimate connection with the community (Sharma, 2020).

For the local population, homestay tourism is a valuable source of income, contributing to the economic development of Ghandruk. It empowers families by providing them with opportunities for financial growth, especially in a region where other industries might be seasonal or unreliable (Shrestha & Dahal, 2018). Additionally, this form of tourism creates avenues for skill development in hospitality management, guiding, and customer service. As homestay owners collaborate with trekking agencies and other local businesses, they can create specialized travel packages to attract international visitors, further boosting the local economy. Overall, homestay tourism in Ghandruk presents a sustainable and mutually beneficial approach to tourism that enhances the cultural experience while supporting local livelihoods (Bhatta, 2019).

Conclusion

Ghandruk has a rich culture, with the Gurung community being the largest group that is 73%, and most people are Buddhists. Many locals work in homestay tourism, earning between “10,000-20,000” per month. While there are challenges, there are also many opportunities for growth in homestay tourism. It can create new jobs and improve skills in hospitality, benefiting both the community and visitors. With the right support and cooperation with local businesses, homestay tourism in Ghandruk can become an important part of the local economy and help promote cultural exchange. Tourism in Ghandruk lets visitors explore its beautiful nature, culture, and trekking paths. Homestay tourism offers travelers the chance to stay with local families and experience the real village life of Ghandruk. By staying with locals, visitors can connect with the traditions of the Gurung people while enjoying the stunning Annapurna region. The survey aims to check if homestays can be a sustainable way of tourism that helps cultural exchange and brings economic benefits to the local community. This type of tourism helps support local families and promotes environmentally friendly practices.

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