Asian Social Science; Vol. 9, No. 5; 2013
ISSN 1911-2017 E-ISSN 1911-2025
Published by Canadian Center of Science and Education

Challenges and Community Development: A Case Study of Homestay in Malaysia

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Received: January 5, 2013 Accepted: March 1, 2013 Online Published: April 27, 2013

doi:10.5539/ass.v9n5p1 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n5p1

Abstract

Homestay programme, which was introduced in 1988, has become the iconic rural tourism product highlighting Malaysian cultural and traditional ways of life. The concept of Homestay is whereby a tourist stays together with the host family and interacts with the local community for a reasonable charge. This paper presents a review of community development through the Homestay programme in Malaysia as well as to review challenges facing the Homestay operators and community. Due to the potential of homestay in providing additional income and employment within the community, more participants have become motivated and encouraged to run the Homestay programme. Research methodology using content analysis approach was adopted in analyzing the data. The study revealed the many aspects of development, issues and challenges arising encompassing the stakeholders namely the Homestay operators, community and government agencies.

Keywords: homestay, local community, community development, challenges

1. Background of the Research

In Malaysia, the Homestay programme can be traced back to the early 1970s at the then 'drifter enclave' of Kg. Cherating Lama in Pahang, where a local lady by the name of Mak Long took in long staying drifters/hippies and provided breakfast, dinner and accommodation within her humble house (Amran, 1997). Subsequently, small villages or otherwise known as '*kampongs*' followed a similar arrangement to gain the benefits of the influx of domestic and international tourists who are looking for a different travel experience i.e. to learn and experience culture through Homestay.

Back in 1988, the first Homestay program began at Desa Murni Homestay which consists of five villages namely as Desa Murni Sanggang, Desa Murni Sonsang, Desa Murni Kerdau, Desa Murni Ketam and Desa Murni Perangap. These villages are located about 15 minutes drive from an east coast state in Malaysia, Temerloh, Pahang. These local village communities worked together to create a Homestay programme and its success has had a dramatic effect on the local economy in terms of financial benefits. (Kalsom, 2007; 2009).

Following the success of the programme, in 1995 under the National Plan for Rural Development, the Malaysian Government took key measures in developing the tourism sector with the involvement of rural communities (Liu, 2006). The Malaysian Government through the Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism had provided a specific fund to assist in the growth and expansion of the Homestay programme.

The Malaysian Government's increased focus on the development of Homestay is significant because it is regarded as a potentially good product in promoting the country as well as getting the community involved in the tourism industry through rural tourism. By taking advantage of the existing natural resources, cultural and heritage assets within the community, communities have been able to develop the Homestay product without spending so much on changing the existing infrastructure.

Not only is Homestay seen as a way to help generate income for the community, it also assists in fulfilling the Government's agenda to eradicate poverty and create job opportunities for the communities involved. This is reflected by the Homestay programme's two-prong objective as follows:

1) Generate income to the people/operator in the rural area; and

2) Promoting Malaysia as a tourist destination by highlighting the cultures of Malaysian people.

The Homestay programme has successfully contributed in providing alternative accommodation options to tourists that seek a different type of holiday compared to those offered in tourism packages. This gives them choice of accommodation and flexibility as to when they travel (Chan et.al, 2004). In practice, most of the Homestay operators offer their extra room as lodgings for guest or tourist to stay at their house for a minimum charge or package. Any Homestay operator running the operation must meet the criteria set by the Malaysian Homestay Association in order to get the assistance and support from the Government and relevant agencies.

The rapid development of Homestay programme as a new tourism product in Malaysia has benefited the tourism industry and given economic gain to the participants involved. In addition, Homestay has been identified as an industry that has a unique Malaysian appeal and packaged with local tradition and cultural elements as well as natural heritage (Intan et.al, 2011; Ibrahim & Rasid, 2009). Moreover, the programme that is categorised as a rural tourism product has seen good demand from local and international tourists. Hence, it has significantly boosted the economy of the communities involved within the particular Homestay locations and has assisted in the development of rural communities as well (Ibrahim et.al, 2004).

2. Problem Statement

Through Homestay, tourists have the opportunity to visit rural villages and attractions as well as experience the hosts' culture in their homes. In consideration, the hosts receive the economic benefits in the form of monetary exchange from the products and services they provide. As such, Homestay programmes in Malaysia have been seen as an opportunity to generate additional income as indicated in the business model helping the Homestay operators nationwide earn some extra income from time to time (Forward, 2009). However, despite villagers opening up their homes, these ventures have not made the '*kampong'* folks rich as they would hope to be.

It was noted that the success of Homestay programmes in certain villages are inter-related to particular operators and communities. Despite many studies reporting on the success of the Homestay programme , there are findings from research undertaken by the Bureau of Innovation and Consultancy UTM (2009) indicating that some Homestay operators withdrew from being operators due to the lack of demand from visitors and tourists in a given period and therefore, no income generated. This issue has led to the interest for further investigation to understand the underlying causes of this scenario. Despite development funds having been injected by the Government into the community, research has remained to identify this problem in certain areas Therefore, it is believed that if this problem could not be tackled soon enough, it could significantly impact the Government's objectives in increasing the economy of rural community through the Homestay programme under the Malaysia Village Action Plan Strategy.

Many studies mostly reported on the success of Homestay which only focuses on certain popular Homestay destinations (Kalsom, 2002; Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2011; Ibrahim, 2004) despite there being many more Homestays in the list according to the records in the Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism (MOCAT, 2011). Therefore, further research needs be done in order to enhance the body of knowledge by expanding research on other Homestay locations to explore their niche and possible challenges faced by the Homestay operators. Each Homestay community could face similar or different challenges in managing the operation as they are likely to offer different packages. Hence, the majority of existing research could be biased being restricted to a small sample size which may not be representative of the entire Homestay programme in Malaysia.

It would seem that the challenges could be very different from one community of Homestay to the other. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the challenges that are being faced by the Homestay industry. For instance, would the characteristics, personalities and styles, etc. of the host guarantee the success of the Homestay? Does the community leader contribute to the success of running a Homestay business? Like any other business, challenges are part of the process that the Homestay operators need to overcome before they can reap the fruits of their success. Unfortunately, until now there is no clear evidence that the Homestay programme in Malaysia has seen consistent success as some operators withdrew from joining the programme due to being unsuccessful in getting the visitors to stay in their homes. Thus, the findings of this study could contribute to the understanding of the factors that influence the success or failures of Homestay operations. It could connote the direction for community development of the Homestay industry and may provide some guidelines for new Homestay operators to prepare before joining the industry.

3. Significance of the Study

Homestay has been recognised as one way to provide cheap budget accommodation to visitors and the best way to get close to the culture and tradition of a particular ethnic group. The ability of the Homestay operators to

provide a very unique and enjoyable experience is the key to the success of the programme. The success stories of certain Homestay operators have encouraged many new operators wanting to explore opportunities via Homestay programmes by offering one or two of their rooms in their homes for rent to the guests. The number of participants had risen year-by-year indicating that awareness of the product to many people, particularly the rural villagers.

Since 1995, the Homestay programme has gained much popularity and has become a good medium to promote rural tourism. Many village communities have opened up by accepting tourists to come and stay at their houses but there are also concerns over the difficulties faced by Homestay operators in attracting business from tourists. The importance of Homestay as part of Malaysia's tourism product has captured the Malaysian Government's attention. The Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism is focused on assisting the rural communities by enhancing their economic welfares and incomes through the Homestay programme. As a result, the Government allocated RM40 million under the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010) and another RM10 million under the Second Stimulus package to upgrade the facilities and infrastructure for all the villages involved in the Homestay programme (Fariza, 2009). The Ministry of Rural and Regional Development also spent RM6.7 million in 2008 to develop the infrastructure of rural communities. Hence, this research could identify the challenges faced by the Homestay operators in particular and the community in general. By doing so, it could identify potential solutions to further establish and enhance the package of Homestay programmes made available to the market. Therefore, this study could contribute to the benefit of related players in the industry particularly Homestay operators in Malaysia.

4. Related Literature

4.1 Homestay Operation

Homestay as the term suggests means staying in someone's home. By definition, Homestay is a home of "a dwelling place together with a family unit that occupies it – household". Homestay provides a unique opportunity to experience the way of life of the local people of an area along with the indigenous and traditional cultures within a comfortable homely setting (Boonratana, 2010; Kamisan, 2004; Kamisan et.al, 2007). Amran (2010) elaborated further by defining Homestay as a form of holiday itinerary which involves the tourist coming to stay with the family and interact with the local community. According to Wipada (2007), Homestay is defined as one type of lodging that tourists share with the homeowner with the intention to learn culture and lifestyle from the homeowner who is willing to transmit and share their culture. The homeowner is the one who prepares lodging and food for the tourists with reasonable pay.

Paul Lynch (2009) gave a broader definition of Homestay by referring it as commercial homes whereby visitors or guests pay to stay in private homes where interaction take place with a host or family. It is a very unique characteristic as this concept promotes interaction between host families and tourists and acting as a development tool to raise awareness on the cultural exchange and respect for the host's culture (Jamilah et.al, 2007).

In the Malaysian context, this concept has great potential as it blends well with the Malaysian culture especially to the Malay community. Meanwhile according to Amran (2010), the official definition of the Homestay programme according to the Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism (MOCAT, 1995) is "…where tourist stay with the host's family and experience the everyday way of life of the family in both direct and indirect manners".

In general, Homestay is very different compared to other modes of accommodation such as a hotel, motel or bed and breakfast which is normally located in the city or suburban areas whereas the location of the Homestay is normally situated in rural areas (Salamiah et.al, 2011) where the whole community is still practicing the traditional way of life and embracing strong culture and traditional practices.

Since the beginning of this concept in Malaysia, some operators have aggressively promoted and marketed their Homestay product to the overseas markets. As a result, their Homestays have gained popularity especially among Japanese, Korean and Singaporean tourists (Jamilah et.al, 2007). As the programme seems to become more and more popular, it garnered the confidence of many newcomers to join the industry (MOTOUR, 2009, 2011). Unfortunately, it was defined that some operators were really successful and some were not (Wilson et.al, 2001; Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010; Sriprasert et.al, 2011). Hence, this issue has motivated the researchers to investigate and undertake studies to help identify the issues as to why some operators have been unsuccessful in their operations compared to others.

In several other countries in the world, the similar concept of Homestay is being known as farm stay, home visit system, agricultural Homestay or bed and breakfast whereby the guest is being offered accommodation and breakfast by the host (Mapjabil et.al, 2011; Getz et.al, 2000). However, the definition and the context of

Homestay might be different in connotations and meanings from various countries. For instance in Australia, the term of Homestay is associated with farmhouse accommodation and it is catered mainly for students acquiring a place to stay where they study. In United Kingdom, the Homestay concept is similar to bed and breakfast arrangements whereby the host offers accommodation for guests to stay in consideration for payment. There is limited interaction with no cultural involvement as it mainly involves only host and guest interaction per se and this is also quite similar in New Zealand.

The Malaysian Homestay is uniquely different with the full involvement of the guest to learn and experience the daily life of the host from the day they arrive to the day they leave place. The immersion of the guest with the Homestay operator and the local community is highly expected as there are many cultural activities involved throughout their stay.

4.2 Homestay and Community Development

In the case of Homestay, the product is not merely a rural tourism programme but it is also a strategy for rural community development. With the active involvement of villagers fostering understanding and cooperation in implementing activities in the village together with the better infrastructure funded by the Government, the growth of the Homestay programme has great potential as an alternative tourism product to attract international and domestic tourists.

Homestay has generated much revenue to the main provider of lodging through the arrival of guest staying in the room offered in the Homestay programme. There are also spillover effects to the community in terms of employment and business opportunities. It has also created employment as some of the Homestay operators could hire someone within the community to assist in operating the Homestay for example. The evolution of Homestay has shown to successfully becoming a catalyst for socio-cultural and economic development to the rural community development (Ibrahim & Abdul Rasid, 2010; Kalsom, 2002; Lynch, 1998).

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Charter clearly stated that Community Based Tourism (CBT) is able to create direct employment opportunities as well as increase income levels and reducing the level of poverty in rural communities (Abdul Rasid et.al, 2011). The operators' involvement in the Homestay programme has helped to generate some income and create jobs within the community itself. In that aspect, since the Homestay programme is one of the tourism products under purview of the Malaysian Government, the community and the village involved will benefit through the budget allocation to improve and build necessary basic infrastructure.

Community involvement is considered to be extremely vital in the success of the Homestay in addition to the Homestay operator themselves. Therefore, the interaction and strength of both the experience provided by the Homestay operator and the community is crucial to the success of the programme. Ibrahim & Abdul Rasid (2011) strongly mentioned that the communities are the basic reason for why tourists are attracted to come and experience the way of life and material products of different communities.

In ensuring the success of the Homestay, local communities have to work hand in hand with the stakeholders involved. Lack of community participations may lead to failure of the Homestay programme. The level of involvement of the local community can be explained by Pretty's typology of participation adapted from Leksakundilok (2006).

Table 1. Typology of participation

Levels	Types	Characteristics
Genuine Participation (active)	Empowerment	Local people may directly contact explorer tourists and develop tourism by themselves.
		Local people have control over all development without any external force or influence.
Symbolic Participation (towards active)	Partnership	There are some degrees of local influence in the tourism development process
	Interaction	People have a greater involvement in this level. The rights of people are recognized and accepted in practice at the local level (Pretty's, 1995).
		People are consulted in several ways through meetings,

	Consultation	seminars, etc. Developers may accept some contribution from the locals (Arnstein, 1969).
Non Participation (passive)	Informing	People are told about tourism development programs that have already been decided by community. The developers run the projects without getting any feedback from local community.
	Manipulation	Tourism development is generally developed by powerful individuals, governments or outsiders without any discussion with the local communities (Arnstein, 1969).

Source: Adapted from Leksakundilok (2006)

Judging from the type of participation from Table 1 above, the success of the tourism product Homestay, very much benefits the local community when there is an active involvement among the locals themselves. When the local people within the community are fully responsible for the development and tourism product on their sites, they are empowered in managing the whole community. However, obtaining cooperation and commitment from every individual in the community is crucial (Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2011; Yusnita et.al, 2012) and this challenge may restrict the success of this community-based tourism.

S. Nepal (2000) in his model elaborated the concept of community relationships between the stakeholder namely tourism, tourism sites and local communities which supported the typology of participation, which was explained earlier in Table 1. Firstly under Win-Win-Win scenario - All the three players or stakeholders mutually benefit. In this situation, all the stakeholders are gaining the benefits through the tourism activities. The interactions with the tourist seem very beneficial with good prospects for inter-cultural exchange. Secondly under Win-Win-Lose scenario - Whilst tourism benefits local communities with tourists enjoying the opportunities provided by the community, the tourist sites suffer from tourism impacts. Thirdly under Lose-Lose-Lose scenario - All the three stakeholders are affected negatively. In this situation, environmental conditions degrade, tourists are discouraged from visiting the tourist sites and local communities do not receive any benefits. Therefore, community involvement is very crucial in ensuring the sustainability and success of the Homestay programme. When the community sees the benefit to be derived and becomes involved seriously, their commitment will strengthen toward the project.

4.3 Economic & Socio-Cultural Impact on Homestay

The Homestay programme is seen to have high potential to be developed based on the response and demand by the visitors. Studies have shown that Homestay's impact can be seen through the development of economy, social, infrastructure as well as environment factors.

According to the statistics in 2010, the number of visitors staying in Homestay was recorded as 128,000 visitors (Zainon, 2010). The increase in visitors staying in Homestay indicated that Homestay has impacted the economy of the Homestay operators. For instance, the finding of research by Abdul Rasid et.al, 2011 has shown that before joining the Homestay programme, most of the operators previously earned a monthly income in the range of RM500 – RM1000 but after participating in the Homestay programme, their income increased between RM1000 – RM1500. The revenue gained by the operators gave a sort of financial motivation to the operators to venture more seriously in the programme. The additional income can be enjoyed not only by the operators but also the villagers or 'kampong' folks who are not directly involved with Homestay. This is discussed further below. Homestay is not just the platform to earn additional income but also to develop entrepreneurial skills through the joint action in tourism.

The typical scenario of a Homestay package would start off with the initial arrival of tourists in the community being greeted by the local school children playing 'kompang' (a traditional musical instrument), the local youth club exhibiting a cultural performance or a traditional games demonstration. These services are generally organised by the local community for a small fee. In addition, Homestay has also provided the opportunity for the creation of sub-business or ancillary opportunities for those who are not directly involved in Homestay. They include for instance, providing village tours, selling souvenirs and handicrafts such as rattan woven baskets, setting up food stalls selling food and local delicacies, catering, transportation rental, recreational activities (horses, boats, bikes, etc.). These vendors also play a very important role in the success of community-based tourism albeit indirectly.

The main success factors for any Homestay programme are leadership and the unity and understanding of its community that enhances its sense of ownership and pride. The more motivated the local communities involved in the Homestay programme become, the more acceptance and readiness to participate actively is shown. This is important because if local communities are not equipped to actively participate, third parties could easily manipulate them resulting in external domination of tourism development (Abdul Rasid et.al, 2011).

From the Homestay programme within the village, the local community obtains the benefits through the support by relevant government agencies. Positive and negative impacts depend on the community who are involved with the Homestay programme and how the community responds to the tourism within their community. In general, the size, criteria and limitation of impact depend on the factors below: (adopted from Zaki et.al, 2011)

- The numbers of tourist activities versus the local community activities.
- Level of density and distribution of tourism activities within the particular area.
- The period and interaction characteristics between the tourist and the community.
- Stabilization or sensitivity of the economic structure, social and surroundings.
- Similarities or differences between the local people and tourists.
- Dependent on how good the tourism is being planned managed and controlled.

Butler's model of tourism lifecycle product can be applied in the context of the host community and the evolution of tourism sites. The attraction or the tourism site has to go through the first initial stage whereby according to Butler (1980), during the first stage, there are a small number of visitors having minimal facilities and lack of access. After sometime, the area will become popular with the extension of marketing and information dissemination. At this stage, conflict may arise between the local community and tourists as development progresses and tourist sites become popular. To maintain the tourist site or in this context Homestay, it is crucial to study many aspects that contribute to the development of the Homestay programme in the local community.

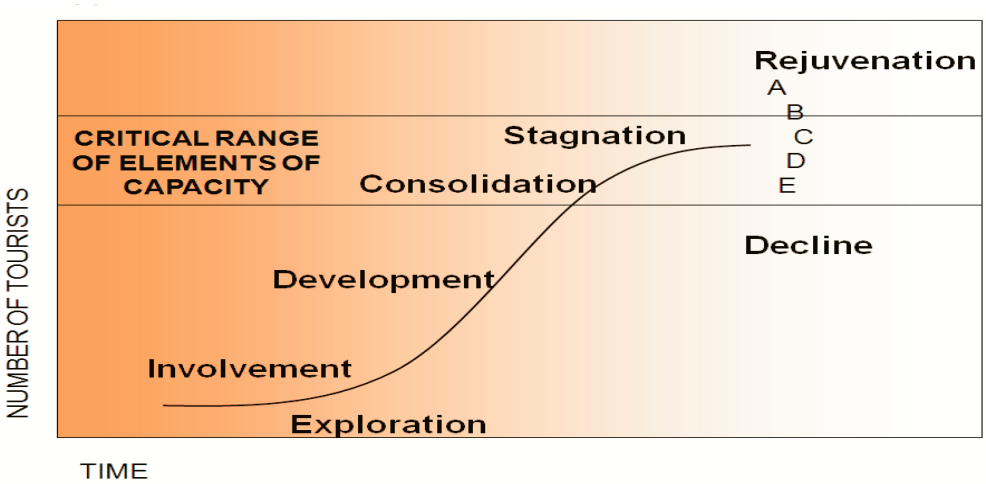

Figure 1. Butler's life cycle tourism product

Source: Butler, 1980

Many research studies focused on the impact of tourism being critical during the consolidation and stagnation periods. At these stages, the impact of tourism is very obvious to the community particularly the economic and social impact plus the environment impact can also be seen in some extent. The process will eventually reach the final stages of either decline or rejuvenation which will determine its survival in the future.

Although operating Homestay could be seen as an important impetus of social and economic for community development however, establishing and operating small business such as Homestay encompasses the possibility of success as well as risk of failure (Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010; Sriprasert et.al 2011; Yi Lin, 2008).

4.4 Challenges of Homestay

The development of Homestay programme has been seen to be attractive and moving forward to the right direction for the benefits of the local community. Some research studies that have investigated on the challenges encompassing the Homestay operators and local community managed to highlight several possible challenges (Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010; Zaki et.al, 2011; Yusnita et.al, 2012).

The study by Nor Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) found out that there were internal and external challenges that may affect the success of community based Homestay programmes. For example, leadership which was categorised as an internal factor by Nor Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) could be a challenge affecting the success of community development in running the Homestay programme. According to the study, the change of leadership style has slowed down the rate of tourism at one of the villages under their study. The Homestay was really successful within the period of 1996 – 2000 with the arrival of tourists to the community. However, the changes of leadership within the community has affected and changed the number of tourists arriving dramatically. Therefore, a good leader with a good leadership style is seen to be very important to help mobilise the community into the right direction and lead the path to the success of community development. Without good leadership and strong community participation, resistance and hostility would be detrimental to the cost of business and could also destroy the industry's potential.

As reported in a few articles in several local newspapers, many owners of lodging operations were using the term 'Homestay' to describe their business operation (Dhruv, 2012; Star, 2010; Mariah, 2011; NST, 2009). The misused term could lead to confusion to tourists who are keen to experience Homestay in the true context. In reality, the lodging operator is merely offering pure accommodation (room) to the guest with no family interaction and community activities involvement as it should be in a true Homestay environment. Therefore, such report needs to be investigated further as it could be one of the many challenges faced by genuine Homestay operators.

There are many challenges affecting the effectiveness of the Homestay programme and each one could be different from one community to another. Due to this factor therefore, this research needs to address the challenges found from previous studies and explore other challenges that may influence the success or failures of Homestay operations. As the Homestay programme involves community participation as one of the identified criteria set by the Ministry of Culture, Art, and Tourism therefore, its success has to cover many aspects from the operators themselves, leadership of the community and holistic involvement of the community, infrastructures, etc.

5. Methodology

The methodology employed in the study involves secondary resources due to limited time constraint to do field work-study and also the financial limitation involved. Hence for the purpose of this research, secondary data from certain reliable sources were found to be most useful for this study.

"Secondary data is data which already exist and which were collected for some other purpose but which can be used a second time in the current project where the researcher is the secondary user" Veal, 1997.

Data was gathered from books, newspaper reports, articles, academic journals and other relevant documents related to Homestay via personal effort and electronically. Content analysis from the previous research findings and updated statistics about Homestay were also taken into consideration. All the findings and data gathered throughout this study has been critically interpreted and presented in the analysis section. Interpretivism or the qualitative approach enables one to explore the richness, depth and understanding the phenomena.

Holsti, O. (1968) defined content analysis as any technique for making inferences systematically and objectively. Categories of the data are created which are then assessed and evaluated to derive findings and conclusions. Furthermore, Hakim (1982 cited by Finn et.al, 2000), mentioned that secondary data allows the researcher to think more closely about the theoretical aims and substantive issues of the study instead of spending most of the time thinking about the problem of collecting new data.

By gathering the content analysis from the previous research studies, this will assist in answering the research questions to be analysed and interpreted further in the step towards understanding the arising phenomena. The content analysis process will be summarised whereby firstly, the existing data will be reduced into several categories that generalised the themes of the documents obtained and secondly, the text will be further elaborated to explain its context and interpretation.

The aim of the study is to find out the challenges faced by Homestay operators and also how the Homestay programmes have been progressing in developing the communities in Malaysia.

6. Findings of the Study

The Homestay programme seems to have benefited the local community and contributed additional income to the participants. This can be supported by the year on year increase in the number of operators joining the programme. For comparison, in 2009 the total number of Homestay operators across Malaysia totaled 3,264 and in 2011, the numbers increased to 3,381, being an increase of 11.7%. However, generally the income generated from the Homestay activities alone was insufficient as the main source of an operator's livelihood. Participants who joined the programme still had to rely on other forms of income to support their families.

The increasing numbers of Homestay operators in the 14 states of Malaysia have shown a significant increase as indicated in Table 2 & 3.

Table 2. Homestay programme (villages) & operators, 2009

No.	STATE	Number of Homestay	Number of Villages	Number of Operators	Number of Rooms
1	Perlis	3	3	55	64
2	Kedah	13	18	268	390
3	Pulau Pinang	9	9	200	227
4	Perak	6	30	178	248
5	Selangor	15	18	581	819
6	Melaka	5	5	111	144
7	Negeri Sembilan	8	26	233	385
8	Johor	15	18	471	772
9	Kelantan	8	10	106	163
10	Terengganu	6	6	149	108
11	Pahang	12	21	375	412
12	Sarawak	19	21	233	243
13	Sabah	18	39	225	413
14	Labuan	3	3	65	75
	TOTAL	140	227	3,264	4,463

Source: Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism, Malaysia, 2009

Table 3. Homestay programme (villages) & operators, 2011

No.	STATE	Number of Homestay	Number of Villages	Number of Operators	Number of Rooms
1	Perlis	3	3	56	64
2	Kedah	14	19	324	421
3	Pulau Pinang	9	9	200	227
4	Perak	6	30	231	308
5	Selangor	15	18	458	660
6	Melaka	7	7	115	173
7	Negeri Sembilan	10	30	251	379
8	Johor	16	35	508	663
9	Kelantan	8	9	152	182
10	Terengganu	6	6	101	103
11	Pahang	15	20	259	387
12	Sarawak	28	32	419	549
13	Sabah	16	25	228	438
14	Labuan	3	3	79	97
	TOTAL	156	246	3,381	4,651

Source: Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism, Malaysia, 2011

From comparing the two tables above, it was noted that the East Malaysian state of Sarawak saw the most substantial increase in the number of Homestay operations from 19 in 2009 to 28 in 2011, the number of villages increased from 21 in 2009 to 32 in 2011, number of operators increased to 233 in 2009 to 419 in 2011 and the number of rooms jumped from 243 in 2009 to 543 in 2011. The other East Malaysian state of Sabah also showed an improvement in the number of rooms in 2011 from the previous year. Sabah and Sarawak has a lot to offer to tourists given that it has many indigenous tribes to attract particularly international tourists to enjoy the experience of the natives' cultures as well as the beauty of the green rainforest.

The northern states of Kedah and Perak in Peninsular Malaysia of Kedah showed significant improvement in numbers of operators to 324 and 231 in 2011 respectively (2009: 268 & 178 respectively) and numbers of rooms to 421 and 328 respectively in 2011 (2009:390 & 248 respectively) despite the numbers of Homestay and villages remained consistent. It would seem that the other villagers in the Homestay community have become more aware and had realised the opportunity to open up their homes to tourists. They have seen the development enjoyed is not only in terms of additional income and better infrastructure but also in terms of a change in the mindset and culture. The local community's perception of their heritage has undergone change as they now realised the importance of preserving the heritage to be shared with the global community.

The biggest state in Peninsular Malaysia of Pahang also showed a marked improvement in the number of operators and rooms in 2011 compared to 2009 due to the good leadership and promotion of Homestay opportunities by the Chairman of Malaysian Homestay Association who hails from the state of Pahang. This indicates that having a good and effective community leader will help lead the path for future success in the programme.

The Malaysian Government is pushing the agenda to promote the Homestay programme as a mechanism to use tourism as a tool to help the development of rural areas and share in the prosperity of the nation. Table 4 shown below illustrates how Homestay has benefited the tourism industry and why this product has been wholly encouraged by the Government. To show how dedicated the Government is in promoting Homestay as one of the potential tourism product that has a special uniqueness in highlighting the real culture of Malaysian hospitality, a special unit or agency was set up purposely to manage the development of the Homestay product. Furthermore, Malaysian tourism offices all over the world have also been mandated in promoting Homestay as one of Malaysia's tourism products to international tourists to enjoy this wonderful experience.

Table 4. Comparison of homestay performance 2010, 2011 & KPI 2012

No	Item	2010	2011	Increment (%)	KPI 2012
1	Total Tourist Arrival: -	196,472	254,981	29.8%	267,730
	- Domestic	147,346	195,324	32.6%	205,090
	- International	49,126	59,657	21.4%	62,640
2	Total Revenue (RM)	RM12.4 mil	RM15.7 mil	26.8%	RM16.5mil
3	Occupancy Rate	25.2%	33.1%	20.4%	34%

Source: Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism, Malaysia, 2012

From Table 4 above, it was noted that total tourist arrival recorded a 29.8% increment in 2011 from the previous year while total revenue showed a marked improvement of 26.8 in 2011 compared to 2010. However, it was found that the increment percentage increase for occupancy rate was erroneously stated and should be reported as 31.3% instead of 20.4%. Thus, the KPI for 2012 was further projected for an increase of about 5% for total tourist arrival and total revenue while the occupancy rate was projected an increase of about 2.7% from 2011 figures.

The projected increase for 2012 was based on the Government's supposition that Homestay has potential to further expand. Publicity and marketing promotions of the Homestay programmes for tourists is expected to increase, in particular with the assistance of the special unit set up by the Government. The awareness of opportunities of Homestay as well as proactive actions by operators and community members particularly in the rural areas will need to be more established to ensure for better success of Homestay as part of the development of tourism of Malaysia in general. The Malaysian Government through its related agencies would have to set the stage for Homestay to play a bigger role through wider promotional efforts.

Even in Malaysia's East Coast Economic Region (ECER) Master Plan covering three states in Peninsular Malaysia – Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and District of Mersing in Johor; the Homestay programme has been considered as one of the projects highlighted to be developed and enhanced to be a major international and local tourism destination.

Table 5 reveals the projection of the number of rooms offered by Homestay and it shows how serious the Government is in promoting Homestay as well as indicating the projection of future development of the Homestay programme in Malaysia under ECER.

Table 5. Projection of additional number of rooms of Homestay in ECER

States/Year	2005	2020	Additional rooms required
Kelantan	3,462	22,937	19,475
Terengganu	6,402	36,248	29,846
Pahang	21,295	70,947	49,652
TOTAL	31,159	130,132	98,973

Source: Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism, Malaysia, 2007

Table 6. Comparison of international tourist arrival to Malaysia and arrival to Homestay programme

Year	Total Tourist Arrival to Malaysia (Millions)	Total Number of Tourist to Homestay Programme	Percentage (%)
2010	24.6	49,126	0.19
2009	23.6	31,523	0.13
2008	22.0	23,117	0.11
2007	20.9	21,368	0.10
2006	17.4	14,458	0.08

Source: Tourism Malaysia & Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism Malaysia, 2011

Statistically, the number of international tourist arrivals to Malaysia has shown a steady increasing rate year to year from 2006 to 2010 due to aggressive promotional efforts by the Government and Tourism Promotion Board. Similarly, the number of tourists exploring the Homestay product also showed steady improvement over the same period as stated in Table 6. However, the Homestay programme does not seem to contribute any significant impact when compared between tourist arrivals to Malaysia and tourists in Homestay programme as the percentage was very nominal at less than 1% per year. This could be a challenging aspect despite all the marketing efforts made in promoting Homestay. According to Goodwin and Santili (2009), the percentage of operators in the same category of accommodation including low budget establishments could only meet 5% occupancy rate in a year. Therefore, when compared to the Homestay programme, having able to achieve at least less than 1% is still a good enough achievement for a relatively new tourism product still in its infancy stage and thus, can still have room for improvement to expand in the future as projected by the Ministry of Culture, Art and Tourism in Table 4 and 5 above.

Study findings by some other researchers have shown that several challenges emerged need to be addressed in order to ensure the sustainability and success of the Homestay programmes. Research findings by Nor Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) identified several challenges that emerged as stated in Table 7 below. The authors have classified all the challenges into two categories, which are internal and external challenges. The definition of internal challenges in this context refers to as any challenges arising within the operators and community that can be controlled with specific measurements as the solution. For example, problems that can be discussed through closed discussion for a possible solution. Meanwhile, external challenges are defined as any factors arising beyond the control of the internal community.

Table 7. External and internal challenges of homestay

External Challenges	Internal Challenges
• Misconception of Homestay programme • Method of payment	• Unbalanced demography • Passive community • Leadership problems • Informal organizational structure • Over – commercialization • Conflicts in community

Source: Nor Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010

An important external challenge was the misconception of the Homestay programme by operators. Typically, first-time Homestay operators need to register with the Minister of Culture, Art and Tourism first and attend the basic Homestay course. Officials from the Ministry will arrange for the house inspection and give their endorsement via certificate before the operators can start accepting guests. During the registration process, there have been cases whereby some operators misinterpret the theory they learnt in their courses and the actual practice they implement in their homes. For instance, some villagers were confused when their applications were not approved because the facilities in their houses fell short of the standard set upon by the State Tourism Action Council after inspection. It was unfortunate that the villagers did not have the funds to invest in equipping and upgrading their houses for the basic comfort of tourists because they come from generally poor rural communities.

Another external downside is when most of the visitors to the Homestay programme in a particular community come from government agencies' programmes. For instance, a particular government agency supplied domestic guests who were part of Homestay management courses from other parts of Malaysia. Even though such programmes involve large numbers of visitors, the operators were not able to receive payment promptly due to the Government being made through LO (letter of order) which is generally slow. Due to cash flow constraint resulting from payment delay, and the need for operators to rely heavily on groups organised by government bodies, certain operators were not keen to participate in the Homestay programme. These drawbacks although out of the villagers' control can however be assisted or amended by the Government in reducing its bureaucracy and improving its payment processes and mechanisms.

Internal challenges such as unbalanced demography where there is a lack of young participants in the Homestay programme, is rather difficult to manage. The Homestay village may have suffered migration problems whereby the younger generations opt to migrate to bigger nearby towns or cities to improve their employment opportunities leaving the older generation to run the Homestay programme. Youth participation is crucial and should be encouraged to become involved in the Homestay programme since there are many good roles for youths such as tour guides, cultural performers, boats and transportation services. When a Homestay village lacks replacement hosts, it will affect its sustainability and vulnerability in the future.

Sometimes a passive community is seen to be an internal challenge in the development of the Homestay programme because the community members have become too dependent on the Government agency overlooking their Homestay programme. When the community becomes too reliant and require constant monitoring, their programme may not run smoothly or sometimes end when they are not regularly monitored. This problem is further intensified when there are leadership problems at the helm such as poor communication, poor external relations, lack of transparency and alleged corruption, etc. When there is also no formal management system in place in the Homestay organisation such as working committees, meetings, minutes of meetings, etc.; the lack of records and information may lead to incorrect statistics and improper knowledge of growth for that particular Homestay programme.

Typically, a Homestay programme that is community-based will only be successful when the villagers perceive that it benefits the general community members. However, if personal interest among certain groups of villagers driven by commercialisation and links with private sectors has replaced community interest, conflicts in the community would arise and soon become disjointed. This negative attitude and breakdown of unity may threaten the sustainability of the Homestay programme as a tourism development strategy and the vulnerability of integrity of the community as a whole.

As seen in Table 8, the findings by M. Zaki et.al (2011) identified several challenges that emerged from their studies as a result from a collection of 60 report assignments done by a group of students on several homestay locations. The result had been summarised in their studies as follows:

Table 8. Weaknesses and threats of Homestay

WEAKNESS (internal)	THREAT (external)
• Weak administration and management • Incomplete infrastructure facilities • Lack of exposure and understanding towards tourism business • Lack of investment capital, expertise and entrepreneurial ability • Over dependence on outside assistance • Communication problem • Culture shock to village community • Lack of network with tourism industry players • Sub-standard and not up-to-par services • Lack of promotion and under-developed marketing strategies • Lack of activities	• Competition from Agro-tourism and Eco-tourism • Exploitation by external parties • Competition from other accommodation providers • Emerging of "false or fake Homestay"

Source: M. Zaki A. et.al, 2011

Under internal weaknesses, M. Zaki et.al (2011) found that the weak administrative and management system among the higher authorities, community development and security members as well as the local villagers; play a role in the development of Homestay programmes. The lack of exposure and understanding of tourism business has also impeded the progress of the Homestay development. Villagers from the rural areas may be lacking investment capital, expertise and entrepreneurial ability when embarking on their Homestay programme. They may often require and sometimes be dependent on external assistance. The quality of facilities and infrastructure has been identified as sub-standard at some Homestay villages. Good infrastructure such as proper roads, clean water supplies, availability of electricity, effective set-up of telecommunications, public facilities and amenities, etc. needs to be in place at a satisfactory level. Typically international tourists, pay a lot of attention on the availability of good infrastructure, facilities and amenities so as to make their experience more enjoyable and comfortable.

The lack of good promotion and under-developed marketing strategies has been blamed for poor dissemination of information regarding the uniqueness of tourists experiencing the traditional life with the host family. The Homestay operators may also be lacking in networking with tourism industry players to help push for a more successful programme. The lack of variety of activities offered to tourists interested in doing something unique and meaningful may also be seen as impeding the progress of Homestay's development mainly due to lack of financial resources, logistic problems, transportation to bigger towns and lack of good event organisers at the particular villages.

Communication between the host and the guest is considered to be an important aspect in achieving a good Homestay experience. The drawback by the host is the lack of communication skills or mastering an internationally accepted language especially English as the medium of conversation with the tourists. The inability of the host to master some basic English is usually a hindrance to the experience of the guest in interacting with the hosts.

Additionally, some village communities have experienced some culture shocks when they opened up their rural homes to international tourists. The difficulty in communicating and the awkwardness in the socio-norms of foreigners in their homes have made some villagers difficult in adjusting their life at first. While it is considered an internal threat, it can however dissipate in time when the villagers get more used to the idea and are able to

interact better with their guest so as to make them feel comfortable in their homes. Authorities should also be more proactive in providing knowledge regarding foreign culture for community capacity building programmes.

Under external threats, rivalry from other tourism products such as Agro-tourism and Eco-tourism have been seen as risks to the Homestay programme because these other types of tourism product also provides an almost similar experience to tourists based on nature and environment. Offering Agro-tourism and/or Eco-tourism activities into a more comprehensive Homestay package can counteract the adverse effects of this competition. In this all-in-one package, the Homestay package could provide a more wholesome experience to interest and attract more tourists.

The emerging of 'false' or 'fake' Homestay programmes can also affect the true Homestay programme considering that tourists are most likely to believe the wrong interpretation of the original concept of Homestay. The misuse of the term 'Homestay' has been widely used by competitors of other accommodation providers even though it does not truly mean the original context of not purely accommodation but also the uniqueness of interaction of activities with the host family sharing the accommodation in a traditional setting. Exploitation by external parties in the private sector such as travel agents have also somewhat tarnished the Homestay programme's name by making use of the villagers and not reimbursing them for services rendered.

Table 9. Weaknesses and challenges of homestay

Weakness (internal)	Challenges (external)
• Low standard of accommodation • Unacceptable bathroom and toilet facilities • Lack of hospitality experience	• Identity problem - brand image issues • Failure in meeting international standards • Lack of training • Lack of marketing and promotion • Lack of commitment and cooperation among operator, community and leadership

Source: Siwar, C.et.al, 2011

From Table 9, it was noted by Siwar, C. et.al (2011) that poor standards of quality of the Homestay accommodations as well as unacceptable bathroom and toilet facilities in Malaysia was seen to be an internal weakness for not being able to attract more international tourists. International tourists especially Westerners place a lot of attention on hygiene and cleanliness whenever they go for their travels abroad. Hence, a sub-standard accommodation and toilet facilities can be considered to be a 'push' factor by most international tourists when enjoying their travels.

The Homestay programme was perceived to be lacking in identity whereby each Homestay does not have an identifiable brand to be associated with. As brand image is a key element in developing a strong destination of any business, unfortunately Homestay has not yet made its presence felt in catapulting Malaysia's name in the eyes of world tourism. There is still a lack of publicity campaigns and effective marketing strategies in developing Homestay as one of Malaysia's strong tourism product. While Homestay might not be the ideal attraction for the average type of international tourists looking for standard accommodation and facilities, target marketing strategies may be carried out to niche market segments for tourists who would enjoy simple basic types of accommodation but with the added twist of immersing themselves in the uniqueness of their host's culture and daily life.

It does not go unnoticed that there is a lack of hospitality experience by the Homestay operators however, the Government and relevant agencies are helping the villagers and communities involved to have better skills training in providing good accommodation and services to their guests so that they will feel more at home and more comfortable in their surroundings. The Homestay operators and community in general may be lacking in the service quality aspect and English or foreign language capability however, these skills can be trained and improved upon. The stakeholders particularly the Government agencies involved should emphasise training planning and management and also provide informational resources to the participants. Besides the opportunity for additional income being the main motivational factor to participate in the Homestay programme, community members, young and old should also be convinced by their leaders to develop a sense of community, a sense of belonging and social capital so as to improve their socio-economic situation.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

From the analysis and interpretation that has been elaborated in the previous sections, Table 10 summarises the external and internal challenges emerged from the data analysis is presented for further discussion.

Table 10. Homestay external & internal challenges

Internal Deficiencies	External Deficiencies
• Incompetent community leadership & operators commitment	• Misuse of Homestay term by opportunist
• Inexperienced, lacking of knowledge and understanding of the industry	• Exploitation by external parties
• Dependability syndrome	• Inefficient networking
• Lack of creativity and entrepreneurship skills	
• Generation Y commitment	

According to Kalsom (2009), Homestay programmes failed because of lack of local participation, local leadership, knowledge of skills, poor planning, community structure, etc. Thus, competent community leadership and high commitment by the stakeholders involved is important to be maintained. Having a good leader and getting community participation is an empowerment mechanism for people to partake in their community development by being involved in many stages of decision making resulting in benefits to be enjoyed by all and not for a selected few for self-interest.

Understandably, the initial stages of Homestay are surely being inexperienced, lacking of knowledge and understanding of what the tourism potential has to offer. Additional income plus preserving heritage and environment are the main motivational factors in becoming an operator in the Homestay programme. Therefore, the stakeholders namely the authorities and proactive leaders, must think through strategies and appropriate training to impart knowledge and workable resources to effectively develop the programme.

The Homestay programme operators and community cannot be totally dependent on government and external bodies because too little effort on their part will not see the resilient nature of the programme itself. They must be self-reliant and cannot depend on funds or regular supervisions all the time. They must be proactive and empowered to make their own decisions and keeping their ventures afloat if they are not making enough money at first. The idea behind this tourism product is the income to be gained from tourism activities will improve their quality of life.

Typically, for the purpose of determining the Homestay development, community and likewise Government agencies would have to consider their location whether being appropriate for tourism purposes. For instance, access to the location being not too far away or difficult to go there, is important as most tourists spend a few days only for travelling purposes. As such in an ideal situation, community and authorities need to identify tourist attractions that are easily located within their vicinity such as natural attractions of landscapes like waterfall, padi fields, lakes, flora & fauna, etc.; traditions such as handicrafts, art, architecture of own culture or opportunity to participate in outdoor activities such as fishing, climbing, hiking. However, opportunities can also be tapped in other locations off the beaten path by being creative in coming out with ways and means in making that particular community or village also equally outstanding. By having good entrepreneurship skills, one can look beyond the obvious to search for good qualities of the community to be promoted.

As Homestay in Malaysia means ensuring visitors to experience village-style living first-hand, daily activities taking place can be simple ‘kampong’ living such as preparing food using traditional methods, going to the orchard to harvest fruits, feeding livestock in the farm, learn to fish using traditional catches, indulging in children’s games like ‘congkak’, top spinning, kite flying; witness or join in ‘silat’ demonstration, cultural dances, musical performances or even a mock Malay wedding. The creativity is endless as long as the traditional Malaysian charm that has been preserved throughout the ages is enhanced and kept alive for visitors to have a memorable experience of traditional hospitality.

The acceptance and commitment of Generation Y in ensuring the sustainability of the programme is also an issue. As most of the activities in the Homestay programme are mainly focused on traditional and old cultures therefore, the issue arises on whether the Generation Y could remain in the community and continue these traditions. The trend has shown that the younger generation is leaving the villages to the cities for many reasons. Initiative measures and strategy has to be established to encourage and attract the younger generation to maintain living in

the Homestay 'kampongs' to ensure the continuing sustainability of the programme.

Some of the issues that emerged as external challenges in the Homestay programme are the Homestay operators and communities can also sometimes be susceptible to exploitation by irresponsible tour operators and other third parties who try to get the economic gain of the Homestay programme for their own benefits. The term Homestay is often misused in the social media because this does not reflect the true sense of Homestay. The Government can help by underlining the proper mechanism in a true context for instance, creating the copyright so that opportunistic people cannot simply advertise or promote their non-Homestay low budget accommodations as copying Homestay. Tourists intending to visit true Homestay programmes often become disappointed and disillusioned when the truth is uncovered after they actually visit the place and found it to be lacking in the true experience of way of life by the local people. The weakness in establishing a smart collaboration or networking among the stakeholders could also become the external deficiencies of the Homestay programme.

Although Homestay has been recognised as one of the mechanism to eradicate poverty especially in the rural areas, it is noted that the impact of Homestay has not been sufficient to eradicate poverty and there are still deficiencies in certain areas. Therefore, a more thorough study and cooperation from all the stakeholders to ensure that Homestay can really be successful are needed to be able to reach the targeted objectives. Throughout this study, the author has used the literature to understand the whole concept of Homestay and has been able to analyse the data. Many challenges have actually being identified throughout the study to answer the research objectives. As the challenges emerged from many situations depending on the site of the Homestay's location therefore, some challenges need to be tackled according to a case-by-case basis. This is very interesting for discussion as some of the challenges arising from the study involve a very close matter among the Homestay operators and it can be addressed directly for solutions among the participants within the community.

Throughout the analysis, community cooperation has to be strengthened in any Homestay location as it has been identified as an essential aspect in ensuring the success of Homestay operation. Community participants have to be empowered and allowed for any decision making involving their community as suggested in Pretty's Typology model to get an active and genuine participation from the community. This is strongly supported by Murphy (1985) who clearly mentioned that public participation in tourism planning and management is essential because when the development and planning does not fit the aspiration and needs of the local community, it will cause resistance and hostility which can jeopardise the tourism activities in the location as well as within the tourism industry. Hence, with full involvement and empowerment by the community, it could bring to light some possible solutions for the internal challenges among the Homestay operation.

Attitudes of the communities need to be strengthened in terms of sense of belonging, sense of community, sense of tourist needs, etc. so that everyone can cooperate and work together to make their Homestay a lasting success. Through proper planning and implementation, operational regulation and management, appropriate development and financial allocation in Homestay operations, all of the stakeholders involved in Homestay programs can ensure a sustainable tourism development.

As a community based tourism product, the Homestay programme has great potential to develop as a valuable tourism product with its own uniqueness. No other places can offer the same Homestay product as what Malaysia can offer as the strength and uniqueness lies in the people who uphold a traditional culture that has become their biggest asset to be experienced and showcased to local and international tourists. The increasing number of new participants registering and joining the programme as operators has given a good indicator that there is room for sustainable development of the Homestay programme and bringing economic gain for the participants. This projection for the number of rooms demanded for 2020 again became a good indicator that this project has opened a big opportunity for the community to prepare for the influx of tourists to come in the future.

Nevertheless, all the challenges have to be seen as a positive implication to further improve and enhance the programme to perform better in future. Finally, this research cannot be claimed to be all conclusive and thus contains limitations. As such, it is recommended that other academic research could be conducted in the future as with the progression of time, many changes would have evolved resulting in the emergence of new challenges that may require different probes or approaches to reach for a better solution from different angles and perspectives.

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