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**COMMUNITY-BASED HOMESTAY ACTIVITIES: SUSTAINABLE
OR PERISHABLE TOURISM?**

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Abstract

The tourism industry has been developed in various ways, including community-based homestay activities, in rural areas. The community-based homestay activities include local people's lifestyles, cultural heritage, traditional food, economic activities, recreation, and environmental preservation that attract the guests of rural homestay accommodations. Community-based tourism aims to attract tourists in rural tourism, particularly their homestays, to experience the uniqueness of the community way of life, as the village people have done. The homestay industry can also provide significant supplemental income to locals while instilling a sense of responsibility for Malaysia's cultural legacy. However, the new generation is reluctant to continue and sustain the community-based homestay activities due to the big gap in homestay income between the homestay operators and other industries, which are not consistently earned. According to the registered homestay statistics, some operators have withdrawn, and the number of registered operators has decreased in Selangor. Hence, this study concentrated on community-based homestay activities awareness and perceived contributions to rural areas' socioeconomic and physical sustainability in Selangor. A profound interview was conducted with the owners of the homestays and the head of the homestay managers to collect data. As a result, homestays have the potential to be both a pro-poor tourism strategy and an eco-tourism tool for improving Malaysians' quality of life and social capital.

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1. Introduction

Various efforts have been being carried out by the government through the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), Malaysia, to increase the number of tourist arrivals, including through the branding of Malaysia. The branding of Malaysia through the slogan or tag line such as “Malaysia: Truly Asia”, further diversifying existing tourism products including organising events at the international level such as “1Malaysia International Shoe Festival”, “1Malaysia International Tourism Exchange”, “1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourist” and “1 Malaysia International Tourism Night Floral Parade”.

Specifically in Malaysia, the tourism industry has become one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA), and it is one of the most important contributors to national income. Furthermore, the tourism industry is the third-largest contributor to Malaysia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) after the manufacturing and commodity sectors. The tourism sector contributed around 15.9 per cent to the total GDP in 2019 (MIDA, 2021). In recent years, the tourism industry in Southeast Asia has experienced significant growth, including Malaysia. The “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia 2020” campaign was launched with the hope of reaching the target of 30 million visitors and tourism receipts of 100 billion Malaysian ringgit in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the tourism sector to record losses of almost RM100 billion by the end of 2020. Table 1 shows the tourist earnings performance of the homestay experience program in Malaysia for the year 2020. Meanwhile, Table 2 shows the statistics of international tourists visiting Malaysia in 2020 for the homestay experience program.

Table 1. Tourist Earnings Performance of the Malaysia Homestay Experience Program 2020

No	State	Total Earnings (RM)	Domestic tourists	International tourists	Number of tourists
1.	Perlis	33,233.76	708	0	708
2.	Kedah	289,341.60	3,617	263	3,880
3.	Penang	78,870.00	476	53	529
4.	Perak	145,739.00	2,415	766	3,181
5.	Selangor	252,255.00	4,070	247	4,317
6.	Melaka	206,100.00	3,439	280	3,719
7.	N. Sembilan	158,615.00	591	84	675
8.	Johor	432,841.00	6,883	314	7,197
9.	Kelantan	24,424.00	586	25	611
10.	Terengganu	390,520.00	1,613	25	1,638
11.	Pahang	3,532,171.56	53,595	6	53,601
12.	Sarawak	1,173,955.36	6,480	2,509	8,989
13.	Sabah	1,790,314.23	22,687	14,804	37,491
14.	Labuan	112,200.00	1,244	2	1,246
Total		8,620,580.51	108,404	19,378	127,782

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC, 2021a)

The homestay program offers an opportunity for tourists to stay with selected families, interact and experience the daily life of their homestay families and learn about the culture and lifestyle of the rural community in Malaysia. The homestay program cannot be classified as an accommodation facility. Instead, it focuses more on lifestyle and experiences, including cultural and economic activities. Each

homestay program offers a variety of activities, depending on the culture, food, economic activities, and location. Each state in Malaysia has its uniqueness in culture, ranging from nasi dagang in Kelantan to Sumazau dance in Sabah and longhouses in Sarawak. Examples of homestay activities include: (i) culture and lifestyle history; traditional dances, traditional songs and traditional food; traditional games and sports; culture: weddings, animal sacrifice gatherings and celebrations; (ii) economics activities; rubber tapping; fish breeding; agriculture: rice, cocoa, oil palm, fruit; (iii) recreation and sightseeing; explore the forest; white rafting; visits to nearby tourism products; (iv) environmental preservation - tree planting program: tourists are encouraged to plant trees in their homestays with the aim of preserving the environment and beautifying the scenery of the homestay.

Table 2. Foreign Tourist Statistics for Malaysia Homestay Experience Program 2020

No	Nation of Origin	Number of tourists
1.	South Korea	8,539
2.	China	1,367
3.	Japan	448
4.	Indonesia	385
5.	Singapore	382
6.	Europe	322
7.	Australia	160
8.	United States of America	87
9.	United Kingdom	72
10.	Brunei Darussalam	44
11.	Others	7,572
Total		19,378

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC, 2021b)

Due to the potential of homestay programs to provide additional income and employment, the registered homestay and the number of homestay operators in Malaysia has increased, as shown in Table 3 and Table 4. The increased demand can be explained by recent global social and cultural changes that have resulted in greater interest and appreciation for cultural heritage, lifestyles, and environmental issues.

Table 3. Registered Homestay 2020

No	Nation of Origin	Number of tourists
1.	Number of Homestay Clusters	219
2.	Number of Villages	371
3.	Number of House Participants	4,244
4.	Number of Rooms	6,009

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC, 2021c)

In Malaysia, the number of homestay operators in Malaysia has increased. However, homestay operators are less competitive in strengthening homestay programs. In addition, many homestay operators in Malaysia do not make improvements to their products' service quality, including the lack of basic amenities (Hussin et al., 2014). This situation has led to a decline in tourists' interest in homestay programs in the country. For example, in the study of Jamaludin et al. (2012), bathroom facilities in Kg.

Laklok, Machang, Kelantan homestays do not meet the needs of tourists. Furthermore, obtaining information about the homestays and the items or services the homestays provide can be challenging for certain potential customers. Therefore, potential clients who have the necessary information face a new challenge in reserving homestay rooms.

Table 4. Homestay Operators' Statistics by State from 2017 to 2019

NO	YEAR	2017		2018		2019	
	STATE	OPERATOR	HOMESTAY	OPERATOR	HOMESTAY	OPERATOR	HOMESTAY
1.	Perlis	56	3	56	3	56	3
2.	Kedah	345	16	345	16	356	17
3.	Penang	234	11	234	11	234	11
4.	Perak	305	11	305	11	305	11
5.	Selangor	454	16	449	16	449	16
6.	Melaka	137	9	137	9	137	9
7.	N. Sembilan	288	13	288	13	288	13
8.	Johor	497	24	522	26	556	27
9.	Kelantan	152	8	152	8	152	8
10.	Terengganu	185	10	185	10	216	11
11.	Pahang	323	16	323	16	323	16
12.	Sarawak	594	41	601	41	653	44
13.	Sabah	345	25	394	29	406	30
14.	Labuan	79	3	79	3	79	3
	Total	3,994	206	4,070	212	4,210	219

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, Malaysia (MOTAC, 2021d)

As a result of homestay programmes, rural communities can expand and prosper (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017). The homestay programme is well-known and refers to the housing of visitors who live with adoptive families and go out to eat and participate in traditional activities with the community. The homestay programme, on the other hand, has theoretically served as a spur for local economic growth, but in practice, there are very few homestays in Malaysia that are competitive or sustainable (Soh, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

Tourists have been highly concerned by scholars, among other factors, who are actively engaged in sustainable tourism development, exploring the precedents, impacts, key actors, performance indicators, climate effects, and the like (Niyazieva & Zhechev, 2020). In 1980 the concept of sustainability was first discussed with the ecological paradigm. Goodman (2000) argues that sustainability is regarded as a framework that various sectors can adopt, including tourism. The four main fields of sustainable tourism include responsible tourism, eco-tourism, community tourism, and conservation tourism (Buckley, 2012). In addition, sustainability factors have been widely addressed to measure community-based tourism (CBT) sustainability for economic, social, cultural and environmental reasons as well as for life satisfaction (Lee & Jan, 2019).

CBT is managed and owned by communities to allow tourists to increase their consciousness and awareness and become acquainted with the community and the way they live (Bhuiyan, 2019). Lee and

Jan (2019) emphasised that CBT should promote local economic opportunities to improve residents' quality of life and protect their local environment.

Sustainable tourism is a positive approach to reducing tension and different negative consequences created without compromising visitor satisfaction due to the complex interactions between tourism industry players with the environment and local communities (Hastuti & Assriyani, 2021). The WTO has adopted three types of criteria for sustainable development in the tourism sector: (i) protecting environmental resources; (ii) providing local communities with economic and quality of life; and (iii) providing visitors with a high level of quality (Habibullah et al., 2019).

During the Movement Control Order (MCO), which the Prime Minister of Malaysia announced, the state of the homestay programme will be affected for an unknown period from 18 March 2020. In the course of the MCO, tourism-friendly premises must be vacated, including homestay operators. Despite that, the participation of different stakeholders in the development of the homestay industry will boost the homestay economy in the short term. Moreover, community participation and local participation may have an impact on a homestay business.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions arise due to the above problem statement related to homestay business sustainability.

- i. What are the problems faced by the homestay operators in Selangor?
- ii. How can community-based tourism (CBT) in Selangor intensify?

4. Purpose of the Study

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism is one of the hardest-hit industries. So it impacts visitors from other countries that the government feels compelled to assist the local tourism industry. However, there are important lessons to be learned from this crisis about the resiliency of the tourism industry. As a result, the situation is getting worse, as nearly every country has implemented immigration restrictions. According to the findings in some literature, the COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on the travel and tourism industry (Gössling et al., 2021; Ismail & Daud, 2020). Thus, this study focuses on the problems faced by the homestay operators in Selangor and how the CBT can be enhanced in sustaining the homestay program in Selangor. In terms of economics, social, culture, and the environment, the homestay development programme had a variety of effects on the local communities. homestay development's outcomes will vary depending on which community groups' perspectives are considered.

5. Research Methods

The qualitative approach is best if limited data are available and exploration is required because the determining factor of a particular phenomenon is not identified (Creswell, 2013). In addition, qualitative research is not used to generate generalisation of findings but to select sites and participants with data to help researchers better understand the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A

qualitative research approach was also taken to understand and deeply understand local communities' attitudes, motivations, and views. A convenient non-random method has been used to select samples for data collection. This approach is consistent with current tourism research on the perceptions of rural tourism operators (e.g., Hastuti & Assriyani, 2021; Matilainen et al., 2018; Sawatsuk et al., 2018).

In-depth interviews were conducted to address the research objectives. A benefit of this approach is that it is possible to adapt the data collection as well to follow up the ideas and leads. In addition, further examination or exploration may be carried out, such as clarifying the responses or discovering the respondents' motivations and feelings. A standard, semi-structured interview sheet was used as an interviewer guide to help cover research objectives that are not directly administered to the respondents.

The respondents were encouraged to explain their views as necessary and when they felt necessary with minimal or no interruption by the interviewers. Three interviewers attended each interview session: two persons to administer the interview and the other to record the responses. The first interviewer could concentrate on the replies and take the necessary follow-up measures. In order to seek further clarification or further examination, the act of recording the replies in writing had been designed as an immediate reference in the event of a vague reply or any interesting issues. Using a voice recorder would not avail such opportunities as transcription of the interview would be performed later. The interviews took an average of 45-60 minutes and were arranged to ensure their schedules were not disrupted according to the convenience of the interviewees.

Representatives from the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Selangor and the homestays' operators were approached. Three participants were interviewed, which is representative of Haji Dorani Homestay, Sungai Sireh Homestay and Banghuris Homestay. The Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Selangor director, was asked about the statistics of tourists staying at the homestays, as well as the homestays' running mechanism process. Haji Dorani Homestay, Sungai Sireh Homestay and Banghuris Homestay were chosen due to their aggressive and proper homestay activities. All participants cooperated well, and each question was answered plainly and clearly by them.

6. Findings

To fully grasp the compatibility of homestay business with sustainable community development, it is necessary first to examine the difficulties associated with sustainability. It is important to evaluate the compatibility of homestay companies with sustainable community development before proceeding. There will be no sustainable community growth if MOTAC and the local authorities do not take forceful action to manage and monitor homestay programmes, which are expanding in number as well as those that are not officially recognised. Local engagement, community knowledge and skills, leadership, community structure, a feeling of community, and external cooperation are critical success indicators for community capacity building. Furthermore, local communities are more hesitant to give their full commitment when they see little benefit from the programme. More registered operators are also likely to withdraw if they do not earn enough money from their participation in the programme. If these homestays activities are to be sustained and ensured long-term, they need strategies to market and package their particular rural lifestyle at both regional and global levels. The followings are the factors that CBT activities can be sustained or perished.

6.1. Less number of youth participation

Homestay operators in the programme are motivated by various factors, including financial security and a positive work atmosphere. According to Salleh et al. (2014), homestay activities increased the purchasing power of the local community by supplementing their existing income. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is currently less popular, which is having an adverse effect on local livelihoods, especially those with poor or no additional income. This factor makes the youth or the new generation not interested in participating in the homestay programme due to no fixed income earned. To ensure the program's long-term viability, increasing the number of youth participants must be addressed. To encourage youth to participate in the homestay program, stakeholders must devise strategies and implement activities. Local leaders have a lot of influence; therefore, they should seek to the young to help them develop the programme. Ismail and Daud (2020) recommended that social entrepreneurship as a means of providing assistance to homestay operators must be extended and taken seriously.

6.2. Lack of financial resources and capital

In this study, almost all respondents said that establishing a homestay programme that meets the ministry's bare minimum criteria is difficult due to a lack of financial resources and capital. According to the homestay operators, financial constraints and capital prevented them from purchasing or renovating additional facilities. The villagers had expected financial aid from outside investors to help them develop their homestays. However, the assistance received was too limited to the homestay operators. In addition, it was revealed that the homestay operators expected assistance from the development organisations in the form of training, cash, and a good supervision or monitoring system. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the income from homestay operations was extremely low, and tourists stopped visiting homestay. Ismail and Daud (2020) proposed in their study to use social entrepreneurship to boost the homestay industry's competitiveness following the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) by the involvement of MOTAC. Hence, the government has a critical role to play in the face of mounting real and financial pressures among the homestay operators.

6.3. Lack of commitment and cooperation

Researchers discovered that homestay operators' attitudes influence their level of commitment. This finding is consistent with Syahriah et al. (2018) study on the case of Kelantan homestay operators. Nor and Awang (2017) asserted the same issue of commitment and cooperation among homestay operators. Homestays can only be successful if there is a strong bond between the communities involved, as it is a tourism concept solely focused on providing a service. As Kasim et al. (2016) emphasised that commitment is the most important sustainability criteria for the homestay programme in Malaysia. To manage a successful homestay programme, community members must work together and coordinate their efforts; otherwise, future disputes may arise.

6.4. Lack of leadership quality and organisational management

Operators that are registered with the homestay association are never involved in the management or administration of a homestay. Instead, the local community selects a homestay manager to serve as a leader. Additionally, the ministry authorises the manager to oversee the homestay programme and set prices associated with its various homestay package offers. However, homestay providers have grown less devoted to providing high-quality services to tourists due to conflicts of interest among selected managers. This may be seen in the number of complaints travellers have made about the quality of the service they received (Nor & Awang, 2017).

6.5. Lack of marketing and promotional activities

Marketing relies heavily on promotion to be successful. Most homestay operators and other tourism service providers relied on word of mouth and direct contact for bookings (either by phone or email). Currently, social media plays a vital tool for promotion though not being extensively used by the homestay operators in the study region. They were not familiar with digital marketing's full potential as a tool for marketing their business. Using social media to communicate with potential clients and share information on the practices of competitors could be beneficial to homestay operators. According to Singh et al. (2020), social media may help homestay operators learn more about tourists' behaviour and tourism practices by providing them with the most recent information.

6.6. Intensifying community-based tourism (CBT)

According to Eslami et al. (2019), CBT has enormous potential to foster community growth and transformation. It is a unique institutional development model in which communities retain control over tourism development and enterprises. As Mtapuri and Giampiccoli (2020) emphasised, community-based tourism entails local communities' ownership, management, and control of projects. CBT may result in community growth and empowerment, as well as in the reconfiguration of community institutions to make them more equitable and democratic (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016). Coping to markets, commercial viability, supportive policy frameworks, and implementation support are critical drivers of CBT. CBTs are successful because of partnerships and collaborations, attractive products manufactured in the community, a cohesive community with ventures entrenched in it, sound market research, transparency, demand-driven services, and a monitoring and evaluation system (Kayat & Zainuddin, 2016).

Therefore, the homestay programme is not just a rural tourist initiative but also a rural development plan. However, execution requires a high level of commitment and understanding on the part of the villages. In addition, Matilainen et al. (2018) asserted the critical role of collaboration amongst diverse knowledge communities in the process of community-based tourist development. Accordingly, to establish a successful homestay programme, a deliberate effort is required, particularly in terms of promotion, without relying on outside aid. The expansion of Malaysia's homestay programme has created enormous opportunities for rural areas. This initiative complements rural socioeconomic development, social capital development, and rural conservation and improvement efforts by increasing public awareness of rural living and environmental challenges in general. However, for the initiative to be

effective, operators must demonstrate complete dedication, as well as strong support from government agencies and other connected business entities, such as tour operators.

7. Conclusion

Malaysia's homestay programme has had a considerable positive impact on the local economy and community development. Therefore, the issue of community capacity in the process of community tourism development is an important focus of this study. The limitations of community capacity invite various important implications for the community involved, such as inability in terms of planning, constraints of involvement, community dependence, control and ownership in tourism development, external dominance and other negative implications. In this regard, to ensure that community tourism development truly functions as a catalyst for rural community development, especially in Malaysia, exploration of community empowerment which covers aspects of human capital capacity among community members, organisational capacity at the community level and social capital capacity is critical in the process of tourism development at the community level. Digital information should also be applied in developing homestay programs internationally.

Immediate action is required to boost the local economy. When the MCO period is over, it is a little too late to do anything. However, it is clear that things have changed in the community after the COVID-19 outbreak. Economic circles can be restored, and more community members' mental and physical health can be restored with timely and appropriate planning. While Malaysia's homestay and travel industries have suffered during MCO, it is optimistic about the industry's long-term prospects. Foreigners' perception of Malaysia as a relatively safe destination and how the Malaysian government responded to the public health issue are both factors.

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