

Deviation from Authentic Homestay Concept: A Case Study of Homestay Practices in Ella in Sri Lanka

R.G.A.M. Premarathne^{1,*} and D.D.P. Sanjeewa²

*Department of Tourism & Hospitality Management, Faculty of Management Studies,
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, Sri Lanka^{1,2}*

*Corresponding author: hm2020036@mgt.rjt.ac.lk

Abstract

Homestays, a key segment of the vital lodging sector, are designed to provide cultural immersion and authentic local interaction within the rapidly growing tourism industry. However, recent evidence suggests that many homestay practices in Sri Lanka, particularly in the popular tourist destination of Ella, have deviated from the authentic model. This study seeks to identify the causes of homestay operations' deviation from the authentic model and proposes corrective realignment strategies. Adopting a social constructivist paradigm, this study used a qualitative case study approach to examine the perspectives and experiences of homestay operators in Ella via in-depth interviews. A purposive sample of eight owners was interviewed until data saturation was achieved. Subsequent thematic analysis identified key deviations and informed the development of strategic realignments. Findings indicate that key factors influencing deviations include profit-oriented attitudes among hosts, insufficient guidance and monitoring by government authorities, guest-driven modifications, competitive market pressures, and external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the national economic crisis. Additional issues include limited opportunities and resources for new entrants, along with a lack of awareness about the authentic homestay model. To address these concerns, the study proposes strengthening host education and awareness, enhancing the role of government in regulation and support, and introducing measures that preserve cultural authenticity while adapting to market demands. These findings hold important implications for policymakers, tourism authorities, and local communities seeking to safeguard the cultural and experiential integrity of Sri Lankan homestays, thereby promoting their long-term sustainability and global competitiveness.

Keywords: authentic homestay, deviation factors, Ella Sri Lanka, hospitality industry, tourism development