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# THE ROLE OF MALAY TRADITIONAL HOUSE AND RUMAH GADANG AS HOMESTAYS

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# ABSTRACT

In both Malaysia and Indonesia, traditional houses have been used as homestays, as a new type of rural tourism accommodation. This study aims to compare the implementation of rural tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia, to reveal the usage of traditional Malay house and Rumah Gadang as homestays in both countries, and to promote homestay as an alternative for rural tourism accommodation. Experiences on participating in both homestays in Kampung Lonek Homestay, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia and Nagari Sumpur, West Sumatra, both majorly populated by the Minang community, are shared and analyzed to achieve these aims.

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**Keywords**: Rural tourism, Malaysia Homestay Experience Program, traditional Malay house, Rumah gadang



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# INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism is defined differently in each country. Nilson (2002) stated that rural tourism is a tourism type covering all tourism activities in rural places. Meanwhile, the European Union defines rural tourism as the desire of the people who likes spending their holidays in rural areas by seeing rural inheritance and who likes rural lifestyle (European Commission 2003). Some of the researchers also see rural tourism to be called as farm tourism. village tourism, highland tourism, agro tourism, ecological village tourism and green tourism (Maestro, Gallego & Requejo, 2007; Dimitrovskia, Todorovic & Valjarevic, 2012; Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012). A communitybased tourism like the rural tourism is protected and supported by various international organizations such as the World Tourism Organization and the aim is towards achieving a high quality visitor experience, conservation of natural and cultural resources, development of social and economic and community's empowerment and ownership. Furthermore, the focal benefits of community tourism are the economic impact on communities, improvements of socioeconomic and a more sustainable lifestyle diversification (Manyara & Jones, 2007).

Nevertheless, the concept, implication, development style, objectives, components, regulations, and a participating organization of rural tourism in Asia differ from European countries as well as in each Asian country. Rural tourism in Asia has been developed by the rural community itself and concentrates on providing experiences with agriculture, fishery, forestry, and culture for tourists in contrast to the European model (Miyazaki, 2006). While in Europe, the families of the farmers themselves mostly managed the rural accommodations, in Asia, government organizations, local authorities, and the rural community manage rural accommodations and rural tourism programmes. However, some concepts of rural tourism in Asia have been influenced by bed-and-breakfasts and farm stay, which were created and have been active in Europe for a long time.

In Malaysia, rural tourism contributes to achieving the Government's agenda to build job opportunities and eliminate poverty of the communities involved. Other than that, it can be seen as a way to aid in generating income for the communities (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). It also focuses on providing opportunities to visitors to visit rural villages and rural attractions

and to experience the culture and heritage of Malaysia as well as giving socio-economic benefits to the local communities (MOTAC, 2001). The government also focuses on the development of rural tourism as a major contributor in promoting eco-tourism which is the current trend in their efforts to tourism sustainability that remains as a key focus of the government under the 10th Malaysia Plan for the year 2011 to 2015 (Economic Planning Unit, 2010). A total of 15% of foreign tourists came to Malaysia who chose to live in rural areas (Loganathan & Ibrahim, 2010), and there is a relatively high demand from tourists to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage in the countryside, and this opportunity should be seized by the tour operators to concentrate with their tourism activities in the rural area. Siow et al. (2011) also stated that rural tourism in Malaysia has a growth rate of 30% each year and they further claimed that Malaysia is popular as rural tourism destination among the international tourists.

Meanwhile, Indonesia as a tropical country has its own potential resources for rural tourism, including cash crops such as rubber and oil palm on large estates, food crops and horticulture on a smaller scale, livestock production and fisheries. Any of these may be used as a tourist attraction, and have a multiple role for agricultural production as well as tourist promotion and the earning of foreign exchange (Iwantoro, 1998). Tourism, including rural tourism, is one of the most important sectors of the Indonesian economy, and it does not only contribute to Indonesia's sources of foreign exchange and earnings but also a tool to grow job opportunities and offer better income distribution to the local people (Sugiyarto, Blake, & Sinclair, 2003).

This study aims to clarify the implementation of rural tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia, to reveal the roles of traditional Malay house and Rumah Gadang as homestays in both countries, and indirectly to promote homestay as an alternative for rural tourism accommodation. Two examples of homestays in Malaysia and Indonesia: Kampung Lonek Homestay in Negeri Sembilan and homestay in Nagari Sumpur, West Sumatra, were selected to clarify comparison on the implementation of homestays in both countries and the spatial usage of the houses after being used as homestays.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

### Rural Tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia

In the Rural Tourism Master Plan (MOTAC, 2001), Malaysian rural tourism was defined as 'tourism that provides opportunities for visitors to visit rural attractions, and to experience the culture and heritage of Malaysia, thereby providing socio-economic benefits for local communities including day-visits'. Rural tourism in Malaysia encompasses three parts: the central support area, rural and hinterland, focusing on the tourism within the core rural area: in the rural space between urban areas and hinterland; however, it may also include villages located outside the rural area, where the traditional lifestyle remains preserved. Rural tourism includes ecotourism, marine tourism, agro-tourism, and the Malaysian Homestay Experience Program, which was established by the Ministry of Tourism, Art and Culture (MOTAC) in 1995.

The target customers are known as 'middle ground tourists' because they occupy the middle ground between mass tourism and ecotourism as well as preferring rural areas between cities or resorts and remote areas. This Master Plan has also evaluated the Malaysia Homestay Experience Program as the best alternative for accommodation in Malaysian rural tourism. The participation of villagers in this homestay program in rural tourism activities in Malaysia is one of the government's ongoing efforts to develop rural tourism in order to achieve the target of reducing economic disparities of rural and urban as well as empowering the village community. A few of the local communities responded to the challenge with a homestay program that allows foreign tourists and domestic tourists alike to stay together with the local community and be able to learn their way of life, culture and daily practices of the community (Ibrahim & Razzaq, 2010).

Meanwhile, the discussion on rural tourism emerged in Indonesia since the Indonesian Government issued Ministry of Culture and Tourism concerning in the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM Mandiri) in tourism through the notion of Tourism Villages (Aly, Yuliawan, Noviyanti, Firdaus, & Prasetyo, 2019). A year later, it was amended in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism Regulation, concerning 'PNPM Mandiri in Tourism'. This amendment was intended to accommodate the technical implementation of this program and expand the scope of program itself. The Regional Government places rural tourism development into the Long Term Regional Development Plan (RPJPD) 2005-2025 and the Regional Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMD) 2014-2019. Moreover, it is also stated that rural tourism plans must be included in regional tourism planning initiatives (Article 23 [2]).

Indonesia offers enormous potential for tourism development (Purwomarwanto & Ramachandran, 2015). Tourism is also expected to continuously contribute to the Indonesian economy in the future. In a recent government plan set forth by the Ministry of Tourism, Indonesia has prioritized its tourism development in ten destinations, collectively known as "the new Bali 10" (Subaidi, 2017). This programme focuses on 10 destinations that have been considered to possess the highest potential to become iconic destinations similar to Bali. These locations include Lake Toba (North Sumatra), Borobudur (Central Java), Mandalika (Lombok), Bromo/Tengger/Semeru (East Java), Labuan Bajo (Flores), Wakatobi (Southeast Sulawesi), Pulau Seribu (DKI Jakarta), Morotai (North Molucca), Tanjung Lesung (Banten) and Tanjung Kelayang (Bangka Beli-tung).

### Malaysia Homestay Experience Program

In Malaysia, the traditional Malay house has been used as a homestay since the 1970s, which was influenced by the 'bed and breakfast' concept. In the late 1980s, Malay house homestays were used by the Japanese youths during the students' exchange programmes, where they had the opportunity to participate in Malay kampung's community activities (Hamzah, 2008). Later, homestays in the Malay kampung were used in agro-tourism programs, with FELDA becoming the most successful authority in the homestay industry.

In 1988, a few villages in Pahang were selected to form the Desa Murni Homestay, which was used as a model for the new Malaysian Homestay Experience Program, when MOTAC saw the potential of Malay Kampung as a tourism product (MOTAC, 1995). In 1995, MOTAC launched the Malaysia Homestay Experience Program, where the Malay houses become the official accommodation, villagers as the host family, homestay committee chairman and members, cultural performers, caterers, and guides, and the village organizations are also involved (Ramele et al., 2017).

This programme was also a pilot project for the Rural Tourism Master Plan to provide guidance and technical assistance as to policy direction, infrastructure development, marketing, and training for rural tourism development (MOTAC, 2001). When MOTAC saw the development of homestays by FELDA, Ministry of Agriculture and individual villagers at Malay Kampung, and based on the increasing number of tourists and incomes earned from Desa Murni Homestay, MOTAC established the Malaysian Homestay Experience Program officially in 1995 for all villages in rural Malaysia.

In this programme, participating villagers form a new homestay committee and create programme activities independently (Table 1). These activities differ from each state, district, and village, following the type of village and from the 50 ethnicities among the Malays and aboriginal peoples in Malaysia (Ramele and Yamazaki, 2014). This programme was opened to Malay Kampungs and all rural villages including Chinese New Villages, Indian settlements, and Orang Asli villages in Peninsular Malaysia and traditional villages on North Borneo. However, in Peninsular Malaysia, only Malay Kampungs participated in this programme since Malays are still mainly populating rural areas. The traditional environment of Malay Kampung is the main attraction for tourists. Meanwhile, multi-ethnic communities of Malay were influenced by migrations of the Javanese, Minangkabau, and Bajau peoples from Indonesia and the Siamese from Thailand during the colonial period. This multi-ethnic influence the villagers' lifestyle, cultures, traditions, architectural styles of the Malay houses, and cuisines, have all contributed to various characteristics of each homestay programme.

The numbers of homestay programmes, host families and tourists, and incomes earned by homestay committees and host families from this programme have increased since its establishment. However, these incomes were only properly documented by all homestay programmes starting in 2007. By September 2019, there are 219 homestay programmes established throughout the country, with 4,227 houses and families participated as the host families, to provide 5,997 rooms at one time (MOTAC, 2019).

Daily Lifestyle	Learning the village's history
	Eating local cuisine
Cultural Activities	Watching and experiencing traditional dances, music and games
Community Activities	Attending community activities (wedding ceremony, religious festivals, and other gatherings)
Economic activities	Fishing
	Watching and experiencing agricultural activities (paddy harvesting, rubber tapping, oil palm plucking)
	Visiting SME factories
	Visiting paddy field and farms
Leisure	Leisure Sightseeing or visiting nearby tourist attraction
	Jungle trekking and water rafting
Landscape	Plan-a-Tree (PAT) Program
Source: MOTAC (1995)	

**Table 1. Homestay Program Activities** 

Source: MOTAC (1995)

### Homestay Programme in Indonesia

According to the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN – Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional), the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy targets 244 tourist villages to be certified as independent tourism villages by 2024. In accordance with the President's vision to develop Indonesia from a Village, Homestay is a type of amenities developed in tourist villages, based on local wisdom. Seeing the large potential of tourist village homestays in driving the village economy, homestays are carried out to be the main amenities that will be developed in priority destinations.

In order to realize this vision, the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has compiled a Tourism Village Homestay Development Guideline for the Community in 2018. The guidelines contain the requirements for establishing a tourist village homestay which is encouraged by the Ministry of Tourism: a) the homestay must be located in a tourist village that has attractions based on nature and or culture; b) homestays must be managed by the local community or what can be called Community Based Tourism Development; c) homestay has local nuances / uniqueness in accordance with the context of the local culture and environment (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2018).

Based on the homestay requirements issued by the Ministry of Tourism, it shows that homestays in Nagari Sumpur meet these requirements both in terms of location, management and local uniqueness. The existence of this homestay is not only able to empower the local community, but also excel in its fast development. The uniqueness of traditional architecture also makes a homestay in Nagari Sumpur not only function as an amenity, but also as a very interesting attraction.

In an effort to develop homestays in the regions, the Tanah Datar Regency Tourism, Youth and Sports Office is again exploring the enthusiasm and potential of tourism actors, so that tourism will revive. Excavation of the spirit are carried out in stages by providing increased competence for tourism actors, including homestay managers. Homestay management training was given to 40 participants who were homestay managers in Tanah Datar Regency last October 2020. In this activity, materials were given on how to provide services, governance, promotion, including issues of Clear, Health, Safety and Environment (CHSE).

# METHODOLOGY

This study aims to clarify the definition and implementation of rural tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia. The implementation of the Malaysia Homestay Experience Program was also revealed, representing the most successful rural tourism product in Malaysia. The roles of traditional Malay house in Malaysia and Rumah Gadang in Indonesia as homestays in both countries are identified by taking two examples of homestays:

Kampung Lonek Homestay in Negeri Sembilan and homestay in Nagari Sumpur, West Sumatra. A few host family's houses were selected to determine the spatial usage and transformation done on the traditional Malay house and Rumah Gadang after they are used as homestays to provide accommodation for the tourists. This comparative study is expected to promote homestay as an alternative for rural tourism accommodation to existing chalets and resorts in both Malaysia and Indonesia.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of the research were obtained from site investigation, interviews with the host families and homestay committee members, and experience participating in the homestay programmes in both Malaysia and Indonesia.

### Kampung Lonek Homestay, Negeri Sembilan

Kampung Lonek is located in Batu Kikir, Jempol, Negeri Sembilan. The village has been awarded as The Most Beautiful Village in Malaysia once due to the lush paddy field, clear water stream and rich fruit orchard. Formerly, villagers in Kampung Lonek have been receiving visits by university students under community programmes for many times since the 1980s, initiated by the village headman and the existing village organization (JKKK: Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung / Village Development and Safety Committee).

The Kampung Lonek Homestay was later officially established under the MOTAC's Malaysia Homestay Experience Program in 2004. Today, the homestay programme provides 180 houses at one time by participation of 180 host families. Out of 180 houses participated, 58 houses are traditional Malay houses, and the others are modern village houses. Among the attractions of the homestay programme is the cultural tradition of Adat Pepatih, Minang cuisine, and the living heritage of Minangkabau architecture. From 2007 until 2016, the homestay programme has been receiving several awards from MOTAC for the achievement on the highest income and number of foreign and domestic tourists visiting the homestay programme.

Today, besides agriculture, and the Small and Medium Entrepreneurship (SME), the income of the villagers is also mainly dependent on the homestay tourism industry. The record shows Kampung Lonek Homestay earned the highest annual income of RM374,270.00 in 2009 from visits by 417 foreign tourists and 2,675 domestic tourists. The villagers have created a new official committee called the Homestay Management Unit, which organizes the accommodation, recreational and sports activities, transportation, safety, cultural activities, food, promotion, and cleanliness. Among the homestay programme activities provided for the tourists in the brochure are rubber planting, visits to SME factories, dodol making, paddy harvesting, traditional

sports, fishing, and traditional dance and music performances.

**Figure 1. Traditional Malay Houses used as Homestays in Kampung Lonek** Source: Ramele (2020)

### Homestays at Nagari Sumpur, West Sumatra

Nagari Sumpur is located in Batipuh Selatan District, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Nagari Sumpur has many remains of Rumah Gadang which are still inhabited and well maintained. Since the formation of Wadah Kampung Minang in 2013, the traditional and cultural activities in Nagari Sumpur have actively being organized.

Nevertheless, the fire disaster that occurred in 2013 has burned five Rumah Gadang in Jorong Nagari, Nagari Sumpur. With the support and participation of various parties, two Rumah Gadang were reconstructed, namely Rumah Gadang Nuraini, which was built in 2013 and completed in 2014. Meanwhile, the second Rumah Gadang Siti Fatimah was built in 2015 and completed in 2016. The construction of these Rumah Gadang followed a traditional procession and initiated by many parties, starting from the planning stage, material search and development.

After the success of this reconstruction, customary and cultural activities have continued to develop. The number of visitors to Nagari Sumpur is increasing, not only for recreation but also for educational purposes to study the architecture of the Rumah Gadang and the Minangkabau culture. One of the targets of the reconstruction of the two Rumah Gadang is to support traditional and cultural activities that can help improve the economy of the people in Nagari Sumpur. Hence, the two Rumah Gadang are being used as homestays as a result of the reconstruction. Other existing Rumah

Gadang in the surrounding area, which is still in good condition are also used as homestays.

Similar to Kampung Lonek Homestay in Negeri Sembilan, here in Nagari Sumpur, the villagers also participate unofficially as the host families, caterers, guides, drivers, and cultural performers. Among the activities that attracted tourists are watching silat performance, visiting paddy field and recreation areas surrounding the lake, and walking around the villages to witness the architecture of the original Rumah Gadang. Nevertheless, homestays in Nagari Sumpur are not regulated by any guideline by government organization, they are managed by the villagers themselves with support and help from the academicians and researchers from the surrounding higher educational institutions. The formation of a homestay committee is also established unofficially, and basically based on voluntarily concept. Moreover, the activities provided are not fixed and based on the request by the tourists or visitors themselves.



Figure 2. Rumah Gadang Siti Fatimah and Rumah Gadang Nurani Source: Wongso (2016)

### Traditional Malay Houses and Rumah Gadang as a Homestay

A traditional Malay house consists of two leading houses: the Rumah Ibu (the main house or the living room) and the Rumah Dapur (the kitchen house) (Figure 3). Rumah Ibu is said to be an essential part of the Malay house and used to be the space used for the male and guests (Gibbs, 1987). Meanwhile, the Rumah Dapur is mainly used by the family members, and as entrance for the women and children.

Many of the villagers in the rural area participate in the Malaysian Homestay Experience Program as a solution to the issue of empty rooms in their Malay houses occurred due to the migration of the villagers' children

to the urban areas (Ramele and Yamazaki, 2014). The host families use the empty rooms, mainly that are located at the Rumah Ibu as the tourists' rooms, and the family members move to the rooms located at the Rumah Dapur at the extension part of the back or side of the house.

Figure 4 shows the transformation on the spatial usage of the Malay house, from the traditional Malay house into modernization era and during the participation in the Malaysian Homestay Experience Program. It can be seen that the separated spatial usage (of male and female) has disappeared during modernization era but seems to further recreated (separated spatial usage of tourist and family members) after being used as a homestay.

In some cases, anjung (the entrance/veranda) and Rumah Ibu are used as tourist entrance, living room, and bedrooms. In this living room, the family members will be spending time interacting and having meals with the tourists during their stay. Meanwhile, Rumah dapur has become the family entrance, living room, bedrooms, and kitchen. In some houses, newly built house is also constructed separately on the house compound to provide more bedrooms for the tourists. Here, tourists have more privacy due to the private bathroom and toilet in the new house.

The family bedrooms in the Rumah Ibu are transformed into tourist bedrooms, and the family will be sleeping in the bedrooms located in the Rumah Dapur or the extension part at the side or the back of the house. Due to this transformation, Rumah Dapur has become the space used mainly by the tourists, and Rumah Dapur as space mainly used by the family members. For easier maintenances and cleaning routine, the host families spend their daily activities in the Rumah Dapur, the extension part, or at the space under the house including on days when the tourists are not visiting.

Rumah Gadang, according to the adat in Minangkabau, is a family house consisting of several families. Rumah Gadang was built by the local wisdom of the ancestor of Minangkabau, with a consideration of the natural characteristic of Minangkabau hinterland, such as the roof form has been adapted from the geological site of the Minangkabau, the direction of the house has a close relationship with the movement of the wind, and land contour. Rumah Gadang, as a legacy that needs to be preserved, is an attraction and asset that is of high value and can be developed for the welfare of its residents. Various attempts to use it as a place to stay (homestay) have been carried out in several villages in West Sumatra, such as in Nagari Sumpur and Nagari Koto Baru in South Solok.

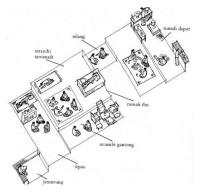


Figure 3: Spatial Layout of Traditional Malay House

Source: Gibbs (1987)

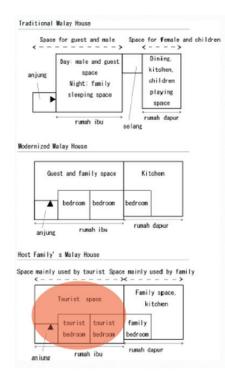


Figure 4. The Transformation on Spatial Usage of Traditional Malay House Source: Ramele and Yamazaki (2014)

In most of the Rumah Gadang that are used as homestays, the tourists will stay in the bedrooms located at the end of the house (called anjung or the bride's bedroom), bedrooms located in the middle of the house, or at the main area of the house (living room), especially if the tourists come in a big group of people (Figure 4). Meanwhile, the host family (or the owner of the house) will be staying in the bedrooms located in the middle of the house.

At the rear part of the house, an extension of a concrete structure is usually added to provide bigger kitchen and extra bathrooms and toilets for the tourists. In this kitchen, the villagers' women will gather to provide meal for the tourists.

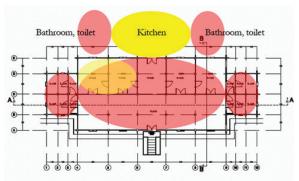


Figure 4. The Spatial Usage of Rumah Gadang as a Homestay Source: Wongso (2016)

# CONCLUSION

This study shows the similarities and differences in the implementation of rural tourism and homestay in Malaysia and Indonesia, and the role of Malay traditional house and Rumah Gadang as a homestay in both countries. To sum up, both countries implement rural tourism and homestay with the same aim and objectives, which are to increase the villagers' income and to protect cultural tradition and the architecture of the traditional Malay house and Rumah Gadang, daily lifestyle and Minang cuisine. It is also to promote local economic activities and to encourage the local community to be involved in the tourism sector, as a new rural economic activity. However, the attractions of rural tourism in Malaysia focus on the various of ethnicity, culture and identity; meanwhile, in Indonesia the focus is more on the sightseeing of nature and natural disasters.

The homestay programme implementation is also similar in both places, where the villagers are giving cooperation and involvement to manage the tourists' accommodation and meals, to drive and guide tourists for sightseeing, and to perform the cultural performance for the tourists. The similarity can also be seen at the spatial usage of the house, where in both countries, tourists will stay in the main part of the house (Rumah Ibu in traditional Malay house and bedrooms of the main house or in the living room in Rumah Gadang). Nevertheless, most of the homestay programmes in Malaysia are registered with the MOTAC and regulated under stipulated guidelines, as an official business package with a proper formation of a homestay committee and sometimes also involved by the existing village organizations. Meanwhile, in Nagari Sumpur, even there is a guideline established by the government, the homestays are managed by the villagers themselves more casually, with flexible activities for tourists and visited mostly by university students and researchers, mainly to study the architecture of the Rumah Gadang.

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