

# Homestay Business Sustainability in Selangor and Perlis: Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) Perspectives

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## Abstract

This paper examines the pivotal roles played by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) in assisting homestay business owners to sustain their operations, focusing on the context of Perlis and Selangor, Malaysia. Homestays represent a significant component of the tourism industry, offering unique cultural experiences and contributing to local economies. However, ensuring the sustainability of homestay businesses requires concerted efforts from government agencies such as MOTAC. Through a comprehensive review of the literature and empirical evidence, this study elucidates the multifaceted roles undertaken by MOTAC in supporting homestay business owners. These roles include cultural preservation, community engagement, promotion of responsible tourism practices, and policy support. MOTAC organises training programs, workshops, and seminars to enhance the skills and knowledge of homestay business owners, promoting sustainable practices. Furthermore, MOTAC collaborates with local communities to preserve cultural heritage and foster social cohesion while advocating for supportive policies and regulations that create an enabling environment for homestay businesses. By interviewing six MOTAC officials from the Selangor and Perlis regions, this paper highlights MOTAC's interventions in enhancing the sustainability of homestay businesses. This paper also highlights the issues and challenges MOTAC faces in ensuring the sustainability of homestay operations. By fostering environmental stewardship, cultural authenticity, community involvement, and responsible tourism, MOTAC plays a critical role in ensuring the long-term viability and resilience of the homestay sector in Perlis and Selangor. The findings underscore the importance of holistic and collaborative approaches in supporting sustainable tourism development, with MOTAC serving as a critical facilitator in this endeavour.

**Keywords:** homestay, kampung stay, Malaysia, MOTAC, sustainability, tourist

## 1. Introduction

The homestay industry in Asia is a vibrant and growing sector that offers unique cultural experiences for tourists. This is particularly true in Southeast Asia, where homestays provide tourists with an authentic cultural experience, allowing them to live with a local family and participate in selected activities. They can immerse themselves in the local culture by staying in a homestay, meeting and interacting with locals, and learning about the community's customs and traditions (Cultural Travel, 2024). For instance, in Brunei Darussalam, homestays like Baitul Wajihah and Mukim Pengalan provide diverse homestay options, showcasing unique features of each home. These homestays aim to offer tourists a rich historical experience, attracting them with their cultural authenticity and variety of accommodations (Heyprakhon & Verapreyagura, 2014). Brunei Tourism is actively enhancing its capabilities by expanding its workforce and expertise, which includes engaging international tourism consultants. With a well-defined strategy and realistic yet ambitious objectives, Brunei Tourism is dedicated to promoting its untapped opportunities in the fiercely competitive regional tourism landscape. A recent rebranding effort has been undertaken to establish a unique identity for Brunei within the dynamic regional tourism sector. Collaborating closely with local and international industry stakeholders and media, Brunei Tourism is focused on positioning its country as a distinctive, captivating, and unexplored travel destination in Asia (Imagine Brunei, 2018). The government's strategic planning aims to double the number of tourist arrivals and enhance the sustainability of existing tourism products while developing new quality offerings like nature tourism, bird watching, and community-based tourism.

Another homestay industry destination is Indonesia, particularly in places like KohYaonoi Homestay in Koh Yao, Pang Nga District, which exemplifies the ASEAN homestay standard. These homestays provide a prototype for quality accommodation, focusing on self-evaluation-based standards to ensure high service and cultural immersion for tourists (Hospitality Service in Asia, January 17, 2024). The tourism industry in Indonesia plays a significant role in the country's economy, contributing substantially to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In 2019, tourism directly accounted for 5.0% of Indonesia's GDP, showcasing its importance as a significant economic driver. Despite facing challenges like the impact of COVID-19, which led to a substantial decline in international arrivals, Indonesia has been steadily growing its tourism sector. The country recorded a 74.8% decline in international arrivals in 2020, but domestic tourism emerged as a key driver, accounting for 84% of tourism expenditure in Indonesia. The government's focus on diversifying the tourism sector, especially by merging the Ministry of Tourism with the Creative Economy Agency, highlights the importance of adapting to changing circumstances and leveraging various tools like digital technology and virtual reality to enhance the sector's resilience and competitiveness (Hospitality Service in Asia, January 17, 2024).

Malaysia also offers various homestay establishments that epitomise the country's tourism. These homestays provide an exceptional opportunity for tourists to experience the local culture and hospitality firsthand. Since their advent, homestays have been wholly committed to giving tourists a home-away experience. Homestay businesses are strategically situated in the heart of diverse landscapes, providing convenient access to urban and rural environments (Asean Homestay Standard, 2016). In Malaysia, homestays are considered a community-based tourism approach founded in rural areas, with the government encouraging their development as part of rural development programs (Muniati et al., 2023). Homestays allow residents to supplement their household income and boost income revitalisation for underdeveloped regions in Malaysia. The homestay program created in rural parts of Malaysia is one of the country's promising strategies, with rural tourism being one of the most developed sectors of the travel industry in Malaysia (Muniati et al., 2023).

These establishments serve as gateways to the country's rich history, bushland, and warm-hearted people. They offer a unique opportunity for guests to experience the local culture and way of life while enjoying the comfort and hospitality of a home away from home. With a focus on providing personalised service and creating a welcoming atmosphere, homestay businesses have become the preferred option for tourists seeking a more authentic and immersive experience. Whether exploring the city or the countryside, homestay businesses offer a convenient and affordable option for tourists looking to experience the best of the country (Asean Homestay Standard, 2016). These establishments' accommodations vary from traditional Malay village homes to contemporary urban structures. Above accommodation, homestay establishments expose tourists to authentic links with their communities, including experiencing traditional cuisines, cultural festivals, and village-based activities. Whether it is discovering the beautiful scenery of Sabah highlands, wandering through the ancient alleys of Georgetown, or relaxing on the white sandy beaches of Lumut (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013), Malaysia offers a variety of destinations to explore. However, this study will focus on two distinct Malaysian states, Selangor and Perlis, each with unique characteristics, cultures, and attractions. The homestay offerings in Selangor and Perlis exhibit different characteristics. The uniqueness of homestays in Selangor and Perlis as tourist attractions lies in their authentic cultural experiences and diverse activities. In Selangor, Homestay Haji Dorani provides tourists with a chance to immerse themselves in the local lifestyle, participate in traditional activities like cultural dances, and enjoy musical performances. On the other hand, Perlis offers Homestay Teluk Ketapang, where they can engage in activities such as making traditional handicrafts, learning about local customs, and enjoying outdoor experiences. Both homestays showcase the rich cultural heritage of Malaysia, allowing tourists to live like locals, savour traditional dishes, and witness the unique traditions of each community (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013; Perlis Homestay, Feb 5, 2019).

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) plays a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of homestay businesses in Malaysia. MOTAC is responsible for overseeing and regulating the homestay industry, promoting community-based tourism, and supporting the development of sustainable tourism practices. By working closely with homestay business owners, MOTAC aims to enhance the quality of homestay experiences, promote local communities' economic opportunities, and safeguard tourism's cultural and environmental aspects (Supian, 2023). According to Idris (2014), MOTAC is responsible for overseeing the official homestay program, known as a cluster homestay, which provides tourists with the opportunity to stay with selected families, interact with them, experience their daily lives, and learn about the culture and lifestyle of rural communities. Additionally, MOTAC governs and enforces homestay registration, ensuring compliance with specific criteria such as location, basic amenities, cleanliness, and insurance coverage. The ministry conducts inspections in collaboration with other bodies like the

Ministry of Health, Tourism Malaysia, and the State Homestay Association to maintain standards and quality in the homestay sector (Bojei et al., 2017).

One of the primary challenges for homestay businesses in Selangor and Perlis is the lack of consistent quality across properties. This issue stems from the absence of a unified standard for services, accommodations, and experiences homestay operators offer. According to Yusof et al. (2019), the quality control of homestays in Malaysia is often inconsistent, with some operators failing to meet basic hospitality standards, which can lead to negative reviews and reduced customer satisfaction. This issue is particularly prevalent in rural areas where resources for training and monitoring are limited. Many homestay operators may not be fully aware of or may have difficulty complying with local regulations related to tourism, safety standards, and taxes. This can lead to legal issues and negatively impact the business's reputation. Ranjan et al. (2020) noted that the regulatory framework in Malaysia's homestay sector can be complex, especially for small operators, and non-compliance can result in penalties or loss of business licenses.

However, despite MOTAC promoting tourism investments, formulating regulations and guidelines to enhance the quality of tourism facilities and developing and upgrading human resources in the national tourism service sector through training programs and seminars (Idris, 2020), Malaysia still faces significant sustainability challenges in the homestay industry, including a lack of market access, over-reliance on third parties such as the government, industry, or NGOs, and limited community participation. The digital divide, limited education and technical expertise in digital marketing technology, and over-reliance on other parties, such as travel agents and government agencies, make homestay Malaysia less sustainable (Muniati et al., 2023). Hence, this study aims to investigate homestay business sustainability in Selangor and Perlis through the lens of MOTAC. The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The following section briefly reviews the literature. The following section describes the research methodology. The study's interview analysis is then given, and the final section presents the conclusions and implications of the study.

## 2. Literature Review

The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) plays a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of homestay businesses in Malaysia. MOTAC is responsible for overseeing and regulating the homestay industry, promoting community-based tourism, and supporting the development of sustainable tourism practices. By working closely with homestay business owners, MOTAC aims to improve the quality of homestay experiences, boost local communities' economic opportunities, and safeguard tourism's cultural and environmental aspects (Zamzuki et al., 2023).

The homestay programme is a community-based initiative that emphasises interaction between business owners and tourists, enabling them to learn about the culture and lifestyle of the local community. MOTAC's role in the homestay industry includes providing guidelines and standards for homestay operators to meet, ensuring the quality and safety of homestay accommodations, and promoting homestay tourism as a sustainable tourism product. The ministry also collaborates with other agencies, such as the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD) and the Institute for Rural Advancement (INFRA), to provide training and capacity-building for rural communities involved in homestay operations (Muslim et al., 2017).

A study by Mohamad et al. (2018) found a positive impact on homestay business owners' motivation levels and their businesses' sustainability. This highlights the importance of motivation in ensuring the success of homestay businesses. The study also emphasised the need for sustainable business practices, such as eco-friendly amenities and waste management, to ensure the environmental sustainability of homestay businesses. Supported by Salleh et al. (2014), the homestay program has demonstrated a significant positive impact on the country's economy and tourism sector, particularly for the benefit of the local community. The homestay industry has immense potential to contribute significantly to the country's economy and tourism sector. However, despite its apparent advantages, the industry faces several challenges, such as inconsistent enforcement by local authorities and needing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) proficiency and sustainable marketing practices (Janjua, 2022).

As highlighted by Muslim et al. (2017), challenges to the homestay industry include the lack of awareness among business owners regarding the legal requirements for operating a homestay, the need for infrastructure development, and the lack of trained human resources. One of the significant challenges is the misconception of the homestay programme by business owners, who may need to understand the standards and requirements set by MOTAC (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). Another dispute is the need for more awareness and understanding of sustainable business practices among homestay business owners. Studies have shown that sustainable marketing and promotion policies are crucial for the holistic expansion of the sustainable homestay industry (Muslim et al., 2017). Many homestay owners require more knowledge to implement sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly amenities and waste

management (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). To address these challenges, MOTAC and other relevant agencies must create awareness about the importance of complying with legal requirements, providing adequate infrastructure support, and investing in training and capacity-building programs for rural communities involved in homestay businesses (Muslim et al., 2017).

The sharing economy, which includes platforms like Airbnb and unregistered homestay operators, has also posed challenges for registered homestay business owners. Unregistered homestay operators who do not follow guidelines and procedures can threaten registered homestay businesses, create fierce competition, and offer lower-price rental services (Mohamad Nor et al., 2019). This can lead to complaints of unfair work and concerns expressed by law enforcers. In addition, the lack of public surveillance over business operations can create opportunities for tax avoidance and the absence of formal enforcement by MOTAC and local authorities to control and monitor the increasing number of homestays (Mohamad Nor et al., 2019). This can make it difficult for registered homestay business owners to compete and sustain their businesses.

Muslim et al. (2017) also highlighted that MOTAC and other relevant stakeholders must provide training and capacity-building for rural communities involved in homestay operations to address these challenges. This can include orientation and information modules on homestay operations and training on sustainable business practices and marketing strategies. Additionally, MOTAC and other local authorities can work to enforce regulations and guidelines for homestay operations, ensuring that all operators follow standards and requirements for the benefit of tourists and the local community. Infrastructure-related factors, such as the lack of wayfinding signage and public facilities, can also affect the success of homestay businesses in Malaysia (Zulkefli et al., 2021). A case study of Kota Aur Homestay in Penang, Malaysia, found that these factors are common challenges that need to be addressed to improve the overall experience for homestay guests (Yong & Hassan, 2018). The success of homestay businesses in Malaysia is influenced by several factors, including good management and arrangement, the arrangement of learning experiences for guests, marketing capabilities, firm performance, and social media marketing, as well as the provision of adequate infrastructure and public facilities. Addressing these factors can help homestay businesses in Malaysia achieve their full potential and contribute to the success of the tourism industry as a whole.

The homestay industry in Malaysia has played a significant role in boosting the country's economy and tourism. However, sustainable business practices, effective marketing strategies, and promotion policies are essential to ensure the industry's long-term success and sustainability. Therefore, MOTAC, the government, and other relevant stakeholders must collaborate to address homestay business owners' challenges and ensure their growth and sustainability. This can be achieved by implementing consistent enforcement mechanisms and providing adequate training to improve ICT competency. Developing sustainable marketing practices and promoting the industry can also help improve its performance and ensure long-term success.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative approach to investigate the roles of MOTAC towards the issues and challenges related to the sustainability of homestay businesses in Selangor and Perlis, Malaysia. The study collected relevant data through in-depth interviews with the MOTAC officials. The researchers conducted face-to-face interviews to ensure an accurate and in-depth understanding of the subject. The study seeks to provide insights that can contribute to developing an efficient and sustainable homestay business in Malaysia. The present study employed purposive sampling to identify the subjects for the interviews. During the data collection, six officials from MOTAC were interviewed: two (2) from Selangor and four (4) from Perlis. All the participants were interviewed for one (1) to two (2) hours. The interviews were conducted to gain insights into the homestay business and its various aspects. The obtained information would aid in developing strategies to enhance Malaysia's homestay industry. The interviewees were asked to deliberate on the following factors:

- (1) Overview of the homestay business in Selangor and Perlis
- (2) The roles of MOTAC officials
- (3) Issues and challenges faced by MOTAC
- (4) Factors contributed to the sustainability of the homestay businesses

The appropriate sample size for qualitative research depends on reaching a point of theoretical saturation where no new or relevant information about a category is found in the latest data collected. At this saturation point, the main category or theme is considered well-developed regarding its properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used in this study. The questions were mostly open-ended, allowing the researcher to ask more questions during the interview (Bryman, 2008). Also, the interviewer had some

flexibility in asking further questions in response to significant replies. The interviews were recorded to make sure all relevant information was captured. Notes were also taken as a backup if the recording did not work well. The recorded interviews were transcribed and summarised thematically into roles, issues and challenges and homestay business sustainability.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Homestay Business Sustainability in Selangor

#### 4.1.1 Overview of Homestay in Selangor

There are approximately 50 clusters and 225 participants registered for this homestay program. Each cluster comprises a minimum of 10 registered homestay owners. Regrettably, it is imperative to ascertain whether the remaining 250 participants are still interested in participating in the Malaysian homestay experience program. According to the guidelines established by MOTAC, two accommodation categories are available for tourists: homestay and kampung stay (village stay). The former category refers to an arrangement where the tourist resides in the same dwelling as the homestay proprietor, albeit in separate rooms. Conversely, the latter category entails the tourists occupying separate lodgings from the homestay participants. Notably, homestay participants provide accommodations for tourists through chalets or rooms. It is pertinent to mention that to qualify for the creation of a kampung stay (village stay), a homestay must first be established. Consequently, the kampung stay (village stay) must also be registered and, if deemed necessary, will partake in the homestay activity. The certificates of homestay registration and kampung stay (village stay) are notable and likened to a license.

#### 4.1.2 The Roles of MOTAC Selangor

MOTAC supports and regulates the tourism industry, including homestay businesses. In some cases, MOTAC may offer financial assistance or incentives to homestay business owners to improve their facilities, upgrade infrastructure, or participate in tourism development projects. This support can help homestay owners enhance their competitiveness and sustainability in the tourism market. As indicated by the MOTAC officer:

*“We also work with the Ministry of Urban Development to support the development of homestays. Our goal is to continuously enhance the knowledge of homestay entrepreneurs. Every year, we create programs to help homestay participants, but the allocation to MOTAC is limited. The maximum allocation for a year is RM15,000 for all homestay participants in Selangor through the programs provided. Last year, we also provided a one-off allocation of RM1,800 to participants who registered with MOTAC. In addition, we have received an equivalent grant from the government to help homestay participants recover from the impact of their homestays, providing up to RM15,000 for each participant. Therefore, 225 homestay participants, including the one-off assistance, applied for this assistance”.*

As part of its efforts to promote industrial development, MOTAC only assists those registered with them. This includes initiatives such as Visit My Village and Holidays to Homestay Selangor, where they organise programs in rural areas and invite guests such as students or tourists to participate. Supporting homestay business owners in increasing their income, even if it is just a small amount, can be very helpful. Some homestay business owners also own their restaurants.

Collaborative efforts with local artisans, farmers, and crafters are essential in creating a sustainable and authentic homestay experience. Homestay business owners can establish partnerships with local craftspeople to offer guests the opportunity to purchase handmade products such as batik, songket, or handwoven baskets. According to Masud et al. (2020), promoting local crafts and integrating them into the tourism experience enhances the authenticity of the product and allows for the local community's economic development. Cultural tourism, which emphasises the value of local traditions, history, and crafts, can add significant value to homestay offerings. In Selangor, which has a diverse cultural landscape, homestay business owners can offer workshops on batik painting, traditional Malay music, or cooking classes focusing on authentic dishes like nasi lemak or satay. UNESCO (2003) highlighted the increasing importance of preserving intangible cultural heritage, which can be monetised through tourism experiences. By offering guests a chance to participate in such activities, homestays create more immersive and personalised experiences, driving interest and income.

This kind of support can benefit those who rely solely on income generated in their village. Notably, most homestay business owners in the village are 60 years or older and are retired. Therefore, they tend to carry out work associated with rural living.

Two essential functions play a critical role in the promotion and development of the tourism industry in Malaysia. The first function is managed by Tourism Malaysia, which involves identifying and promoting homestays to foreign

tourists and is supported by State-level tourism. MOTAC leads the second function: inspecting and regulating homestays to ensure they meet the standards for safe, comfortable, and enjoyable tourism experiences. Overall, these two functions play crucial roles in the promotion and development of the tourism industry in Malaysia. They ensure that the industry is well-regulated and sustainable and provides high-quality experiences for tourists. Added by the MOTAC officer:

*“Homestay business owners will find it beneficial to prepare their facilities for the influx of tourists that result from Tourism Malaysia's promotional efforts. The homestays that undergo inspection and meet the standard characteristics set by MOTAC bear its name, signifying their compliance with the established regulations. The inspection process is thorough, covering all aspects of the homestay, including the home, kitchen, toilet, and activities offered to tourists. MOTAC carries it out with the Health Office and Tourism Malaysia”.*

Additionally, MOTAC offers various training programs to help homestay businesses improve their hospitality, service quality, and business management practices. These programs cover customer service, marketing, financial management, and cultural sensitivity. Homestay business owners can benefit from the available management, administration, finance, and marketing training programs. These programs are provided by different organisations depending on their suitability. For example, cooking programs are available to introduce tourists or guests to the regional cuisine. Health training is also provided, including emergency response training for sudden incidents or deaths. These programs are developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. According to the MOTAC officer:

*“We only focus on finance and training and collaborate with the Ministry of Urban Development and Ministry of Health. However, we face challenges when training homestay business owners in Selangor, as there is a lack of interest. The training sessions are quite long, and the older homestay business owners are not keen on participating”.*

MOTAC also support homestay business owners by promoting their businesses through various marketing channels, including tourism websites, brochures, social media, and events. This helps to increase the visibility of homestay accommodations to potential tourists and attract more guests to stay with local hosts. However, sometimes, it can be challenging to find registered homestays listed with MOTAC as they may need a more sophisticated website compared to unregistered ones. Tourism Selangor collaborated with Bougenvillea Homestay last year to promote a few homestays to address this. While some homestays may not last, there are a few that can maintain their services for the next five years, such as Banghuris Homestay, Haji Dorani Homestay, and Sepintas Homestay.

Besides, MOTAC regularly monitors the performance and compliance of homestay operators to ensure that they uphold high standards of service quality, safety, and tourist or guest satisfaction. This may involve conducting inspections, collecting feedback from tourists or guests, and evaluating the overall impact of homestay accommodations on the local tourism industry.

The respondents also highlighted that:

*“The homestay program requires at least one annual meeting; however, communication between business owners has decreased due to the lack of homestay activities. To address this, we have created a WhatsApp group where they can share their problems and concerns”.*

By fulfilling these roles, MOTAC contributes to promoting and sustaining the growth of community-based tourism through its support for homestay business owners. As a responsible entity, it recognises that fostering cultural exchange between tourists and local communities is essential to this effort. By fulfilling these roles, MOTAC contributes to the region's socio-economic development and supports the tourism industry's overall objectives.

#### 4.1.3 Issues and Challenges Faced by MOTAC Officials in Selangor

Ensuring homestay business owners' compliance with all the regulations and standards set forth by the government can be challenging. Homestay business owners may need to be more aware of the legal requirements or encounter difficulties meeting them due to limited resources or infrastructure. As such, it is essential to consider and understand their challenges while striving to comply with the government's regulations and standards. It is also crucial to investigate why some homestay business owners in Malaysia have yet to register with MOTAC. These unregistered business owners may assume that avoiding registration would enable them to operate their homestay business without any interference from government agencies. However, by registering, they would benefit from government incentives offered through MOTAC. Another possible reason for their lack of registration could be that locals prefer to stay in secluded villages rather than homestays due to the perception that they need more privacy.

The question is, is the homestay concept still relevant? When examining the original purpose of the Malaysian homestay experience program, it is clear that the program was designed to aid villagers and provide tourists or guests

with a glimpse into the daily routines of rural communities. This is essential to promoting Malaysians' unique way of life and cultural practices, including Malay martial arts, Malay weddings and other traditional customs. While it may be true that not all tourists or guests are interested in staying in such communities, the inclusion of activities promoting Malaysian culture and lifestyle is still a vital component of the homestay experience. Unfortunately, many homestays today lack such activities and must prioritise their importance. As mentioned by the MOTAC officer:

*“Homestays must establish their identities to differentiate themselves from others in the sector. For instance, homestays in coastal regions may focus on fishing, while those in other areas must be more creative in organising activities that highlight their unique features. Notably, some homestay business owners do not offer any activities, thus missing out on the opportunity to provide a more fulfilling guest experience”.*

The kampung stay, also known as village stay, offers a range of activities similar to homestay experiences. This means that tourists or guests can enjoy the same activities regardless of where they stay. A kampung stay is viable for guests who prefer to remain independently without the host. Currently, there is a growing demand for this type of accommodation.

Building strong relationships with local communities and stakeholders is essential for the success of homestay initiatives. MOTAC officials may need help gaining community members' trust and cooperation, especially in areas with competing interests or concerns about the impact of tourism on local lifestyles and environments. When homestay business owners register with MOTAC, they must submit monthly income data and information regarding the number of tourists or guests visiting their homestays. Nevertheless, collecting this data has become a challenge for MOTAC. This means that MOTAC in each state is responsible for collecting data from all homestay business owners. Added by the MOTAC officer:

*“When we approached homestay business owners to gather data on the number of tourists who had visited their homestays, they reported that no tourists had visited. We acknowledged their response and shared the information with the headquarters that the homestay had not received any tourists”.*

Regarding homestay management, it is essential to have an efficient coordinator who can manage data, generate monthly reports, and ensure that tourists or guests are engaged in activities during their stay. Homestays that lack proper management and rely on a single individual are unlikely to thrive. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of homestay tourism requires careful planning and management. MOTAC officials must address over-tourism, environmental degradation, and socio-cultural disruption while promoting responsible tourism practices among homestay business owners and tourists. While steeped in tradition, the homestay industry faces a significant challenge regarding generational succession planning. Specifically, a need for clear direction concerning future property management responsibilities is a pressing issue. Presently, an initiative is in place to provide coverage, but the fact remains that the original generation that established the homestay continues to run it. As this generation ages, there is a legitimate concern that their successors may need to be equipped to maintain the homestay's high standards, potentially leading to its decline.

The respondents also highlighted the difficulty in maintaining the homestay business.

*“MOTAC aims to connect with homestay business owners' children to encourage them to become homestay entrepreneurs and provide them with the necessary training and motivation to sustain and manage their homestays effectively. During our interviews with potential homestay business owners, we found that many young people are not interested in managing homestays and prefer to work in cities instead. They view homestay income as unstable and unreliable. One alternative for tourists seeking more convenient accommodation is through Airbnb”.*

Hence, addressing these issues and challenges requires a collaborative effort between MOTAC, homestay business owners, and other stakeholders to ensure homestay tourism can thrive in an increasingly competitive industry.

#### 4.1.4 Factors Contributing to the Sustainability of Homestay Businesses in Selangor

Establishing an online presence is essential for homestay business owners to attract tourists and compete in the digital marketplace. However, many homestay business owners may need more knowledge or resources to create professional-looking websites, social media profiles, or online listings that effectively showcase their accommodations. Homestays can be limited when searching online because they need sophisticated websites. However, some homestays are actively updating their websites, such as the Haji Dorani Homestay and the Banghuris Homestay, due to the involvement of their children who manage the web. Unfortunately, sometimes the contact numbers on the website are not updated, making it difficult for tourists or guests to make reservations. This issue has led to unregistered homestay businesses becoming more advanced and well-known than the registered ones. The

question then arises: How can we ensure the sustainability of homestays and kampung stay with the help of the MOTAC, as no authority can regulate these unregistered homestay businesses? As highlighted by MOTAC officials:

*“Homestays can be hard to find online as many business owners do not have proper websites. However, some homestays, like the Haji Dorani Homestay and the Banghuris Homestays, are actively updating their websites. Unfortunately, sometimes the website's contact numbers are not updated, making it difficult for tourists to contact the homestays. This issue has made unregistered homestay companies more popular than registered ones”.*

MOTAC aims to support homestay businesses by promoting community involvement and collaboration between the local community and homestay business owners. Tourism Malaysia and Tourism Selangor are currently conducting promotions, while MOTAC is for registering homestays. Engaging in the community fosters a sense of ownership and ensures the authenticity of guest experiences. Sustainable tourism development that benefits local communities promotes long-term support for homestay businesses. Local product businesses for the community are under the Ministry of Urban Development and are responsible for improving the community economy. Additionally, homestay business owners receive support from different sources, depending on their requirements and preferences for progress. Homestays are an essential and significant part of Malaysian tourism, and the Asia Standard program requires homestays in every state to participate. The MOTAC officer illustrated that:

*“As for Selangor, the Banghuris Homestay has won the Asia Standard award twice, and the Haji Dorani Homestay will be nominated to represent Selangor in any future awards. These two homestays are the most advanced and highly recommended by MOTAC for any event”.*

He added further:

*“According to our statistical data, in 2019, there was a surge in the number of tourists, especially foreign tourists who visited the homestays of Banghuris. This has resulted in the growth of the local economy and has greatly benefited the villagers. They have also formed cooperatives to develop further the local economy, such as the Haji Dorani homestay cooperative”.*

Managing each homestay cluster is crucial as it enables the conveying of important information from MOTAC to homestay business owners. The homestay coordinator must know and stay ahead of other business owners. They should also meet with travel agencies like Tourism Selangor and Tourism Malaysia to promote their homestays. Quality should be the top priority rather than quantity. Therefore, there may be few homestays in Selangor, but they must be high quality. Another point to note is that homestays and kampung stay (villages stay) work together with the other district offices. With their collaboration, the homestays and kampung stay will be able to progress. However, if they cooperate, the homestays' efforts can be elevated to district offices, municipal councils, and even the state government. Presently, they are only relying on MOTAC with limited budget allocations.

It is essential to manage each homestay cluster as it enables the communication of important information from MOTAC to the homestay business owners. The homestay coordinator should stay informed of the latest news and developments and stay ahead of other business owners. They must also collaborate with travel agencies like Tourism Selangor and Tourism Malaysia to promote their homestays. The quality of homestays should be given the utmost priority over quantity. It is important to note that homestays and kampung stay (villages stay) must work with the other district offices. With their collaboration, homestays and kampung stays can progress. If they cooperate, the homestays' efforts can be elevated to district offices, municipal councils, and even the state government. However, currently, they are solely relying on MOTAC's limited budget allocations.

## 4.2 Homestay Business Sustainability in Perlis

### 4.2.1 Overview of Homestay in Perlis

Homestays in Perlis are a unique lodging option where tourists and guests can stay on residential property owned by residents. This provides a more personalised and culturally immersive experience than traditional hotels or resorts. Homestays are usually located in rural or semi-urban areas, giving guests an authentic glimpse into the local lifestyle and surroundings. They can be found in villages, near paddy fields, or natural attractions such as forests or rivers. Accommodation in Perlis homestays varies from simple rooms within a family home to standalone cottages or guesthouses. Rooms are typically clean and comfortable, with basic amenities such as beds, linens, and, sometimes, shared bathrooms. Some homestays may have traditional Malay-style architecture, reflecting the local culture and heritage, where tourists or guests can stay with the host and enjoy the traditional legacy of the homestay. Forty-two (42) participants registered with MOTAC for the homestay program, which was divided into four clusters. The clusters included Ujong Bukit Homestay, Paya Guring Homestay, Felda Mata Ayer Homestay, and Nakawan Homestay.



Nakawan Homestay comprised five villages, with 19 homestay business owners, while the other homestays had only one village, with roughly eight to nine homestay business owners.

#### 4.2.2 The Roles of MOTAC Officials in Perlis

MOTAC offers training programs and workshops to homestay business owners in Perlis. These programs aim to enhance their hospitality skills, improve service quality, and develop marketing strategies. This capacity-building initiative is designed to equip homestay business owners with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their businesses and provide excellent tourist or guest experiences. MOTAC officials will reach out to homestay business owners to facilitate their registration. Once their registration documentation is completed and submitted, they will be provided courses to upgrade their skill set through training.

MOTAC offers a comprehensive course for individuals who own homestay businesses. The course includes training in managing and catering to tourists or guests and decorating the homestay. The Institute for Village Development (INFRA) will cover the expenses for the training course. In the case of new homestay business participants, INFRA will provide funding to increase the budget. It is mandatory for those who want to register for a homestay with MOTAC to attend this introductory course. The MOTAC officer highlighted that:

*“Only homestays registered with MOTAC will be listed on the website and Facebook. While INFRA can notify anyone who wants to promote their homestay, they cannot notify homestay business owners who are not registered with MOTAC”.*

MOTAC employs various marketing channels to help promote homestay businesses. These channels include online platforms, tourism fairs, and collaborations with travel agencies. By showcasing homestay accommodations, MOTAC aims to attract more tourists to Perlis and encourage them to experience the local culture through homestay options. A group of homestays in Perlis can earn up to RM12,000 per month, possibly due to their strategic location, beautiful houses, and the small size of Perlis. Typically, each homestay business owner has a guest room, but if guests prefer their own space, the owner will stay in another home to provide privacy. In the event of full occupancy, they extend their assistance by directing tourists or guests to another suitable homestay within the exact location. According to the MOTAC officers:

*“We have observed that the homestay owners in the group work together. For instance, if a homestay is fully booked and tourists seek accommodation, they will refer them to other homestays. This is the advantage of group homestays”.*

MOTAC provides financial assistance or grants to support homestay facilities, infrastructure development, and improvement. This funding can be used for renovations, equipment purchases, or marketing initiatives to attract more tourists or guests to homestay accommodations in Perlis. Two years ago, in 2021, one-off assistance was provided to homestay business owners. In the first year, they received financial aid; in the second year, they received financial aid and assistance to repair their accommodations. Each homestay owner received a maximum of RM15,000 for room repairs, depending on the damage needed.

Homestay business owners affected by damages will receive aid based on the cost of repairs needed. However, they must contribute at least 10% of the total repair cost, while MOTAC will cover the rest. For instance, if the repair cost is RM10,000, the homestay owner must pay RM1,000, and MOTAC will pay RM9,000. Homestay owners dedicated to their businesses and fulfilling their commitments should not face any issues contributing to the repair cost.

Besides that, MOTAC Perlis also assists homestay owners in navigating regulatory requirements and obtaining necessary licenses and permits. This support ensures homestay businesses comply with legal and safety standards, enhancing trust and confidence in tourists and guests. It is safe to assume that all homestay business owners adhere to the guidelines provided by MOTAC. They must understand the conditions necessary to continue business and prevent legal infractions. It aims to ensure homestay business owners can continue their business without impediments.

Additionally, meetings between MOTAC and homestay business owners are conducted once and sometimes twice a year. If a meeting is held among homestay business owners, MOTAC officials will participate as mediators only. At MOTAC Perlis, they have a good relationship with the homestay business owners. Numerous programs were conducted, as mentioned by the MOTAC officer:

*“If we cannot carry out a large-scale program, we participate in cleaning activities (gotong-royong) event at the homestay. Previously, we had a Bubur Lambuk (Lambuk porridge) program and invited two government*

*representatives from different ministries for the event. The event was conducted near the Kedah-Perlis border, and we distributed the Bubur Lambuk to those who entered Perlis as a welcome gift”.*

As a crucial element in promoting and supporting the homestay sector, MOTAC serves a vital function in assisting homestay business owners. Offering various programs and initiatives assists homestay business owners in developing their businesses and provides the necessary resources for their continued growth. As such, it is a pivotal contributor to the advancement of the homestay industry, ensuring the success of homestay business owners. The homestay sector's continued growth and development relies heavily on the ongoing support provided by MOTAC, which fosters an environment where homestay businesses can thrive.

#### 4.2.3 Issues and Challenges Faced by MOTAC Officials in Perlis

MOTAC Perlis, like any other government agency that supports the tourism industry, faces several challenges in assisting homestay business owners. The main issue is the presence of unregistered homestay businesses that often need to comply with local regulations, zoning laws, safety standards, and taxation requirements. This creates unfair competition for registered homestay businesses that have invested time and resources in meeting regulatory requirements. It has become a concern regarding unregistered homestays with a kampung stay concept that operates alongside registered ones. Furthermore, whether MOTAC has taken any measures against these unregistered homestay business owners is still being determined. As indicated by the MOTAC officer:

*“It is worth noting that neither MOTAC nor the Kangar Municipal Council possesses the legal authority to take punitive action against these unregistered homestay business owners”.*

Enforcing regulations against unregistered homestay operators can be challenging for local authorities due to limited resources, difficulties in identifying and monitoring illicit operations, and legal complexities. This can create a perception of impunity among unregistered homestay business owners and further exacerbate the problem. MOTAC officials say it worsens when no enforcement bodies can act against unregistered homestay business owners. The presence of unregistered homestay operators can tarnish Perlis's reputation as a tourist destination. Negative experiences or incidents associated with unregistered accommodation can discourage potential tourists or guests and harm the tourism industry's image. The MOTAC officer illustrated that:

*“There are concerns about homestays that state government officials have established. These homestays offer amenities such as swimming pools and BBQ pits. However, they have not been registered with MOTAC. This means that they may not be following the safety regulations set by MOTAC, which could result in health and safety risks for guests. This could lead to negative guest experiences and potential legal liabilities for the government officials running the homestays”.*

Promoting homestay accommodations and attracting tourists or guests can be challenging, especially for smaller businesses with limited marketing budgets. Homestay business owners may need help to reach target tourists or guests and compete with unregistered homestay business owners with more marketing and promotion resources. MOTAC Perlis has put significant effort into promoting the homestay concept. However, the main challenge is the existence of unregistered homestays with a kampung stay concept. This is because some people believe that homestays may not be very suitable, especially in a Muslim community where privacy and modesty are of utmost importance. As a result, the kampung stay concept has gained more popularity in Perlis, gradually replacing the traditional homestays.

#### 4.2.4 Factors Contributing to the Sustainability of Homestay Businesses in Perlis

MOTAC Perlis is vital in promoting homestay businesses' sustainability through various initiatives and strategies. There is an inquiry into the sustainability of homestays in Perlis for the next five years. While the future of older homestay business operations is still being determined, there is a belief that newer homestay establishments can maintain their business for the same duration. The latest group of homestays is meant to supplement the old homestays. Instead, they are operated by a new generation of homestay business owners. However, it is still being determined if the existing old homestay groups can sustain themselves as they have yet to have any successors willing to continue the homestay business. According to the MOTAC officer:

*“It appears that the current homestay business owners may face challenges due to a lack of successors to continue their business”.*

To ensure the sustainability of homestays in Perlis, MOTAC has recently reduced some requirements, such as increasing the homestay radius from 5km to 10km and allowing annexe homestays. An annexe homestay is a semi-detached house with one wall and two different doors. Homestay business owners are encouraged to create twin

houses with only one room, including a bed, kitchen, and bathroom. This will allow for more options while still maintaining the semi-detached structure of the homestay owner's house. Added by the MOTAC officer:

*"This category is designed to assist homestay business owners. According to MOTAC, any homestay business owners registered with them is not considered a business. Instead, it is a program that educates people about the way of life in the village. That is why they cannot register for a homestay in a residential area".*

MOTAC Perlis also advocates for responsible tourism practices that balance economic development with social and environmental considerations. Through its promotional activities, MOTAC encourages tourists or guests to choose homestay accommodations, prioritising sustainability, cultural authenticity, and community engagement. By raising awareness among guests and promoting responsible travel behaviour, MOTAC contributes to the long-term sustainability of homestay businesses in Perlis. This setup has resulted in a visually appealing homestay, where a new group of homestay business owners owns half of the houses. The Nakawan Homestay is a reassuring exception despite concerns about unregistered homestay operators. Operated by young business owners, this homestay demonstrates a proactive approach to the challenges faced by this industry. Their homestay has three rooms and follows the concept of an annexe homestay. In the first month of operation, they earned more than RM6,000, which shows the business's potential. In June last year (2023), their income was RM12,000, which is a testament to their success. Added by the MOTAC officer:

*"I have three years of experience working with homestay business owners, and I actively listened to their issues and helped solve them. New guidelines give homestay business owners more opportunities to maintain their businesses. As a result, many homestay houses have opted for the annexe way of maintenance, as it is the easiest option available."*

The homestay concept is an essential means of displaying the reality of life in the village. Numerous individuals residing in cities require exposure to the activities and challenges of living in rural areas. For instance, children who grow up in towns often need to gain knowledge of the processes involved in tapping rubber trees, planting paddy, or growing trees. As mentioned by the MOTAC officer:

*"As someone who grew up in this village, I have first-hand experience working in the fields and caring for rubber trees. The homestay program is a wonderful opportunity to share our way of life with people from outside the village so they can learn more about rural living".*

Additionally, MOTAC Perlis promotes collaboration and cooperation between homestay business owners and local communities. It ensures that tourism benefits are distributed fairly and that community interests are respected by involving the local community in developing and managing homestay businesses. This collaborative approach helps to build social cohesion, support local livelihoods, and mitigate potential negative impacts of tourism on communities. Regarding the leadership coordinator, it is recommended that homestay business owners and coordinators work together to resolve any issues that may arise. It is essential for the homestay business owner to feel comfortable with the coordinator, but they should also have a backup facilitator in case of any problems. This will ensure a smooth and practical relationship between homestay business owners and coordinators. According to the MOTAC officer:

*"To foster cooperation, a program has been implemented at the Paya Guring Homestay. The homestay business owner clusters participating in the program were Paya Guring, Ujung Bukit, and Nakawan, along with Felda Mata Ayer. Together, they organised a program and distributed 500 containers of porridge to orphanages, religious homes, and the general public. The presence of homestay operators was satisfactory".*

In addition to their regular income, those without a fixed source of revenue can earn extra money by selling local products. For instance, Felda Mata Ayer Homestay offers honey bamboo shoots, while Ujung Bukit Homestay specialises in famous traditional cookies. In 2023, the association sponsored each homestay cluster to visit Langkawi and sell its products there. During their stay, all accommodations, transportation, and meals are accessible. This way, the people of the village can earn additional income while promoting their way of life. Hence, it is essential to ensure the sustainability of homestay operations as they can generate extra income for business owners. Overall, MOTAC Perlis plays a pivotal role in promoting the sustainability of homestay businesses by fostering capacity building, environmental conservation, cultural preservation, community engagement, responsible tourism practices, and policy support. By addressing these key areas, MOTAC contributes to the long-term viability and resilience of the homestay sector in Perlis.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the MOTAC in Perlis and Selangor play a pivotal role in assisting the sustainability of homestay business owners. Through their diligent efforts in providing support, guidance, and resources, they are vital pillars in nurturing and enhancing the homestay industry in these states. In Perlis, MOTAC officials contribute to the sustainability of homestay businesses by facilitating training programs, fostering partnerships, and promoting the region's unique cultural heritage. By leveraging their expertise and networks, they empower homestay owners with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the competitive tourism landscape. Similarly, in Selangor, MOTAC actively engages with homestay operators to address challenges, capitalise on opportunities, and promote responsible tourism practices. Through initiatives such as marketing campaigns, capacity-building workshops, and regulatory assistance, they create an enabling environment for homestay businesses to flourish sustainably.

While MOTAC in Perlis and Selangor are instrumental in supporting the sustainability of homestay business owners, they face a range of significant issues and challenges in fulfilling their roles effectively. The problems and difficulties surrounding unregistered homestay operations present substantial hurdles as they endeavour to support the sustainability of legitimate homestay businesses. Unregistered homestay operations undermine the integrity of the tourism industry, pose threats to public safety, disrupt local communities, and erode the competitiveness of legal homestay establishments. Besides, the need for more successors for homestay business owners presents a pressing challenge for MOTAC in Perlis and Selangor as they strive to support the sustainability of homestay establishments. The absence of successors within homestay businesses not only jeopardises the continuity but also undermines the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry in the region. One significant challenge is the younger generations' limited awareness and interest in pursuing careers or taking over family-owned homestay businesses. Factors such as changing lifestyle preferences, economic opportunities in other sectors, and inadequate succession planning contribute to the need for more successors within the industry.

Additionally, the need for more cooperation from some homestay business owners poses significant obstacles. The reluctance or resistance of some homestay business owners to collaborate with MOTAC can hinder efforts to implement initiatives to enhance the industry's sustainability. This lack of cooperation may arise from various factors, including scepticism about the benefits of government assistance, concerns about compliance with regulations, or simply a need to understand the value of working with regulatory authorities. Despite these challenges, MOTAC officials in Perlis and Selangor recognise the importance of addressing the succession issue to safeguard the sustainability of homestay businesses. By implementing targeted initiatives such as mentorship programs, training workshops, and financial incentives to encourage succession planning and skill development among aspiring successors, MOTAC can help bridge the generational gap and ensure the continued success of homestay establishments. It is imperative to highlight that the research presented in this study has certain limitations that prevent it from being considered conclusive. Therefore, it is highly recommended that additional academic research be conducted to address novel challenges that may require distinct approaches from various angles and perspectives as time progresses and changes occur. It is crucial to remember that the sample size utilised in this study is confined to Selangor and Perlis and thus may only partially represent Malaysia. Scholars advocate for further interviews with participants from different states to gather more comprehensive data.

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