

A Study of Determinants Affecting Homestay Tourism in Kullu District of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

Homestays are an emerging tourism and accommodation concept in India which has provided a significant contribution to Indian economy. Homestay offers hospitality which provides an exclusive experience where the tourist gets to know real culture and feel of the estimation. In spite of all the benefits offered by homestays, they are less popular in comparison to other accommodation services in India. This study has focused to review the factors which contribute to success of homestays in Indian Himalayan Region (IHR). The thorough analysis of the study revealed that some important factors leading to success of homestays are accessibility, authenticity, biodiversity, culture, attraction, environment friendly, safety and security of the tourist etc.

Lack of awareness to end users is the main barrier which can overcome by using multimedia and advertisement. The finding from this review suggests that by focusing on the determinants of comfortable homestay, proper marketing strategies and sustainable practices, popularity and success of homestay could be highly improved.

Key Words: Indian Himalayan region, home stay, determinants, sustainable practices, marketing strategy.

Introduction

In Indian culture, there floats around a very famous saying that goes as follows, “*Athithi Devo Bhava*”, which invariably translates to “The Guest is God”. Tourism and Hospitality is considered as a strong pillar in the relationships between hosts and guests. Earlier relationship was defined in terms of respect and honor within correlation. It was always an honor to be visited by someone, and the host used to treat the guest with respect and at the same time provided them comfort, entertainment and security. As the guest could easily feel the honor the host was bestowing upon him, it was the duty of the guest to repay the same with kindness and respect for the host’s customs and traditions.

In Indian Himalayan Region the word Himalaya is driven from Sanskrit word “Him” means snow and “Alya” means House. This region is wide spread in between Indus and Brahmaputra region, about 2500 km wide and 5.3 lakh square km in area. It starts from Shivalik hills and extended up to Tibet in the north. Mainly Himalayan Region is divided into three regions, The Greater Himalaya (Himadri) Lesser Himalaya (Himachal) outer Himalaya (Shivalik). The Himalaya is originate due to deposition of Tibetan ocean crust between India & Tibet. Summer Monsoon provide the moisture for snowfall in this region world’s highest peaks like Mount Everest lies in this region which is taller than 8000 meters. It also bears so many glaciers (9575), i.e. Siachin, the largest glacier in the world. These glaciers results in as sources of many rivers in the region.

IHR ranges from latitude 21⁰57' N and 37⁰5'N Latitude and Longitude 72⁰4' E and 97⁰25' E and covers 5, 33,000 km² area starting from Jammu and Kashmir in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east. In IHR the lesser Himalayan region i.e. Himachal is having less snow fall in comparison to upper region, that is the region that people like to visit Himachal for their four purpose in higher region the climate hazards like land slide, heavy rainfall has been observed during past year.

Objectives

- To study the awareness of tourist visiting homestay in Kullu, Himachal
- To assess the 5 A's of homestays tourism in Kullu Himachal
- To assess the promotion & Marketing of Homestays
- To analyze the sustainable practices adopted by Homestays owners and the Guests during their stay for development of the Homestays tourism

Evolution of Accommodation in Tourism & Hospitality Industry

The development of the hotel industry in India is closely linked to travel. People mostly traveled on animals like mules, horses or camels. During the Muslim period with the Arab invasion in the Sindh Province, the concept of Musafir Khananas and sarais came into being. Delhi still has numerous sarais. Each sarai had a talab or baoli for bathing, a stable for the animal with which the traveler came with, a dargah, and a bimarkhana in case any traveler needed to be nursed back to health. Some of the famous sarai's are Qutub Sarai, Lado Sarai and Ladha Sarai.

Further with the British invasion, the sarais developed into Dak Bungalows, Circuit Houses, Inns and western style hotels. In 1840 Pallanjee Pestonjee started the first luxury hotel in Mumbai with an excellent cuisine and wine and beers. The Auckland Hotel in Kolkata was built in 1843, and was later renamed as the Great Eastern Hotel in 1858. John Watson, a silk draperies merchant built the Esplanade Hotel in 1871. Finally in 1903, JRD Tata constructed the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, which is the flagship hotel for the Indian Hotels Company. Hotel Fonseca in New Delhi was owned by a Swiss family, which was demolished and today is none other than The Taj Mahal at Mansingh road.

Although there exist numerous famous of accommodation in today's age and time, from Five Star deluxe hotels to hostels and many more, the concept of homestays comes closest to the Indian saying, "*Athithi Devo Bhava*".

About Homestays and Homestays Tourism

As per Merriam Webster Dictionary, a homestay is defined as "*a stay at a residence by a traveler and especially by a visiting foreign student who is hosted by a local family*". However, according to the Government of India, a foundation can be classified as a homestay if:-

- The owner/promoter is physically residing there along with their family.
- There should be at least one and at most six rooms available for rent.

After the completion of evaluation, based on the facilities provided by each homestay, they further have the categories which differ from state to state. For example: the Government of Kerala label the homestays as Diamond, Gold, and Silver whereas the Government of Rajasthan categorizes them only as Gold and Silver. The yearly fees of homestays to government are directly proportional to their category which implies higher pay for premium category. Although, again, this keeps varying from state to state. The states which are best in getting governmental support for setting up a home stay are Maharashtra, Karnataka, Rajasthan, and Kerala.

A homestay has a concept that is quite similar with the concept of bed and breakfast. The guests are provided the accommodation in the family home, or separately in their respective accommodation nearby. These days, the comfort and services provided by homestays to their guests are comparable to a reputable hotel. One of the best and most intriguing features of a homestay is that by staying the locals of the place, the guest has firsthand access to the local information of the place. There's nobody better than a local resident introducing a tourist to the local areas, food and culture at large. These are all things the most guides and brochures may not be updated.

Kuwahara (2020) made hypothetical strategies for homestay start-ups entrepreneurs in which he states that who has the basic knowledge and skills in the tourism sector helps in overcoming from different challenges alone while start-up with a new homestay business. Those who don't have any experience in the tourism industry need to be trained with comprehensive skills. There is one more category in his study in which he found that it is very difficult to make the elderly leader understand homestay business.

Research Gap of the Study

There have been very few and limited studies on homestays as a community-based tourism product and related challenges. In South Africa, Chipumuro and Lynette (2011) and Kwaramba et al (2012) reported the harsh challenges in the Kwam eMakana homestay initiative faced by particularly women homestay operators. The major challenges as reported in both the studies were lack of direction of the homestay project, low awareness of the product, low motivation for growth, dependence on government for the promotion of homestays, and diminished networking capabilities. This study is an attempt to review the factors which contributes to success of homestays in Indian Himalayan Region (IHR).

Homestays Tourism in Indian Himalayan Regions (IHR)

With the influx of tourists travelling far and wide to explore different culture and places, homestays have become the most preferred accommodation option. With this trend on the rise, the Ministry of Tourism has decided to increase the number of such accommodation options and thus provide travelers with clean and affordable homestays in most tourist destinations across the country, announced by Mr. K.J. Alphons. This initiative falls under the Incredible [India](#) Bed & Breakfast/Homestay Establishments project. It aims at providing accommodation to foreign and domestic tourists, however the main focus is on providing foreign tourists with an authentic experience of India. In order to strengthen this

trend in India, the Ministry of Tourism has been conducting sensitization workshops in order to promote this particular project through its domestic offices. These workshops have been planned to emphasize the need and reason behind establishing homestays to accommodate tourists who visits country.

Determinants of Homestays

Two Major attributes that contribute to building the experience of a guest at a homestay have been listed below.

- 4 A's of Tourism
- Availability & Marketing of Homestays

- 4 A's of Tourism Includes
 - **Accessibility**

The location of the homestay should be accessible.

- **Attraction**

The place where guests visits, should typically reflect its inherent or exhibited values especially the historical and cultural significance like handicraft centers, performing arts centers, historic places, and green areas.

- Biodiversity: - There must be an existence of a wide variety of plant and animal species in their natural environment.
- Culture: - The guests must be able to have easy access to the habits, traditions, local practice and beliefs of a society.

- **Authenticity**

The place should be a genuine, original, unadulterated or the real thing in order to give real socio-cultural and natural experience.

- Interpretation skills: - Another critical aspect of homestay experiences is communication. It is important that the host and guest speak a common language through which they can communicate, without which the whole purpose is defeated if they do not understand each other.
- Security: - Last but not the least, security of the guests at a homestay is of top concern to a guest. Although they are coming into homes that people have opened up to them, it is imperative that the security of the guests are ensured and assured by the hosts.

- **Accommodation**

Implies to the place where the guest is going to take rest during the journey or after reaching the destination. These places should be environment friendly as well as there is always a good relationship between the host community and the guest would be there.

- Environmental friendly: - The homestay must also be related to eco-friendly in context to goods and services, laws, guidelines, and policies claimed to inflict minimal or no harm to the environment and the local community.
- Homestay provider/host: - The relationship between the host and the guest is a very critical part of the homestay experience of every guest, as the host is

the key to what the guests have come from faraway places to experience in the first place. The better the rapport between the host and the guest, the better the experience it can be for the guest, as well as the homestay provider as a host.

- **Availability & Marketing of Homestays**

In India, the host community is very diverse. Some states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Goa and Maharashtra are widely famous for the homestays. The hosting travelers include young couples, late adults whose children are abroad, single mothers and elders who can easily earn enough through homestays without having to go out from their home.

In almost 100 cities in India, there are more than 36,000 listings of homestays. Goa alone has 6,000 listings. The travel agents, tour guides and other people involved in tour industry should be awarded about the destination and the various services related to homestays through FAM tours time to time. The travel business people can easily answer to the question been asked by the guest regarding homestays as per their personal experience about the destination to promote them.

Tenzin et al (2019) studied community opinion towards a village homestay program in Soe. The main motive of their study is to find out the opinion of the local community towards homestay activities. They conclude in their study that the local community is having mixed opinions towards homestays. The male supported the homestay activities in the local community strongly as they feel that they can earn more revenue while investing less and can develop better health and sanitation where as women are opposing the concept of homestay program due to general safety, lack of experience of tourism, and workload at home.

Sustainability in conjunction with homestays in IHR Regions

The Global Himalayan Expeditions team was installing sustainable solar-based micro-grids in some 20 odd remote villages of Ladakh, which were in the dark, and had no electricity, they realized that the homes could be attractive stay options for trekkers. This would in turn uplift the surrounding communities by creating job opportunities and bringing in income for these communities. And with this, thus was born Mountain Homestays. In 2016, Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) launched Mountain Homestays as its flagship initiative. Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE) is a venture that have its main focus on providing the communities of Ladakh with access to education and clean energy. Since Ladakh is a high altitude, cold desert in the Himalayas with an average altitude of 12000 feet, life there is not easy. As a result of tough terrain and remoteness, most villages do not have access to electricity. Since 2013, GHE have worked with the communities in order to setup an education base and install solar micro-grids in 53 remote villages. With the sole objective to alleviate poverty and address urban migration, they are creating alternate sources of livelihood opportunities for the villagers through homestay based tourism. These unexplored rural destinations in Ladakh let the visitors experience what it's like to live closest to the real Himalayan culture.

Summer resorts which are also known as 'Hill Stations', were established by the British in the 19th century. These places have become famous over the last two centuries. Now a days few of them are major tourist destinations like Darjeeling, Nainital, Mussoorie, and Shimla. The Himalayan region is considered as a "sacred space" with a spiritual meaning to Hindus. They believe it is a representation of the divine. Hence IHR has been extremely famous for pilgrimage tourism for centuries. Till the middle of the 19th century, the number of pilgrims of visited Badrinath were considerably low in comparison to today. However the expansion of roads improved the accessibility, and by the middle of the 20th century, Badrinath can be reached by roads. Which results the heavy traffic in Badrinath reason and the development of IHR has increased dramatically. It was reported that in 2016 alone, approximately 0.62 million pilgrims visited the holy shrine.

According to MoT India/ UNDP (2008), the Ladakh Himalayan Homestay program is believed to be one of the best examples of community inclusion and ownership in tourism. Snow Leopard Conservancy in collaboration with UNESCO and the local community initiated the "The Himalayan Homestays" in Ladakh, which has resulted in supplemented income of households and at the same time has helped preserve the threatened wildlife and given and increased ownership to the local people (Lama et al 2012). Peaty (2010) studied four different projects based on community homestay tourism in the Himalayan region and found that despite different approaches, all the projects brought considerable monetary and non-monetary benefits to the community, encouraged youth and women empowerment, and strengthened the preservation and protection of the culture and environment.

Literature Review

Shah et al (2020) did a study on Kashmir and discuss different prospects and challenges face by the homestays in the north area of Kashmir. During the study, they found instability and insurgency in the Kashmir valley that is the major challenge in homestays development. They also found the high potency of homestay development in Kashmir valley.

Chakraborty (2020) reviles in her study that, to restore cultural values and tradition for a future generation the development of sustainable rural tourism is the most important factor and homestay business becomes the major element of sustainable rural tourism. With the help of this element, they can save their lost heritage, culture, and vanished identity. She also states that the government should develop the strategies and rules for the development of homestay business for proper functioning and for diverting international tourists towards the rural place.

Cabral and Dhar (2020) conducted a review study on eco-tourism research in India and state that eco-tourism plays an important role to fill the gap between rich and poor and environmental degradation which develops naturally in India.

Tosun (2000) analyzed that community involvement is critical for the development of tourism and may play an important role in either the benefits of tourism development or in the decision-making process pertaining to it. He also provided some structural,

operational, and cultural factors; which are believed to limit the participation of communities in a practical way in regulating the 'decision-making' process of tourism development. Some identified limitations involved centralization of power, regional power structures, the dominance of elites, lack of awareness, and knowledge about travel and tourism.

.Kwaramba et al. (2012) in his study found that as a result of the long history of apartheid, low Emotional Intelligence (self-confidence, social awareness, and social skills) were common in women homestay entrepreneurs, and due to this, they failed to translate the opportunities for economic advancement.

Getz et al (2004) observed that rural businesses due to remoteness increasingly rely on mediators for marketing efforts in the form of establishing links with destination organizations/industry partnerships and maintain supply-demand balance. While there are extensive social media and online homestay booking websites available, the above-mentioned statement may be ambiguous for many places but it stands true for the Kullu region. In rural areas, there are still many people with no internet access with a lack of knowledge of social media but however, a local NGO on their behalf can undertake the promotion for now (as observed in several other Himalayan regions of Ladakh). In the future, when internet usage will increase, locals could be given the training to use it efficiently for the promotion.

According to Chipumuro & Lynette (2011), Liu (2006), and Razzaq et al (2011), there is a need for creating awareness of the scheme training, understanding of different cultures, and guidance in hospitality, respectively. The prospective challenges faced by rural entrepreneurs can be solved through consistent motivation and engagement. To attain this, a mentorship program in line with the core vision of homestays has been proposed which will be directed by an institutional agency. However, without equal involvement and support from the communities, the program may not work as expected regardless of proper planning.

Tosun (2000) observed that NGOs play a pivotal role in creating awareness, providing finance/marketing support and training in developing countries like India which is fractioned based on political, class, and gender issues.

Beliveau et al (2012) studied homestay patterns in Namibia and suggested that the hosts are cautious of their cultural beliefs and therefore, expect their guests to understand the cultural clashes, follow and respect household regulations (such as rules related to smoking, curfew timings, and alcohol consumption) and strictly abide by the health and safety precautions. Kontogeorgopoulos et al (2015) studied the success of homestays in Thailand and identified multiple setbacks and perceived threats among their operators which included unwanted loss of social harmony, rural authenticity, and economic diversification.

. S.L. Hsu and Y.M. Lin (2011) studied different factors determining the students' choice for homestay. The study was based on a questionnaire that gathered information regarding the choice of college students of homestay accommodation while traveling. For the reliability and validity of the questionnaire to meet the quantitative requirements, 380 questionnaires were issued out of which 212 effective questionnaires were retrieved. After result analysis, nine factors were extracted, namely: 1) Activities arrangement; 2; Scene attraction 3) Quality of services 4) Social demands and facilities, 5) Sanitation and comfort, 6) Price, 7) Specialty appearance 8) Transportation and 9) Leisure and relaxation.

Gunasekaran and Anandkumarb (2012) studied different Factors that influence the choice for alternative accommodation in Pondicherry, a coastal heritage town. According to them, Commercial homes, Bed & Breakfast and Guest Houses serve as an alternative to the traditional hotels for the tourists who prefer the latter. Alternative hoteliers provide an entirely different tourism product which has marked differences in the services provided by traditional hoteliers.

Thapa and Malini (2017) conducted a review study and state that the tourists who want to stay in homestays are those who are more fascinated towards getting experiences like learning their culture and lifestyle rather than availing services of artificial tour packages. In their study, they have found out that the reason behind choosing the homestays are feeling of personalized service, being at home, safety and security, authentic local touch, and being pocket friendly. The homestays also improve the financial status, as these factors provide direct benefits to the host community. Along with these they also conclude that sustainability is the most important factor on which further research can be done.

Kannegieser (2015) conducted a study on socio-economic benefits of homestay tourism on rural women and their communities in Darjeeling district, study reviles the significant improvement in the socioeconomic status of women which effects on their living standards and with the increase in their economic status they start spending more on their children's education and start doing more expenses on households.

Bhalla et al (2016) find out that interaction between humans & wildlife and occupation plays a vital role in influencing villagers to attitude for homestay program in their study on homestays' contribution to community-based eco-tourism in the Himalayan region of India. Further study reveals that the eco-tourism objectives were directly or indirectly influenced by homestay activities. Homestay also generates the income for unemployed local individuals which develop the responsibility for the natural setting to preserve the local culture and heritage to strengthen the eco-tourism.

Marques and Matos (2017) conducted research based on a case study i.e. network relationality in the tourism experience: staging sociality in homestays. They identify key principles of network relation in homestays i.e. temporary belongingness in between host and guests.

Bhalla and Bhattacharya (2019) conducted a study on Visitors' satisfaction from eco-tourism and state that protected areas offer various ecotourism products like bird watching, photography, and homestays. They also state that environmental conservation, the safety of visitors, and maintaining viewpoint conditions are the major factors of service provider performance for visitor satisfaction, and emphasis should be given to improve users' facilities like the guide, food quality, information, accommodation, etc.

Sood et al (2017) studied about community non-participation in homestays in Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, India and states that there are tourism-based occupations in their community which includes photographers, taxi drivers, porters, organizers of adventure activities, etc. but there are also non-participation of the local community in Homestay activities in Kullu. The reason behind non-participation are socio-cultural issues like social

believes and cast structures, the daily workload of women, clash of the harvest season, and tourist arrival season.

Acharya and Halpenny (2013) conducted a study on homestay as an alternative product for sustainable community development. They states that in the poor countries where the development of tourism products is not so feasible the homestay is the best alternative for the development of tourism. The homestay helps improve socio-economic, ethnic, and gender disparities. As per the study, the homestays are successful when there is a good partnership between local community members, line agencies, and different levels of government. Proper hospitality training and regular monitoring are required to operate homestay activities.

Bhan and Singh (2014) point out during his study on Homestay Tourism in India that homestay tourism is micro tourism entrepreneurship and it is going to popular in the future but the government has no clear vision, plan, policy, strategy for this activity and government has to develop a clear policy in this regard this will increase the socio-economic condition of the stakeholder.

Dayananda (2014) explores the employment opportunities during his studies Tourism and employment: Opportunities and challenges in Karnataka. He finds out the employment opportunities in the tourism industry at Kodagu district are restaurants, lodges, homestays, transportations, coffee day, shopkeepers, and street traders. He states that homestay will improve the additional income of local families. Homestay also generates employment opportunities in many ways hence the invention of homestays tends to increase in tourism at Kodagu.

Thapa et al (2018) conducted a sentiment analysis on unraveling tourists' preferred homestay attributes from online reviews in which they suggested that online reviews play a key role in selecting the homestays by the tourists. The most important key in writing online reviews is a warm welcome excellent service with a smile and love at homestays.

Regmi and Walter (2016) conclude a study on conceptualizing host learning in community-based ecotourism homestays and they suggested that host learning must be practical based. The practice-based learning in community-based ecotourism, the host plays a vital role which helps in finding the nature of learning, Eco-tourists teaching, and the different benefits that occurred to their communities and families. The learning should be in the ways which allow both local homestay hosts and community so that they can resist and adopt eco-tourism at their own.

Imran and Nguyen (2018) conclude in their study about community response to tourism in which they are focussing on the homestay program in Nanital. They state that there are no economic benefits to the local community from tourism but they also feel that they can improve their income through the concept of Homestays as their main source of income is agriculture production. The families who are involved in the tourism industry earn additional income so homestays are the most beneficial way of providing economic benefits to the local community.

Yassin et al (2017) studied different factors that contribute to the success of homestays in Malaysia and they concluded that Malaysian homestay's successes are getting

motivated by several factors like the self-interest of local community for doing own business and the willingness of earning more income. They got influenced by their friends' success. They are looking for potential in the homestay business with the help of it they want to find out flexibility in time and balance lifestyle which convince them to motivate about becoming an entrepreneur for homestay business.

Dube and Sharma (2018) state in their review study that money and status are the key factors which motivate the host for homestay activities, Socio culture is the factor in the same league. The rural host faces more challenges like language, education, etc. as compare to urban host.

Mapjabil et al (2015) studied the re-evaluation of factors in Malaysian homestay business and state that as homestays contributing enormously in the development of the economy, few factors are neglected in the initial stage but they create a negative impact in the longer run.

Acharya and Halpenny (2017) observe during their studies about the socio-cultural sustainability of small tourism enterprises that, Ghalegaon community in a small region in Nepal are benefited with homestays, as these enterprises help in the wellbeing of the community and somehow the overall development of that community is based on homestay tourism.

Ming Gu and Wong (2006) studied homestay and coastal tourism development on Dachangshan Dao Island in northeast China and state that in the initial stage government permitted fishermen to operate the homestay business without consulting the other stakeholders which develop the conflicts between government bodies, stakeholders, and homestay operators.

Study Area

Study area is Middle Himalayan region i.e. Himachal (Kullu) as the middle Himalayan region are less natural hazardous and there are more tourists who visit this place frequently. In kullu there are more well defined homestays available as compare to other part of middle Himalayan region. Till date there has not been any study which has focused exclusively on the determinants, Marketing strategies and Sustainable planning for increasing the popularity of homestays tourism in India. Hence this is the most compatible area for the study.

Research Methodology

In this exploratory study, both quantitative and qualitative approach has been applied. Further, the authors also interviewed the local communities and tourists about home stay tourism in Kull region. Brief notes were also taken depending on the researcher's observations. The researchers adopted a qualitative approach as it helps in understanding the values, beliefs, and assumptions of respondents (Choy, 2014). The researchers also studied a large number of published documents including research papers, books, and website materials to gather relevant secondary data for this study.

Suggestions & Recommendations

At present, the HP Tourism Department website stands as the only source of promotion of these homestays. To begin with, the government should make links with the travel agencies for extensive promotion and marketing of these homestays which would help the locals to thrive in the intense market competition and pull in the tourists interested in experiencing the cultural beliefs and lifestyle of the people of Kullu. New trails and itineraries may prove helpful in connecting homestays in different villages. There is a need for implementation of tourism schemes at local levels to address the challenges like social divisions among factions in the village and the inexperience of village-level institutions. To strengthen the homestay development, there is a dire need with greater stakeholder involvement and implementation mechanisms at the village level. If the formulation of schemes does not get translated into implementation, the homestay schemes would just be a waste effort. As many participants had an incorrect perception of their capabilities, as a result, they have compromised skills which remains a major constraint.

Agarwal and Mehra (2019) make a study on socio-economic factors that are involved in the success of Homestays and they come up with some benefits and loopholes. The benefits include, due to homestays activity society is benefited with financial gains and the destination is conserved or maintained by the local community, it also provides the facility to promote the local product and culture in the market. Lack of supervision and infrastructure facilities are the main loopholes. These can be overcome by the support of government authority by providing more facilities.

Conclusion

The study revealed that some important factors are 4 A's of tourism i.e. Accessibility, Attraction, Authenticity, Accommodation of the tourist that contribute to popularity and success of homestays as it influences the choice of tourist to select the most convenient accommodation. Understanding the key determinants for preferring homestays over other accommodation services will offer some light in defining the facilities, service and marketing decisions for increasing its popularity. This will also help in developing homestays as a sustainable mean for tourist accommodation and revives the importance of marketing in success of homestays tourism. With the help of this study we can also find out that how homestays tourism can contribute in GDP of Himachal Pradesh.

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