

The Evolution of Homestay Tourism in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This research reveals the evolution of homestay concept in Malaysia from ‘bed and breakfast’ for long-stay tourists through to their becoming an official national tourism product in 1995.

Keywords: Community participation, homestay, host family, Malay Kampung, rural tourism

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, Malaysia began to encourage rural Malays to participate in the tourism sector arising from the popularity of Malay Kampung (Malay Village in Malay Language) as homestay for long-stay tourists and Japanese students.

When the Master Plan for Traditional and Planned Settlements in Local Government Areas of Peninsular Malaysia was carried out in 2010 in 17 selected villages in Peninsular Malaysia, developing homestays was seen as a means to deal with issues such as decreasing populations, especially among youth; lack of infrastructure and public facilities, unemployment, lack of interaction among the community, damage to the environment and landscape, and decreasing awareness towards culture and tradition.

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METHODS

This research aims to clarify the characteristics of Malaysian homestays. The transformation and development of

homestays into an official tourism product is revealed in a chronological order.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Definition of Homestay

Homestay is defined by the World Tourism Organization as ‘people who travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for more than twenty four hours and not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited’ (Kadir et al., 2010). Meanwhile, Richardson (2003) defined a homestay as ‘where families offer their own home to international students for part of, or the duration of their stay in the country’. The homestay host is expected to take care of the needs of international students’ and provide a means of cultural exchange.

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Tourism (MOTOUR) defined homestay as ‘where tourists stay with the host family and experience the everyday way of life of the family in both a direct and indirect manner’ (Ministry of Tourism, 1995).

Malaysian homestays differ from *minshuku* in Japan, farmstays in European countries, and homestay programs in English education (Ramele, 2015). Here tourists stay with families in the Malay Kampung and participate in the rural community activities.

The relationship of Malaysian homestays with other types of tourism: community-based tourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism, sustainable tourism, and special interest tourism have contributed to

the characteristics (Jamal, 2012) and have created a significance value for this research.

The Evolution of Homestays

The Bed and Breakfast. The homestay accommodation in rural areas since the 1970s is based on ‘bed and breakfast’ concept (Hamzah, 1997).

In the late 1980s, Malaysian homestays were used by the Japanese youths while on students exchange programs (Hamzah, 2008), where they had the opportunity to participate in community activities.

As educational tours became part of school curriculums Malaysian homestays became attractive. Later, homestays in the Malay Kampung were used in agro-tourism programs, with FELDA becoming the most successful authority in the homestay industry in this sector. FELDA has produced 23 homestays in 23 villages in 5 states with 414 host families. By August 2013, 36,722 tourists had visited FELDA homestays and generated RM802,589.45 in income.

The Malaysian Homestay Programs. In 1988, the community of five villages in Temerloh, Pahang established the Desa Murni Homestay, which was supported by the Ministry of Tourism as a model for the new Malaysian Homestay Program (Kayat and Nor, 2006).

The Malaysian Homestay Program was officially launched in 1995, when the Ministry of Tourism saw the development of homestays (by the Ministry of Agriculture, regional governments and individuals) as a source of revenue.

This program was also aimed at increasing rural community participation in the tourism sector. This program was also used as one of the pilot projects for the Rural Tourism Master Plan of 2001 to provide guidance and technical assistance in policy

making related to rural tourism development (Ministry of Tourism, 2001).

The number of homestay programs established, number of tourists received, and income earned from the homestay programs have notably increased (see Table 1).

Table 1
Statistics of the Malaysian Homestay Program

Year	No. of Homestay Programs	No. of Host Family	No. of Tourists Received	Income (RM)
2007	135	2,533	72,423	4,923,433
2008	146	3,034	91,533	6,393,676
2009	141	3,283	161,561	10,920,877
2010	139	3,005	196,472	12,407,227
2011	150	3,211	254,981	15,736,277
2012	159	3,424	325,258	18,545,656

Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2013

The Malaysian Homestay Association. In 2000, the chairman of the Desa Murni Homestay Committee established a new national level organization called the Malaysian Homestay Association to provide guidance to all homestay programs in the country.

Japanese youths continued to be the main tourists in the Malaysian Homestay Program established by the Ministry of Tourism in 1995. According to Hamzah (2008), Desa Murni Homestay in Pahang, Banghuris Homestay in Selangor, Relau Homestay in Kedah, and Pelegong Homestay in Negeri Sembilan are among successful homestay programs in this regard.

The Malaysian Homestay Railway Tourism. The Malaysian Homestay Program is linked to the Malaysian Railway

to form a new Malaysian Homestay Railway Tourism aimed at promoting an experience of culture, tradition and lifestyle of the Malay Kampung.

To date 21 homestay programs in Peninsular Malaysia have been selected to participate in this program.

The Kampungstay Program

In 2012, the Kampung stay program was introduced as a new type of accommodation where new traditional Malay house are built in the rural areas for long-stay tourists. The Kampung stay Program was established as an initiative under the Rural Tourism Master Plan to encourage rural community to participate in the tourism sector and as a continuation of the Malaysian Homestay Program (Ministry of Tourism, 2012b). The

Ministry of Tourism defines a Kampung stay Program as ‘an experience where tourist is provided an accommodation in the rural villages without the host family’; however, it still offers the opportunity to interact and participate in village lifestyle. Kampungstay Programme is aimed at providing tourists with the option on available accommodation in the country.

CONCLUSION

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Tourism defined homestay as ‘where tourists stay with the

host family in both a direct and indirect manner’. Homestays in Malaysia tourists have the opportunity to stay with the rural people in their houses and participate in community activities.

Homestays in Malaysia began as bed and breakfast’ concept. In the late 1980s the homestay idea took on the concept of ‘homestay in a Malay Kampung house’ as popularized by Japanese students who visited Malaysia under the student exchange programs. Consequently many rural Malays too came to be attracted by the homestay

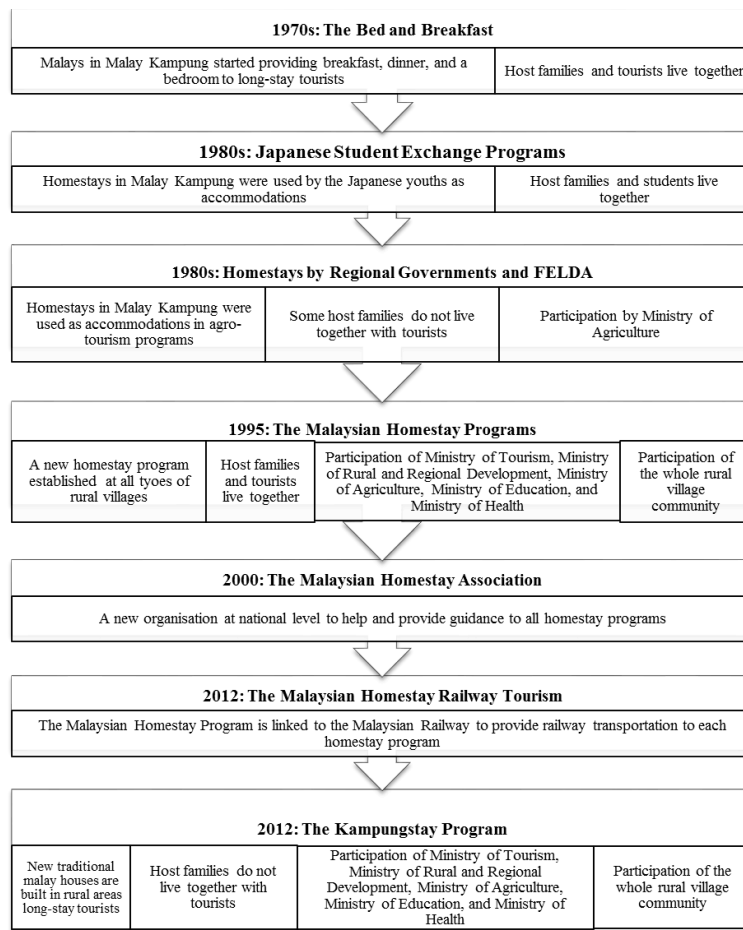


Figure 1. The Evolution of Homestay Programs in Malaysia

trend and started renting out their houses to tourists, turning them into resort style managed accommodation.

By 1995, homestays become a part of the Ministry of Tourism program, where the host family, the rural community (homestay committee members, cultural performers, guides etc.), the existing village organizations, and other government organizations, came to be involved. The program was then expanded into the Malaysian Homestay Railway Tourism and the Kampungstay Program. The evolution of homestay programs in Malaysia can be summarized in Figure 1.

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