HOMESTAY IN SNNP

SNNP is one of the unique parks in the world which not only inhabits wildlife, birds and plants but also local community exist within the park. There are 7 Village Development communities in National park area among them 4 Villages namely-Mulkharka, Chilaune, Okhreni, Kune are the villages suffering economically. There are altogether 450 households and these households due to lack of knowledge and awareness are conducting activities that is creating negative impacts to the environment. With few livelihood options local people are carrying out activities such as deforestation, alcohol brewing, use of insecticides and chemical fertilizers in farming which are the activities prohibited by law. Also the communities lack sanitation / hygiene and proper waste management system.

Therefore to sustain and maintain this fragile environment revenue from eco-tourism activities is essential. realizing the need of alternative opportunity for the tourism development; NETIF introduced eco-tourism development programs, Home-Stay accommodation services and trail development for hiking opportunities within the park areas.

Homestay is a new concept in Nepal’s tourism, which can play an important role in rural development. In the Nepalese contest, homestay tourism is the inclusion of all rural tourism components like trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, pleasure and recreational tourism, adventurous tourism, ecotourism, nature-based tourism and the like.

To encourage the micro-economic component and to provide employment and economic value by exposing the rural culture and nature to the outside world with the focus in environmental conservation; NETIF along with the community have initiated homestay service in villages such as Okhreni and Kune that lies in the upstream part of the National Park. These villages are mostly populated by Tamang communities. There are no hotels in these villages so introducing such service can be beneficial to both the community as well as for the tourists visiting the Kathmandu valley Cultural Trekking trail (KVCTT) in SNNP national park. Further to promote and develop the homestay program; NETIF has allocated a budget of Rs 1,50,000 and a revolving fund has also been created for the program . A member from the community willing to start homestay program can use the fund and return back within one year which latter will be used by another member so the money can be used as a revolving fund .

According to a feasibility study carried out by NETIF; a group of the locals who are willing to start homestay service in their houses have been formed. In order to make the group acquainted and develope homestay service system; NETIF is planning to send the group for a FAM trip to one of the village in Pokhara where homestay is being practiced so that it can help them get experience of the service and plan for their community as well.

Homestay in Okhreni , Mulkharka and Kune:

Home stay here will be the best way for you to experience what it's really like to live in Nepal. Staying in a family home, sharing their food, meals and chores helps you to gain a window into life in rural Nepal and see a world outside of computers, high-tech gadgets and modern amenities that we all take for granted. A home can comfortably accommodate two to three trekkers; normally you will be given the main bedroom and treated like an honored guest. Here you can sit in the kitchen and help prepare the evening meal or wander around and lend a hand cutting grass, gathering wood, tending the animals and generally seeing how these people live.

The food will be simple but wholesome and almost always vegetarian unless you offer to buy a chicken for the family. Toilet facilities will most likely be basic and water limited. A small price to pay for the amazing cultural experience that you will gain.

In the evening the family will invite you to eat the meal with them, normally they eat with their right hand, but most likely they will offer you a spoon. Around the kitchen at night time is a great place to chat with the family. The language barrier may be an obstacle that’s why it’s a great idea to carry some photos of your own family and home and your country to show them and get a basic conversation going.

At first you may feel uncomfortable staying in a family home, but just relax and try and interact with the family as much as you can, it is sure to be one of the best cultural experiences and a highlight of your trek, not to mention you are bringing income directly into the village where it will stay and be of great value to them.

With the home stay service in SNNP, the visitors get an opportunity to experience a place in a dependable, comfortable and homely setting. In general, home stay provides visitors

(i) unique opportunity to experience the rich and hospitable cultures of the village;

(iii) to meet and interact with the local people from the host country,

(v) learn about environments and cultures through other people’s eyes,

(vi) Contribute directly to the rural economy and people in need,

(vii) Provide opportunities to support the community in conservation initiatives.

You can enjoy nature and have a rural life experience since these home stays are located away from the rush of city life and busy traffic. why not visit then??

**SETTING UP VILLAGE HOME STAYS – PROPSAL AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

**Important Points for Home stays**

* **Separate sleeping quarters –** A separate area should be provided, be it an additional building or simply a spare room within the house where the guests can sleep. Though it may seem ideal to offer the guests the main families’ bed room, a guest would feel uncomfortable with the fact that the family would in turn have to be sleeping on the floor in the kitchen. It is essential that there is a spare room to be used as the guests sleeping quarters. This gives the guest and the family both a sense of security and privacy. Also if the guest is sleeping directly with the family they may feel uncomfortable or disturbed when family members get up to work before the sunrise.
* **Involvement within the household –** The family should feel comofrable and happy to encourage the guest to help out with house hold and farm chores. If not the guest could feel uncomfortable and intrusive if everyone is hard working and they are not. Villagers need to be encouraged to include guests in things like preparing food, collecting grass and fire wood, helping with the animals and in religious worship etc. This will give a guest a memorable experience.
* **Cleanliness –** Sleep Quarters and sleeping mats and blankets should be clean and bug free. Bed bugs are one of the biggest complaints in home stays. Villagers need to be shown how to prevent and get rid of bed bugs in blankets and mattresses. The simple task of airing bedding out in the sunshine after use will eliminate the problem of bed bugs. Though a home does not have to be spic and span, it should be clean and well looked after, appear homely and lived in. Guests are paying to experience the culture no to sleep in filth, but they also appreciate an authentic home as opposed to a sterile home specifically set up for tourism. Put simply, floors should be kept swept, kitchen areas tidy and clean, animals kept out of the kitchen, unused food should be stored appropriately, toilets should be clean and have access to water and bedding should be well aired and not smelly.
* **Payment –** A set pricing system should be implemented on a bed and two meal basis ( ie dinner and breakfast) This will ensure that the villagers are not the victim of haggling and bargaining and get what’s due to them and that visitors are not the victims of overzealous villagers. A set pricing system for Home stays in a region is a fair and sustainable system.
* **Toilets –** There should at a minimum an enclosed squatter style toilet with water access and a bin for toilet paper. A toilet is a must as guests would not feel comfortable making use of open fields. The toilet should have an adequate treatment or sewage system, should not empty into any water source and be away from the home or kitchen area (bad smell is off putting). Squatter toilets are fine, western style toilets are not required.
* **Washing and bathing –** Where possible a small wash or shower room should be provided to avoid embarrassment to both locals and visitors. Locals could feel uncomfortable with western women openly washing at a village tap and vice versa…..
* **Cultural experience -** It’s important that the experience in a home stay is a cultural and authentic experience for the guest. This means a guest’s presence in the house should not upset the daily routine. Meals should be typical, daily chores maintained etc. A house should also be a typical style house, not a new or modern building built specifically for a home stay.
* **Drinking water –** Within a village where there is a home stay, there should be a shop that supplies bottled drinking water, toilet paper and snacks for visitors. Though visitors should also be given the opportunity to fill up their drinking bottles with filtered or boiled water which they can treat themselves. Also bins for rubbish should also be provided.
* **Physiological Problems associated with home stays -** The guest and the family need to feel comfortable with the sleeping arrangements. If a guest feels like they are in the way it may upset their stay and if the family feels uncomfortable with the guest it could be hard for them. Host families need to be fully briefed before setting up a home stay. They should have some concept of western mentality, ideals and needs and be mentally prepared to deal with any situation that may arise.
* **Language barrier –** It would be good for some members of the host family to have basic language skills in English.
* **Food and Hygiene –** A host family needs to know basic food hygiene and how to prepare food that will not make westerns ill. Local food is perfectly acceptable but it must be prepared in a hygienic manner. This is easy to do and with simple instruction a host family can avoid their guest getting sick. Main things that should be avoided are giving visitors old or dried meat, untreated local water, too much Chang and undercooked foods.

**Setting up Homestays**

1. **Source suitable houses within suitable villages –** A village should have good water supply and cultural interest as well as a willingness to open up their village to tourists. Small cold store or local shop is also good. Also possibly access to a land phone line is required in case of emergency.
2. **Educate the villagers** and prepare them mental for what to expect from tourists, help the culture shock that they could experience from having westerns staying in their homes
3. **Set up guidelines for** villagers in regard to meal times, rubbish disposal, keeping clean of public village toilet, preparation of hygienic food etc.
4. **Food hygiene training** - Villagers or hosts need to know about safe food for tourists, for example washing vegetables in iodine treated water, the proper cooking of meat etc. Villagers need to be given access to iodine in such cases. Villagers should also be provided or encouraged to use gas as opposed to wood fire cooking. Though wood fire is more traditional, gas cooking is better for the environment and does not provide uncomfortable situations of a Smokey kitchen which may be hard for visitors to deal with.
5. **Bedding –** It is a good idea to provide a host family with appropriate sleeping mats and blankets that can be used only for visitors.

**Types of Home stays**

**1. Group home stays for groups up to 12 people (village based)**

In this style of home stay, normally a separate sleeping lodge or building is provided in the village for groups to sleep in. The villagers will be responsible to keep the lodge clean, bedding washed and to work jointly to provide typical food for the group. This works well as the guests have a separate sleeping area and the entire village works jointly to look after the lodge and supply food which means that profits are shared in the village instead of kept in just one family.

**2. Shared home stays for individuals or groups no bigger than 4 people. (normally private homes)**

In this style of home stay, a guest or trekker will actual stay within the house with the family. This kind of home stay is suitable for one to two people but not more than four people.

The house providing the home stay will be required to have a separate sleeping room to accommodate the guests with adequate bedding. There must be water and a designated place for the toilet. The toilet does not have to be attached to the home itself, a clean village toilet is perfectly acceptable.

A family providing such a home stay should be comfortable with the fact the foreign guests will be in their house and kitchen, helping them prepare food, sharing meals with them.

This is one of the best ways for a guest to get a rounded cultural experience and insight in to how villagers live, though if the same family is always hosting guests it could create bad feelings in the village when it comes to wealth and money issues.

**3. Village Dormitory/ Community House**

This is where a dorm style building is provided in a village to host guests for sleeping. During meal times, the guests will eat a house in the village. Each time guest arrive in the village, they will eat at a different house. A roster is created for catering and the family gets paid accordingly. The dorm room is ran and maintained by a village committee who will also be responsible for the monies raised. This is a very successful style of home stay for high volume usage. Plus it’s a win-win for villagers and visitors alike.