

Explore the Factors Affecting the Operational Costs of Homestays in Kundasang, Sabah During Pandemik Covid-19

Syarifah Hanum Ali^{1*}, Tshin Lip Vui², Kamaliah @ Kamaliah Sulimat³

¹ Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

² Politeknik Kota Kinabalu (PKK) No. 4, Jalan Politeknik KKIP Barat Kota Kinabalu Industrial Park 88460 Kota Kinabalu Sabah, Malaysia

³ Politeknik Tawau Sabah KM36, Jalan Balung, 91009 Tawau, Sabah, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: Syarifah Hanum Ali, Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Email: syarifahhanum.ali@ums.edu.my

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Abstract: Tourism is one of the industries most affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. The status of the homestay programme will be maintained for the period of the Movement Control Order (MCO), as declared by the Malaysian Prime Minister, from March 18, 2020, until an undefined date. According to the study, tourism is one of the worst-affected industries in Kundasang, Sabah. This study seeks to identify the internal and external challenges intrinsic to the Kundasang homestay. Next, the research was to collect recommendations for addressing the community's problems. Qualitative research investigates a social or human situation and is utilised as an inquiry procedure for understanding based on diverse methodological traditions. Twenty-three sources have been questioned. According to the data acquired through informant interviews, the most critical factor was medical necessities. Many homestay businesses believe that government and commercial entities will be able to alleviate and resolve the obstacles they experience. After the pandemic outbreak, everything changed. Medical requirements, labour, utility, maintenance, and miscellaneous are all considerations for homestay enterprises. Several ideas for enhancement offered after this study will indirectly aid the tourism management body in improving the tourism sector in Sabah, particularly homestays in Kundasang.

Keywords: *Homestay Entrepreneurs, Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Tourism Sector*

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1. Introduction

Unknown cause pneumonia was identified in Wuhan, China, on December 31, 2019, and reported to the WHO National Office in China. As of early January 2020, China had hospitalised 41 people with a proven coronavirus infection (COVID-19) [1]. Although the virus spread

swiftly in Wuhan, political leaders in other parts of the world initially ignored it (although intelligence services issued warnings of potentially catastrophic events; [2]. Wuhan was isolated (a combination of provincial and local quarantine procedures), and the number of cases across China stabilised at around 80,000 by mid-February [3]. At

Corresponding Author: Syarifah Hanum Ali, Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Jalan UMS, 88400, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia. Email: syarifahhanum.ali@ums.edu.my +60176790923

the time, worldwide air transport had spread the virus to all continents, and by mid-March 2020, it had afflicted 146 countries, including Malaysia.

Kundasang is a town in Sabah, Malaysia's Ranau district. Most people are Dusun, with some Chinese. It's 6 km from Kinabalu National Park and 12 km from Ranau city and known for its weekly vegetable market. It's close to Mount Kinabalu and has beautiful views. Locals run most enterprises here. 215 homestays are in Kundasang, Sabah. This study examined the pandemic's consequences on Dusun homestay owners, who own everything. This study is expected to guide Sabah's tourist 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, 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. Improvement suggestions from this study may help the tourism management body expand Sabah's tourism sector, primarily homestays in Kundasang.

2. Research Objectives

This study identifies internal and external difficulties at the Kundasang homestay. The study then gathered recommendations for improving community issues.

3. Research Problem

Tourism is one of COVID-19's hardest-hit industries. The homestay programme will continue till the end of the Movement Control Order (MCO), declared by the Malaysian prime minister on 18 March 2020. During the MCO, establishments 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 beliefs in unproductive circumstances [4]. The involvement of all

parties in a successful economic plan 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 revenue 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 must spend some money on homestay maintenance and utility bills.

According to Ismail [5], homestay entrepreneurs face many challenges in managing their businesses. One of the challenges is a cost increase. Homestay entrepreneurs are having difficulties maintaining their business operations without income from tenants. Some homestay entrepreneurs own two or more homestays simultaneously. They cannot keep their business operating costs and are unable to pay salaries to their employees and choose to end up the company. Sarah Eian and Brett Matsumoto [6] stated that most homestay 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.

Homestay communities have distinct issues. This study investigates factors affecting homestay businesses and gives

their recommendations to relevant parties. This study's findings may help understand the elements that influence the cost increase of homestay management, collect suggestions, and propose associated parties. During the epidemic, they could guide the collaborative development of the homestay industry and provide rules for homestay entrepreneurs.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Tourism Sector

Globally, tourism-dependent countries have suffered enormous economic losses due to COVID-19. International visitor arrivals have declined by 20% to 30% compared to 2019 predictions, losing \$300 to \$450 billion in worldwide tourism revenues (exports) or roughly one-third of the \$1.5 trillion generated globally [7]. Numerous countries suffer more severe economic consequences than others due to their high reliance on the sector. Eight of the top ten destinations for foreign tourists, including France, Spain, the U.S., China, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Germany, the U.K., and Thailand, were the hardest hit by COVID-19, indicating that tourism has a significant economic impact on those countries. According to current forecasts, Asia will see the most important travel and tourism revenue loss in 2020, with China leading the way [8].

The global epidemic has taken a significant toll on local tourism players, causing Malaysia's lifestyle and economy to unravel, according to the president of the Malaysian Tour and Travel Agents Association. Malaysia's COVID-19 has slowed Malaysia's GDP growth by 0.8 to 1.2 percentage points, costing RM 17.3 billion. The economy slowed in January as COVID-19 swept across China and Asia. The COVID-19 outbreak, coupled with the Movement Control Order, significantly hampered Sabah's tourism industry (MCO). Chinese and South Korean travellers make up 40% and 27% of Sabah's international visits. Twenty-six per cent had lost their businesses, 34% were on unpaid leave, and 32% of tourism-related jobs had to be cut. He also noted that most companies lost money during the MCO phase due to a lack of visitors. Due to lack of money, businesses can't pay staff or cover costs.

But because of the disease outbreak, many countries, including Malaysia, have put entry bans and border

restrictions. This has made what was once a good year for many in the tourism industry hard. Yap Lip Seng, the Malaysian Hotel Association (MAH) CEO, says that hotels could lose RM3.3 billion in room revenue from January to June [9]. Malaysia, meanwhile, hopes that a quick recovery in tourism will make people want to come back. The hardest thing will be to win back the trust of both domestic and international tourists. One way to do this is through the "Clean and Safe Malaysia" campaign. The goal is to give hotels that follow government rules a seal of approval. Furthermore, airlines, hotels, transportation companies, and other travel providers need to work together and offer pre-packaged trips. This would cut costs for both businesses and tourists and make the country's tourism industry more stable. The tourism industry in Malaysia is expected to slowly get better by the end of the year and level off by June 2021 [10].

Malaysia has a lot of tourists, and tourism is now the country's second-largest source of income. There are many kinds of tourism, and community-based tourism is one of them. The community is crucial in managing how people move around and how accommodation works in a destination. Most tourists go to rural parts of Malaysia. Tourists who come here to enjoy the beauty of nature like the quiet, peaceful atmosphere and being away from the busy city. So, tourists are drawn to villages and other rural areas. Ecotourism, also known as tourist environment, is tourism in rural areas. Tourists want to enjoy the beauty of nature, sea flora and fauna, and village life in terms of food, activities, festivals, etc. They also want to stay in the village [11].

4.2 Homestay Entrepreneurs

Most of the time, tourism is linked to being an entrepreneur. Young people, especially women, are encouraged by the government to start their businesses in the tourism sector. Entrepreneurs can look into the science and study tour that has been done in terms of laws, the type of financial support from the government, support agencies, business strategy to develop sustainable growth, etc. As you can see, most women and young people take part in the homestay

programme. Because of this, the government is making sure that people who run homestays have enough business skills to be competitive and deal with the problems and challenges that are coming [12].

In Malaysia, the homestay programme dates to the early 1970s in the "drifter enclave" of Kg. Cherating Lama in Pahang, where a local lady named Mak Long gave breakfast, dinner, and shelter to drifters/hippies [13]. Small villages, known as 'kampongs,' adopted a similar setup to take advantage of domestic and international tourists wanting a unique travel experience, i.e. to learn about and experience the culture through homestays [14]. Homestay development is becoming a significant government priority in Malaysia. Rural tourism is considered a way to promote the country and involve the locals. Communities can develop Homestay without changing infrastructure by exploiting existing natural resources, culture, and legacy. Homestay creates cash for the neighbourhood and helps the government fight poverty and create jobs.

4.3 Standard Operating Procedure

A standard operating procedure (SOP) is a specific technique for documenting routine or repetitive organisational procedures. An operation-specific practice defines the activities required to complete tasks following industry regulations, provincial legislation, or even a company's specified 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 practices in all industries with quality standards. SOP development and implementation are critical components of an effective quality system because they educate individuals on proper job performance, ensure consistency of products or end-quality results, and credibility. "SOP" is a term that appears in various administrative and management documents such as protocols, guidelines, workbooks, and laboratory operating procedures [15]. SOPs apply to the entity or facility whose activities help that entity maintain its quality management and quality assurance processes while complying with applicable government regulations.

Management, preferably the direct supervisor, should evaluate and reinforce the use of SOPs. SOPs must be easily accessible for reference in the work areas of those operating, either in hard copy or electronic format; otherwise, they serve no purpose [16].

SOPs document routine or systematic procedures in an organisation. It describes the steps that need to be taken to complete tasks according to industry standards, provincial laws, or the business standards of a company. SOPs are step-by-step production line techniques used to make things and teach workers. The SOP defines all quality-regulated industries' practices. SOPs are vital to a quality system because they educate employees on correct job performance and assure product consistency and credibility. "SOP" appears in protocols, guides, workbooks, and lab operating procedures [15]. SOPs apply to a business or facility whose actions aid in quality management, quality assurance, and compliance with government laws. Direct supervisors should assess and enforce SOPs. For SOPs to be valid, they must be easy to find in hard copy or electronic form so that people can use them at work [16].

5. Research Methodology

Qualitative research seeks participant meaning [17]. Creswell [18] defines qualitative research as an investigation of a social or human problem based on distinct methodological traditions. In this study, 23 informants were interviewed; two to three repeated the same data. The data would then be clustered to explain All interviews, observations, documents, journal entries, and field notes will be transcribed before data analysis. Transcribing helps researchers understand the data [19]. Interviews, observations, documents, and journal entries will be saved and protected.

5.1 Research Finding 1

The homestay program appears to have benefited the local community and provided additional income to participants. This is 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 homestays dropped to 0% - 15%. As mentioned above, 23 informants were interviewed, and there were only five critical factors after the data clustering process. The factors are shown in Table 1.0

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

According to the data collected through informants' interviews, medical essentials rank the highest factor among the five. According to the data collected from the informants, medical conditions included pills and drugs, a first aid kit, traditional medicine, and doctor consultation fees. This is a new factor among all the elements because medical essentials become an essential factor during the outbreaks of pandemics and cause severe 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 costly during the pandemic. But we have no choice, and we must buy. The government also forces us to buy the hand sanitiser and thermometer on our premises, and we must buy also. We bought this to our premise, and it will become our cost, increasing our cost”. Most informants mentioned that medical essential is a critical factor influencing cost increase.

According to table 1.0, emergency factors rank lowest among all the elements. According to the data collected, the miscellaneous is included transport, facilities,

complimentary, and food wastage. All sub-costs are concluded into various because there is no significant part of the cost, and it's not happened frequently. However, it has to count as a part of the cost because it occurs under some circumstances. 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 thrown”.

According to Sarah Eian and Brett Matsumoto [20], before the outbreak of COVID – 19, the main factors that influenced homestay entrepreneurs were operational cost and Maintenance. However, after the pandemic outbreak, the priority cost changed, and this is the most valuable information obtained during the interview session with the informants.

5.2 Research Finding 2

The hospitality industry was one of the most affected sectors during the Covid 19 pandemic, mainly due to international and domestic travel restrictions during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. Many homestay entrepreneurs hope that the government and private agencies can 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 managing and covering the daily operating expenses of the premise. Some entrepreneurs own more than two premises, which is a heavy burden. The tenants have no income, but they have to pay many 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 regular. 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 reduce the rules for those who completed two vaccination doses 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. Recommendation and Discussion

Khan and Hashim [21] say that after COVID-19, the tourism industry needs to develop a well-thought-out, long-term business plan based on global awareness to save the companies, the industry, and, ultimately, jobs. They suggested the following ways to deal with resurgences to keep the Malaysian tourism industry going:

- Throughout history, tourism has been able to bounce back from disasters and crises on a local and global scale in a compelling way. It was often possible because local, state, and national governments worked together on stimulus packages and incentives like tax breaks and wage subsidies.
- Because the effects of COVID-19 are unexpected in both time and space, things won't go back to how they were before the pandemic. Instead, we'll have to get used to the new normal [22]. Because of this, tourism destinations, businesses, and sub-sectors will have to change to fit the new measures. Hamzah [23] says that the Malaysian government should think about making a recovery plan for the next one to two years. The program should focus on building capacity and digitising tourism. The first is to stress how important it is to retrain human capital resources in hygiene, safety, telling stories, and providing good service.
- Social media platforms are always thought to be essential for fighting the pandemic and bringing the industry back to life. In particular, using social media can be a great way to spread good vibes and change how people feel about affected destinations and tourism businesses because of the pandemic [24]. Prioritizing social media and other digital platforms (like blogs) as a

source of ideas could help the tourism industry get back on its feet faster after the pandemic [25-26]. Local governments and government agencies could use these videos to show how local projects and efforts can help others get ready for the challenging future of the tourism industry after the pandemic [27-28].

- The biggest challenge for the tourism and hospitality industry after the pandemic will be to win back the trust of both international and domestic tourists. So, a "clean and safe destination" could be one way to win back visitors' trust. This could be done by giving certification to tourism operators (like hotels, homestays, etc.) that follow the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the relevant authorities [29]. Through global, national, and local certification programmes or campaigns, the hospitality industry must also quickly show that its safety, health, and hygiene practices are in line with COVID-19 [30].

- Lastly, to make the tourism industry more stable and fairer, teachers, researchers, and students in the field must first understand the causes of the problem. Instead of keeping going the way they are, they should set up a critical pedagogy to reform and change the industry. To prepare the country's current and future leaders for what will happen after the pandemic, they need to have an essential conversation about letting go of the "old normal of tourism" and learning what might be fairer and more sustainable [31-32].

7. Conclusion

From the analysis and evaluation that have been discussed in the previous sections, we can see that the homestay entrepreneur went through a lot of big changes and had to deal with a lot of big problems when the pandemic started. Before the pandemic broke out, people who ran homestays worried about the costs of running and maintaining them. But after the pandemic broke out, everything changed. Homestay business owners worry about medical needs, labour, utilities, maintenance, and other things. This is a

discovery, and the results of this study are very interesting. Is hoping that the relevant agencies will act and find ways to help homestay business owners keep their businesses going during the pandemic. The research won't stop here; it will move on to look for a long-term solution and come up with new plans for homestay entrepreneurs after the pandemic.

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