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## Community-Based Homestay Service Quality, Visitor Satisfaction, and Behavioral Intention

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### Abstract

The homestay program is regarded as a community-based tourism product by many nations. Despite the enormous growth of the homestay program in Malaysia, the industry faces numerous new challenges. A moderate level of service quality was one of the main factors contributing to their poor performance. A descriptive research design using a quantitative approach was opted to reach more respondents. The questionnaire was validated based on the content validity and reliability through exploratory factor analysis technique (EFA). This paper confirmed the relationship between community-based homestay service quality and behavioral intention and the moderating roles of satisfaction.

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*Keywords:* Homestay; service quality; satisfaction; behavioral intention

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### 1. Background of the study

In recent years, community-based tourism has been considered as a tool for promoting the development of some economically and socially depressed rural areas in many nations (Chambers, 2014; Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, &

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Zulkifly, 2013; Leigh & Blakely, 2013; Liu, 2006; Pina & Delfa, 2005). The majority of countries promoted the community-based tourism at the expense of natural resources and local cultures. This is why the concept of community-based tourism depends fundamentally on the unique products available in the area. Nevertheless, similarly to the urban tourism concept, the appeal of community-based tourism lies in the range and quality of the available attractions and the supporting facilities such as the accommodation (Mckercher, 2001).

The government of Malaysia has been transferring existing residences into home stay facilities to generate extra income for rural dwellers since 1988. In fact, the total home stay programme revenue between January and June 2012 was RM 8,710,526 million, which was an increase of 45.2 percent compared with the same period the previous year (BorneoPost, 2013). This data clearly shows that participants in the homestay programme have been able to earn a substantial income, and the activity has helped to generate more economic activities at the local level. However, despite the enormous growth of the homestay program in Malaysia, the industry faces numerous arising challenges, due to external and internal factors in its business environment that affect the program's performance and efficiency. The external factors include stiff competition from neighbouring countries (Indonesia and Thailand) and continuous uncertainties in the hospitality industry life-cycle (Malaysia, 2011). Besides that, the homestay operators have to deal with internal challenges that are related to efficient homestay management. The inefficient homestay management also contributes to their poor performance in terms of low levels of service quality and moderate levels of average occupancy rates (Razalli, 2008).

Homestay tourism emphasises on the ecotourism and community-based products and services, in which visitors stay with the foster families and get involved with the normal daily activities in order to experience the lifestyle and local culture. Similar to other services, visitor perceptions of the service quality are essential for the homestay program. Receiving excellent service will reinforce the loyalty of current visitors and increase the prospect of attracting new ones (Albacete-Saez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Lloréns-Montes, 2007; Erdil & Kalkan, 2010; Jamaluddin, Hanafiah, & Zulkifly, 2013). Furthermore, the dissemination information of a destination could be strongly related to the features of the service offered, where the visitors are allowed to enjoy contributing to the host's surroundings or the tasks, customs and lifestyle of the local inhabitants (Sumarjan et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, insufficient attention was given into meeting the core requirements of rural tourism consumers, the diversity of services, customer satisfaction and behavioural intention. Further problems arise as those who are engaged in homestay programs are lacking in marketing knowledge that is indispensable for a successful business. Majority of the homestay entrepreneurs failed to meet the requirements of consumers in a permanently changing competitive environment. For that reason, they should focus on the service quality that will influence the satisfaction, which, in turn, has an impact on a visitor's intention to re-patronize. In practical terms, raising tourist satisfaction could improve a destination's competitive positioning and facilitate understanding of which factors are creating higher customer loyalty. Therefore, it is crucial for the homestay entrepreneurs to understand the environment of the homestay business and the current state of services marketing in order to be successful. Therefore, this paper seeks empirically to investigate the relationship between homestay service quality, visitor satisfaction and future behavioural intention.

## **2. Malaysian homestay program**

The homestay program is a tourism product that has been given special emphasis by the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Tourism. The Malaysian homestay program can be regarded as a rural, cultural and community-based tourism product which was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia in 1988 in an effort to diversify the tourism products through the provision of alternative accommodation for tourists (Malaysia, 2007). This program was officially launched in 1995 at several locations including Desa Murni, Kerdu, Temerloh and Pahang. The program falls under the Rural Tourism Master Plan in 2011 which was developed to encourage the participation of the rural community in the tourism sector.

Malaysian homestays offer a uniqueness that differentiates them from other types of accommodation. They are located within a rural environment, have a limited number of rooms/beds for guests, are equipped with essential services and are architecturally consistent with the surrounding styles. Through this program, tourists will enjoy a relatively cheap vacation that is different. The tourists stay with a host family that participates in the program and

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