

## **A Qualitative Study of an Investigating the Tourist Necessities Commencing Alternate Accommodation in Indian Hospitality Sector**

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**Abstract:** Alternate Accommodation (AA) has become very popular among tourists around the world. With many domestic and international visitors preferring to stay in AA rather than traditional hotels, this is true of India as well. Using primary and secondary data, a qualitative approach was adopted. The secondary data analysis showed that AA requirements' primary constructs include format form, local experiences, cheap pricing, good hosts, availability of services, safety and security, and sustainability. The primary data was gathered from 50 tourists in the country who had stayed in AAs. The primary data analysis found that visitors tend to stay in unconventional formats such as tree & boat houses, village hut type accommodations, etc., rather than only living in villas or apartments. They search for authentic and local experiences. A crucial necessity is for the AA to be environmentally friendly and provide local individuals with jobs.

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**Keywords:** Accommodation, Tourism, Hospitality, Housekeeping, Tourist.

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### **1. Introduction**

The hospitality sector in India, comprising of hotels and other accommodations, plays a vital role in stimulating the country's tourism sector. It is because accommodations are an actual tourist product with the range and scope of accommodations determining the number of tourist footfalls at any destination (Nuntsu et al., 2003). Accommodation is a critical component of the tourism product for visitors. The amount and value of tourism possible at any destination are determined by the form, extent, and quality of accommodation (Henning & Willemse, 1999; Nuntsu, Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2003). Although conventional hotels of various types are usually referred to as tourist accommodation, alternative accommodation refers to establishments such as Guesthouses, Service apartments, and Residential homes that offer paid accommodation to visitors on a short-term basis. They vary from conventional hotels in that they provide more diminutive and more customized services with a natural, "local" feel.

In recent years, the concept of alternate accommodations has become very popular among tourists abroad. Alternative accommodations (AA) have been defined in terms of homestays, bed & breakfast lodges, guest houses and service apartments that are offered for short-term stay purposes to tourists (Scarinci and Richins, 2008). which increase the employability and sustainability (Bansal et. al., 2020). They are different from traditional hotels in that their range of services is more limited (Radder, 2006). However, these services are more personalized and, instead of being standardized, are localized in accordance with the customs and traditions of the region. Globally an average of 37% of all tourists prefers to stay in AA. Finding suggests the growing importance of AA in India. 68% of all domestic and foreign tourists visiting India in 2018 expressed their desire to stay in an AA format (Booking.com, 2019). A measure of the demand for AA is that over 2017-18, Airbnb India registered a 100% increase in demand for rooms/houses (Statista, 2018). According to Booking.com (2019), India is among the 20 fastest growing markets for AA. However, AA service providers are not clear about the requirements of tourists visiting their accommodations. The range and nature of services to be provided to incoming guests are not known. It can potentially stifle the growth of the Indian AA sector, which can reduce India's image as a tourist destination. It is these gaps in the literature on the Indian AA sector that this paper will bridge.

**Research Question:** *What are the requirements of tourists from the alternate accommodation sector in India?*

## 2. Literature Review

Reynolds and Emenheiser (1996) proposed a potential development in which alternative accommodation providers, such as Bed & Breakfast operators, will play a huge role in the hospitality industry in their groundbreaking research. Increased competition and market fragmentation, increasingly discerning and difference-seeking buyers, and communication technologies are all factors contributing to the increasing popularity of niche segments such as alternative accommodation (Novelli, 2005; Scarinci and Richins, 2008). The awareness of alternative accommodation, which is typically distant and out of the mainstream, as well as direct accessibility for visitors seeking a unique experience, is significantly improved by this connectivity technology.

Foxley (2001), Canwell and Sutherland (2003), and the Professional Association of Innkeepers International (PAII) (2009) have a taxonomy of alternative accommodation. As a result, there are three forms of alternative accommodation available: service apartments, guest houses, and commercial homes such as homestay and bed and breakfast. Furthermore, PAII categorizes commercial homes into six categories: Homestay, Bed & Breakfast, Bed & Breakfast inn, Bed & Breakfast cottages, Bed & Breakfast hotel, and Country Inn. The term 'service apartment' has no standard meaning, but it is commonly thought to provide short-term, self-contained accommodation with specific services (Foxley, 2001). According to Canwell and Sutherland (2003), a guest house is a less than average hotel with a restricted number of rooms and facilities. Commercial home describes a form of 'homelike' accommodation in which tourists or customers pay rent in private residences, where transactions and interactions take place with a host and/or family who usually live on the premises, and with whom public space is shared to some extent (Stringer, 1981; Lynch, 2005; Lynch, McIntosh, & Tucker, 2009; McIntosh, Lynch and Sweeney, 2010).

Numerous scholars have argued for conducting thorough research on this sector of accommodation providers, taking into account the segment's progress, success, and allure (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997; Dawson & Brown, 1988; Ingram, 2002; Morrison, 2002; PAII, 2005). In addition, some categories within this segment are underutilized (Sweeney and Lynch, 2007; McIntosh, Lynch and Sweeney, 2007). Despite the efforts of the Destination Marketing Organization to promote Bed & Breakfast and Homestay accommodations in India, this segment remains unexplored mainly in terms of scientific study. This is an impetus to carry out this research.

On the other hand, researchers' approaches are to investigate the motivational factors that explain why visitors prefer alternative accommodations. Although restricted in its investigation of the aforementioned aspect, the current literature can be classified as viewpoints from the supply-side, specifically, alternative hoteliers and the demand-side, namely, the guests at alternative accommodation. Prior research has discovered that alternate hoteliers see natural environment (to indicate place and geographic area), service quality, and enjoyable experience as the primary motivators that attract visitors (Schor and Fitzmaurice, 2016), but service quality is one of the critical factors for customer satisfaction (Dandotiya, Aggarwal & Gopal, 2020) and on the other hand the employability skills also create a significant impact on customer (Bansal et al., 2020)

Across the world, tourists have become more conscious about the impact of their travel/stay on the environment, resource conservation and sustainability (Schor and Fitzmaurice, 2016). To reduce the environmental impact of tourism, they prefer to stay in resource-efficient formats and based on the circular economy concept, which emphasizes recirculation and recycling of resources. An essential need for tourists is to live like the locals do whilst visiting foreign destinations (Dogru, 2017). They want to be able to experience the local life, society, culture, traditions, festivals, food etc., in the places they visit and look for accommodations that can provide them with these experiences (Zervas et al., 2016). Most tourists also want their hosts to be knowledgeable, hospitable and create a homely atmosphere when they visit alternate accommodations (Lee, 2016). Studies by McIntosh et al., (2015), a key factor of choice in the alternate accommodations sector is price. Tourists expect their alternative accommodations to be priced lower than traditional hotel formats. Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2016) say that alternate accommodations must be able to create perceptions about safety and security among tourists and that this is more important for countries like India.

Furthermore, studies by Ingram (2012) revealed that tourists who use alternative accommodations do not want to compromise much on their comfort or ease of stay. The implication here is that alternative accommodations must ensure that their guests are provided with most of the facilities that they would get in traditional hotel formats. Based on these findings, the theoretical model in figure 1 was developed.



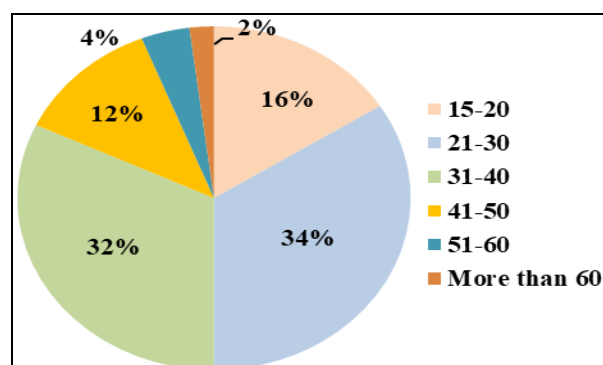
**Figure 1.** Theoretical Model

### 3. Methodology

The analysis of secondary literature identified key concepts related to AA. These constructs are summarized in figure 1. The primary data was collected through an online questionnaire administered to 50 foreign tourists visiting India and staying in various AA formats in Tamil Nadu. The persuasive sampling technique is used to manage the data (Gopal, Singh & Aggarwal, 2021). Their views indicated what tourists visiting India and staying in AA formats require. Their responses were summarized in graphical form and explained using select quotes.

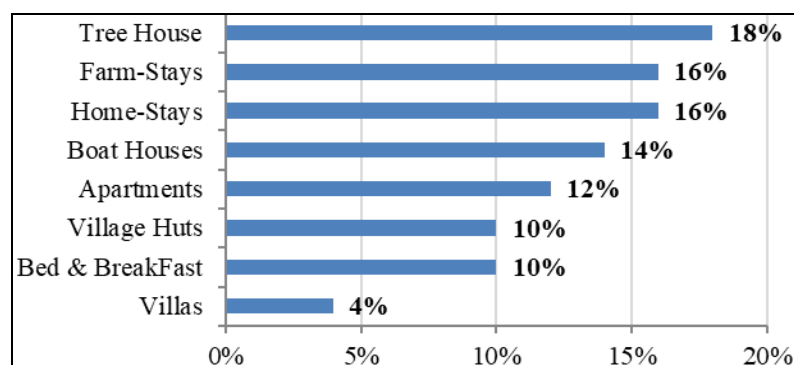
### 4. Analysis & Discussion

From the primary data, the age profile of the respondents that indicated their preference for AA rather than traditional hotel formats was identified and summarized in figure 2,



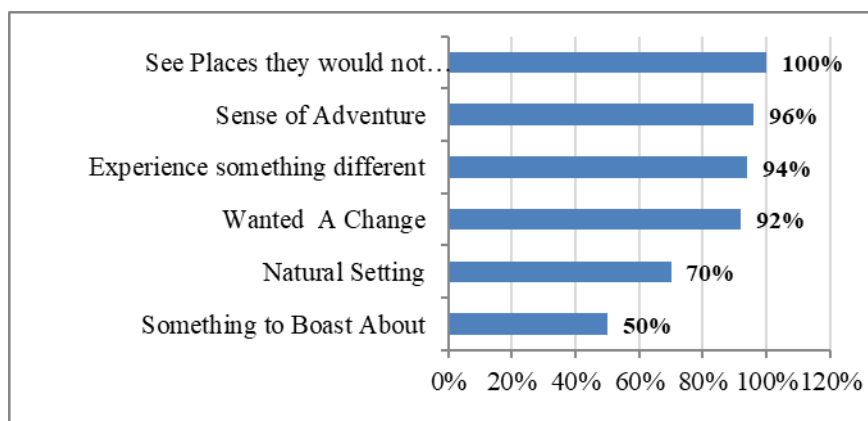
**Figure 2.** Age Profile

From figure 3 it is observed that the younger the tourist, the more willing and amenable to stay in an AA. In particular, the tourists in the age group 21 – 40 years most indicated their willingness to stay in an AA format. It is in accordance with the observation made by Dogru (2017) that it is the millennial tourists or those born between 1981 – 1996 and in the age group 22 – 37 years that are more adventurous and willing to try new experiences during their travels, as compared to their older counterparts. Figure 4 indicates the type of AA most preferred by the tourists.



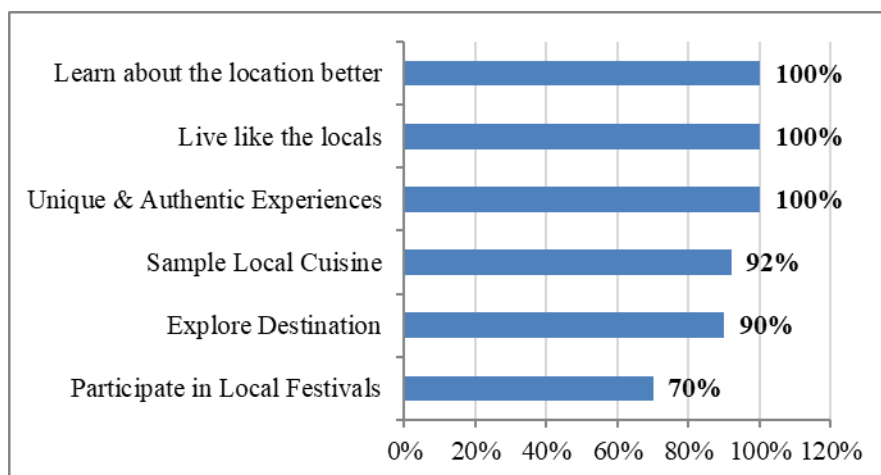
**Figure 3.** Type of AA Format

From figure 4, it is observed that the AA formats most in-demand in India include tree-houses, farm-stays, boathouses and homestays. This is contrary to the popular supposition that most tourists visiting India prefer to stay in villas or apartments. This finding matches with the inference made in figure 3 that most tourists who want AA formats in India seek adventure and are willing to stay in accommodations that are different from the conventional accommodation formats.



**Figure 4.** Type of AA Format

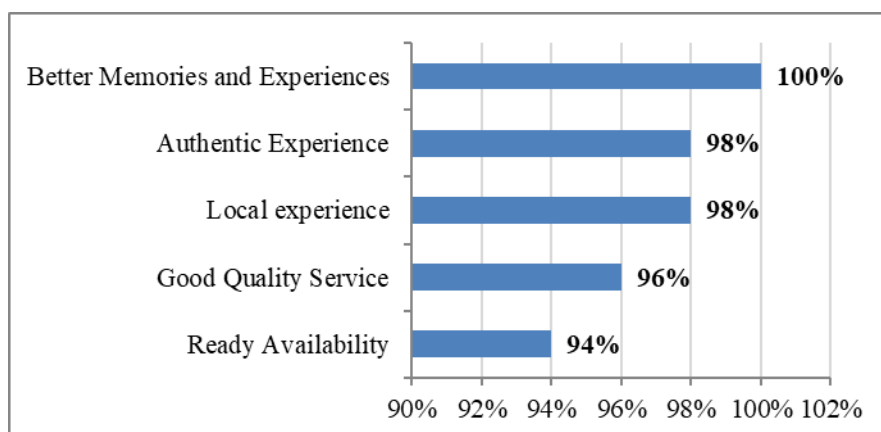
From figure 5 it is observed that the most critical reason for tourists choosing to stay in an AA is that it enables them to see places they would have never otherwise seen. It implies that AA's have the potential to stimulate tourism even in those places in India that tourists do not usually visit. To attract more tourists, the AA must be located in natural settings as far as possible. From the perspective of the AA service provider or owner, they must be able to provide their guests with opportunities for adventure and with new experiences that they would not have got anywhere else. This would also be in line with the tourist's preference to experience a change when they visit an AA. Tourists also want to be able to boast about their travel. This is in line with the findings made by Zervas et al. (2016), who said that most tourists today are connected with social media and want to highlight their travel by uploading pictures and videos of their holidays for their friends and family back home to view. These findings suggest that AA's must be more than a place to stay. To truly create a difference, the AA must be able to accommodate the preferences of tourists that are indicated in figure 5. Figure 6 analyzes the construct of local experiences most sought after by the tourists.



**Figure 5.** Local Experiences

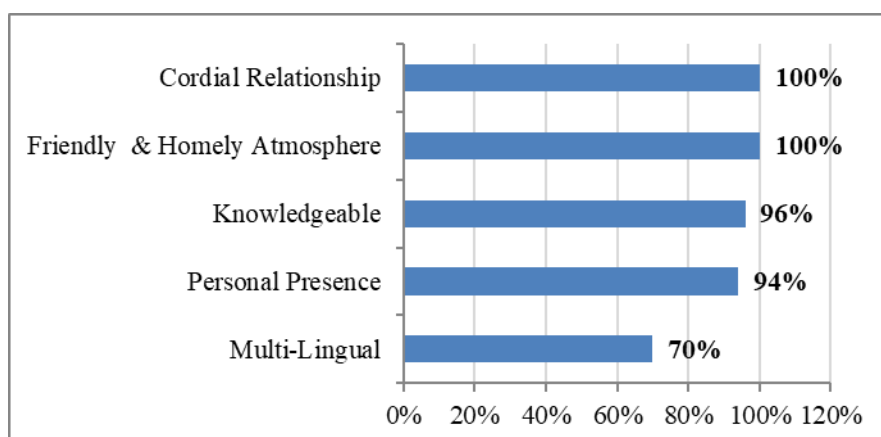
Tourists that visit AA's are primarily motivated to do so because of the promise of unique and authentic experiences. They want to live like the locals and learn about and explore the location better. These are requirements that traditional accommodation formats like hotels and resorts cannot provide. Respondent 8 stated that 'because I stayed in this gorgeous village hut off Tanjavur, I was able to see the surrounding paddy fields and forests'. Respondent 9 mentioned how he 'saw how village women make flower garlands for the great temple in the farmhouse's vicinity where he was staying. Most respondents indicated that AAs would enable them to sample the local cuisine. Several respondents mentioned how the idli's and chutneys made in their local AA's were very different from those given to them in the big hotels in Chennai. Other local experiences made possible

by AA's include participating in local festivals and exploring the destination in greater detail. The respondents were asked as to whether the price was a determining factor in their choice of AA. This query was made because of McIntosh et al., (2015) finding that cheap pricing was significant for an AA to be chosen over a hotel. Figure 6 summarizes the respondents' views on pricing.



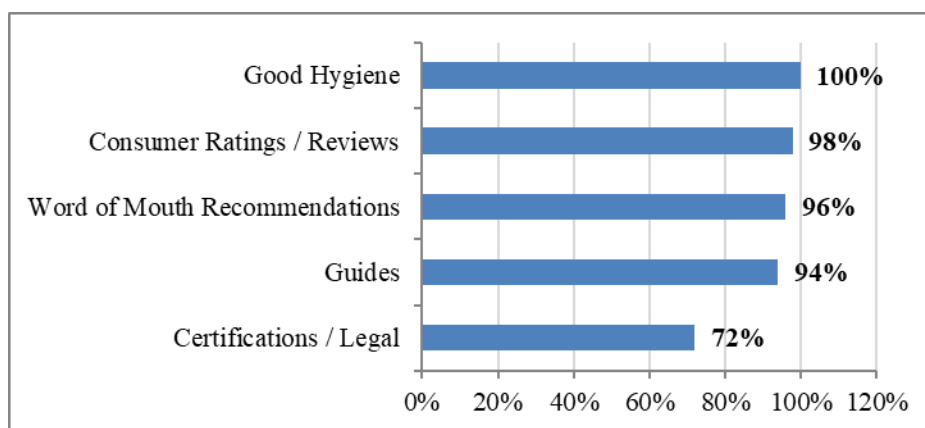
**Figure 6.** Local Experiences

From figure 6, it can be seen that pricing is not a determining factor that influences the choice of accommodation among tourists. Respondents 8, 16 and 32 said that they were willing 'to pay slightly more than they would for a hotel, provided the AA could fulfil their requirement of memorable and better stay experiences'. Most other tourists mentioned that they did not consider higher prices to deter them from staying in an AA if the accommodation was able to create an authentic and highly differentiated experience from that provided by conventional hotels. However, it may be noted that the respondents were not willing to compromise on the quality of service offered to them at the AA. Respondent 45 said that 'I don't want to slum it out when staying in my AA. I want to be as comfortable as possible. This implies that owners or AA service providers must provide their guests with services that are equivalent to the conventional accommodation formats as far as they possibly can. Figure 7 indicates views given by respondents concerning the hosts in AA's.



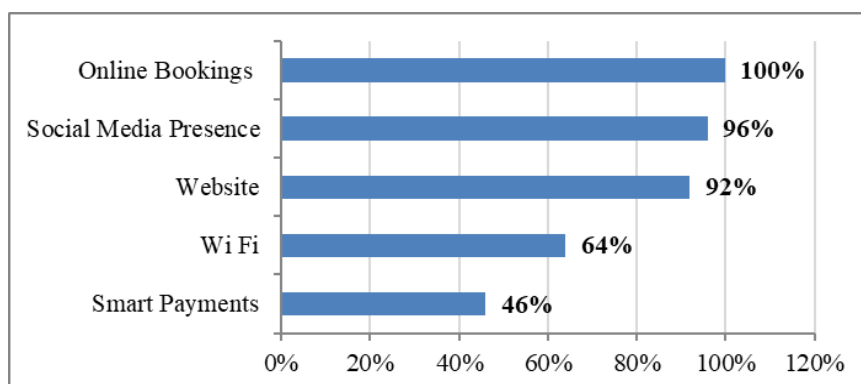
**Figure 7.** Requirements from Hosts

Most respondents indicated that hosts in Indian AA's were mere owners or managers of the accommodation. Respondent 18 said that 'while the owner was polite, it was clear that we were paying guests. He was not very warm'. Guests want their hosts to be knowledgeable about the region, its history, key places to go to etc. Respondent 23 observed that 'the host did not know much about the ruins situated near our homestay. He did not know who built it, why it was built here, nothing!!!'. They want the host to be present in the AA during their visit. Respondent 35 said that 'I was distraught when I was handed the key to my tree-house by a servant. The owner was nowhere to be found. Respondents expect their hosts to know English at least. Most respondents expressed their frustration because of their inability to communicate with or make themselves understood to their hosts. Safety was an essential requirement defined by the respondents. Their views in this regard are given in figure 8.



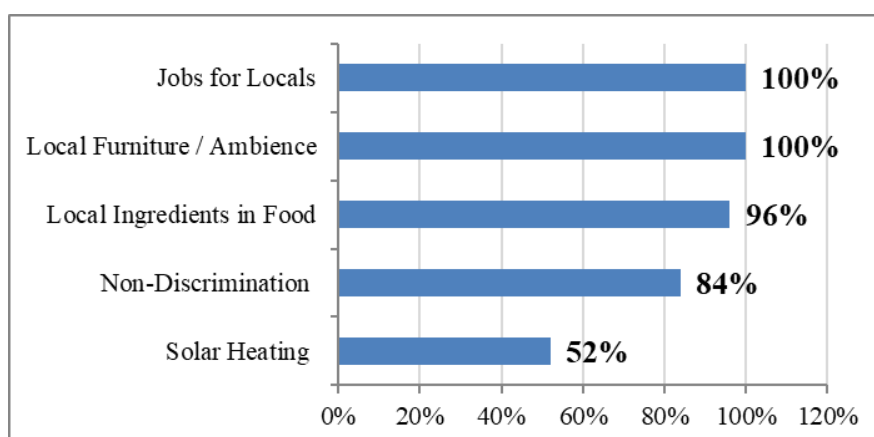
**Figure 8.** Safety

Respondents indicated good hygiene as a critical indicator of safety. However, most respondents complained that the AA's in India, particularly those located in forests or village areas, were damp, had cockroaches and smelt bad. Respondent 22 noted that 'given the growing incidence of crime against women and robberies in India, she always observed consumer reviews and word of mouth recommendations to see if the AA being advertised was safe or not. Respondents do not want to go about alone but want to be accompanied by guides. Government certifications prominently displayed, which indicated the AA was a legal entity and ran according to the government's rules was a key indicator of safety. Figure 9 demonstrates the role of modern technology even for accommodations.



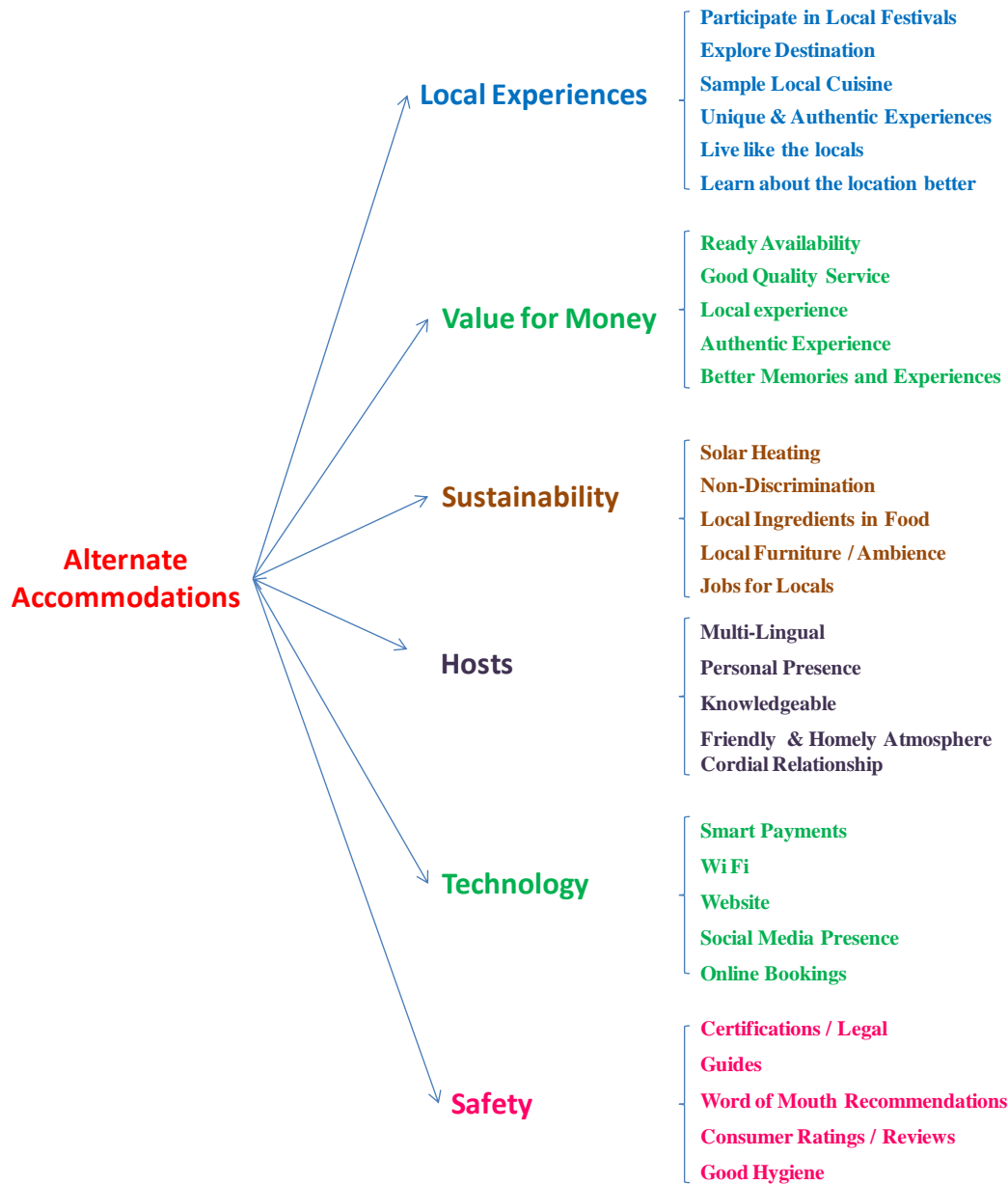
**Figure 9.** Technology

From figure 9, it can be concluded that tourists visiting AA's want the formats to be advertised on social media. This creates a feeling of safety and enables them to explore the accommodation, read reviews etc., before making a booking. They want to be able to book online. An essential requirement is WiFi connectivity as they want to be in touch with their friends/family back home through their Smartphones and for the hosting of pictures and videos on social media. Figure 10 gives respondent views on sustainability.



**Figure 10.** Sustainability

All the respondents want their AA's to be environment friendly. Indicators of this include using local ingredients in food, building to feature provincial furniture and design, and locals to be provided employment. Some Indian respondents complained that white tourists were treated better than they were and indicated that AA's must be non-discriminative. Based on the above finding, the conceptual model showed in figure 11 was developed.



**Figure 11.** AA in India – Conceptual Model

Figure 11 summarizes the key factors that tourists look for when choosing AA accommodation in India.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings in section 4, it can be concluded that the AA format has enormous potential for attracting more numbers of foreign tourists. A comparison with tourist requirements with the range and scope of AA services and quality indicates several improvements to be made if AAs are to cater to the demand. To do this, the following recommendations are made:

AA's must be more than just accommodation located in a natural setting. They must be able to create experiences for guests that are local, authentic and memorable. The nature of this experience can be in line with the particular location in which they are located and reflect the local culture, customs, traditions and history. For

example, in the Tanjore district, local homestays must reflect the temple culture of Tamil Nadu in their construction, design, décor, cuisine etc.

Rather than adopt a pricing strategy that under-prices AAs compared to hotels, it is recommended that AAs adopt a premium pricing strategy for value propositions created for tourists. The price can include curate, authentic experiences, local food, local experiences all built into one package. It can generate more revenues for AA as well.

AA's must enable guests to experience local lifestyles as much as possible. For this, it is recommended that the AA develop special programs. Perhaps, guests can be taken to local villages for a day and opportunities provided to them to stay in the local huts, interact with the locals, observe how handicrafts, if any, are made, eat their food, participate in local festivals etc. Or special tours and trekking expeditions can be organized to local sights.

The Department of Tourism must provide training to AA owner /managers. The training must focus on how to treat tourists, strengthen their knowledge of the area in which their homestays are located, history, and culture. Furthermore, training must emphasize basic conversation skills in English, cultural sensitivity, and how to establish cordial relationships with guests before, during, and even after their stays.

AA's must be technology-enabled to the extent possible. For example, they must be present on social media such as Facebook and Instagram. The posts must feature lots of pictures and videos and write-ups about the place and its attractions. There must be a WiFi facility on the premises. Guests must be able to make bookings online or at least inquire online. It is essential as most guests to AA's are millennial who use technology extensively when travelling.

AA's must create a perception of safety and security. It is essential given the reputation of India among most foreign tourists as an unsafe destination. It is recommended to have guides whenever tourists visit local areas and government certifications displayed prominently on the premises.

As far as possible, AA's must serve local food cooked with local ingredients. The furniture and décor must reflect local sensibilities. The people employed in the premises must hail from the neighbourhood. There must be environmentally friendly technology such as solar heaters and water harvesting arrangements, and these must be made visible to the tourists.

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