



Rural tourism: Socio-economic and cultural analysis on Kota Aur Homestay, Penang.

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ABSTRACT

Homestay activity is one of the branches in tourism that is growing rapidly especially in Malaysia. In this paper, there are several aspects on socio economic as well as on cultural aspects to be discussed and analysed. There are some things to do with the natural attraction to homestay Kota Aur are the first things to be discussed and followed by some marketing methods that have been implemented in attracting tourists to visit the homestay of Kota Aur. Among other things presented in this paper are those parties or government bodies that play a crucial role in ensuring the economic viability and if possible may have to give little or some impact sustainability of the homestay industry in Malaysia especially the existence of this particular homestay. This writing also touches on some of the elements of the attractions found at homestay Kota Aur and can be divided into three main elements, namely the environment and nature elements, the aspect of visitor acceptance and the last element is related to the participants of homestay itself. There are several future initiatives that can be done such as more organized planning and marketing aspects, research on activities planning, customer service and spending budgets that will ensure the positiveness of the socio-economic aspects on running the homestay 'business'.

Key words: homestay, Kota Aur, tourists, culture, socio-economy, local knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION

The homestay program was first introduced in Malaysia as one of the initiatives in the tourism industry by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia to encourage the involvement of rural people, especially in the country's economic development activities (Shukor, 2014). The program aims to provide a balanced and comprehensive benefit not only to the government but to the populace, especially those directly or indirectly involved in developing the homestay industry itself. There are several activities that have been implemented and can be developed by the homestay operators themselves, especially those who are directly involved with the traditional culture and customs of the locals. It is important to introduce local culture and customs to visitors who come to stay in homestay as

well as to encourage communication between locals and foreign tourists who come (Nor S. E., 2015).

The Malaysian government has targeted a total of 33 million tourists in 2017 which contributed to the target of RM 113 Mil. to national income. This was driven by the launch of the 2017 SEA Games this year (H. Metro, 2016). This is further coupled with the visit of ASEAN contingents in conjunction with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of ASEAN Nation, which is also expected to have a positive impact on the tourism industry in Malaysia. Therefore, this situation should be better utilized by homestay entrepreneurs to attract as many tourists as possible to visit homestay centers throughout the country. The same situation can be utilized and applied in Kota Aur homestay, especially in increasing the number of tourists in the homestay. In achieving this goal, various efforts need to be strengthened to make this a reality.

Malaysia is one of the unique countries, having a diverse culture, race and language as well as advantages in other aspects such as food and strategic locations have made the country a strategic international tourism destination. The development of homestay programs in the country has had a positive impact on local residents from economic, cultural and environmental aspects. The impact of homestay development will be more diverse and more vibrant if more parties are working more seriously in developing the homestay industry.

2. DATA ANALYSIS

2.1 Kota Aur Activities and Economic Gain



Figure 1: Kota Aur Homestay activities.

The diagram (Figure 1) shows some activities that have been carried out by homestay visitors of Kota Aur. Visitors will be exposed to activities that highlight the traditional culture and way of life in the Malay village in particular. By having also traditional Malay timber houses give extra assets to the homestay value (R, Talib et. al, 2016) Among the activities that have taken place are bicycle rides around paddy fields and villages, visiting the tsunami museum, wearing traditional local people dressed in Malay shirts and Kedah shirts, tasting the freshness of coconut juice, cooking traditional pancakes and trying out local food. Visitors are thrilled to learn the culture and lifestyle of local communities through the Kota Aur homestay program. This is because they learn new knowledge that is different from their living culture at their home country.

Moreover Figure 2 shows the observation and study of visitor’s attendance at homestay Kota Aur during the year 2016. There is a good flow of foreign tourists came to the homestay on that year (2016) thus giving positive impact on the socio-economic gain and is shown in its ranking based on its importance scale at in Fig. 2.

contributed to the Homestay Kota Aur participants as well others as shown in the chart in detail. This is due to the hospitality and the excellent service provided that caused the tourists giving positive feedback and the non-homestay members running other services like cooking, maintaining the boat or providing the ‘*roti canai*’, grocers etc. feel comfortable with the homestay owners himself; it was rank with 10 points which mean it is the biggest factor. Batik shop and bicycle shop that located nearby Homestay Kota Aur were rank at medium level which are at 5. Further to this, the tourists can get to know and learn how to use batik and ‘*pelikat*’ sarong cloth during one of the activities tailored. The same amount is shared with the number of tourists when cycling is among the important activities thus local bike shop received fair number of bicycle to be fixed and the bicycles shop owner gain some monetary reward. The most least was the souvenir element that only rank at 1 point as the fellow came a bit far from the homestay in Kulim.

We are still seeking the support from the villagers especially the younger generation to be involved for the martial arts activities such as ‘*silat* and ‘*muay thai*’ kick boxing demonstration and to form good size of ‘*kompang*’ group. The not too positive attitude from some of the JKKK (Federal) committee of Kota Aur village especially the leaders by not giving good encouragement to the village youngster to participate in the artistic program is a pity. These people just does not have the capability to promote the homestay program and show less interest in the program at the first place. The Ministry of Tourism even already agreed to provide a special training for the kids however that sort of main village committee

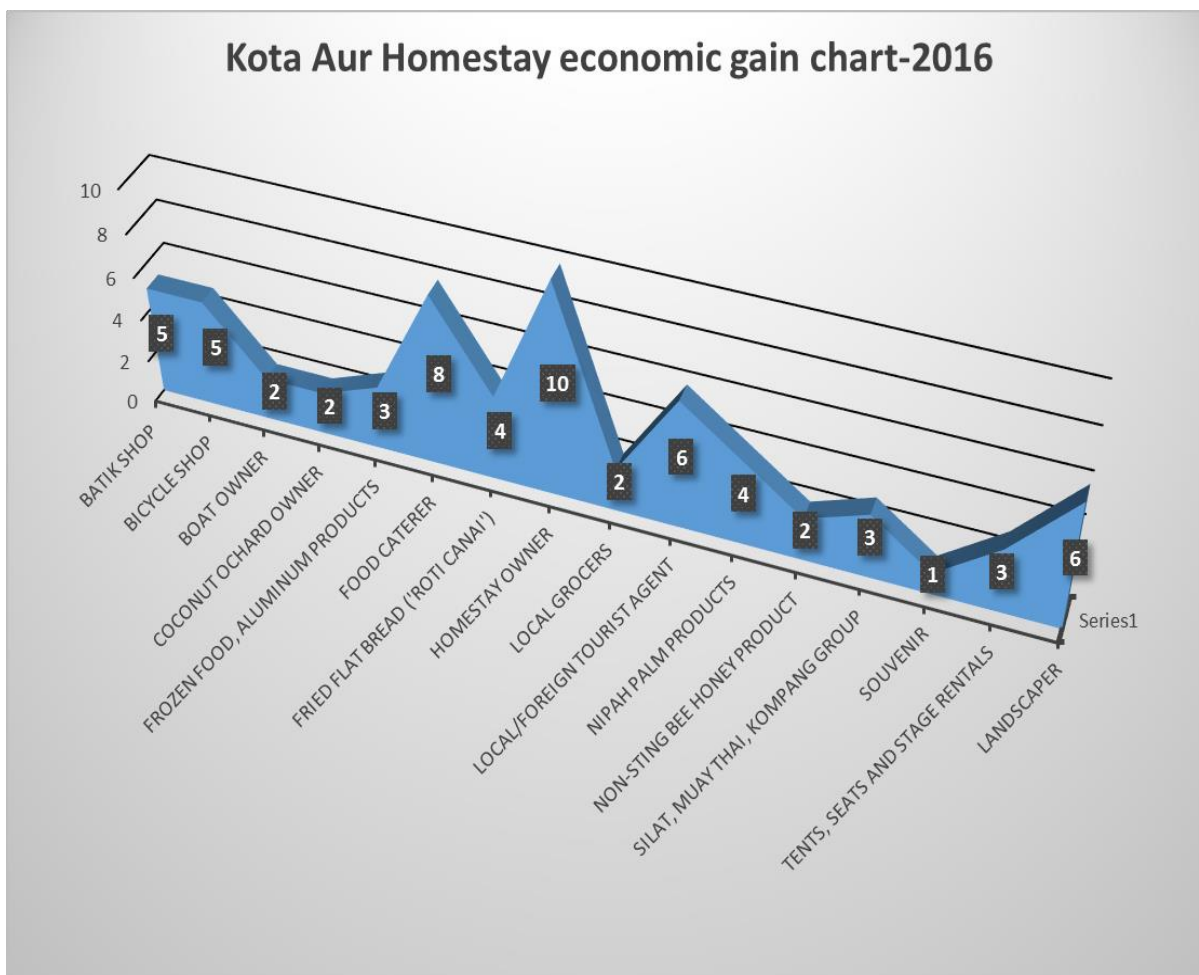


Figure 2: Homestay Kota Aur economic gain chart for 2016.

First of all, the presence of the tourist give huge/positive impact on the village socio-economic production and is highly

responsible to uplift the standard or the quality of living for the villagers not doing what they supposed to do.

2.2 Marketing Approach Strategies

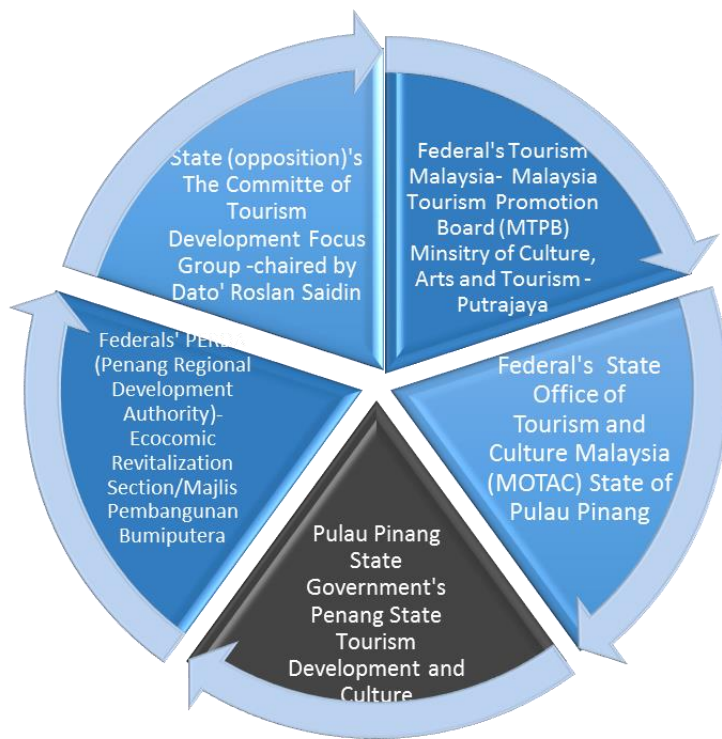


Figure 3: Marketing approach strategies of homestay Kota Aur in 2016.

The diagram (Fig. 3) shows how visitors can be able to come and visit the homestay through 4 main elements of marketing strategies. These four main methods identified based on our questionnaire data gathered. Among the strategies is through social media such as blog spots and Facebook (<http://www.homestaykotaaur.blogspot.com/> author-Roslan Talib, update 2017). This method is widely used by local visitors to get information about homestay Kota Aur. In addition, the marketing methods from overseas travel agencies are also important and help in increasing the number of visitors to Kota Aur homestay.

The good relationship between local universities and overseas universities is also seen as one of the ways to get visitors to Kota Aur homestay; especially in getting visitors among students such as study tours. In addition, our own initiative and approach as homestay owners especially the homestay leaders and through local tourism carnivals have also been implemented in promoting further the specialty of Kota Aur homestay.

2.3 Agencies Involved in Homestay Kota Aur Development.

As published in the Malaysian major newspaper; Berita Harian (online) on Tuesday, 23 May 2017 (N.I. Mohamad, 2017) the homestay need to take her own initiatives even by going to the

UK in promoting her existing Government homestay and not rely to the body to ensure the program keep on running.

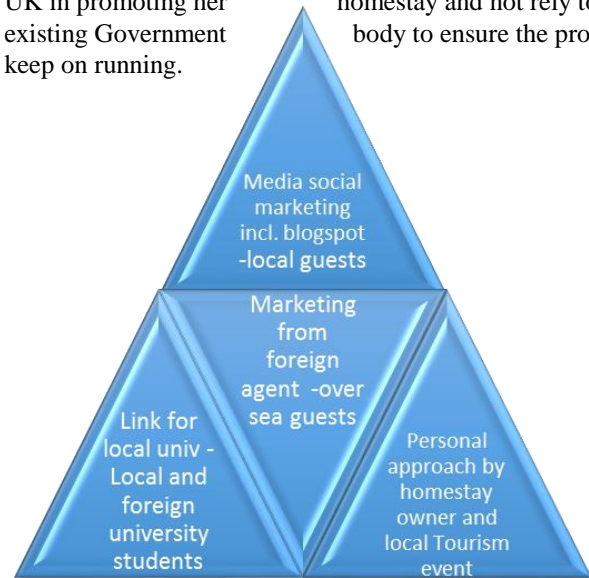


Figure 4: Agencies involved in homestay Kota Aur development.

The diagram above (Fig.4) shows the parties involved in ensuring the continuity of the activity and existence of this homestay. All of these parties play its own role in ensuring that the homestay can continue active thus can continue to introduce local traditional culture especial the Malay culture to the tourists thus also preserving the local culture. This is important in the mission of internationalization of matters relating to the culture and customs of Malay culture to the world.

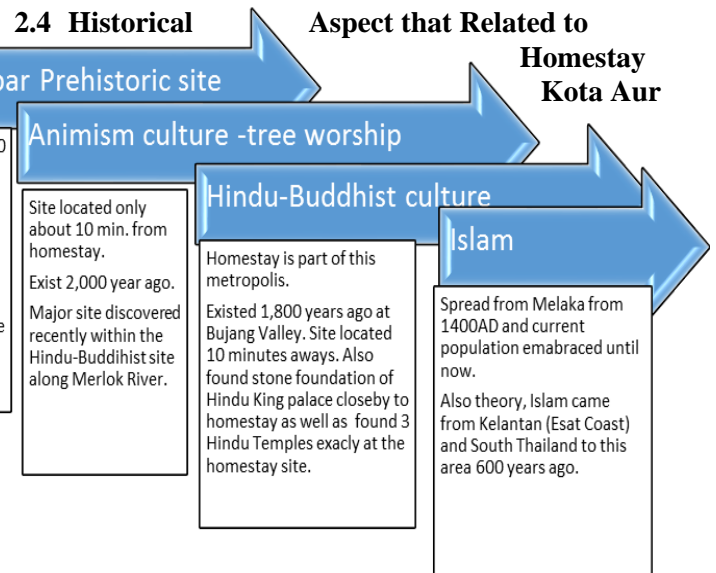


Figure 5: Historical aspect that related to homestay Kota Aur.

The diagram (Fig.5) shows the time frame sequence element that has to do with the rich history of the Kota Aur homestay. It can be said that this village is the oldest village existed in South-East Asia starting with the prehistoric cave twill and cultural animism existed nealy 3,000 years ago as well as

Hindu-Buddhist influences nearly 2,000 years ago and the arrival of Islam spread from Malacca in the 1400 AD. Please note that there was a Neolithic river people live nearby Kota Aur some 6,000 year ago.

Furthermore, the most important assets of homestay Kota Aur is its natural setting in the rural environment (PERDA, 2015). I can say all the tourists came mentioning how impressed they were with the paddy field panorama, the coconut tree horizon and the banana and tropical trees dotted the village landscape. This tropical feels with the throw of paddy field carpet with the rural tourism theme can be compared to the selected rural places visited by the main author starting from in the USA while the author received his tertiary education until the post-working period to down under (R, Talib, 2012). Each of the places has its own rural feeling however with the majority of the visitors coming from the cold region, Kota Aur is definitely giving them different experience and warm atmosphere not found in the origin place of the visitors. See Table 1 below shows the comparison based on the author experience concerning the asset of rural theme exploration tourism.

Table 1: Selected rural theme places visited by author

Year Visit	Place	Type	Rural theme	Cost
1983	Washington Island, WI	Tent	Temperate forest	Low
1984	Wakonda State Park, MO	Tent	Lake -mid continent	Low
1985	Montana/Jesse James legend area	Tent	Semi-desert	Low
1988	Pelee island, Canada	Cottage	Lake Erie Island/ temperate	Mid
2001	Mojave Desert, CA	Tent	Desert	Low
2001	Sequoia National Park cottage, CA	Cottage	Mountain-Giant tree forest	Mid to high
2001	Millerton Lake State Rec. Area, near Fresno, CA	Tent	Mediterranean / Lake	Low
2002	Alpsbach, Austria	Cottage	Alps/ Mountain	Mid to high
2002	Alimini, Otranto, Italy	Cottage / Resort	Mediterranean /forest	Mid to high
2002	Kyneton Resort, VIC, Australia	Cottage / Resort	Bushland	High
2002	The Moorings, Tomakin NSW, Australia	Resort	Bushland/ river	Mid
2003	Rotorua, New Zealand	Resort	Sulfuric landscape	High
2005	Kota Aur, SPU, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia	Home stay	Paddy field, coconut, banana orchard	Very low

3. CONCLUSION

Homestay industry absolutely is a sufficient industrial potential and have a good chance to enhance. The homestay activity has provided a lot of benefits not only to the entrepreneurs but also to the visitors who come as well (PERDA, 2015). Therefore, all parties should engage each other more actively to make full use of the benefits having this homestay in the vicinity. This homestay is a micro entrepreneurial activity but there are many major parties who are increasingly keen to get involved in the homestay industry but seems lost on its role. This seems to be true as certain leaders in the village especially the leaders from the leading political parties not giving fully support with the program. These people show less commitment especially seeing the homestay started generating some success achievements. This is bad if the behaviour keep on continue. However, all the shortcomings that have been identified; for example in the implementation of activities and other matters can be improved to make this homestay continue to receive more visitors.

Apart from PERDA by providing 3 big tents, 50 bicycles, air-conditioned units, water heaters, mobile stage as well as handing over numbers of hybrid coconuts and honey banana trees to the homestay participant; PERDA and Penang's Ministry of Tourism also giving trainings to the participants. It is somehow a good planning where the homestay's centre of activity been using 2 gazebos (1 big and 1 small) and 1 unit of homestay place built with the funding from BJIM USM grant in 2013/2014 under community-university knowledge transfer program.

In addition, the main target is definitely the local people to benefit from the economic, social, environmental and even cultural aspects of the program, especially after their whole energy involving themselves in all the activities. On the other hand, the Government involvement still needs to be taken seriously in their roles, especially in terms of funding and also emphasizing the implementation of policies related to tourism. For example, policies relating to ensure the program can be continued been running smoothly require certain things such as better homestay signage, better promotion, better infrastructure with good quality roads to the houses, forming the martial arts performers as well as targeting the homestay into the UNESCO traditional village category and receiving the island's cruise ships visitors to the homestay; can be achieved soonest possible to see more people can enjoy coming here.

After all, indeed, the home stay program is a good opportunity for local people to engage in entrepreneurial activities. This is simply because the home stay program will help in providing jobs and economic aspects and improving the quality of life of the local population.

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