

Research on Self-Rescue and Innovative Models in the Rural Tourism Homestay Industry under the Impact of the Pandemic

—Taking the Ancient Huizhou Areas Such as Xiuning in Shexian as an Example

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a tremendous impact on the global tourism industry, with a serious effect on the rural tourism homestay sector as well. Taking ancient Huizhou areas such as Xiuning in Anhui Province as an example, this article explores the self-rescue measures and innovative models of the rural tourism homestay industry through field research and data analysis under the pandemic background. The research finds that during the pandemic, rural tourism homestay owners actively responded to challenges by innovating business models, improving service quality, and developing online markets, achieving certain results. The article aims to provide reference and inspiration for the self-rescue and future development of the rural tourism homestay industry during the pandemic.

KEYWORDS

Impact of the epidemic; Rural tourism homestays; Self-rescue measures; Innovative models

1. INTRODUCTION

Relying on the unique charm of ancient Huizhou landscape and humanities, her natural scenery, the quaint village between the green waters and green mountains, and the deep courtyard full of exquisite stone carvings and wood carvings, she has a pastoral leisure, but also a delicate and mottled history, and has achieved great development for more than 20 years. When Huizhou counties and cities promote the rural revitalization strategy, B&B plays the role of the backbone. B&B operators are also like carp crossing the river, with money and hope to invest in this burgeoning industry.

The sudden outbreak of the new crown pneumonia epidemic in 2020 has hit the originally booming Huizhou homestay industry hard. As an important part of the tourism industry, the rural tourism homestay industry is also facing challenges such as declining passenger flow and operational difficulties [1]. In the post-epidemic era, rural tourism homestay operators should effectively respond to the crisis, reduce economic losses and even reverse development, which is a practical problem that needs to be considered and solved urgently. In this paper, we selected Xiuning and other ancient Huizhou regions in Anhui Province as the research object, aiming to explore the self-help measures and model innovation of the rural tourism homestay industry under the impact of the epidemic, provide feasible suggestions for the recovery and future development of the industry, promote its benign development [2], and minimize economic losses.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT STATUS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HOMESTAY INDUSTRY IN XIUNING, SHEXIAN COUNTY, ANHUI PROVINCE AND OTHER ANCIENT HUIZHOU AREAS

2.1. Basic Overview

As one of the areas with a relatively concentrated concentration of traditional Chinese culture and historical and cultural heritage, Xiuning and other ancient Huizhou areas in Anhui Province are rich in tourism resources and attract a large number of tourists. As a result, the tourism homestay industry in the region has developed rapidly. As one of the areas with a relatively high concentration of traditional Chinese culture and historical heritage, Xiuning and other ancient Huizhou areas in Anhui Province are rich in tourism resources and attract a large number of tourists. In this context, the tourism homestay industry has developed rapidly. According to data from Tongcheng Travel, from 2019 to 2020, more than 70% of tourists in Huizhou hotel and homestay bookings chose regular mature hotels, while homestays accounted for less than 30%, and since 2021, the number of boutique homestay bookings in Huizhou has increased by more than 40% month-on-month, and the total number of homestay bookings has surpassed hotels and become one of the most important forms of accommodation for tourists coming to Huizhou.

2.2. Features

- (1) The number of homestays continues to grow: In recent years, the number of tourist homestays in Shexian, Xiuning and other areas has continued to grow, which reflects the vigorous development of tourism in the local area. Many traditional buildings and old mansions have been converted into B&Bs, providing visitors with a unique accommodation experience.
- (2) Outstanding theme features: In order to attract more tourists, B&Bs focus on creating unique themes and features in their operations. For example, some B&Bs have designed simple and elegant rooms with traditional culture as the theme, while others feature farmhouses that allow visitors to get close to nature and experience rural life.
- (3) Continuous improvement of service quality: In order to enhance competitiveness, B&B has worked service quality. From reception to room facilities, from dining to entertainment, we strive to make guests feel at home.
- (4) Online platform promotion: B&B owners in Xiuning and other places in She County also actively use the Internet platform to promote. By publishing information on major tourism platforms, the popularity and exposure of the homestay have been improved, attracting more tourists.
- (5) Increased government support: The local government has also increased its support for the tourism homestay industry, and introduced a series of support policies, such as tax reductions and exemptions, financial subsidies, etc., which provide a strong guarantee for the healthy development of the homestay industry.

To sum up, the development status of tourist homestays in Xiuning and other ancient Huizhou areas in Anhui Province is showing a vigorous trend, but it also faces some challenges, such as fierce market competition and uneven service levels. In the future, it is necessary to further improve quality and innovate business models [3] to meet the needs and development of the market.

3. PROBLEMS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL TOURISM AND HOMESTAY INDUSTRY IN ANCIENT HUIZHOU

In the wake of the pandemic, the global travel industry has faced unprecedented challenges. As an important part of the tourism industry, the rural tourism homestay industry has also been seriously

affected. It is mainly manifested in the sharp decline in passenger flow, reservation cancellation, and revenue reduction, which has brought great pressure and challenges to the development of the industry. Xiuning and other areas in Shexian County, Anhui Province are one of the important areas of China's rural tourism homestay industry, and they are also the focus areas of this study. During the epidemic, the rural tourism homestay industry in the region was also seriously affected, but there were also some positive changes and explorations.

3.1. Restrictions on Regional Development Hinder the Expansion of the Scale of Homestays

According to the data compiled by the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Shexian, Xiuning, Yixian and other ancient Huizhou regions, as of the beginning of 2023, the number of homestays has exceeded 3,000, with an annual reception of more than 2.5 million people, and an operating income of more than 1.5 billion yuan, with high, medium and low-end homestays, accounting for about 30%. Before 2020, the overall passenger flow was about 1.5 million, showing a year-on-year growth trend, but in 2020, due to the impact of the epidemic, the flow of people decreased. Most of the mid-to-high-end B&Bs can basically meet the configuration needs of ordinary hotels, and a few can reach the standard of five-star hotels. Huizhou is mostly mountainous, with few developable areas and insufficient industrial infrastructure, which limits the expansion of the number and scale of homestays.

3.2. The Existing Commercial Promotion Channels of B&Bs Are Old

According to detailed market research, we found that about 60% of the owners in the homestay industry in Huizhou have chosen to use the power of the Internet for booking and initial marketing promotion. They have attracted a large number of tourists through popular app platforms such as Ctrip, Meituan, Fliggy, etc. Not only do these platforms provide convenient booking services, but they also help homestay owners expand their customer base and increase visibility. However, 40% of homestay owners stick to traditional ways of soliciting guests. They rely on local searches, phone reservations, or referrals from friends to book rooms. These homestay owners don't seem to have fully mastered the art of internet marketing, and they rely more on word-of-mouth from past tourists for marketing promotion. Although this model is more traditional, it also reflects the shortcomings of some homestay owners in terms of Internet marketing.

3.3. Lack of Innovation in the Business Model of Homestay Operators

Except for a very small number of influential and well-known B&Bs, such as Shihe Flower Sea, NanpingShuitian House, TachuanAcademy and a number of specialized, themed and diversified mid-to-high-end boutique B&Bs, most of the Huizhou B&Bs are homogeneous, with a single business mode, which are simply stacked and repeated. Under the impact of the epidemic, the source of tourists has withered, and they can only compete viciously with each other, and the result will inevitably be a lose-lose situation for both operators and tourists. However, there are also some homestay operators who have continuously adjusted their business models in order to adapt to the epidemic, and have achieved considerable results. For example, the usual short-term rental has become a long-term rental, and the business owners in different locations share customers. However, due to the fact that many B&Bs are run by individuals or families, there is a lack of professional management teams and standardized operation models, resulting in uneven management levels and service quality, which affects the experience of tourists.

4. THE SELF-HELP MEASURES AND MODEL INNOVATION STRATEGIES OF THE HOMESTAY INDUSTRY

4.1. Develop Online Markets and Expand Marketing Channels

During the epidemic, online marketplaces have become an important sales channel for rural tourism homestay owners. In the face of the challenges of the pandemic, owners should actively respond to the challenges by strengthening online promotion and cooperating with major online travel platforms to effectively increase the exposure and booking volume of homestays, thereby promoting the recovery and development of the business. When it comes to promoting online marketplaces, business owners should adopt a variety of strategies.

First of all, you can create your own official website and social media accounts to showcase the characteristics, environment and services of the B&B to attract more potential customers. Secondly, they should actively participate in various online travel platforms, such as Ctrip, Meituan, etc., to publish the information of the homestay, and use the user traffic and resources of these platforms to expand the exposure of the homestay. In addition, owners can also offer special offers and packages through partnerships with online travel platforms to attract more customers to choose to book homestays.

These methods can not only increase the visibility and visibility of the B&B, but also stimulate the willingness of customers to book. The ease and transparency of online booking can attract more tourists to choose country houses as their way of staying. At the same time, online channels also provide more opportunities for communication and interaction, so that owners can respond to customer inquiries and needs in a timely manner, improving the quality of service and customer satisfaction.

4.2. Improve Service Quality and Increase Customer Satisfaction

Improving the service quality of the homestay industry is the key to improving customer satisfaction and promoting business development. This can be done by training employees, optimizing service processes, and improving facilities and equipment [5].

First of all, training employees is an important part of improving service quality. Owners can help employees improve their professionalism and service level by holding regular training courses, including etiquette training, communication skills training, service awareness training, etc. At the same time, establish an employee incentive mechanism, such as a reward system, promotion opportunities, etc., to stimulate employees' enthusiasm and sense of responsibility, and improve their attention to service quality. Secondly, optimizing the service process is also key. Owners can make detailed analysis and adjustments to customer reception, check-in process, housekeeping, and other aspects to improve efficiency and service quality. For example, simplifying check-in, providing personalized room layouts, and establishing mechanisms to respond quickly to customer needs can all enhance customer experience and satisfaction. At the same time, improving facilities and equipment is also an important means to improve service quality. Keep the facilities and equipment in good condition, maintain and update them regularly to ensure that the guest rooms are in good condition, hygienic and clean, and provide a comfortable accommodation environment. In addition, according to customer needs and feedback, new facilities and equipment or additional services are introduced in a timely manner, such as providing free WiFi, gyms, spas, etc., to improve customer experience and satisfaction.

4.3. Innovate the Business Model and Create A Diversified Boutique Homestay

Innovating the business model of the homestay industry is an important way to enhance its competitiveness and attractiveness, which can be considered and practiced from many aspects, such

as launching special theme activities and strengthening cooperation with local agricultural products [4].

First of all, B&Bs can consider launching a variety of attractive special themed activities to attract more tourists. These activities can include local traditional cultural experiences, handicraft making, picking activities, and more, and are designed to provide a unique experience that will attract visitors and increase their stay time. Secondly, strengthening cooperation with local agricultural products is also an effective and innovative measure. B&Bs can work with local farmers or agricultural cooperatives to launch food and beverage menus that focus on local produce, or provide purchase services for produce. This can not only enrich the catering projects of the homestay, but also promote the sales of local agricultural products, support the development of rural agriculture, and achieve a win-win situation for the industry.

By expanding the launch of special themed activities and strengthening cooperation with local agricultural products, B&Bs can provide guests with a more colorful experience and increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. At the same time, this innovative business model will also help to enhance the popularity and competitiveness of B&B, attract more customers to choose to stay, and promote the healthy development of the B&B industry.

5. SUMMARY

This article takes the ancient Huizhou area of Xiuning, Anhui as an example, and explores the self-help measures and innovative models of rural tourism homestay industry under the background of the epidemic through field research and data analysis. Research has found that during the epidemic, rural tourism homestay owners have actively responded to challenges by innovating business models, improving service quality, and developing online markets, achieving certain results.

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