

STUDY THE FACTORS AFFECTING THE COST OF HOMESTAYS IN KUNDASANG, SABAH DURING MALAYSIA GOVERNMENT MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDER (MCO)

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic COVID-19. The status of the homestay programme will be maintained for the duration of the Movement Control Order (MCO), as announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, from 18 March 2020 to an unspecified date. According to the study, tourism is one of the worst-affected industries in Kundasang, Sabah. This study aims to identify the problems inherent in the Kundasang homestay, whether the problem is internally and externally. Next, the study was to collect the recommendations for improvement to the problems faced by the community. Qualitative research has been used as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Twenty-three informants have been interviewed. According to the data collected through an interview with informants, medical essentials ranked the highest factor, and many homestay entrepreneurs hope that the government and private agencies can reduce and solve the challenges they face. After the outbreak's pandemic, everything changed. Medical essential, labour, utility, maintenance, and miscellaneous are all concerns for homestay entrepreneurs. Several improvement suggestions presented at the end of this study will indirectly assist the tourism management body in developing the tourism sector in Sabah, primarily homestays in Kundasang.

Keywords: Homestay Entrepreneurs, Operation Cost and Tourism Sector

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Pneumonia of uncertain cause was found in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019, and was initially reported to the WHO National Office in China. As of early January 2020, China had hospitalised 41 patients with a confirmed coronavirus infection (COVID-19) (Huang et al., 2020). Although the virus quickly spread throughout the country's Wuhan province, political leaders in other parts of the world initially largely ignored it (although intelligence services issued warnings of potentially catastrophic events; Washington Post, 2020). To contain the virus, Wuhan was quarantined (a combination of provincial and local quarantine actions), and the number of cases in China stabilised at around 80,000 by mid-February (ECDC 2020). At the time, global air transport had spread the virus to all continents, and by mid-March 2020, it had infected 146 countries, including Malaysia.

Kundasang is a town in Sabah, Malaysia's Ranau district, located along the Kundasang Valley. It is located approximately 6 kilometres from Kinabalu National Park and 12 kilometres from Ranau city and is famous for its seven-day-a-week vegetable market. It is the closest town to Mount Kinabalu and offers stunning views of the mountain. The majority of the population is Dusun, with a small number of Chinese. Locals run almost all businesses in this area. In the district of Kundasang, Sabah, there are 215 homestays. Where everything is the property of the indigenous Dusun people. The purpose of this study was to examine the pandemic's effects on homestay owners. Additionally, this study expected to serve as a benchmark for the Sabah government's local tourism development.

Among the sectors said to be hardest hit is tourism, particularly Homestay Kundasang, Sabah, the subject of the study. The Covid 19 pandemic has harmed Sabah's tourism economy, which is one of the state's developing economies. Thus, the conclusion of this study may contribute to economic recovery, particularly in the tourism sector, as Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin stated during a press conference with *Berita Harian* on 23 July 2020. The findings of this study will enable us to ascertain the extent to which homestay owners in Kundasang, Sabah, face difficulties. Suggestions for improvement made after this study may also indirectly assist the tourism management body in developing Sabah's tourism sector, particularly homestays in Kundasang.

The tourism sector is one of the sectors most affected by the pandemic COVID-19. The status of the homestay programme will be maintained for the duration of the Movement Control Order (MCO), as announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, from 18 March 2020 to an unspecified date. During the MCO, establishments that host tourists will have to vacate their premises. This also applies to host family business owners. At the same time, these host families live on their premises in unproductive circumstances (Ericsson, 2016). Involvement of all parties in a thriving economic agenda can be achieved through social entrepreneurship. According to Wong homestay entrepreneur, when the crisis hit Malaysia in March 2020, homestay industry income dropped to 30%-40% because some existing tenants still cushioned the number. However, when it came to mid-August and September, the income dropped to 0%-15%. According to information from *Berita Harian* sources, on 2nd June 2020, there were almost no direct bookings, and we had to change the status of the homestay to a rental house. According to Mohammad Azmir Zahir Bakar, treasurer of the Malaysian Tourism Residential Accommodation Organization (MARTA), the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic had a critical impact on the tourism sector, especially the homestay industry. He also noted that the problems experienced by homestays or homestays, like the hotel industry, were realised since last March when bookings decreased, while cancellations increased at the last minute following the implementation of the MCO. The study found that more than 80% of homestay operators do not get direct bookings or only 25% compared to before who receive customers every week. This worries homestay operators because the source of income of some residents in the Kundasang district is based on homestay rental income. In addition to facing income problems, they also must spend some money on homestay maintenance and utility bills.

According to Ismail (2020), homestay entrepreneurs face many challenges in managing their businesses. One of the challenges is a cost increase. Homestay entrepreneurs are having difficulties in maintaining their business operations without income from tenants. Some homestay entrepreneurs own two or more homestays simultaneously, and they are unable to maintain their business operation costs and unable to pay salaries to their employees and choose to end up the business. Sarah Eian and Brett Matsumoto (2020) stated that most homestay's businesses were affected by COVID -19 in several ways, from the loss of customers to changes in operating costs. These are the challenges faced by homestay entrepreneurs.

The challenges could be very different from one community of homestay to another. Thus, the objectives of this study are to investigate the factors that affect homestay entrepreneurs and collect and present recommendations from homestay entrepreneurs to relevant parties. Thus, the results of this study could contribute to the understanding of the factors that influence the cost increase of homestay management and collect all the recommendations and propose to be related parties. They could provide direction for the collaborative development of the homestay industry and prepare some guidelines for homestay entrepreneurs during the pandemic. This study aims to identify the problems inherent in the Kundasang homestay whether the problem is internally and externally. Next, the study was to collect the recommendations for improvement to the problems faced by the community.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19's pandemic has posed a threat to many tourism businesses and resulted in significant economic losses for tourism-dependent countries. International tourist arrivals have decreased by 20% to 30% compared to projections for 2019, equating to a loss of \$300 to \$450 billion in international tourism receipts (exports), or nearly one-third of the \$1.5 trillion generated globally (UNWTO, 2020). Numerous countries suffer more severe economic consequences than others due to their high reliance on the sector, particularly when considering an exciting comparison: eight of the top ten destinations for foreign tourists, including France, Spain, the United States, China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Thailand, were the hardest hit by COVID-19, indicating that the economic impact of tourism on those countries is significant. According to the most recent estimates, Asia will experience the most significant decline in travel and tourism revenue in 2020, with China experiencing the most significant decline (Statista, 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 effected Malaysia's annual GDP growth to fall at 0.8 to just 1.2 percentage level and this resulting in a loss of RM 17.3 billion. Datuk Tan Kok Liang, the President of the Malaysian Tour and Travel Agents Association, stated that the global pandemic had taken a heavy toll on local tourism stakeholders, creating a situation where the very fabric of Malaysia's lifestyle and economy has begun to unravel. In January, when the COVID-19 outbreak began to spread throughout China and Asia, the economy entered a severe slowdown. At the state level, the Sabah tourism sector was also severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbated by implementing the Movement Control Order (MCO). The tourism industry in Sabah is highly reliant on Chinese and South Korean visitors, who account for nearly 40% and 27% of total foreign arrivals, respectively. According to a recent survey conducted by the Sabah Development Studies Institute (2020), 26% of those in the industry had lost their businesses, 34% were on unpaid leave, and another 32% of tourism-related employment had to be paid off. Additionally, he stated that most businesses generated no revenue during the MCO phase due to a lack of visitors. Due to the lack of revenue, the operators have been unable to pay their employees and cover their operating costs.

However, with countries, including Malaysia, implementing entry bans and border restrictions in response to the disease outbreak, what was once a good year has become a struggle for many in the tourism industry. According to Malaysian Hotel Association (MAH) CEO Yap Lip Seng, hotels are considering potential losses of RM3.3 billion in room revenue alone from January to June (MyPF, 2020). Meanwhile, Malaysia hopes that a rapid recovery in tourism will entice visitors to return. The most challenging task will be regaining the trust of domestic and international visitors. The "Clean and Safe Malaysia" campaign is one way to accomplish this. The objective is to certify hotels that adhere to government regulations.

Additionally, airlines, hotels, transportation companies, and other operators must collaborate and offer pre-packaged travel. This would reduce costs for businesses and tourists alike while also increasing the sustainability of the country's tourism industry. Malaysia's tourism industry is expected to gradually improve by the end of the year and stabilise by June 2021 (Welle, 2020).

Tourism is not uncommon in Malaysia and has now become the second-largest contributor to the economy. The tourism sector has many types and one of them is community-based tourism. In a destination, the community plays an important role in managing the movement and operation of an accommodation. Tourism in Malaysia is concentrated in rural areas. Tourists who come here to enjoy the beauty of nature prefer the environment and living in peace and away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Therefore, tourists are attracted to rural areas such as villages. Tourism in rural areas is classified as ecotourism, better known as tourist environment. Tourists want to enjoy the beauty of nature, sea flora, and fauna, stay in the village, and enjoy the cultural life of villagers in terms of food, activities, festivals, etc (Soh, 2014).

Tourism is usually associated with entrepreneurship. The government encourages young people, especially women, to become entrepreneurs in the tourism sector. Entrepreneurs are allowed to explore the science and the study tour that has been done in terms of legislation, the type of financial support from the government, support agencies and business strategy to develop sustainable growth, and so on. As can be seen, the homestay program is mainly followed by women and youth. This situation has prompted the government to ensure that homestay operators have sufficient business skills to be competitive and cope with the issues and challenges ahead (Ericsson, 2016).

In Malaysia, the homestay program can be traced back to the early 1970s, in what was then the "drifter enclave" of Kg. Cherating Lama in Pahang, where a local lady named Mak Long took in the drifters/hippies and provided them with breakfast, dinner, and shelter in her humble home (Amran, 1997). Subsequently, small villages, also known as 'kampongs', followed a similar arrangement to take advantage of the influx of domestic and international tourists looking for a different travel experience, i.e. to learn about and experience the culture through homestays (Arif, 2013).

The Malaysian government's increased focus on the development of homestay is significant as it is seen as a potentially good product to promote the country and can involve the people in the tourism industry through rural tourism. By using the existing natural resources, culture, and heritage within the community, communities could develop the Homestay product without spending a lot of money to change the existing infrastructure. Homestay is not only seen to generate income for the community but also helps in fulfilling the Government to eradicate poverty and contribute to job creation for the affected communities (Arif, 2013).

A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a collection of specific procedures that document routine or repetitive procedures within an organisation. It is an operation-specific practice that defines the activities necessary to complete tasks following industry regulations, provincial legislation, or even a company's defined standards for conducting business. A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a step-by-step production line technique used to manufacture goods and train employees in manufacturing. Indeed, the SOP defines the practices in all industries that have quality standards. The development and implementation of SOPs are critical components of an effective quality system because they educate individuals on proper job performance and ensure the consistency of a products or end-quality

results and credibility. "SOP" is not only a term but is included in various administrative and management documents such as protocols, guidelines, workbooks, and laboratory operating procedures (Bhattacharya, 2015). SOPs apply to the entity or facility whose activities aid that entity in maintaining its quality management and quality assurance processes and complying with applicable government regulations. Management, preferably the direct supervisor, should evaluate and reinforce the application of SOPs. SOPs must be readily accessible for reference in the work areas of those operating, either in hard copy or electronic format; otherwise, they serve no purpose (Anon, 2007).

SOPs are critical as a guideline for conducting business. Additionally, SOPs are the policies, procedures, and systems that a business's operations, marketing, and management disciplines require to succeed. SOP guidelines benefit (a) performance and profitability; (b) product or service quality and reliability; (c) defect reduction in all areas of products and services; (d) a method of resolving conflicts between members; (e) a healthy and safe workplace; (f) employee safety in areas of potential liability and personnel issues; and (g) a road map for resolving issues such as the exclusion of emotion from troubleshooting and the requirement of concentrating on creating an SOP entails systematising and documenting all processes (SBEC,2020). Procedures are frequently in conjunction with various methods for analysing the activities or jobs to be performed in the workplace, including a methodology called occupational safety analysis, which identifies hazards and explains how to manage them.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research aims to understand and explain participant meaning (Morrow & Smith, 2000). More specifically, Creswell (2002) defines qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. In this study, 23 informants interviewed, and the interview saturated because two to three informants repeat the same data as mentioned earlier. The data would then be clustering into a few main factors to explain. Before the data is analysed, the researcher will transcribe all interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes. The process of transcribing allows the researcher to become acquainted with the data (Reissman, 1993). The researcher will create Microsoft Word files for the interviews, observations, documents, and journal entries. All files will be protected by setting a password.

4.0 RESEARCH FINDING 1

The homestay program appears to have benefited the local community and provided additional income to participants. This evidenced by the increasing number of providers participating in the program each year. For comparison, the total number of homestay operators across Malaysia was 3,264 in 2009 and 3,381 in 2018, increasing 13.6%. However, during the breakouts of Pandemic COVID – 19, the business income for homestay drop to 0% - 15%. As mentioned above, 23 informants interviewed, and there were only five important factors after the data clustering process. The factors shown in Table 1.0

No	Factors	Rank
1	Medical essential	23
2	Labour	19
3	Utility	18
4	Maintenance	12
5	Miscellaneous	9

Table 1: Factors effecting homestay cost

According to the data collected through an interview with informants, medical essentials rank the highest factor among five. According to the data collected from the informants, medical essentials included pills and drugs, a first aids kit, traditional medicine, and doctor consultation fees. This is a new factor among all the factors because medical essentials become the important factor during the outbreaks of pandemics and cause serious disease and could cause death. One of the informants mentioned that "we have to pay extra money to the tenants, labour and even ourself to the nearest hospital to see Doctor because the COVID-19 is very dangerous and we don't want anyone die in our premises that's why we have to send them to the hospital immediately, and most of the time we have to cover all the expenses, and it burdens us". Another informant stated that "we have to buy a lot of medicine, pills and drugs to put in our first aids kit to standby any circumstance happened. All the medicine and pills were very expensive during the pandemic. But we have no choice, and we must buy. The government also forces us to buy the hand sanitiser and thermometer in our premises, and we must buy also. We bought this to our premise, and it will become our cost, and therefore our cost increased". Most of the informants mentioned that medical essential is among the important factor that influences cost increase.

According to table 1.0, emergency factors rank lowest among all the factors. According to the data collected, the miscellaneous is included transport, facilities, complimentary, and food wastage. All the sub-cost concluded into a miscellaneous because there is not a major part of the cost, and it's not happened frequently. However, it's having to count as a part of the cost because it happens under some circumstance. One of the informants mentioned that "we have bought a lot of food before the pandemic as a stock to our homestay's tenants. However, we must eat all the food during the MCO, and even some expired and has been thrown".

According to Sarah Eian and Brett Matsumoto (2020), before the outbreak of COVID – 19, the main factors that influenced homestay entrepreneurs were operational cost and Maintenance. However, after the outbreak of the pandemic, the priority cost changed, and this is the most valuable information obtained during the interview session with the informants.

5.0 RESEARCH FINDING 2

The hospitality industry was one of the most affected sectors during the Covid 19 pandemic, mainly due to restrictions on international and domestic travel during the period of the Movement Control Order (MCO). Many homestay entrepreneurs are hoping that the

government and private agencies could do something to reduce and solve the challenges faced. Two main recommendations have been concluded after the interview session.

The first recommendation from the informants is a periodic subsidiary from the government. The homestay entrepreneur is facing a big challenge in manage and covering the daily operating expenses of the premise. Some of the entrepreneurs own more than two premises, and there is a heavy burden for them. There are no incomes from the tenants, but they have to pay many of the expenses every day and month. If the government is willing to offer a periodic subsidiary for the homestay entrepreneur, it will be better, and it will help us release a part of their burden. The informants also suggest that the periodic subsidiary is not long-term, and it will be paid back to the government if their business operation is normal, and the deduction could make thorough paying tax and interest.

The second recommendation from the informants is to loosen the standard operating procedure for the residents who have completed the two doses of vaccination. The government should immediately loosen the rules for those who completed two doses of the vaccination to travel to the nearest leisure park and recreation sites. This will help increase the local economy and increase the income of the local community rather than rely on the government grant.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION AND DISCUSSION

According to Khan and Hashim (2020), in the post-COVID-19 era, the tourism industry needs to develop a well-planned and sustainable business plan based on collective global consciousness to save the companies, the industry, and ultimately job availability. The proposed the following resurgence mitigation strategies to ensure the Malaysian tourism industry's sustainability:

Throughout history, tourism has demonstrated remarkable resilience in the aftermath of disasters and crises on a regional and international scale. It was frequently possible due to coordinated intervention by regional, local, and national governments in the form of stimulus packages and incentives such as tax breaks and wage subsidiaries.

Since COVID-19's impact is unexpected across both time and space, things will not return to normal as they were before the pandemic; instead, we will need to readjust to the new normal (Dube, Nhamo, and Chikodzi, 2020). As a result, tourism destinations, businesses, and sub-sectors will need to adjust to the new tailored measures. According to Hamzah (2020), the Malaysian government should consider developing a recovery plan for the next 1 to 2 years, focusing primarily on two aspects: capacity building and tourism digitization. The first is to stress the importance of retraining human capital resources in hygiene, safety, storytelling, and service quality. The latter will concentrate on using information technology to transform the entire tourism industry's integrated spectrum to embrace "Smart Tourism." In addition, similar to the initial government response to the SARS epidemic in 2003, which was to encourage industry players to explore untapped international markets and promote domestic tourism extensively during the post-pandemic period. The current government response to the SARS epidemic encourages industry players to explore untapped international markets and promote domestic tourism extensively during the post-pandemic period.

Social media platforms are inevitably implied to be crucial in combating and reviving the industry following the current pandemic. Specifically, social media engagement can play a crucial role in spreading positivity and reversing pandemic-induced discrimination and negative perceptions of affected destinations and tourism businesses (Khan, Hashim, Aziz,

and Samdin, 2020). Prioritizing social media and other digital platforms (such as blogs) as a source of inspiration could help the tourism industry recover more quickly in the post-pandemic era (Romagosa, 2020; Yu et al., 2020). For example, "Miso Walai Homestay," a Malaysian community-based tourism operator (CBT), is preparing for a much-anticipated recovery period for the coming year by creating a video about their current course of action, showing building maintenance and refurbishment activities, re-training staff on hygiene and safety aspects, and improving their website. Local governments and government agencies could use such videos to demonstrate how local initiatives and efforts can serve as a source of inspiration for others preparing for the post-pandemic tourism industry's challenging future (Hamzah, 2020; Kaos, 2020).

To reimagine and restart the tourism industry by moving away from exploitative Western neoliberal capitalistic models that ignore places, people, and the natural environment and toward a holistic model with more positive social and environmental outcomes. Unlike traditional neoliberal capitalism, which focuses solely on profit maximisation, the 'newer' tourism model must consider human health, the environment, and the local community's well-being. The essence of this model is to shift our focus from solely economic growth to a unique social connection and a meaningful human flourishing tourism environment.

The tourism and hospitality industry's biggest challenge in the post-pandemic period will be regaining the trust of international and domestic tourists. As a result, introducing a "clean and safe destination" could be one of the ways to reclaim visitors' trust, to award certification to tourism operators (e.g. hotels, homestay etc.) that follow the relevant authorities' standard operating procedures (SOPs) (dw., 2020). Hospitality sector must also quickly recognise themselves as COVID-19 compliant in safety, health, and hygiene procedures through global, national, and local certification programmes or campaigns (Dube et al., 2020).

Finally, to build a more resilient and equitable tourism industry, tourism educators, scholars, and students must first understand the root causes of the epidemic. Rather than continuing the current path, they should publicly establish a critical pedagogy to reform and transform the industry. In the process of preparing its future and current leaders in the post-pandemic situation, that they should encourage the critical conversation to unlearn the "old normal of tourism" and re-learn what might be more equitable and sustainable (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cheer, 2020).

7.0 CONCLUSION

From the analysis and interpretation that has been elaborated in the previous sections, we could see that there are big changes and big challenges that happened to the homestay entrepreneur during the outbreak of the pandemic. As mentioned above, before the outbreak pandemic, homestay entrepreneurs worried about the operation cost and maintenance cost. However, after the outbreak's pandemic, everything was changed. Homestay entrepreneurs worried about the medical essentials, labour, utility, maintenance, and miscellaneous. This is a discovery and interesting findings in this study. Is hoping that the related agencies could act and solutions to help homestay entrepreneurs maintain their business during this pandemic. The research will not stop in this area and will expand to explore the long-term solution and redevelop strategies for homestay entrepreneurs after the pandemic.

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