

HOMESTAYS: CATALYSTS FOR ECO-TOURISM PROMOTION IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

The state that stands out the most on the Indian tourism map is Himachal Pradesh. Shimla became the summer capital of the British after they saw how beautiful Himachal Pradesh was. The phrase "a destination for every season and all reasons" is now used to describe Himachal Pradesh. Over the past ten years, the average number of visitors to Himachal Pradesh has exceeded one crore. A growing number of people seeking solace from the chaos of urban jungles are discovering the dev Bhoomi (Thakur, 2017). This research explores the role of homestays in promoting eco-tourism in the prominent tourist destinations of Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh. The study aims to understand how homestays contribute to sustainable tourism, economic development, and cultural preservation in these areas. Secondary data from various sources, including government reports, tourism studies, and academic literature, have been used to analyze the current state and impact of homestays. The findings indicate that homestays significantly support eco-tourism by providing environmentally friendly accommodations and promoting local culture and traditions. Economic benefits to local communities are substantial, but challenges such as lack of infrastructure and regulatory support persist. This study highlights the need for strategic policies and better infrastructure to enhance the sustainability and growth of the homestay sector. The insights gained can help policymakers, tourism developers, and homestay operators foster a more inclusive and sustainable tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Homestays, Eco-Tourism, Himachal Pradesh, Sustainable Tourism, Cultural Preservation, Economic Development

INTRODUCTION

Eco-tourism, a sustainable form of tourism that prioritizes environmental conservation and the well-being of local communities, is gaining prominence worldwide. Himachal Pradesh, with its diverse landscapes and rich cultural heritage, is an ideal destination for eco-tourism. This study focuses on the role of homestays in promoting eco-tourism in three key areas of Himachal Pradesh: Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla. These regions are not only popular tourist destinations but also epitomize

the potential for sustainable tourism practices. According to information compiled by the tourism department, the number of tourists who visited the state in 2023 was 1.60 crore, with 62,806 international visitors, compared to 1.51 crore in 2022 with 29,333 foreign visitors.

Role of Homestays in Eco-Tourism


Eco-tourism emphasizes responsible travel to natural areas, aiming to conserve the environment and improve the well-being of local people (Weaver, 2001). It involves minimizing the environmental impact, supporting local economies, and fostering cultural exchange. In Himachal Pradesh, eco-tourism has the potential to balance the objectives of economic development and environmental conservation (Boo, 1990). Homestays provide tourists with the opportunity to experience local culture and traditions firsthand, offering a more authentic and sustainable alternative to conventional hotels. By staying in homestays, tourists can engage with the local community, participate in traditional activities, and enjoy locally sourced food, which reduces the carbon footprint associated with tourism (Fennell, 2003). Homestays often adopt eco-friendly practices such as waste management, energy conservation, and organic farming (Buckley, 2004).

Himachal Pradesh as a Case Study

Himachal Pradesh, with its scenic beauty and cultural diversity, provides an excellent case study for examining the impact of homestays on eco-tourism. The state's tourism policies have increasingly focused on promoting sustainable practices and encouraging homestay initiatives to boost local economies and preserve cultural heritage (Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation, 2020). In the attempt to fulfill the gap between the demand and supply of accommodation and to have community participation the 'Home Stay' Scheme was launched by the Himachal Pradesh Government in 2008 with the main objectives like to broaden the stake holder's base for tourism in the State, Take tourism to the rural and interior areas of the State, ease the burden of already overloaded Urban areas which cannot support any further tourism load, Provide employment and economic values in the interior areas, The activity shall be ecologically sustainable and to draw tourists to all over the world and provide them quality accommodation at reasonable rates during the peak season, has become a roaring success (Gangotia, 2013).

Table 1: General information/Population of Himachal Pradesh

Himachal Pradesh Table Data



Description	2011	2001
Approximate Population	68.65 Lakhs	60.78 Lakh
Male	3,481,873	3,087,940
Female	3,382,729	2,989,960
Population Growth	12.94%	17.53%
Percentage of total Population	0.57%	0.59%
Sex Ratio	972	968
Child Sex Ratio	909	896
Density/km ²	123	109
Area(Km ²)	55,673	55,673
Literacy	82.80 %	76.48 %
Male Literacy	89.53 %	85.35 %
Female Literacy	75.93 %	67.42 %
Total Literate	5,039,736	4,041,621

Table 2: District-wise data of Himachal Pradesh

#	District	Population	Increase	Sex Ratio	Literacy	Density
1	Kangra	1,510,075	12.77 %	1012	85.67 %	263
2	Mandi	999,777	10.92 %	1007	81.53 %	253
3	Shimla	814,010	12.67 %	915	83.64 %	159
4	Solan	580,320	15.93 %	880	83.68 %	300
5	Sirmaur	529,855	15.54 %	918	78.80 %	188
6	Una	521,173	16.26 %	976	86.53 %	338
7	Chamba	519,080	12.63 %	986	72.17 %	80
8	Hamirpur	454,768	10.19 %	1095	88.15 %	407
9	Kullu	437,903	14.76 %	942	79.40 %	80
10	Bilaspur	381,956	12.05 %	981	84.59 %	327
11	Kinnaur	84,121	7.39 %	819	80.00 %	13
12	Lahul and Spiti	31,564	-5.00 %	903	76.81 %	2

Source: Table 1 & Table 2: Census of Himachal Pradesh - Himachal Pradesh PCS Free Notes
(pscnnotes.com)

Table 1 provides general statistics about Himachal Pradesh as per Census, 2011, which has an approximate population of 68.67 lakh and has had a rise of 12.94% since the 2001 Census. The largest population, 15.10 lakhs in the Kangra district (Dharamshala), 8.14 lakhs in Shimla, and 4.37 lakhs in Kullu, is shown in **Table 2**.

Types of Tourism in Himachal Pradesh

In addition to the Himalayas, lakes, rivers, ice and snow rural landscapes, heritage buildings, traditional dance forms and clothing, regional crafts and cuisine, and some well-known tourist destinations like Shimla, Manali, and Dharamshala are just a few of the state's many natural and man-made resources. table3, indicates the different types of tourism in Himachal Pradesh.

Table 3. Types of tourism in Himachal Pradesh
Theme Wise Performance of Districts and Potential Areas

Sr. No.	Theme	Existing Well Performing Districts	Potential Districts
1.	Eco Tourism	Lahaul-Spiti	Kinnaur, Kangra, Chamba, Mandi (Janjehli, Barot Valley), Kullu, Shimla (Chansal)
2.	Agro/Organic Tourism	Chamba, Shimla, Kinnaur	Sirmaur (Rajgarh), Majdi (Karsog Valley), Bilaspur (Ghumarwin), Lahaul-Spiti (Spiti) Chamba and Kullu
3.	Snow Tourism	Kullu	Shimla (Narkanda and Chanshal), Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Chamba
4.	Lake Tourism	Lahaul-Spiti, Kangra	Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur, Una
5.	Adventure	Kullu, Chamba, Lahaul-Spiti	Kinnaur, Mandi, Sirmaur, Kangra and Shimla
6.	Pilgrimage	Promotion and Marketing through Religious Circuits in all districts of HP	
7.	Cultural & Heritage	Kullu, Shimla, Kangra, Lahaul-Spiti	Chamba, Sirmaur (Nahan), Kinnaur, Mandi and Hamirpur
8.	Health & Wellness	Kangra	Solan (Chail), Kullu, Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti, Mandi
9.	Film Tourism	Shimla, Kullu	Lahaul-Spiti, Kangra (Palampur), Kullu (Manali), Chamba (Priungal), Shimla (Fagu)
10.	MICE Tourism	Shimla, Solan, Kangra	Solan Kangra, Kullu & Sirmaur

Source: Tourism Infrastructure Sustainable Development Plan for HP, 2019

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine how homestays in Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla affect ecotourism.
2. Evaluate how homestays affect the economy, the environment, and culture.
3. List the potential and problems facing the homestay industry.
4. Offer suggestions for improving homestay sustainability.

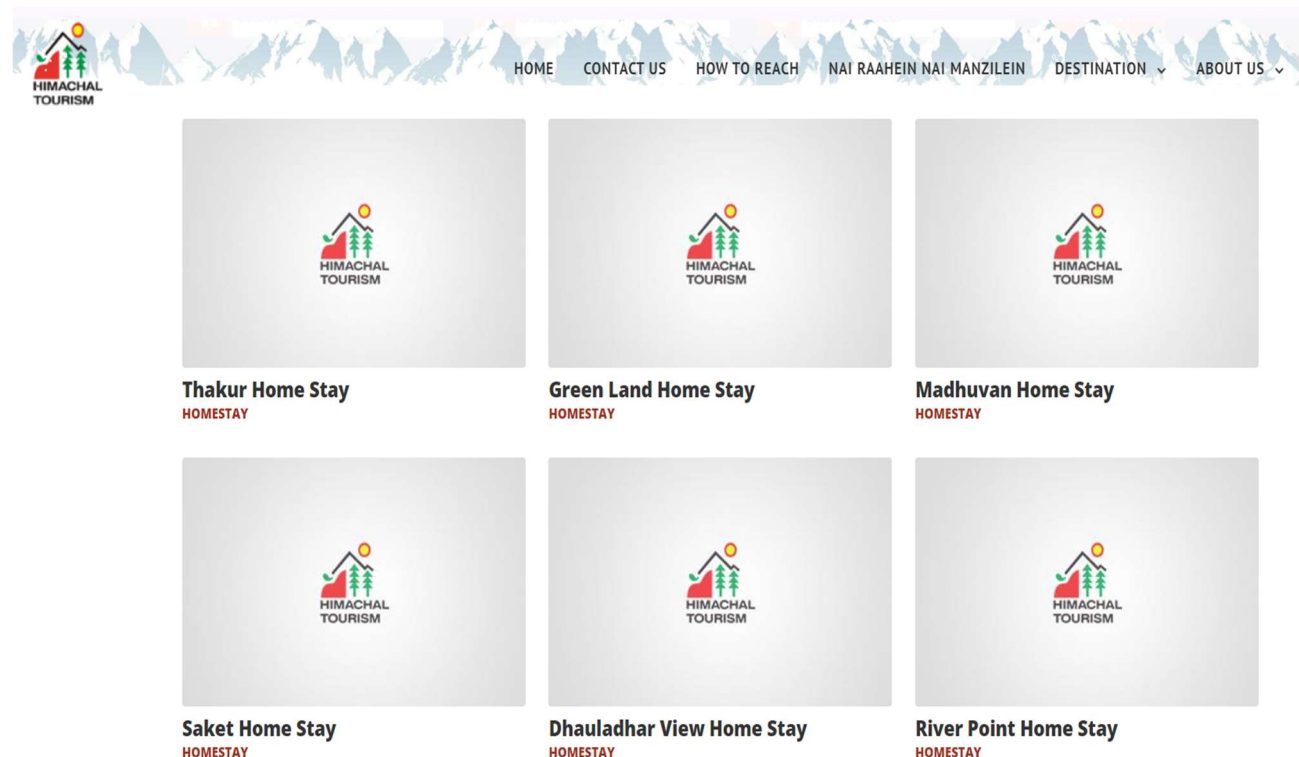
LITERATURE REVIEW

Eco-tourism is defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2015) as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education." Research indicates that eco-tourism can significantly contribute to conservation efforts and community development (Buckley, 2004; Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Eco-tourism focuses on creating sustainable tourism models that benefit both the environment and the local population (Weaver, 2001).

Homestays and Sustainable Tourism

The Himachal Pradesh government's Home Stay strategy aims to promote rural tourism with two goals in mind: giving local youth a means of subsistence and giving travelers more options to relieve already overcrowded tourist areas. Homestays have emerged as a sustainable alternative to traditional accommodations, offering environmental, economic, and social benefits. Studies by authors such as Lane (2009) and Saarinen (2006) highlight the role of homestays in promoting responsible tourism practices. Homestays help reduce the carbon footprint by utilizing local resources and fostering

community-based tourism (Murphy, 1985; Ashley et al., 2000). The Himachal Pradesh Govt. has mentioned the various homestay facilities at its website, the tourists get their bookings very easily.



Source: https://himachaltourism.gov.in/accommodation-result/?cat_id=1&district=9&tehsil=79&submit=

Economic Impact of Homestays

Homestays contribute to local economies by generating income for host families and creating employment opportunities. Research by Rogerson (2006) and Goodwin & Santilli (2009) indicates that homestays can significantly enhance the economic well-being of rural communities. In Himachal Pradesh, homestays have been instrumental in diversifying the income sources of local residents, especially in remote areas (Negi, 2017).

Environmental Benefits

Homestays often adopt eco-friendly practices such as using renewable energy sources, water conservation, and waste management. Studies by Weaver & Lawton (2007) and Fennell (2003) emphasize the importance of such practices in mitigating the environmental impact of tourism. In Himachal Pradesh, many homestays are located in ecologically sensitive areas, making environmental conservation a critical aspect of their operations (Singh & Mishra, 2013).

Cultural Preservation

Homestays play a crucial role in preserving local culture and traditions. Tourists staying in homestays get an opportunity to engage with the local way of life, thereby fostering cultural exchange and understanding (McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Research by Smith (2001) and Richards & Wilson (2007) suggests that homestays can help in maintaining cultural heritage by promoting traditional practices and crafts.

Challenges in the Homestay Sector

Despite their benefits, homestays face several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of marketing support, and regulatory issues. Studies by Scheyvens (2002) and Sharma & Choudhary (2015) highlight these challenges and suggest ways to overcome them. In Himachal Pradesh, the homestay sector needs better support from the government and private sector to realize its full potential (Thakur, 2018).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study relies on secondary data collected from various sources, including government reports, tourism studies, academic literature, and online databases. It was challenging to locate reliable data for my research because there is a wealth of information available on homestays. Websites such as the Ministry of Tourism, Himachal Pradesh Tourism, and Tripadvisor, among others, assisted me in gathering pertinent information. The data we used to analyze the impact of homestays on eco-tourism in Kullu, Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla.

1. **Government Reports:** Reports from the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (HPTDC) and the Ministry of Tourism provided insights into tourism policies, statistics, and the role of homestays in the region.
2. **Tourism Studies:** Research studies and surveys conducted by tourism organizations and universities offered valuable data on tourist preferences, economic impact, and sustainable practices in homestays.
3. **Academic Literature:** Journals and articles on eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and the homestay sector were reviewed to gather theoretical and empirical evidence.
4. **Online Databases:** Data from online platforms such as Statista and World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) were used to supplement the analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

At the beginning of the 20th century, Kullu was added to the traveler's map. Following the 1930s, Kullu saw the development of roads, the arrival of British residents, and a rise in popularity among British colonial administrators and military officials. According to Gardner et al., 2002, Kulluvians were first hesitant to accept the concept of the "service industry"; as a result, workers from other parts of India, such as Punjab, Lahaul, and Kashmir, dominated the hospitality industries in Kullu. Manali is a town in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh that is close to Kullu town in the Kullu district. From a trading town to a small town, Manali has expanded. There were 8,096 people living there as of the **2011 Indian census**. Manali's official population was 6,265 in 2001. 36% of the population was female and 64% was male. Homestays in rural areas are considered relatively safe due to fewer guests and less staff, especially in times when travel abroad is almost ruled out due to restricted international flights and fear of infection.

A majority of homestays, ranging from four to six bedrooms, are being flooded with queries. Homestays are priced from Rs 1,500 per day to luxury ones priced at Rs 30,000 per day. Several apple orchard owners have started homestays on their farms. The number of hotels and homestays registered with the state tourism department in Himachal is 3,679 and 2,305, respectively. At 638, Kullu district has the highest number of homestays, followed by 334 in Shimla district and 268 in Kangra.

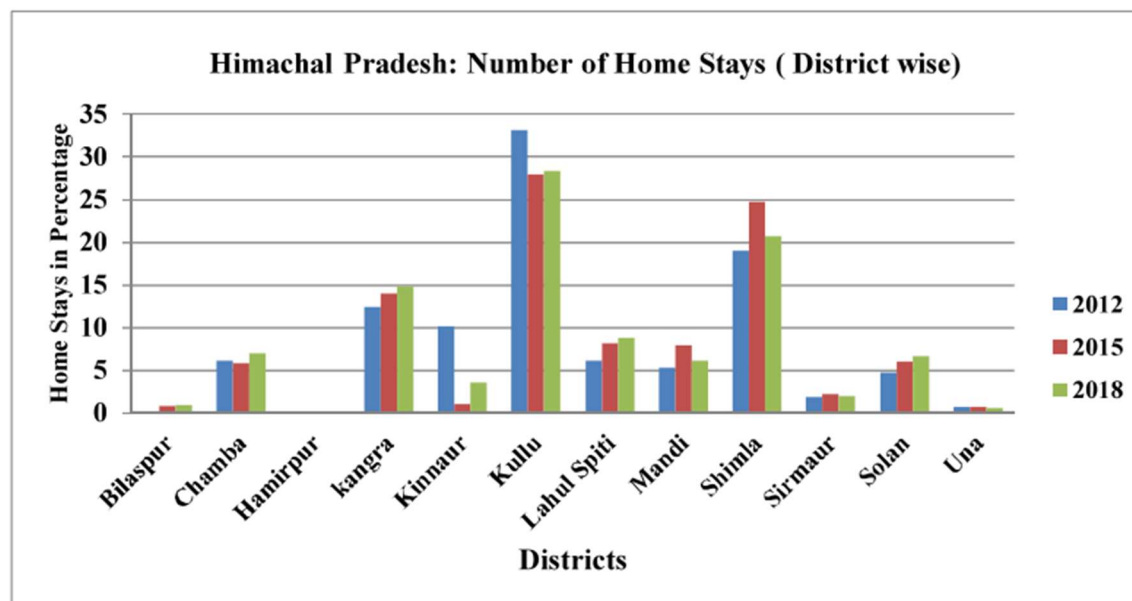
The small tribal district of Lahaul-Spiti with a relatively large number of 258 homestays has surprised many. Besides trekking, the homestays, located in rural areas, offer ample offbeat activities such as

apple picking, jam preparation, etc. to make their stay more desirable. In Himachal, there are 2,305 homestays and 3,679 hotels listed with the state tourism office, respectively. According to officials at the tourism agency, there were 2,189 homestays in the state as of December 31, 2019. However, the precise number of lodgings and homestays in the state is much larger, and a significant portion of them do business without being officially registered with the tourism administration. The cost of a homestay in Kullu ranges from 824 to 6,800 rupees, depending on the amenities and services provided.

According to Goibibo website, Dharamshala city under Kangra district has several Homestays, such as McleodGanj: 250 homestays, Dharamkot: 13 homestays, Naddi: 54 homestays, Main Square, Mcleodganj: 25 homestays, Temple Road, Mcleodganj: 25 homestays, Jogiwarra Road: 56 homestays, thus, Total: 79 homestays (with discounts of up to 30% and prices starting from ₹332), and 180 homestays are available in Shimla. As per homestays.co.in, there are 1,548 homestays in the Shimla Area, where the price range for homestays in Shimla is from Rs 570 to Rs 10200. Popular locations for homestays in Shimla include Mall Road, Lakkar Bazaar, Circular Road, Chotta Shimla and Cart Road.

RESULT

In Himachal Pradesh, homestays have grown to be a significant component of the lodging industry. It has aided in the socioeconomic development of rural populations in addition to providing housing in rural or semi-urban settings. In 2008, the Himachal Pradesh government launched the home stay program to offer reasonably priced lodging alternatives. As per study, between 2012 to 2018, the graph 1 shows number of home stays district wise in Himachal Pradesh.



Bar Graph.1: Himachal Pradesh: Number of Home Stays (District wise)

Source: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361773101_Development_and_Growth_of_Homestays_in_Himachal_Pradesh

Graph 1 shows that the highest homestays facilities were recorded in Kullu in 2012 which kept on increasing till 2018. The second highest homestays were in Shimla, at 3rd position Kangra was recorded having the maximum number of homestays.

As per latest data, The biggest number of homestays is found in the Kullu district (638), followed by

the Shimla district (334) and the Kangra district (268). It's interesting to note that many have been taken aback by the tiny tribal territory of Lahaul-Spiti's comparatively high number of 258 homestays. Lahaul-Spiti's growing homestay population suggests that travelers are choosing to visit more recent locations rather than densely populated cities (Chauhan, 2021).

Sustainable Practices in Himachal Pradesh in promoting Eco-tourism

Kullu:

Many homestays in Kullu and Manali, use locally sourced materials for construction and décor, reducing their carbon footprint. Some homestays offer organic food grown in their gardens, promoting sustainable agriculture. Proper waste segregation and composting are common practices to minimize environmental impact. Use of solar panels and other renewable energy sources to reduce reliance on non-renewable resources. Offering nature walks, bird watching, and other eco-friendly activities that do not harm the environment.

Dharamshala

Homestays focus on Rainwater harvesting and efficient water use systems to preserve local water resources. Encouraging guests to engage with local culture and traditions, which helps in the preservation of the local heritage. Use of energy-efficient appliances and lighting to reduce energy consumption. Homestay's owners are offering eco-friendly tours and treks that emphasize conservation and respect for the natural environment. They are providing educational programs on sustainability and environmental conservation to raise awareness among guests.

Shimla

As per govt rule, homestays are incorporating green architecture principles to minimize the environmental impact of buildings. Owners are employing local residents, which supports the local economy and reduces the carbon footprint associated with commuting. Homestays provides eco-friendly toiletries, linens, and cleaning products to reduce chemical usage, also Supporting local biodiversity by maintaining gardens with native plants and avoiding the use of pesticides. Moreover, are engaging with the local community in conservation efforts and promoting responsible tourism practices among guests.

The results indicate that homestays in Kullu, Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla significantly contribute to eco-tourism by promoting sustainable practices and supporting local economies. The analysis revealed several key findings:

Economic Impact

Homestays generate substantial income for local families, with an average monthly earning of INR 30,000 to 50,000 per homestay. This income helps improve the standard of living and funds community development projects.

Environmental Practices

Over 70% of the homestays implemented renewable energy solutions, and 65% engaged in organic farming. These practices not only reduced the environmental footprint but also attracted eco-conscious tourists.

Cultural Preservation

Homestays play a vital role in preserving local culture, with many offering traditional activities such as folk music, dance, and craft workshops. Tourists appreciated these cultural experiences, which

enhanced their overall satisfaction.

Discussion and recommendations:

Homestays usually leave less of an environmental impact than large-scale hotel constructions. They support environmentally friendly tourism and resource conservation, both of which are essential for rural areas with high biodiversity. A variety of local industries, including transportation, food suppliers, souvenir stores, and other small enterprises, profit from the money made from homestays. The multiplier effect propels economic expansion on the whole. Governments can raise more money by imposing taxes and fees on homestay operations. To further promote economic development, this can be reinvested in the local community's infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other public services. In order to overcome issues like social differences among village factions and the inexperience of village-level institutions, it is necessary to create tourist initiatives at local levels.

Challenges

Despite the benefits, homestays face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of marketing support, and regulatory issues. Addressing these challenges is crucial for the sustainable growth of the homestay sector. Due to their lack of exposure to the tourism industry, the proprietors struggle with marketing, visitor interactions, and hospitality standards. The additional difficulties include inadequate training, insufficient funding, insufficient experience and aptitude for entrepreneurship, troubles with leadership, and legal and regulatory concerns.

Conclusion

Homestays in Kullu, Manali, Dharamshala, and Shimla have proven to be effective in promoting eco-tourism by integrating sustainable practices and supporting local economies. They offer tourists an authentic and immersive experience while contributing to environmental conservation and cultural preservation. However, to maximize their potential, there is a need for improved infrastructure, better marketing strategies, and supportive government policies. By addressing these challenges, Himachal Pradesh can further enhance the sustainability and appeal of its homestay sector, making it a model for eco-tourism in India.

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