
UNIT 26 ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

Structure

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26.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you should be able to :

- understand the meaning and importance of alternative accommodation,
- identify various types of alternative accommodation, and
- plan for developing socially and economically viable alternative accommodation.

26.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit will help to explain the diverse ways in which accommodation can be provided to the tourists, outside of the formal sector. In the formal sector accommodation is provided mainly by commercial hotels. However, when there is a shortfall in availability of rooms, most destinations have to fall back on the alternative sector. It is not only scarcity of rooms in the formal sector that made people to look for alternative sector. There are large numbers of tourists who do not feel comfortable in star category hotels nor do they like the typical tourist destinations and tourism products. Alternative accommodation units like tents, caravans, heritage hotels, etc. are some of the options that such tourists can exercise. In this Unit, we have attempted to define alternative accommodation along with its different types. Various considerations required for developing and promoting alternative accommodation have also been dealt within the Unit.

26.2 WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION?

Alternative accommodation can be simply defined as consisting of all those types of accommodation which are available outside the formal or organised accommodation sector. We may consider as an alternative any form of accommodation that is different to/from that which is generally accepted as tourist accommodation. At any tourist destination, the concept of alternative accommodation carries additional importance both to the tourists as well as to tourism professionals. In most of the tourist destinations along with star category hotels there are a number of establishments that come under the category of alternative accommodation. These establishments provide bed and breakfast and some basic services required by tourists at a reasonable price. There is a large section of tourists who can not afford to stay in star category hotels. Hence, alternative accommodation provides them sleeping space and modest food. The establishment of such facilities in a third world country like India is not evolutionary or organic. Their development is generally linked with demand. In the following Section, we will introduce you to various forms of alternative accommodation that have emerged as per the demand.

26.3 FORMS OF ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION

In India perhaps the best known form of alternative accommodation is the Indian style hotel. Delhi's Pahargunj is a good example of such accommodation. Travel guides in several European countries describe this area as a tourist paradise, which provides 10,000 rooms in 350 listed accommodation units. For the budget domestic visitor making an extended stay, (say for Rs.200/- per day) you can have a room with all basic facilities and perhaps a discount on the bill. The area is also accessible because it borders the New Delhi Railway Station. The local residents began to convert their properties in the late 1970's in the wake of the promotion of Delhi for the Asian Games. These small business operators however are not licensed to rent commercial accommodation. At many other destinations also you find such accommodation units. Such services are often preferred by the tourists because the arrogance and impersonality of the luxury hotel is replaced with friendliness and personalised service. At times, being in the heart of the export district it suits the business tourist as well. Most of the visitors are repeaters, who have built relationships with the owners and find themselves welcome and at home. The promotion of such accommodation is more by word of mouth rather than through brochures or advertisements.

The Indian style hotel can be found at every destination in India and its quality of service is constantly improving, both in hygiene and in the manner in which rooms are furnished and kept. These units cater to customers who would not be netted by the classified western style hotels. In this category we also have Dak Bungalows and Circuit Houses and Forest Bungalows, which tourists can access through the District Administration. All these properties have an ageless charm and an old world style of hospitality as well as a special cuisine, which forms a part of the attraction apart from the low tariff. Such units are located in the prime scenic areas of the country and are often the only place where clean and comfortable accommodation is available, off the beaten track.

The recent trend towards turning heritage buildings into accommodation units once again makes use of the charm of such units. This charm includes their architecture or the period furnishings or a history linked to the region or the building. The stress here again is on the personalised style of services with an accent on home cooking and fresh garden or home kitchen products. Many people who own country houses have transformed them into accommodation units providing weekenders with an escape from their everyday reality.

In locations like Spiti, Zanskar, Nubra Valley or even the hills and glaciers of Uttar Pradesh or Himachal Pradesh, trekkers and mountaineers are taking to new ways of finding shelter in the lack of beyond (a phrase that suggests that no one had ever thought of pitching a tent at such a place because it was not accessible to the traveller). Tents (excluding the designer swiss cottage luxury tents provided by the Tourism Task Force of the ITDC for its Adventure camps) come in three basic designs:

- pyramid shaped,
- dome shaped, or
- Alpine.

These are from two person to five person sizes. Mess tents accommodate upto 30 persons. There are kitchen and toilet tents available too. The furnishings in these tents include ground sheets, carrymats and sleeping bags. Most service modes hire out such equipment and many enterprising individuals provide tented accommodation in camps at specific locations along routes that are commonly travelled.

Camps can also be constructed at special locations which are intensively used during the holiday season, using simple linear designs and local construction material. Here common toilet and kitchen facilities are provided or there is provision for self catering where local produce is available. Log huts and tented space are a good example of such a facility. They provide accommodation when needed and being flexible can be dispensed with if a destination does not have the carrying capacity or the environment is too fragile.

Ethnic construction, like mud huts are also becoming popular with urban visitors to the countryside. These are low investment openings for local entrepreneurs. Such accommodation units do not generally lavish resources on the guest and are spartan in character. Though we have cited here the examples from India but they hold good for all tourist destinations worldover.

26.4 ALTERNATIVE ACCOMMODATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Alternative accommodation is seen as being an alternative to the demand of mass tourism. This indicates that such units should be

- small scale,
- locally controlled and developed,
- based on local nature and culture, and
- ensuring a consciousness of environmental and carrying capacity norms.

However, it must be recognised that such development is based on the needs of **budget and middle class tourists** in its **concept, design and operations**. As long as this form of accommodation provides the broadest range of possibilities it will be both economically and socially beneficial. It also keeps down inflation in hotel rates as well as resolving the problem of uneven development, since the provision of alternatives removes pressure from the formal sector which is in short supply all over the world because of the high investment and management techniques required. New tourism products also require a destination and dispersal of tourist services and facilities. At the same time, it must be noted that accommodation is a high risk area and would require a more flexible approach in developing countries where capital is in short supply.

26.5 MARKETING CONSIDERATIONS

As mentioned earlier, the development of alternative accommodation sector is linked with the demand. In terms of applying the marketing concepts, a number of aspects should be considered in this regard.

Selection of proper site of location is of prime importance in this regard. Most of the non star category hotels particularly the small ones are located near the railway stations, bus stops or taxi stands i.e. nearest to the entry point of travellers.

The basic requirements in terms of product design include a neat and clean room with beds, little furniture, bed tea etc. Lately, even the small hotels have been improving upon the tangible components in their service product. For example, providing a TV set or good curtains etc. in the room.

The serving personnel in most of these small hotels are not professionally trained and the services are provided by whatever they have learned through experience, on the spot decisions or as the owner managers tell them to do. However, it is important that the owner managers take proper care of training their employees particularly keeping in mind customer satisfaction. This requires not only the development of professional skills but also communication skills alongwith creating a keen and hygienic atmosphere.

In terms of advertising, the small hotels depend more on sign boards near the tourist entry points or on the highways leading to the destination. Customer satisfaction provides them with word of mouth publicity.

From the selling point of view they depend on the informal sector which includes utilising the services of touts, taxi drivers, auto rikshaw drivers etc. by offering them commissions on the business they procure for them. In many cases they put their own agents also at the bus stands or railway stations for directly selling their products and services to the visitors. Most of the visitors using the services of such hotels belong to low or middle budget categories and very often bargaining also takes place in terms of pricing.

In the case of Dak Bungalows and Circuit Houses, no publicity, promotion or advertising is taken up because they are controlled by the Government and meant to cater to the Government servants and their families etc. Yet there are times when tourists are also accommodated on a price. In the case of heritage accommodation units, the owners make use of the heritage concept in developing their products and this is also highlighted in their promotion and publicity.

Tented accommodation, as mentioned earlier, is being used in the case of adventure, hill or desert tourism. Many tourism departments provide tented accommodation at tourist destinations. The Jaisalmer Desert Fair, Pushkar Mela or tented accommodation for trekkers are the example in this regard. In some cases private entrepreneurs have also come forward in this regard and this form of accommodation finds a place in the brochures of tour operators and tourism departments.

In certain areas, entrepreneurs have gone ahead with providing ethnic construction units for tourist accommodation. This includes staying in mud huts and in some cases even without electricity or any modern gadgets. This type of a product does attract many urban dwellers who want to spend some time in an atmosphere which takes them completely away from the urban life. At certain resorts, this type of accommodation is even priced very high because of its ambiance, environment and the atmosphere around it.

The way the tourism demand is growing and the tourist flows are increasing, alternative accommodation sector is bound to grow. However, it is time that the owners of such accommodation units should start adopting the modern marketing concepts for product improvement, promotion and market research.

Check Your Progress

1) What do you understand by alternative accommodation?

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2) What are the various forms of alternative accommodation?

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3) List out some of the positive characteristics of alternative accommodation.

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4) As an owner of a small hotel, how would you market your product?

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26.6 LET US SUM UP

Alternative accommodation has an important place in the development of tourism because it caters to the needs of special income and interest groups. It has also been used as a strategy to develop accommodation at new destinations which have emerged as tourist attractions and yet do not attract the mainstream accommodation providers because of the costs and risks involved. Third world countries have a rich tradition in alternative accommodation, architecture styles and construction materials. Tourist villages and camps providing such ethnic units have increased tourist arrivals to the destinations where hotel rooms are not the principal attraction. Such accommodation also gives an opportunity to local residents to participate in the providing of services to tourists, so that they not only develop their skills but have income possibilities, particularly in the season when there is no other economic activity. For example, as Wildlife sanctuaries are displacing tribal populations, it has been suggested that they provide such accommodation units to tourists visiting the sanctuaries. Hotel accommodation often forms a major aspect of the negative environmental impact of tourism, as for example, the hill stations in the himalayan region. Alternative structures which tend to be low rise and in conformity with the local environment, are environmentally more acceptable. Alternative accommodation preserves the social and cultural heritage by ensuring that the construction skills of the community are also preserved apart from other tourism resources. Alternative accommodation is also considered sustainable because it does not need a concentration of resources or infrastructure and can have alternative uses if tourism does not continue to be a major activity.

26.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress

- 1) See Sec. 26.2.
- 2) See Sec. 26.3.
- 3) You have to answer this question reading Secs. 26.4 and 26.5.
- 4) Yours answer should include product design, product mix, delivery modes, pricing policy, customer care, etc.