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ENHANCING VISITOR EXPERIENCE IN NEPALESE HOMESTAYS: HOSPITALITY, DINING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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ABSTRACT

This article examines guest experience with Nepalese homestays, with the focal points of hospitality, food and facility satisfaction, by assessing how guests perceive hospitality and food quality and the rating of facilities and services. Carried out in Sirubari (Syangja) and Ghale Gaun (Lamjung), the study used quantitative survey methodology with 89 valid data samples analyzed descriptively using SPSS. Responses showed high ratings in personal hospitality (75.28% "Satisfied") and food quality (78.65% "Satisfied") and strong booking ease and pre-test communication (over 98% satisfaction). In-room amenities including electricity (64.37% "Very Satisfied"), water, cleanliness and internet connection received an overall positive response. Transport and infrastructure, however, were major concerns; 32.58% of residents were "Dissatisfied" with transport, and just 2.25% were "Very satisfied" with road connection. Opinions were somewhat divided about comfort-related amenities 21.35% respondents were "Neutral" about bedding and 6.74% were "Dissatisfied", as were 25.84% respondents about provision of simple facilities like toiletries. Thus, in all likelihood, these infrastructural and amenity deficiencies may be the reason behind such a very short stay duration (averaging only 1.07 days). "Given how enriching and hospitality of Nepalese homestay is, the weaknesses in infrastructure, mainly in transportation and guest comfort seems to be major bottleneck that must be addressed. Specific enhancements in access roads, transport services, bedding quality and delivery of basic services can vastly improve the user-experience, resulting in longer visits to village homestays, and generate stronger ties between rural Nepal and homestay tourism as an economic option.

KEYWORDS: *Homestay Tourism, Visitor Satisfaction, Hospitality, Rural Tourism Infrastructure, Sustainable Tourism Nepal*

INTRODUCTION

Nepal is a tiny country but is immensely rich in culture and varied in geography. Covering an area of 147,181 kilometers, it marks the house of Mount Everest, the highest mountain on earth, and the birthplace of Lord Buddha (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). With such varied landscapes and a cultural heritage so ancient and entrenched, it is no wonder that Nepal has become one of the world's premiere nodes for tourists from all walks of life who are in search of adventure, spiritual satisfaction, and the beauty of nature. Tourism is one of the mainstay industries in the country that generates employment and foreign exchange as well as stimulates development in other sectors. Utilization of the development of infrastructure and services to this buoyant industry has been catalyzed through the 1950s; major turning points include the historical successful climb of Mount Everest in 1953 (Linnard, 2007).

Sustainable alternatives to traditional forms of mountain tourism in Nepal have been in development in the form of homestay tourism over the past few decades. This type of community tourism encourages tourists to visit local families, often in rural areas, where it provides an experience of living in another culture while promoting grassroots economic recycling (Timalsina, 2012). Homestays contribute towards the conservation of nature, the promotion of cultural heritage and the social and economic upliftment of the deprived communities. Innovative homestay programs

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in regions like the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) showcase how such programs can encourage both conservation and socioeconomic strength (Gangotia, 2013).

With more and more travelers looking for genuine, more individualized experiences, the success of a homestay is largely based on hospitality, food, and overall guest satisfaction. The experiences of guests – including the warmth of their hosts, the convenience of amenities and the specialness of local foods – are critical to the success and sustainability of homestay tourism. But even as homestays are gaining in popularity across Nepal, there is a dearth of empirical research focused on visitors' perceptions, specifically in terms of the quality of hospitality and facilities available. Earlier studies have concentrated on limited number of established destinations like Ghale Gaun while many of the newer destinations such as Sirubari of Syangja and Ghalegau Lamjung have remained relatively unexplored (Maharjan & Thapa, 2009;Gurung & McCoy, 1999). This gap is sought to be filled by this research, through examining the visitor's experiences in the homestays of Nepal with the following objectives: 1) To look at the visitors' experiences on dining and hospitality of homestays in Nepal. 2) To analyze the guest experiences and facility ratings in the homestays of the study region.

METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research design and survey approach in the study present an in-depth investigation into guest experiences with dining and hospitality, facility ratings and in-room facilities experiences (Pandey et al., 2023; Kurzhals, 2021). The research took place in two of the local homestays of the country, located in Sirubari in Syangja and Ghalegau in Lamjung, in Nepal and therefore offers a comprehensive view of the very local homestay business. The sample is composed of homestay visitors within the study area. The total number of homestay operators in the sample is 89 45 in Sirubari and 44 in Ghalegau. Therefore, the sample size for a finite population was determined using formula by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) to ensure valid results.

$$n = \frac{N \times Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}{(N-1) \times E^2 + Z^2 \times p \times (1-p)}$$

Where n=required sample size, N=Total population cover under the study (230homestays), Z=Z-value (1.96 for 95% confidence), p=estimated proportion (0.5); if no previous study is available 0.5 is the best conservative approach, e=margin of error (0.05 or 5%). The structured questionnaire was the main tool, prepared on the basis of review of literature, to gather quantitative data relating to management of homestay program in Nepal and elsewhere. It consists of some parts Demographics and Satisfaction of tourists. All answers were ordered using a 5-point Likert scale for comparability and quantification. Primary data were cleaned; coded and analyzed by using statistical software like SPSS. Descriptive statistics will be used to present participant characteristics and key variables.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics of visitors

The characteristics of the respondent population constitute a key one for the interpretation of the research results and their generalizability, especially for research on service satisfaction, tourism management etc. It is essential to know who contributed in the study, as these may vary among different demographic groups, in guests‟ preferences, needs and expectations. The involvement of 89 valid questionnaire respondents in this study provides sound evidence for analysis.

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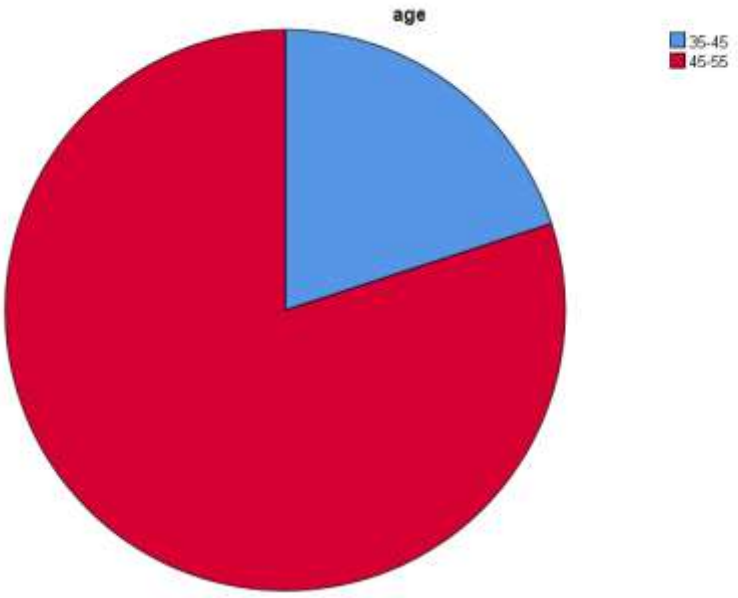


Figure 1: Pie chart showing the age distribution of homestay respondents.

In the pie chart, the proportions of the respondents by their ages are represented, with a strong majority of the respondents belonging to the 45–55 age group, which corresponds to the largest red area in the chart. A smaller, yet still fairly high percentage of respondents falls in the 35-45 age group (blue). Importantly, the 45 to 55 age group in either model accounts the majority of the sample, indicating that most homestay guests are either mid-to-late career or early retirement adults. This trend corresponds with the previously calculated mean age of around 38.6 years, confirming that the average guest is middle-aged or older. This kind of demographic is probably going to really value comfort, safety, and having genuine local experiences.

Number of Days Stayed

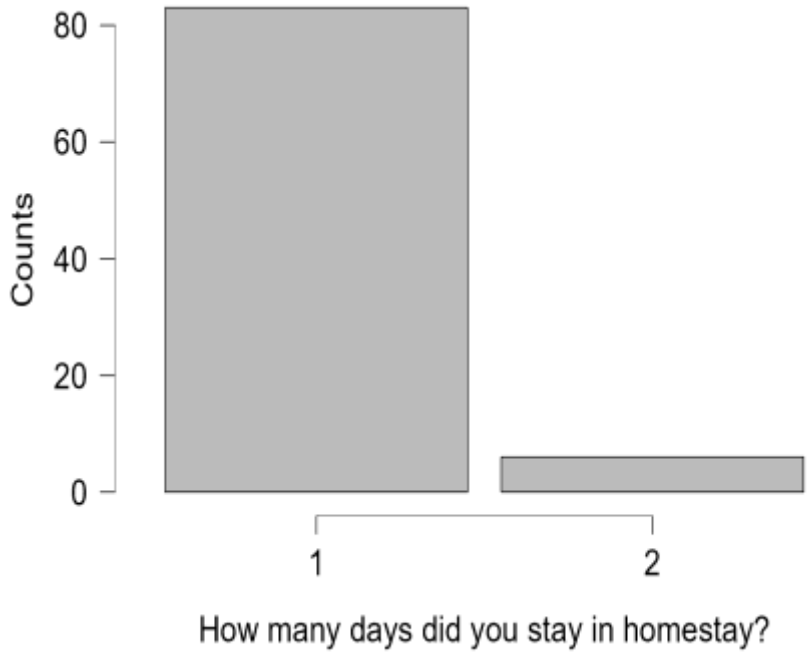


Figure 2: Count of days guest stayed in homestay.

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A bar chart shows a visual representation of the length of the homestay experience respondents had. It indicates that the great bulk of guests lodged for a day only, and that only a very small number lodged for two days. This is confirmed in the average stay of 1.07 days (SD = 0.25), which is both very short and very homogeneous across participants. The small range, where the responses are only one or two days, indicates that homestay visits in general are short in duration.

Guest Experience and Facility Ratings

Table 1: Frequencies for Easy of booking the homestay

Easy of booking the homestay	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	1	1.124	1.124	1.124
Satisfied	47	52.809	52.809	53.933
Very Satisfied	41	46.067	46.067	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

This occurrence can be explained by the fact that factors influencing guest experience begin before their actual arrival. They can be identified through both tangible and intangible means. Tangible factors include booking ease, information accuracy, and homestay accessibility. Table 1 below shows the responses' frequency related to how easy it was to book the accommodation. Since overwhelming most of the proposed answer variants voted in favor, the comfort of the booking process likely means a lot to guests. Specifically, of 89 respondents, 47 gave the "Satisfied" rating and 41 gave the "Very Satisfied" response. Only one identified with the "Neutral" answer, and there was no one who was dissatisfied. Such universal satisfaction demonstrates that booking systems and adherence to a user requirement works favorably among homestay providers.

Table 2: Frequencies for Road access to the homestay

Road access to the homestay	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	14	15.730	15.730	15.730
Neutral	26	29.213	29.213	44.944
Satisfied	45	50.562	50.562	95.506
Very Dissatisfied	2	2.247	2.247	97.753
Very Satisfied	2	2.247	2.247	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

Regarding road access (Table 2), more mixed responses were given, thus revealing clearly a point of concern. Forty-five (50.56%) guests were "Satisfied" while 26 (29.21%) were "Neutral" and a total of 16 (17.98%) guests responded "Dissatisfied" or "Very Dissatisfied" with access. That is a reflection, it seems, of the fact that the homestay is still hard for a lot of guests to get to, maybe because Nepal has mountains (and underdeveloped rural infrastructure). Only 2 (2.25%) clients were "Very Satisfied" with access. These findings indicated that infrastructure improvement is an urgent requirement for sustainable homestay development.

Table 3: Frequencies for Transportation facilities

Transportation facilities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	29	32.584	32.955	32.955
Neutral	37	41.573	42.045	75.000
Satisfied	20	22.472	22.727	97.727
Very Dissatisfied	1	1.124	1.136	98.864
Very Satisfied	1	1.124	1.136	100.000
Missing	1	1.124		
Total	89	100.000		

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Transportation services also performed poorly (Table 3). 29 (32.58% of participants reported that they were "Dissatisfied", 37 (41.57%) reported that they were Neutral and 20 (22.47%) reported that they were "Satisfied", and a single Guest each reported that they were "Very Satisfied" or "Very Dissatisfied". The relatively low positive scores concerning transportation together with the information about road access stress the necessity of collaborative efforts among homestay operators, local municipalities, and tourism authorities to improve guest access and mobility.

Table 4: Frequencies for Clarify of information provided before arrival

Clarify of information provided before arrival	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	11	12.360	12.791	12.791
Satisfied	64	71.910	74.419	87.209
Very Satisfied	11	12.360	12.791	100.000
Missing	3	3.371		
Total	89	100.000		

Table 4 showed that the resolution of information before arrival-middle was rated fairly high through guest feedback: 64 (71.91%) were "Satisfied" 11 (12.36%) were "Very Satisfied" and 11 (12.36%) were "Neutral". This demonstrates that communication is working but also suggests that a few contributors believe that information could be better, for example more detailed instruction, clarification about what to expect or facilities available.

These tables together reveal that, while booking and information are the strong parts of the homestay experience, access and transport are still serious barriers. Providers of homestays must look to invest in clear arrival instructions, shuttle or pick-up services, or work to lobby for improvements to roads and transportation on a community level to further improve the guest journey.

In-Room Facilities

Table 5: Frequencies for Electricity facilities

Electricity facilities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied	31	34.831	35.632	35.632
Very Satisfied	56	62.921	64.368	100.000
Missing	2	2.247		
Total	89	100.000		

The guest's overall perception and their willingness to recommend a homestay are greatly influenced by whether or not they are satisfied with in-room facilities. Table 5 presents percentage for satisfaction with electricity services: Satisfied with Electricity Services 31 (34.83%); and Very Satisfied with Electricity Services 56 (62.92%). Only two responses were not collected, and we recorded no negative responses, making it a fairly established norm in the studied homestays to have reliable electricity despite the rural context.

Table 6: Frequencies for Communication and Internet facilities

Communication and Internet facilities	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied	29	32.584	32.584	32.584
Very Satisfied	60	67.416	67.416	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

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Regarding Communications & Internet facilities (Table 6), 60 (67.42%) guests were “Very Satisfied” and only 29 (32.58%) were “Satisfied.” None of the participants indicated dissatisfaction or neutrality. Connectivity in the digital age, Wi-Fi or phone is a differentiator for homestays, not only because it’s essential for guest communication, but also for them to share their experience on social media platforms, and indirectly promote the property.

Table 7: Frequencies for Water facilities (Drinking + bathing)

Water facilities (Drinking + bathing)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	5	5.618	5.682	5.682
Satisfied	36	40.449	40.909	46.591
Very Satisfied	47	52.809	53.409	100.000
Missing	1	1.124		
Total	89	100.000		

Similarly, the supply of water facility (drinking and bathing is high (Table 7), where 36 (40.45%) are "Satisfied" and 47 (52.81%) are "Very satisfied." Very few (1.75%) were “Neutral” or “Non responsive” which suggests that fresh water supply is generally adequate to guest expectation in both hygiene and public health.

Table 8: Frequencies for Cleanliness of the room

Cleanliness of the room	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	1	1.124	1.124	1.124
Satisfied	59	66.292	66.292	67.416
Very Satisfied	29	32.584	32.584	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

Cleanliness of room (Table 8) is also another excellent, in which 59 (66.29%) "Satisfied" and 29 (32.58%) "Very satisfied". One respondent indicated being “Neutral,” while there was none who were dissatisfied. Clean rooms are key to making guests feel comfortable and confident, especially if they are international visitors who are exposed to varying levels of cleanliness.

Table 9: Frequencies for Comfort of the bedding

Comfort of the bedding	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	6	6.742	6.742	6.742
Neutral	19	21.348	21.348	28.090
Satisfied	51	57.303	57.303	85.393
Very Satisfied	13	14.607	14.607	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

In terms of bed comfort (Table 9), responses were mostly positive, however more were mixed than those in relation to cleanliness. Despite 51 (57.30%) “Satisfied” and 13 (14.61%) “Very Satisfied,” 19 (21.35%) “Neutral” and 6 (6.74%) replied “Dissatisfied.” That might also be an area for opportunity for improvement, using higher quality mattresses and linens, as it would seem that a large number of the guests are just satisfied with the bedding, or not even.

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Table 10: Frequencies for Availability of essential amenities (e.g. towels, toiletries)

Availability of essential amenities (e.g. towels, toiletries)	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	23	25.843	25.843	25.843
Neutral	33	37.079	37.079	62.921
Satisfied	24	26.966	26.966	89.888
Very Dissatisfied	1	1.124	1.124	91.011
Very Satisfied	8	8.989	8.989	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

The table of the basic services is a very neglected aspect (Table 10), in particular related to towels and toiletries. Only 24 (26.97%) were "Satisfied," and 8 (8.99%) "Very Satisfied," 33 (37.08%) "Neutral" as well as 23 (25.84%) "Dissatisfied." This means that there are some unmet expectations, and/or homestays are not providing for basic needs. This discovery is actionable and signals a fairly cheap way to enhance the experience of the guest.

Dining and Hospitality Experience

Table 11: Frequencies for Quality of food served

Quality of food served	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	1	1.124	1.124	1.124
Neutral	10	11.236	11.236	12.360
Satisfied	70	78.652	78.652	91.011
Very Satisfied	8	8.989	8.989	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

Serving quality food (Table 11) is the most important strength of a homestay. Of the 89, an outstanding 70 (78.65%) were "Satisfied", and a further 8 (8.99%) "Very Satisfied". Only 10 (11.24%) of them said they were “Neutral,” and only 1 (1.12%) of them stated they were “Dissatisfied.” This overwhelmingly positive satisfaction rate highlights the importance of food quality in the guest experience and suggests that taste and preparation can be successfully met by home stays.

Table 12: Frequencies for Variety of local dishes offered

Variety of local dishes offered	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Neutral	16	17.978	17.978	17.978
Satisfied	67	75.281	75.281	93.258
Very Satisfied	6	6.742	6.742	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

There were also very favorable guest responses on the variety of local cuisine (Table 12) with 67 (75.28%) "Satisfied" and 6 (6.74%) "Very Satisfied." But 16 (17.98%) were “Neutral”, which means the diversity of the menu still has some potential to be raised. (See Rejoinder 3.) There were no negative answers, warranting that most visitors believe homestays are genuinely trying to expose their guests to local foods.

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Table 13: Frequencies for Hygiene and cleanliness of the dining area

Hygiene and cleanliness of the dining area	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied	42	47.191	47.191	47.191
Very Satisfied	47	52.809	52.809	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

The cleanliness of dining area (Table 13) was excellent and positive responses were 42 (47.19%) "Satisfied" and 47 (52.81%) "Very Satisfied". Looking at Table 1, zero responses were found to be indifferent or negative, indicating a strength and competitive advantage for homestays, particularly concerning the health and comfort of the guest.

Table 14: Frequencies for Friendliness and hospitality of the host family

Friendliness and hospitality of the host family	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Dissatisfied	1	1.124	1.124	1.124
Neutral	4	4.494	4.494	5.618
Satisfied	67	75.281	75.281	80.899
Very Satisfied	17	19.101	19.101	100.000
Missing	0	0.000		
Total	89	100.000		

Friendliness and hospitality of host families (Table 14) are also rated very high. Regarding satisfaction, the vast majority of information providers 67 (75.28%) were “Satisfied” with 17 (19.10%) being “Very Satisfied.” Only 4 (4.49%) did express “Neutral” opinion while 1 (1.12%) was not satisfied. Indeed, it confirms that homestays are best in the area where they were meant to be great: the human touch that underlines the charm of this type of stay.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study provide valuable insight on the visitor experience in Nepalese homestays, the strengths of which are the interpersonal hospitality and food services. Satisfactory levels of guest satisfaction with friendliness of host families, cleanness of dining spaces, and also with quality and variety of local food make a nice fit with previous literature that claims that genuine local interaction and traditional food experience are major predictors of homestay satisfaction (Lama, 2014; Sharma et al., 2020). The host-guest relationship that supports culture immersion contributes to the social perceived value of the homestay and to its potential to be positioned as an alternative and sustainable form of tourism (Kunwar & Pandey, 2016). Similarly, the strength of pre-arrival communication clarity and the ease of booking indicated strong guest endorsement of operator uses of technology and communication for the booking of the homestay. These assets bode well for Nepal’s community-based tourism as the sector has potential and opportunity for the professional and mature age market which is looking for safety, authenticity and personalized service (UNWTO, 2021).

While these are positives, the study found other challenges including transport, road access as well as in-room facilities. The relatively low satisfaction regarding access infrastructure, and the availability of items of basic necessity such as toiletry items and comfortable bedding, is reflective of earlier insights generated from research on rural tourism in developing countries, such as the low-level of investment in physical infrastructure, which impedes future growth prospects (Nepal, 2007; Dahal & Shrestha, 2018). Many guests were for a short stay, as little as one night, perhaps because of the logistical obstacles that limit deeper immersion in the community. These service and infrastructure gaps can be tackled to a significant extent to improve the comfort of visitors, extending their stay thereby maximizing the economic and cultural exchange of benefits. It would be a worthwhile investment in small and potentially high-impact changes, such as transportation, improved bedding and provision of essentials, to enhance the holistic visitor

experience while maintaining the distinct, local people centered character of homestay tourism in Nepal (SNV, 2010; Singh et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This research is one of the few of its kind to demonstrate visitor experiences in Nepalese homestays are significantly influenced by dining excellence, real hospitality and extensive pre-arrival communication; all yet play critical roles in the overall satisfaction of guests. Emerging evidence shows very high satisfaction with the facility of booking and transparency of information pre-arrival, suggesting a novel digital adoption by rural homestay providers. Yet weaknesses remain concerning physical access, and many visitors complain about road access and transport infrastructure. Furthermore, while basic facilities such as electricity, water and cleanliness were rated high, basic comforts like the quality of bedding and availability of toiletries were found to be critically wanting. crucially, it uncovers a new pattern of predominantly short stays mostly one night which are likely related to these infrastructure and amenity constraints. These findings highlight benefits as well as emerging issues in homestay tourism in Nepal by indicating that targeted investments in the physical transport infrastructure and guest comfort can significantly improve the overall experience and encourage longer, more rewarding visits.

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