

DZULUK—Eco-tourism Haven

Vivek Ghatani traces the setting up of home-stays in Dzuluk, and their immense contribution in bringing back tourists to the small Sikkimese hamlet



Where there is a will, there is always a way. Meet Gopal Pradhan, a taxi driver turned tourism entrepreneur who has propelled home-stay tourism in Dzuluk, benefitting a local population of 294 people residing in at least 65 houses.

Starting-up

Until tourism came to the village, the residents depended on making their livelihood mainly from manual labour works with minimum pay. Pradhan who pioneered

the move to start the business not just for himself but for many others like him says that he learnt the tricks of the trade while ferrying tourists from Gangtok to Dzuluk. 'Later, I borrowed a couple of ideas from Sebastian Pradhan in Pedong in the Kalimpong subdivision of Darjeeling hills, who is also into the business and doing well,' he says. In Pedong, they operate eco-tourism projects along the River Reshi.

'After a lot of leg work since 2002, in September 2008, we finally started eco-tourism at Dzuluk. The

first group of tourists arrived from Kolkata,' recalls Pradhan. The tourists stayed in Green Cottage, one of the home-stays developed by Lali Guras and Himali Kasturi.

Giving Face-lifts

The State Government in 2004 had handed over a guest house of the Agriculture department to the group. The guest house built in 1981 was earlier the first choice for tourists to stay but remained non-functional because of no flow of tourists to the region of late.

TOURIST FACT FILE

- Out of the total 650 species of birds in Sikkim, 450 varieties are seen alone in Dzuluk and its surrounding villages
- The Red Panda, Himalayan Black Bear, Barking Deer and many more species of wild and rare animals are also seen
- Tourists mostly visit Dzuluk in package tours of 4 nights 5 days. The charge applied is Rs 750 per person for food and lodging. The vehicular fare is Rs 2800 per day



A home-stay sits pretty on a snow-capped hill

18 rooms later. Today, Dzuluk has over 10 home-stays in operation with a capacity to accommodate at least 200 tourists on any given day.

What Dzuluk Offers

Dzuluk now offers bird watching, snow tourism, flower tourism, and much more. A tourist who wishes to visit the region can avail the facility by spending Rs 750 per day along with a transportation charge of ₹2800. Tourism packages are also readily available.

'The flow of tourists is so high that it is sometimes very tough for us to manage. When the tourist season is at its peak, we send tourists to a nearby village where people have started home-stays on their personal capacity,' says a visibly pleased Pradhan. As a result, the economy has significantly improved by all standards in the region. As Pradhan says, 'People are living a life which is more comfortable than it was earlier'.

Miles to Go

With tourism flourishing in Dzuluk now, the local people are thinking of setting up a community hall so they can organize cultural shows for the tourists. 'It would be

an added attraction for the tourists. Our demand has been placed before the local MLA and we are waiting for his move towards implementation,' adds Pradhan.

Also, out of the ten newly established home stays, the government has issued licenses to only four of them. However, their most pressing demand is for the establishment of a Primary Health Centre. People now depend on the Army dispensary for medical benefits which is located at quite a distance from Dzuluk.

Though the government has more to do in the region, it cannot be said that the same has done nothing for the development of Dzuluk. The department has already parted two months of training to home stay operators. The Chief Minister during his last visit to Dzuluk has sanctioned the construction of ten houses with four rooms each for the beneficiaries identified along with the land. With the initiation of home-stays, employment opportunities are available in Dzuluk itself, and the locals have taken the lead in showing that innovation and hard work leads to self-sufficiency. The State Government needs to continue its support to the resilient people of Dzuluk. 🇮🇳



The winding alleys of Dzuluk

The revamping of the guest house to a Green Cottage brought tourists back to Dzuluk after a long time. The place became so popular with more and more tourists visiting Green Cottage that it started to face a space crunch. 'We then started another home-stay at Dawa Sherpa's house which is called the Palzour Home Stay. In 2009, my own home-stays came into existence with Late Dil Maya Home stay and Hidden Paradise,' an excited Pradhan quips.

Initially, the home-stay had only four rooms which were extended to

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