

Langkawi Homestay: Exploring an Innovation Aspect in Homestay Industry

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Abstract

At present, Tourism Malaysia experiences demand from local and foreign tourists of desires for the taste of local cultural resources when they visit Malaysia. This can be accomplished through various activities. But the present research was done to explore and innovate the homestay industry in Malaysia. Affordable and comfortable living homestay offers tourists to stay longer and experience the local nature and rural lifestyle. The research focuses on the innovative aspects of generating additional income to the homestay operators and to see how these aspects were taken into consideration. Besides, this research were also undertaken to identify what can be done to improve the homestay experience through innovative solutions. The research seeks to readdress the situation and focusing on the current experiences and practices of the local homestay operators. The expected outcome from the research will benefit into the instillation of knowledge to the homestay operators which can contribute as earning to the operators and contribute to the body of academic knowledge in the tourism field in Malaysia.

Keywords: Langkawi Homestay, Tourism innovation, Homestay program product

1.0 Introduction

Research in tourism has investigated the tourist selection criteria for accommodation, evaluation of service quality and benchmarking determinants may contribute towards accommodation selection (Millward Brown Lansdowne 2010). It has been noted that the desire for tourism experiences of local cultural resources can be accomplished through a homestay activity or direct involvement in this act. A homestay means that the traveler lives with a family for at least part of their trip or living alone at provided house experiencing the local nature and rural lifestyle with the owner. In other country, many term were used to describe the traveler which lives with a house owner during travelling such as farm stay, home visit system, agricultural homestay, or bed and breakfast (B&B) (Ministry of Tourism Malaysia 2012).

Phonwiset, Yomsatharn, and Chusakul (cited in Rahman 2012) justified homestay as one of tourism product which emphasize on community based tourism and ecotourism attraction. Thus, an affordable and comfortable living places offer the attention for tourist to stay at a homestay. The location of homestay where is nearby to the paddy fields, mountain or green hills and sidelines of technology and modernity also an interesting attractions to be considered. According to Unlumlert (cited in Rahman 2012) define homestay as:

As one type of lodging that the tourists share with home owner with intention to learn culture and lifestyles from the home owner who is willing to transmit and sharing culture.

According to Rojas & Camarero (2012) tourists seek a total experience, including leisure, culture, education, and social interaction through their activity. These activities can be accomplished through their close involvement with the local people in the area. How the local homestay operators play their roles is highly important in order to secure a continuous visit from the other tourist. This aspect relates the tourists in regards of satisfaction and service quality that are provided during their activity. Marketing and hospitality literature discussed and had a disagreement about satisfaction and service quality (Choi & Chu 2001).

Satisfaction were elaborate as “a judgement that a product, or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption – related fulfillment, including levels of under or over fulfillment” as defined by Nash, Thyne and Davies (cited in Ibrahim & Ahmad 2008, p. 13). According to Nash, Thyne and Davies (2006) customer satisfaction specifically tourists’ has been noted as a major element as described by Ueltschy, Laroche, Tamilia, and Yannopoulos, “needed to create and sustain a competitive business” (Ueltschy et al. 2004).

Tourists achieves their satisfactory level if they receive a good service as they expected, “a consumer is considered satisfied when his weighted sum total of experiences shows a feeling of gratification when compared with his expectations. However, a tourist is considered dissatisfied when his actual experience shows a feeling of displeasure when compared with his expectations” (Choi & Chu 2001). This action naturally involves with an element of expectation associated with the service. However, in this research the focus was not to enter into the debate associated with the expectations and service quality performance. This study focus to identify what characteristics associated with the surrounding homestay operators specifically in Langkawi which can be

utilized and the other issue arises in regards of Langkawi Homestay operators.

At this point, this study focus on the innovative aspects of generating additional income to the homestay operators and to see how far the previous programme succeed and what can be improve to explore through an innovative solution. Instead of just providing the tourists with home services and facilities, the homestay operators will offer side attraction for their customers. This is in-line with the Malaysian Government’s Economic Transformation Program (ETP) as the outcome of this program should increase the society’s level of income from tourism activities and in line with the goals outlined in the country’s Rural Tourism Master Plan (Performance Management & Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) 2013). The research began with an analysis of Malaysia’s policy which encourages the growth of local tourism and the interview conducted for Langkawi Homestay operators to readdress the situation. As indicated by Liu (2006), “tourism initiatives introduced in Malaysia’s rural setting, where there is strong adherence to cultural and religious observations, have neglected to give adequate attention to the incubation of cultural understanding, adaptability and appreciation of cultural differences” (Liu 2006, p. 2). Hence, there is a significant study need to be focus on the homestay programme as in this case specifically in Langkawi.

2.0 Langkawi Homestay Programme

Many programs have been done by Malaysian government and other sector to develop an activity which can helps the villager to generate additional income by creating so many activities, product and services. However, tourism industry in regards of homestay program need to compete with other highly and medium price accommodation in offering a quality and accessibility place compared with the other country. Table 1 show the total of tourists in Malaysian homestay which is gradually increased slowly with the increment of the total tourists throughout the years.

Table 1: Malaysian Homestay achievement 1995-2006

	2006	2007	2008	2009
Local tourists	21,795 (68%)	45,354 (69%)	68,416 (75%)	29,782 (72%)
International tourists	10,038 (32%)	20,361 (31%)	23,117 (25%)	11,729 (28%)
Total tourists	31,833 (100%)	65,715 (100%)	91,533 (100%)	41,511 (100%)
Total income	2,065,980.34	4,923,433.30	6,393,676.63	3,062,244.35
Total operators	1,563	2,533	3,034	3,264
Total homestay	105	135	146	140

* Until 30 May 2009

Source: Malaysian Tourism Ministry 2009 (cited in Rahman 2012)

Langkawi Island which situated in Kedah as one of the oldest states in Malaysia is rich in natural resources, historical heritages and man-made offer the potential to be developed as tourism products (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010). Kedah as one of the state in Malaysia, located at the northern tip of the Malaysian peninsular bordering with Thailand. Known as the “rice bowl” of Malaysia, Kedah’s terrain features abundant cropland (about 52 per cent of land use) and forestry (37 per cent) with a very low level of urbanization (2 per cent). According to Liu,

“Kedah, however, is one of the poorer and less developed states in Malaysia. Natural resource-based industry supplies the main income source, which provides a pedestal for light industry expansions, predominately furniture factories and tobacco barns. The relatively low industrialization base makes Kedah an underprivileged state with low gross monthly household income that is 40 per cent less than the Malaysian mean and almost twice the poverty level. Kedah has a rich resource base to create agro-tourism products. Conversely, product development strategies adopted for the development of rural tourism in Kedah have created paradoxes – problems of asymmetric ethnic representation, social appropriateness and control” (Liu 2006, p. 880).

Starting from the early 90s, the Kedah state government has seriously taken into action focusing into tourism industry due to its capability in generating economic growth, creating more job opportunity and changing the rural development landscape of the tourists’ places. Government has passed several policies and strategies in line with the Kedah as Developed State Policy 2010, Kedah Structured Plan 2000-2020 and Northern Region Economic Corridor 1007-2015 (NCER) in promoting tourism development (Ibrahim & Ahmad 2008). The need to promote greater local participation in tourism was further stressed in the Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000. Malaysia’s effort in rural tourism reflects such social, political and ideological circumstances.

The increasing tourists’ trend visiting Langkawi over the years has been reflected by the effect of

economy surrounding, politics and other global disaster which overcome the other part of the world. Table 2 reveals the total tourists had declined in the year 1997 and 1998 due to economic crisis which had been faced in East Asia and the haze disaster during the uncontrolled open fire in Indonesia. Total tourists majorities are focusing in the Langkawi Island compared to Kedah mainland consists of 70% over 30%. Domestic or local tourists spend their trip on single destination, self-drive and day trippers which occupied to a short stay accommodation. In reverse, international tourists are more spending their trip to multi destination, stop over type and spend their stay longer at certain places. The international tourists spend their trip at average of RM500/per day compared to domestic or local tourists for average RM250/per day. The majorities of the tourists were come from ASEAN countries, South and East Asia, Northern and west European Countries and Oceania as well as United States of America (Ibrahim & Ahmad 2008).

Table 2: Total tourist visiting Langkawi between years 1995-2006

Year	Langkawi Island	
	Numbers	Percentage %
1995	1,169,147	69.1
1996	1,187,015	63.7
1997	1,065,089	69
1998	873,689	70.2
1999	1,057,658	69.7
2000	1,079,223	68.4
2001	1,302,953	67.5
2002	1,529,222	71.7
2003	1,789,157	72.2
2004	2,179,629	74.6
2005	1,892,401	65.7
2006	2,043,956	67.2

Source: (Schiffman & Kanuk 2010)

Langkawi were competed as one of the popular tourists destination followed by Phuket in Thailand and Bali in Indonesia. The development of tourists in Langkawi has achieved the stagnation level where it must rely on the existing tourist's attraction in order to attract them. However, tourism industry in Langkawi were exploded after receiving the first status 'Geopark' in South East Asia by UNESCO in June 2007. Added to this, Langkawi also known as the popular destination for famous world event included the Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace (LIMA), Le Tour de Langkawi, Langkawi International Regatta, Langkawi Ironman Triathlon, and Langkawi International Dialogues (LID) (Ibrahim & Ahmad 2008).

These events has invited tourists from over the world and developed Langkawi as a self-contained international resort destination with overwhelming accommodation capacity (about 7000 rooms or 77 per cent of Kedah's total supply) and accessibility. The highly demand for alternative accommodation has generally influences the existing residences to transformed their places into homestay facilities to generates extra household income. To fulfill this demand, Langkawi homestay offered and provide an alternative choice in regards of cheaper accommodation as well as supplementary source of income to the owner or operator. Table 3 indicated the total registered homestay operators in Langkawi.

Table 3: Total registered homestay operators in Langkawi until December 2012

No	Homestay	Village	Number of operator	Number of operator	Number of Room
1	Homestay Pulau Tuba, Langkawi	Kg. Teluk Berembang	1	28	49
		Kg. Teluk Bujur	2		
		Kg. Lubuk Etok	3		
		Kg. Tepi Laut	4		
		Kg. Bukit Putih	5		
		Kg. Batu Putih	6		
2	Homestay Kg. Sungai Itau, Langkawi	Kg. Sungai Itau	1	19	19
3	Homestay Kg. Bukit Tangga, Langkawi	Kg. Bukit Tangga	1	10	18
4	Homestay Kg. Selat Bagan Nyior, Langkawi	Kg. Selat Bagan Nyior	1	13	13
5	Homestay Kg. Padang Lalang, Langkawi	Kg. Padang Lalang	1	7	13
6	Homestay Desa Wang Tok Rendong, Langkawi	Desa Wang Tok Rendong	1	69	88
Total			26	146	200

Source: (Fillis 2000)

The involvement of homestay operators in Langkawi resulted from the Malaysian homestay programme which was initially promoted by the Ministry of culture, Arts and Tourism. The involvement of Langkawi Homestay operators resulted as recommended by Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) officer and operators because it is regarded as being as an exemplary of operation homestay in Langkawi. Data were gathered in September 2013 through in-depth interviews with 10 operators and their family members. Interviews were conducted separately and using Bahasa Malaysia.

3.0 Perspective from homestay operators

Initially, 10 families were participated in the interviews including their family members. The idea of promoting their kampong was the main motive that encouraged the participating operators. Table 4 shows that the majority of homestay operators' participants with their employment in a variety of fields and involved in the programme as source of income.

Table 4: Profile of homestay operators

	<i>Title, age & occupation of operator (s)</i>	<i>Household members</i>	<i>Total of rooms/ room(s) for rent</i>	<i>Initial investment (\$)</i>
1	Father - 55 – Farmer Mother - 50 - Housewife	4	4 / 2	1200
2	Father - 62 – Retire Mother - 60 - Housewife	5	3 / 2	2000
3	Father - 60 – Grocery owner Mother - 57 - Housewife	4	2 / 1	300
4	Father - 48 – Fisherman Mother - 45 - Housewife	5	5 / 1	250 - 300
5	Father - 62 – Rubber tapper Mother - 60 – Rubber tapper	4	5 / 2	1500
6	Father - 54 – Retire Mother - 50 - Retire	3	3 / 1	500
7	Father - 58 – Farmer Mother - 53 - Housewife	2	3 / 1	200
8	Father - 61 – Restaurant owner Mother - 58 - Housewife	2	4 / 1	350
9	Father - 47 – Farmer Mother - 48 – School canteen helper	4	4 / 1	450
10	Father - 60 – Fisherman Mother - 55 - Housewife	4	5 / 2	250

Majority of the homestay operators were come from Pulau Tuba including its surrounding Kampung Teluk Bujur, Kg.Tuba, Kampung Telok Bombang, Kampung Lubuk Etok, Kampung Selat Bagan Nyiur, and Pulau Dayang Bunting. The entire homestay programmes in these locations are organized by the Chairman of the programme which is appointed by the committee. The Chairman act as coordinator to organized the room and

the selected operators according to the tourist demand and requirement. The coordinator also managed the liaison with the tourism authorities and other agencies as well as distribution of visitors.

Pulau Tuba is the second biggest island in Langkawi and considered as an exclusively Malay village. According to the homestay operators, visitors have been come from previous tourists who come for short visiting, foreign students who come for cultural exchange and educational purposes. Previous visitors sometimes promote their places through word of mouth, friends and blogs. This is considerably an important marketing strategy in backpacker decision making as in this case a homestay programme (Nash, Thyne & Davies 2006). Local or domestic visitors also come for short visit or for fishing activities and choose homestay for their accommodation. As for their services, charges are around RM 40 to 60 per head including meals and usually visitors will spend more than 2 nights at their places. For long stay accommodation, usually the average visitors will be come around 1 to 4 times in a year.

According to Liu (Liu 2006), the availability of sufficient space added with security of the homestay structure and level of quality and suitability, are considered an important elements to involved as homestay operators. These aspects are outlines in the guidelines for homestay operators in Malaysia (Ministry of Culture Arts and Tourism Malaysia 1997 ; Ministry of Tourism Malaysia 2012). The activities organized by the homestay operators were includes fishing, jungle tracking, kayaking in surrounding island, sun bath, traditional indoor games, and picnic near the sea side.

The participating homestay operators express their concern with the local agencies as less promotion and indirect relations in communication with the authority. Some operators indicated that they had some barrier with visitors from other than main English as their communication for example Japan (Bureau of Innovation and Consultancy 2006). Thus, despite this barrier, the visitors from these countries are increased throughout the year due to increment from the tourists' population in Malaysia.

All the operators involved indicated a lack of activity and limited project plan in regards of the decrease of foreign student cultural exchange. Also, most of the total visitors are not systematic recorded and the resulted in incorrect information. Thus, despite the limited number of the visitors, there were some visitors that cancelled their plan due to uncomfortable premises and unprepared room. Added to this, the location of the homestay which situated in rural places gives disadvantages to the programmed as it constrained with the transportation and communication infrastructure.

Nevertheless, there were some complaints concerning the homestay concept itself. The participating homestay operators query on the function of homestay which became a commercialize chalet but using the term homestay for its advertisement. This issues has arises by the operators as it would change the understanding and perspective of the tourists regarding the homestay function and the activity within the programmed. This is supported by Ibrahim and Ahmad (2008), which define the tourists information facilities is still lack in implementation and not supposed to be at it places.

4.0 Findings and conclusion

Despite of the problem concerning the homestay operators, there are some possible explanations and solutions that were identified from this study. Most of the homestay operators never experienced as tourists nor they have never ever been exposed to foreign cultures and foreign homestay experiences. Most of them have come about operating a homestay through learning from others experiences. Encounters with their visitors have been undertaken in a simple way with humbleness and generosity, rather than as a commercial-oriented activity that visitors can find in commercial resort or hotel. Visitors or homestay guests learn to adapt and urged to follow their lifestyle and tend to be more culturally aware and sensitive at the end. Thus, there is a need to improve the homestay management and human resources management. As suggested by Mapjabil, Mohd Rosdi, Shuib, and Abdullah (2011), the need to focusing more on homestay program as one of the tourism competition will be value added in improve this initiative in contributing to the nation economy.

Tourist satisfactions affect the intensification of the visit and if the visitors satisfied, they will prolong their stay, and take more interest within the cultural exposition (Rojas & Camarero 2008). According to the participated homestay operators, there are many tourists who still communicate with them and were treated like their own families. In regards, by improving the service quality, other sources of built and facility, environment quality and natural resources will upgrade the socio-economy and life of the homestay operators. It has been noted in Liu (2006), that there is no formal training were provided prior to the homestay operations rather than professional advice and inspections by Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism regarding hygiene, facilities placement and proper etiquette.

The role of community and agency is important and crucial in order to this program sustain and develop in the near future. An innovative aspect of the program need to be explore in terms of providing more variety and alternative in tourism product. The barrier in rural places can be improved by using other alternatives as solution. Surrounding by natural resources, the homestay operators need to maximize the potential activities such as agricultural activities, handcraft skills, herbal medicine and traditional cure as their innovative products

to promote homestay program to the tourists. Thus, in the context of Malaysia's rural setting, a strong adherence to cultural and natural resources would likely invite the opportunities for tourism as well as by improving and strengthen the promotion strategy to the targeted visitors.

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