

# E-BOOK OF EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## THE 14<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL INVENTION, INNOVATION & DESIGN COMPETITION 2025



14<sup>TH</sup> **INDES** 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL • SOCIAL • GOVERNANCE



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THE 14th INTERNATIONAL  
INVENTION, INNOVATION &  
DESIGN COMPETITION 2025

**Organized by:**

Office of Research, Industry,  
Community & Alumni Network  
UiTM Perak Branch

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

No e- ISBN: 978-967-2776-52-9

Cover Design: Dr. Mohd Khairulnizam Ramlie

Typesetting : Georgia

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# SUCCESS FACTORS OF HOMESTAY PROGRAMS IN MALAYSIA: THE HOST-S MODEL

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## ABSTRACT

The Homestay Program in Malaysia has emerged as an iconic rural tourism product, offering tourists the opportunity to stay with local host families and engage directly in the daily life and culture of rural communities. For a reasonable fee, visitors experience, authentic local lifestyles, customs, and traditions, making it a distinctive form of cultural tourism. In the post-pandemic period, Malaysia's tourism industry—including homestay programs—is actively striving to regain its momentum. This study aims to identify and analyze the key success factors contributing to the effectiveness and sustainability of homestay initiatives in Malaysia. The research adopts a multi-stakeholder approach, considering perspectives from homestay operators, government officers, industry players, tourists and researchers who have studied community-based tourism. A qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather in-depth insights from thirteen informants. Interviews were primarily conducted in Bahasa Melayu, and responses were translated into English for analysis. Using thematic analysis, the data were systematically categorized into key themes, which informed the development of a comprehensive model known as the HOST-S Model. The HOST-S Model serves as a strategic framework and guideline for homestay operators and related stakeholders. It outlines the critical components necessary to establish and sustain a successful homestay program within Malaysia's evolving tourism landscape.

**Keyword:** Homestay, Critical Success Factors, Focus Group Discussion, Qualitative, Success Model.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Homestay Program in Malaysia has become an iconic rural tourism initiative, emphasizing immersive experiences where tourists live with host families and actively participate in local customs and community life. This form of community-based tourism (CBT) serves multiple purposes: it generates supplementary income for rural residents, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes sustainable tourism practices (Nor, 2014; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia [MOTAC], 2020). As the tourism industry recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's homestay sector faces the challenge of regaining momentum and adapting to new travel behaviors and expectations.

This study investigates the success factors critical to revitalizing and sustaining homestay programs in the post-pandemic era. Recognizing the adverse effects of the pandemic on homestay operators, a

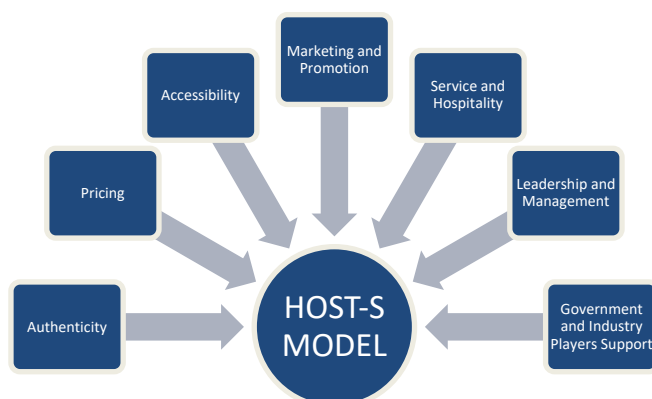
deeper exploration into the factors that can help these businesses recover and thrive was therefore imperative. This research aimed to provide valuable insights into factors that can contribute to the resilience and success of homestay programs by investigating the critical success factors (CSFs) that influence the success of homestay programs in Malaysia, providing additional perspectives for homestay owners to ensure the sustainability of their businesses. Additionally, this research sought to identify and understand the different perspectives on critical success factors from tourists, government agencies, industry players, and the community, on top of exploring the market potential of homestay in Malaysia. According to Caralli et al. (2004), critical success factors (CSFs) are explicit key areas of performance crucial for an organisation to achieve its mission. This research has been published within the *Journal of Ecohumanism* (Azmi et al., 2024), which is ranked as a Q2 journal in cultural science field.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research employed focus group discussions (FGDs) to identify the critical success factors affecting the success of homestay programs in Malaysia. Qualitative research was used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviors, experiences, attitudes, intentions, and motivations, based on observation and interpretation, to find out the way people think and feel (Ahmad et al., 2019). In addition to FGDs, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather views and perspectives from homestay operators, government agencies, industry players, and tourists regarding the critical success factors affecting the homestay program in Penang. This method provides the flexibility to explore diverse viewpoints in-depth, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing homestay success.

The semi-structured interviews began with a briefing on the research purpose, as recommended in social science research (Hanafiah et al., 2021). A total of thirteen respondents were interviewed through various methods, including online via Google Meet, physical group discussions, and one-on-one sessions. Their responses were based on their thoughts, experiences, and personal knowledge. The interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes, with all participants assured of privacy and confidentiality. The respondents included: (i) homestay operators, (ii) government officers involved in homestay development, (iii) industry players in the travel agency business, (iv) tourists, and (v) researchers who have studied community-based tourism. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English when necessary. The thematic analysis method was used to analyze the collected data. The output of these themes constituted the findings and eventually be reported per research questions.

## 3. FINDINGS



**Figure 1.** Homestay Success Model (HOST-S MODEL)

The study identified seven critical success factors (CSFs) essential for the success of homestay businesses. These factors include authenticity, marketing and promotion, pricing, accessibility, service and hospitality, leadership and management, and support from government and industry players. Authenticity emerged as a key factor, driving tourist interest through unique cultural experiences and traditional activities. Marketing and promotion were highlighted as crucial in raising awareness and attracting visitors, leveraging platforms like social media effectively. Pricing strategies were found to influence visitor decisions, with affordability enhancing competitiveness against other available lodging options. Accessibility, which includes transport links and proximity to attractions, significantly impacted visitor satisfaction and convenience. Service and hospitality were important in ensuring positive guest experiences, emphasizing effective communication, cleanliness, and personalized services. Effective leadership and management practices were identified as instrumental in the operational success of homestays, fostering community engagement, and ensuring sustainable growth. Government and industry players' support played a significant role, providing financial backing, infrastructure, and promotional platforms crucial for homestay development. From the findings, a model is developed consisting of all the seven critical success factors (Figure 1).

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The homestay program is one of the branches of tourism that offers exclusive experience to domestic and international tourists. This research has explored and identified seven critical success factors (CSFs) essential for the success of homestay businesses in Malaysia and proposed HOST-S Model as a guideline for a success homestay program in Malaysia. This study contributes to the literature of homestay by providing further information on the development of successful homestay in Malaysia. This will enhance the understanding of perception and behavioral needs of the tourists, and the stakeholders involved in the development of homestay.

The HOST-S Model contributes both theoretically and practically to the discourse on rural tourism development. It provides strategic guidelines for homestay operators, government planners, NGOs, and tourism educators, offering a structured pathway to enhance quality, resilience, and competitiveness in homestay programs. The model also responds to current post-pandemic challenges, including changing tourist expectations, digital transformation, and the need for community-based economic recovery. This study explores the importance of inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement and context-sensitive planning in shaping the future of homestays in Malaysia. As rural tourism continues to gain traction globally, frameworks like the HOST-S Model can inform more sustainable and culturally respectful tourism development strategies.

Future studies should seek deeper into specific sub-themes identified, such as the role of digital technologies in marketing, innovative pricing strategies, and sustainable tourism practices. Collaboration among stakeholders, including government bodies, industry players, and local communities, will be vital in implementing recommendations derived from this research. Additionally, future research could also expand to include comparative studies across different regions or countries to validate findings and explore cultural variations in homestay experiences. On the other hand, longitudinal studies could track the evolution of homestay practices over time, considering changing consumer preferences and economic conditions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the organizers of INDES, particularly Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Perak, Kampus Seri Iskandar, for the opportunity to present this innovation. This study was supported by the Universiti Teknologi MARA Strategic Research Partnership Grant [Ref: 100-RMC 5/3 SRP INT (014/2022)]. Appreciation is also extended to the project leader, Azila Azmi, for her invaluable guidance, as well as to UiTM Cawangan Pulau Pinang for the support and resources provided. The authors are grateful to all team members, peers, and the participating informants for their contributions to this study.

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e ISBN 978-967-2776-52-9



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