

Guesthouser: A startup that verifies accommodations, offers travellers taste of local culture

The Economic Times, 6th February 2015

http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-02-06/news/58878890_1_indian-travellers-indian-startup-airbnb

BENGALURU: An eight-month-old startup is aiming to organise the Indian homestay industry by offering verified accommodations that also offer travellers a taste of the local culture. The company, Guesthouser, founded by 23-year-old Dhruv Sharma, lists a range of properties from villas to bedand-breakfasts, treehouses and houseboats. Sharma spotted a business opportunity when he realised Indian travellers staying at unlisted properties were throwing up a variety of security issues.



"The one thing that you can't risk in an emerging economy is safety - but there was a lack of trustworthy homesharing," he said. "Not everyone can be a Guesthouser - you have to offer a unique flavour and show customer courtesy."

The Gurgaon-based company has 14,000 properties listed and has received over 2,000 booking requests since the portal was officially launched in December.

Unlike free-for-all portals like Airbnb that enable anyone to register their property, the Guesthouser team has so far combed through over 100,000 offline and online listings, of which they identified around one-tenth as 'quality' accommodations.

"Even though some other platforms try to provide the option for listing such spaces, they do not specialise in catering to traveller's needs. Guesthouser sets up an infrastructure and personalisation that adds tremendous value to the overall experience," said Dilip Puri, regional vice president, South Asia of global hotel conglomerate Starwood. According to Puri, there are 400 million domestic travellers in India every year.

The Indian informal rooming market has attracted global players such as Airbnb and HomeAway, while another Indian startup in the sector, short-stay listing company Oravel, founded in 2012, has shifted focus to its budget hotel chain, OYO Rooms. Guesthouser, which has been bootstrapped so far, charges a commission from travellers but makes it free for hosts to list. It also has a customer service team to guide customers through the booking process.

"We want to emphasise the aspect of travel and create more of a human brand that has more to it than just somewhere to stay," said Sharma.