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Preliminary Investigation of Environmental Practices among Homestay Operators

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Abstract

Environmental management and sustainability have been recent important issues in various industries. Aside from the authorities' effort to improve tourism and hospitality offerings, the hospitality business should take responsibility for their actions and encourage environmental practices, so they could enjoy the benefits and at the same time protect the surroundings. There had been an argument that some hoteliers have not yet adopted environmental practices even in developed countries. While studies on the environmental practices by chained affiliated hotels are well established, yet research on Homestay operators particularly in Malaysia are limited and scarce. Thus, this paper conducted a preliminary investigation using a qualitative approach to understand the current environmental practices phenomenon at Homestay level. Four individuals representing Homestay operators from Homestays in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Perak were interviewed to gain insights on the matters. Consequently, this initial study has raised some issues in the Malaysian context. Thus it is deemed necessary to propose further empirical investigation and expected to be useful for tourism authorities, Homestay operators and local communities.

Keywords: Homestay, Environmental Practices, Barriers.

Introduction

Hospitality and tourism are one of the industries contributing to Malaysia economy with 26.76 million tourist arrivals in 2016 with total receipts of Ringgit Malaysia, RM82.1 billion (Tourism Malaysia Website, 2017). Tourism in Malaysia is the biggest injection to the economy rather than the manufacturing industries (Ibrahim & Abdul Razzaq, 2010). One of the business involvements in hospitality industry especially in most developed tourist attraction is Homestay accommodation (Lin, Lin, & Liu, 2010). Likewise, Homestay tourism was established by the government, along with various new tourism in order to promote community-based products in Malaysia (Ahmad, Jabeen & Khan, 2014). However, most countries that encouraged community-based tourism are risking and deteriorating their natural resources as well as affecting local cultures (Ismail, Hanafiah, Aminuddin & Mustafa, 2016). The efforts of industry expansion and evolution as well as transportation caused

a different type of pollution (Borhan & Ahmed 2012). In the meantime, environmental issues and pollution in Malaysia are not new, as the concept of sustainability has started earlier and getting focus in 1997 after the economic crisis (Yusof & Jamaludin, 2013). Hence, according to the former Director-General of the Department of Environment (DOE), Datuk Dr. Ahmad Kamarulnajib Che Ibrahim, the Environmental Quality Act (1974) which had been used for more than 40 years will be abolished and replaced with new regulation, as environmental problems were now complicated (The Malay Mail Online, 2017).

On the other hand, Doody (2010) asserted that regardless of the rising awareness and publicity to environmental practices concept within various industries, the implementation within hospitality arena has a low appreciation for a number of reasons. While Datuk Kamarlin Ombi, the former Minister of Sabah State Tourism, Culture and Environment Assistant pointed out that Homestay operators must highlight the cleanliness of their homes and the area should be free of rubbish and litter (Daily Express Newspaper Online, 2016), and the awareness in reducing domestic waste through recycling is still low among Malaysians, as reported by the Solid Waste Management and Public Cleansing Corporation (SWCorp Malaysia) in The Star Online (2017). Besides, the topic of Homestays is basically neglected in the tourism literature, as compared to other kinds of commercial home enterprises, especially when it is related to assessing the prospects, challenges, and impacts of a private home for commercial purposes (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen & Duangsaeng, 2015).

On a brighter note, there was an increasing demand by tourists for environment-friendly hotels in Malaysia as stated by former Malaysia Tourism and Culture Minister, Datuk Seri Mohamed Nazri Abdul Aziz, although the supplies of rooms are limited (The Malay Mail Online, 2014). Since Malaysian placed third after Bruneian and Indonesian as Asian travelers who are willing to pay more for environmental friendly accommodation (The Star Online, 2014), thus it is necessary to issue a primary question of how local accommodation providers particularly the Homestay operators relate their operations to environmental protection in order to satisfy the needs of the travelers, and whether the existence of current environmental practices affect their engagement in Homestay activities. Accordingly, investigating and understanding the current environmental practices phenomenon at Homestay level especially in Malaysia context is a continuing concern and deemed necessary in order to further improve our local accommodation services and product.

Literature Review

Overview of Homestay tourism in Malaysia

Generally, the idea of Homestay is any type of private lodging where the guests share common space with the house owner and their family (Lynch, 1999). The Homestay program is apparently identical with the Community Based Tourism program, where the participants could gain money and be employed without leaving to the cities (Jamaludin, Othman & Awang, 2012). Therefore, Homestay has been developed in order to expand cultural tourism product, contribute economically by offering employment opportunities to local communities while improving their qualities of life (Ahmad, Jabeen & Khan, 2014). Besides that, Homestay tourism was introduced to provide opportunities for the tourists to stay with designated local family and involvement with their daily routine as well as learn their cultures (Ariff, Md. Yassin & Masram, 2015). While Homestay

program emphasizes the ecotourism and community-based products and services, Ismail et al. (2016) agree that the guests could get involved with the normal daily activities of their adoptive families. Thus, it is a clear chance for the tourists to socialize with others in learning their culture, lifestyle, and ideas (Subash, 2014).

In Malaysia, Homestay program was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture (MOCAT) (the ministry was later renamed as Ministry of Tourism Malaysia in 2004), with the involvement of another ministry such as the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development of Malaysia (Jamaludin, Othman & Awang, 2012). Homestay settlement is normally located at the coastal area (Mohd Salleh, Othman, Nordin, Mohd Idris & Shukor, 2014). However, contradict with the normality of other Homestay settlement, the first Malaysia Homestay program which officiated in 1988 is located at Temerloh in the state of Pahang and began at Desa Murni Homestay, which consists of five villages namely Desa Murni Sanggang, Desa Murni Sonsang, Desa Murni Kerbau, Desa Murni Ketam and Desa Murni Perangap (Mohd Salleh et al., 2014; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Yusof, Muda, Amin, & Ibrahim, 2013). When the potential of the program was recognized by respective authorities, the Rural Tourism Master Plan 2001 was formulated to promote Homestay program in developing rural community (Ibrahim & Abdul Razzaq, 2010). Therefore, registered Homestays under the Malaysia Homestay Program is bound to follow the standards required by the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia (Ariff, Md. Yassin & Masram, 2015). Essentially, the Homestay program committee is created to manage a group of Homestay homes that are participating in the program (Ibrahim & Abdul Razzaq, 2010). While culture and lifestyle are still well sustained in Malaysia, the Homestay industry is seen as a great potential in the ecotourism sectors. Due to demands from local and international tourists, the Homestay industry in Malaysia has now well developed (Padlee, Ali, Mokhtar & Zulkiffli, 2013) and it requires adequate concern especially in rural areas because the tourists continuously want something that will meet their anticipations (Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2013).

The concept of environmental practices

The activities known as “environmentally friendly” or “green” activities have been introduced in order to preserve and sustain the earth and the environment (Hassan, Hosseinpour, Nezakati & Jofreh, 2015). Individuals started to cultivate environmental practices since in the 1990s, when the Earth ozone layer started to diminish (Yusof & Jamaludin, 2015). In fact, the service industries are being watched over their operations, even though the initial focus by environmentalist were the petroleum industry which obviously giving impact towards the surroundings (Brown, 1996). Accommodation businesses are moving towards environmental practices due to the world trend and organizations are evaluated based on their business ethics, social accountability and socio-economic awareness as their stakeholders are interested with climate changes (Han, Hsu, Lee & Sheu, 2011). Many terms are used to describe environmental practices that considered representing similar definition, such as environmentally friendly practices, green approaches, green practices, best practices, green environmental attributes and sustainable practices (Yusof & Jamaludin, 2015). Most contemporary, particularly in Malaysia Hospitality context, are addressing factors, dimension, and standards of the environmental practices (Lee, Abdul Wahid & Goh, 2013). While other researchers explored on the execution and obstacles from

management perspectives (Kasimu, Zaiton & Hassan, 2012; Samdin, Abdu Bakori & Hassan, 2012; Yusof & Jamaludin, 2013; Yusof & Jamaludin, 2014; Yusof & Jamaludin, 2015). Few studies are known to report fair share results regarding environmental practices from consumer perspectives in Malaysia (Mohd Rasdi, Abdullah, Sukur, & Razak, 2014; Rasidah, Jamal & Sumarjan, 2014; Tan & Yeap, 2012) and it is seen that the focus are mainly on well-established hotels or large chained affiliated accommodations. Together, these writings delivered significant understandings in the context of environmental practices among Hospitality operators, yet with far too little attention has been paid to environmental practices in the Malaysia Homestay business setting.

However, numerous hotels and resorts in Malaysia are not recognized as environmentalist even though they have practiced environmental approaches in their operation (Yusof & Jamaludin, 2014). More to the point, it is acknowledged that the public is not entirely enjoying the benefits of going pro-environmental, although the hospitality sector can be more advanced towards responsible practices by earning certifications (Mohd Rasdi et al., 2014). While increasing demand for the environmental establishment by customers is along with customer's consideration and their interest to buy eco-label products (Han, Hsu, & Sheu, 2010), the customer will likely to purchase eco-label products, consume organic foods and supporting in recycling program (Chan, Hon, Chan & Okumus, 2014). They also require to be notified and guaranteed that their efforts and spending are taken seriously to achieve the true goals of involving in environmental tourism (Tierney, Hunt & Latkova, 2011).

Preliminary Investigation Findings

A qualitative research design was used in this preliminary investigation to explore the current environmental practices phenomenon in Malaysia Homestay, from the Homestay operators' perspectives. It is believed that qualitative data focusing on people's experiences are appropriate to be collected in finding the significances on situations (Marino, 2012). Malaysia Homestay operators were selected based on convenience sampling procedure within February to March 2018. Four individuals from Homestays in Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Perak were approached randomly as Homestay representatives. The aim is to enhance the researcher's understanding of their awareness and initiatives in implementing environmental practices. By using semi-structured interviews as the primary research approach, the researcher began the interviewing process with structured questions related to demographic details, followed by occasional questions (if necessary) for clarification. The interviews were tape-recorded and vary in length from 45 minutes to one hour. Most main questions were informal and open-ended, carried out in a conversational style. The demographic profile of the informers is as in Table 1.

Table 1: Informers' demographic profile

Details	Informers 1	Informers 2	Informers 3	Informers 4
State	Negeri Sembilan	Selangor	Perak	Perak
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Female
Age	46 years old	54 years old	60 years old	68 years old
Length of operation	22 years	15 years	13 years	8 years
Number of rooms offered	2 rooms	1 room	1 room	2 rooms

Positively, all of the informers agree that environmental practices should be enforced at Homestay. Some of the environment-related activities such as gotong-royong (communal services, for instance, building maintenance, streets cleaning, etcetera.), waste separation at source, recycling practices, and landscaping activities were done grounded on the Homestay operators' own initiatives. Furthermore, a list of major criteria and requirements was referred to in this study, adapted from an audit checklist of ASEAN Green Hotel Standard (2016). This checklist is primarily developed as part of ASEAN initiative for certification process in forming a professional green hotel operation, developing an effective environmental plan, establishing green products as well as enhancing human resource and environmental management, which indirectly will allow environment and societies to gain advantages to operational proficiency. Subsequently, the common barriers in implementing environmental program were found and stipulated in Table 2, based on the list of major criteria and requirements.

Table 2: Summary of common barriers in implementing an environmental program at Homestay based on ASEAN Green Hotel Standard (2016) checklist.

Major criteria and requirements		Informer 1	Informer 2	Informer 3	Informer 4	Percentage of Yes (%)	Percentage of No (%)
Standards for ensuring local guide quality and expertise	Plan for raising staff to be aware of the environment? In other words, training.☐	Yes	No	No	No	25	75
	Environmental management plan for Homestay operation	No	No	No	No	0	100
	A monitoring program for environmental management of Homestay☐	No	No	Yes	Yes	50	50
Collaboration with the community local organizations	Awareness raising programs for the local community on environmental protection☐	No	No	No	No	0	100
Human resource development	Provision of training programs for operation and management staff on environmental management	No	No	No	No	0	100
Solid waste management	Encourage the involvement of Homestay guest in reuse, recycling, and waste separation	No	No	No	No	0	100
Energy efficiency	i. Introduce energy saving techniques and/or energy saving technology and equipment for Homestay to reduce energy consumption☐	No	No	No	No	0	100
	ii. Installation of meters or equipment to monitor energy consumption	No	No	No	No	0	100
	iii. Encourage the involvement of Homestay guest in energy saving	No	No	Yes	Yes	50	50
Water efficiency and water quality	i. Introduce water saving techniques and/or use of water saving technology and equipment to reduce water consumption☐	No	Yes	No	No	25	75
	ii. Conduct regular maintenance procedure for water saving equipment	No	No	No	No	0	100
	iii. Encourage the involvement of Homestay guest in water saving	No	No	Yes	Yes	50	50
Air quality management (indoor and outdoor)	Designation of smoking and a non-smoking area☐	Yes	No	No	No	25	75
Wastewater treatment and management☐	i. Mechanisms to prevent water contamination and reduce wastewater generation☐	Yes	No	No	No	25	75
	ii. Promote the use of recyclable or grey water in operation, in other words watering trees	Yes	No	No	No	25	75
	iii. Conduct wastewater treatment☐	No	No	No	No	0	100

In relation to environmental programs setups or campaign, it is recognized that people in Eastern countries were less aware of environmental practices as compared to those in Western countries, where awareness was raised since a young age (Chan, 2008). Lack of awareness is typically found in the case of small businesses of the hotel sector, unlike in the industrial sector (Bagur-Femenias, Celma & Patau, 2016). Based on Table 2 specifically under the criteria of standards for ensuring local guide quality and expertise, all informers are 100 percent agreed that up to date, there is no environmental management plan at Homestay level. During the personal interview session, Informer 2 who resides at Selangor mentioned that he never aware of any promotion related to environmental practices at their Homestay setting. There is also no program held in raising the awareness of the local community on environmental protection as well as no provision of training programs. Even though the society's environmental awareness was emphasized as high primacy in the Seventh Malaysia Plan, general public awareness on environmental practices is still crucially lacking due to their environment-unfriendly behavior, such as littering and overconsumption (Kasim, 2007). Even though it was not collective, it was found that most of the informers had no plan to hold environmental awareness training among their staff, thus causing a possible barrier in introducing an effective system to successfully implement environmental practices.

Additionally, the informers also agreed 100 percent that they did not encourage the Homestay guests to be involved in reuse, recycling, and waste separation. However, informer 1 who resides at a Homestay in Negeri Sembilan told that waste separation (wet and dry) are normally executed by operators, since the Malaysia government has made it compulsory to separate solid waste at source, beginning 1 September 2015 and enforced the practice in Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya, Johor, Melaka, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Kedah and Perlis (Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government official website, 2018). This is a good practice because solid waste needs are handled systematically in order to avoid other problems such as high operation costs, environmental pollution, land scarcity and many more (Sheau-Ting, Sin-Yee & Weng-Wai, 2016). Moreover, over the last decade, numerous and diverse systems are implemented for food waste separation for later biological treatment especially in European countries (Bernstad, 2014). Nevertheless, based on responses by informer 1 who normally practices waste separation, the related authority is unable to collect garbage in their area due to the remoteness of their homes. Therefore, waste collection was done by sending all the garbage to a centralized disposal location set by the authority and this caused the operators to incur some cost. This becomes a barrier in implementing systematic waste management, which also faced by Informer 3 and 4 who resides at a Homestay in Perak. In contrast, Informer 2 from a Homestay in Selangor had no problem with waste collection due to their village location which is accessible from the main road. Consequently, poorly managed disposal sites lead to open burning of solid wastes and become one of air pollution factors in Malaysia (Afroz, Hassan & Ibrahim, 2003). This is currently happening and degrading the outdoor air quality of Homestays as during the interview, all informers pointed that small-scale open burning activity is seldom practiced at their accommodation setting due to lack of monitoring and unaware that the hazardous smoke would cause pollution. Commonly, in relation to indoor air quality management, there is no provision of space for smoking and non-smoking area at Homestays, except for the village where informer 1 resides, which clearly displays signage of no smoking at their community hall.

In the meantime, even though Homestay guests are not involved in reuse, recycling, and waste separation, it was notified during the interview session by all informers that recycling practices were encouraged among Homestay operators because it is acknowledged as common practices. This is included as part of their regularly conducted communal activity. It seems that practitioners' internal factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and norms are considered to be key bases to induce household recycling activities (Saphores & Nixon, 2014). However, the informers would be glad if there is specific Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (3R) bin provided in the Homestay area. Providing recycling bins and public education most likely will promote source separation and recycling programs as well as enhance the source separation and recycling services among public (Babaeia, Alavia, Goudarzia, Teymouric, Ahmadie & Rafiee, 2015).

Whereas, in terms of water and electricity or energy saving practices, it is considered an ecological behavior because of the contribution towards environmental protection (Chan et al., 2014). As energy is a variable cost, a reduction in consumption will cause indirect cost savings for hotels (Jackson, 2010), so organizations may incur cost reduction by implementing energy savings, waste reduction, recycling and lower packaging and transportation costs (Shairullizan KamalulAriffin, Nabiha Abdul Khalid & Abdul Wahid, 2013). However, based on the checklist stipulated in Table 2, all informers agree that there is no introduction to energy saving techniques or energy saving technology and equipment to reduce energy consumption as well as no installation of meters or equipment to monitor energy consumption. Likewise, all informers informed that they did not conduct regular maintenance procedure for water saving equipment nor conducting wastewater treatment at their Homestays. Also, most of the informers had no mechanisms to prevent water contamination and reduce wastewater generation. Three out of four informers agreed that they did not promote the use of recyclable or grey water in operation, for example in watering trees at their homes. Hence, it can be said that inexistence of water and energy saving techniques, technology as well as equipment to reduce water and energy consumption in daily operation became a barrier in implementing an effective environmental practices among informers. More to the point, the hesitation of all informers to notify their guests to implement electricity and water saving practices has also become a barrier in educating their guests of environmental practices. This is because, the informers were thinking that guests might feel unfavorable to the requests of saving water and electricity usage, as well as believing that guests have made payment for the stay, therefore they are eligible to fully utilize the facilities and utilities provided. This is in contrast to the strategic and successful environmental practices as hotels need to convey their environmental goals to their guests by educating and actively engaging them in order to use resources efficiently (Gabarda-Mallorquí, Fraguell & Ribas, 2018).

Limitation, Future Research, and Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature of environmental practices within Homestay accommodation business setting. The findings discussed important contributions to the understanding of current environmental practices among Homestay operators and their barriers to implementation. Studies on environmental practices were quite common within large chained and established accommodation business. However, this primary investigation related to environmental

practices at Homestay level as medium size type of accommodation has expanded the context. Although there were numerous studies which considered various factors affecting implementation of environmental practices, implementation barriers in Homestay setting are very rarely studied and can be considered as one new contribution. The fact that it was introduced in this study brought something new to the literature that could be pick-up by other researchers in future studies.

Moreover, tourism authorities and operators that handled Homestay program can gain valuable insights from this preliminary investigation. By investigating the current environmental practices and outlining the potential implementation barriers, the tourism authorities may look for diverse solutions in overcoming these issues. As the natures of Homestays are different from hotels, the evaluation standards for hotels would be incompatible to be used at Homestays (Hu, Wang & Wang 2012). Possibly, the authorities specifically policymakers may come out with appropriate guidelines, standards or regulations specifically for Homestay to enforce environmental practice in order to promote cost-saving, preserve the natural environment, and prevent resources in rural area from destruction. Other than regulations, it is important to promote awareness in small and medium-sized (SME) tourism companies (Bagur-Femenias, Celma & Patau, 2016). This study also contributes to the development of Homestay environmental program from the perspective of Homestay operators. Homestay operators need to concentrate more on their knowledge on environmental practices that can benefit them and the guests. Overcoming the barriers stipulated in this study by attending seminars or holding workshops may also aid the operators as a competitive advantage in promoting the Homestays and attracting tourists to stay at the community-based type of lodging.

As with other research study accomplishments, this preliminary investigation has its fair share of limitations as well. Primarily, research of this nature in Homestay business setting is still at its early stages in Malaysia. Thus, there is an insufficiency of literature on this field at home compared to those abroad. It can be said that the preliminary investigation was much dependent on existing literature from established overseas journals and publications. Consequently, future research should conduct mixed method type of study to explore more related to the relevancy of Malaysia Homestay operators in implementing environmental practices from the perspective of the various relevant authorities and Homestay guests as external stakeholders. Besides, as personal interviews were conducted for this study, generalizations about the results usually cannot be made because small samples were chosen and random sampling methods are not used. Therefore, more respondents should be approach and targeting a wider Homestay business setting, as this kind of accommodation business is available in different states which might provide more reliable and valid findings.

In conclusion, this preliminary study points that even though some of the environment-related activities were done on Homestay operators' own initiatives, they are still lacking in many ways in operation and management. Since all of the informers agree that environmental practices should be implemented at Homestay, it is necessary to investigate their failure in conducting the activities and consider it as common barriers in successful implementation. For instance, in order to raise environmental knowledge and awareness among Small Medium Hotels, it is important to

provide technical assistance in implementation, exchanging experience through sessions and organizing training or seminars within the industry (Chan, 2011). Hence, if there are no training programs held at Homestay level, knowledge lacking becomes barriers among the operators, causing mishandling in environmental practices and improper system in managing water, energy, and waste may lead to a surplus of spending.☐

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