

# **HOMESTAY PROGRAM AND ITS EFFECTS TOWARDS SOCIO-ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH HOMESTAY, TANJONG KARANG, SELANGOR**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Homestay or “*inap desa*” is one of tourism products that contributes to economic growth in the tourism industry in Malaysia. Homestay program provides an alternative to accommodation options for tourists; by staying with selected local host families. This opens up opportunity to directly experience the daily lifestyle, culture and heritage of Malaysia. The tourists will have an opportunity to interact and experience the daily lifestyle of the hosts as well as shared values of the local people. This paper aimed to investigate the administration of homestay and its effects on the socio-economic of communities in the Kampung Sungai Sireh, Kuala Selangor Malaysia. This program has a major impact to the local communities especially in the socio-economic aspect and has increased local communities’ income directly or indirectly.

**Keywords:** Homestay, Socio-Economy, Tourism Development

## INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is an important sector and has a fairly good potential to move forward and grow. Increasing number of tourist destinations has opened up space for some countries in the world to invest in this sector. Most countries exploit the tourism sector as their key socio-economic driver through employment and enterprise and infrastructure development. This situation has been seen over the past six decades where tourism has continued to grow and diversify to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in most countries around the world (UNWTO, 2013).

In Malaysia, the tourism sector is the third largest contributor to the country's economy after the manufacturing and oil palm. In addition, the tourism industry is also a key source of foreign exchange, thus contributing to economic growth, investment and employment. As reported in the Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005, tourism industry has performed well in terms of increased tourist arrivals and tourism revenues. The net contribution of tourism increased from RM11.2 billion to RM18.1 billion (EPU, 2001).

Malaysia ranked 16<sup>th</sup> in tourism revenue and dominated almost two percent of global market share in 2008 (EPU, 2010; Mahathir, 2013). This situation shows that the tourism industry is very important in generating economic growth and national income. An area of uniqueness will naturally be an advantage for tourism purposes. In view of the tourism available in Malaysia, the complementary tourism component comprises the elements of community life, culture, heritage and the environment with localization of attraction or assets to the tourism industry (Yahaya, Sulong & Habibah, 2008).

Malaysia is one of the countries that introduces its tourism activities with components that complement each other comprising of community, heritage and environment with local community being one of the key attractions or assets to the tourism industry (Yahaya et al., 2008). One of the tourism products of Malaysia is the homestay program or *Inap Desa*. This program has increased the participation of rural residents in tourism-related activities as well as providing rural households an opportunity to earn incomes. The homestay program is an alternative accommodation facility that involves travellers living with the local participating families and experiencing the daily routine living of the locals. The main concept of the homestay program emphasized an experience-based lifestyle as a tourism product (MOTAC, 2013). The increase in tourist arrival by 21.6% in 2010 to Malaysia indicated that there is a high opportunity and demand in the homestay program (Yusnita et al., 2012).

The aim of this study was to investigate the administration of homestay and its effects on the socio-economic of communities in the in Kampung Sungai Sireh, Tanjong Karang Selangor. Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay is one of the popular tourist attractions in the Kuala Selangor district. One of the main the reasons is due to the presence of a number of tourist attractions nearby such as Bukit Malawati, Fireflies Park, reserved forest and wetlands as well as the serenity of the homestay areas.

The homestay program introduced a new concept of local culture-based products to the tourists. Rural tourism involves a small group of tourists who will stay in a village or suburban area that still preserves its traditional characteristics and rituals where the tourists could experience the activities together with the local residents to gain new experience and learn new culture. Culture is a set of values and lifestyles that are practiced by the local residents and could be pictured through arts, language, clothes, rituals, food and drinks, activities by local community, and belief (Inskeep, 1991).

Tourism industry in Malaysia is performing well in terms of increment in tourist arrival and tourism income. Jabil (2011) stated that the number of homestay in Malaysia is increasing. However, there was a decrement in term of homestay achievement in the year 2009 as shown in Table 1. It is a huge challenge to the community to sustain the homestay programs due to various number of factors namely lack of standardised regulations, inactive participation of homestay owners, minimal cultural or social activities arranged for the tourists and cleanliness.

## **BACKGROUND OF KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH**

Kampung Sungai Sireh homestay is located in the district of Kuala Selangor of around 03°29'50.1" N and 101°11'58.6" E and at approximately seven kilometres from Pekan Tanjong Karang, Kuala Selangor. It is located near to a number of charming tourists' attractions such as the riverine of Sungai Selangor, swamp forest reserves, Fireflies Park in Kampung Kuantan and Bukit Belimbing, Bukit Melawati and Kuala Selangor Nature Park (Figure 1). The environment of Kampung Sungai Sireh is serene and peaceful with natural forests and wetlands with some local traits, despite the location is only 85 km from the Kuala Lumpur city centre.

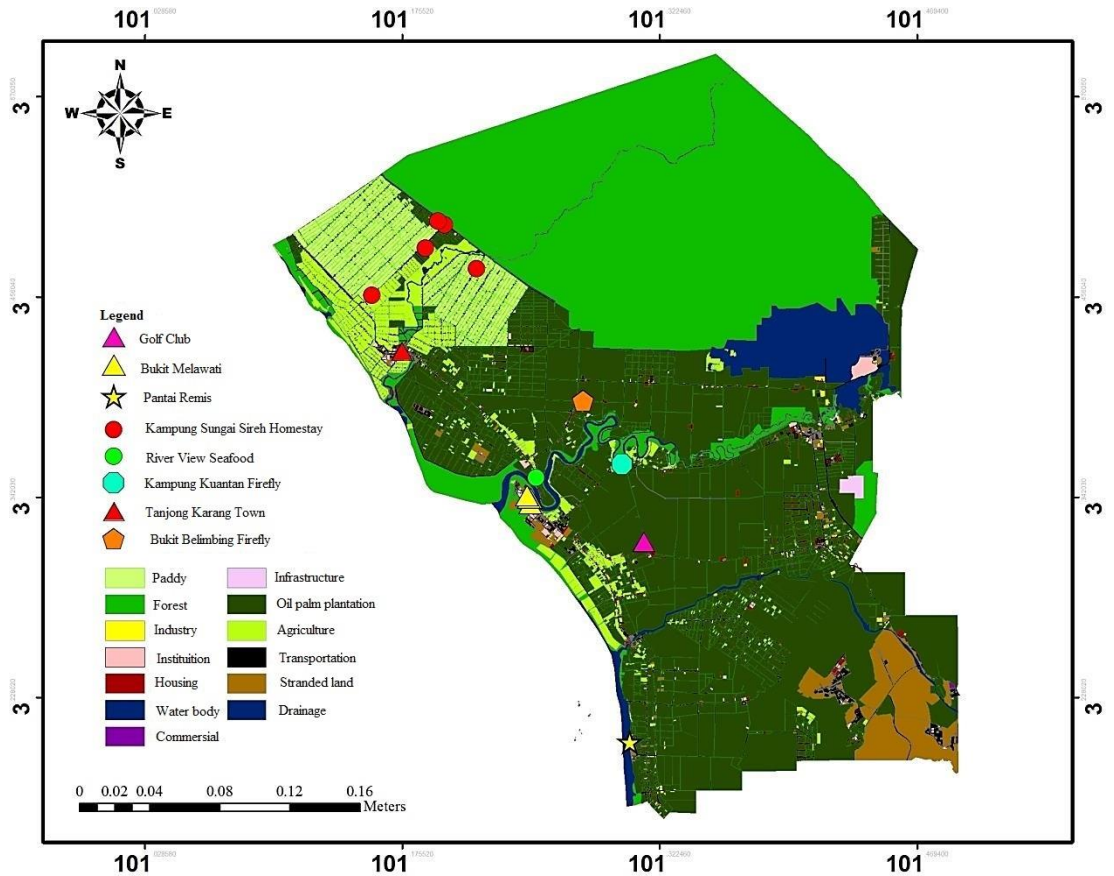
Majority of the Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay residence is of Malay and Javanese descendents; there are also Banjar and Minang people. The houses are distributed in the paddy field, permanent agricultural areas such as coconut and oil palms and also vegetable gardens. The basic facilities of Kampung Sungai Sireh are sufficient to cater for tourism activities such as paved roads, clean water, electricity supplies and wifi connection at the main hall of the village.

The key economic activities in Kampung Sungai Sireh are agricultural based such as paddy and oil palm, vegetables and herbs. Some residence involved in small-scale business in producing the traditional delicacies such *kerepek*, *kuih kapit* and *bahulu*.

**Table 1: The Achievement of Homestay Program for the year 2006-2009**

	<b>2006</b>	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>
Domestic Tourist	21,795	45,354	68,416	29,782
International Tourist	10,038	20,361	23,117	11,729
Total of Tourist	31,833	65,715	91,533	41,511
Total earnings (RM)	2,065,980.34	4,923,433.30	6,393,676.63	3,062,244.35
Number of Homestay Owner	1,563	2,533	3,034	3,264
Number of Homestay	105	135	146	140

Source: MOTAC, 2009



**Figure 1: Tourism attraction areas in Kuala Selangor**

## **HOMESTAY PROGRAM IN KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH**

Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay has started its operation since the year 1989 with the early participants of 15 houses. The local communities of Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay voluntarily manage this community-based tourism. There are many factors influencing the involvement of the homestay owners in the homestay program of Kampung Sungai Sireh. The strength of these factors was measured using questionnaire analyses and interviews with the owners of the homestay. Encouragement and support from stakeholders is one of the factors for the involvement of the owners in this business; such as the local committees as well as the local and federal government. Support from family members and neighbours is also the main factor that influences owner's involvement in the homestay program of which 97.1% of the owners strongly agreed. Other motivations to venture in this business includes to gain additional income, to introduce the traditional village life and culture to the tourists, to experience the

enjoyment and satisfaction and to promote the uniqueness of Kampung Sungai Sireh.

A total of 36 homestays were observed and the information of the homestay, owners and its location was recorded in the GIS database. The data was collected in a series of visits to Kampung Sungai Sireh in 2013 and 2014. Figure 2 showed the distribution of the houses of the homestay. There are four small villages involved in the homestay program namely Kampung Ampangan, Kampung Sungai Sireh, Kampung Sungai Burung, and Kampung Sawah Sempadan. The distribution of the homestay is located around the paddy field and oil palm plantation. Kampung Sungai Sireh and Kampung Sawah Sempadan offered environment surrounded by paddy field, Kampung Sungai Burung with oil palm plantation area, and Kampung Ampangan both paddy and oil palm plantation. Some of other basic information such as types of house, number of room, bed, toilet, and first aid provided were also recorded.

Homestay Kampung Sungai Sireh can receive not more than hundred tourists at a time. It has 73 rooms, 94 beds, 53 toilets in total. The number of facilities and type of house differ from one another. There were 19 houses that are of combination of woods and bricks, 15 houses made of fully bricks/concrete, and a whole wooden house. There are operators who were capable of catering up to six to ten tourists in a session, and mostly capable of receiving between one to five tourists.

The local communities in Kampung Sungai Sireh still practise many cultural activities and religious rituals. Other traditional and religious practices include the *Dendang Fatimah*, *nasyid*, feasts, *zanji* recitation and others. There are a variety of local kampong activities offered such as fishing, eel captivation during harvesting season, kayaking, camping, jungle tracking and hiking. Cultural performing arts that are still practiced include the *tarian zapin*, *gagal*, and *kompang*; traditional games such as *pencak silat*, *layang-layang* and the others. Mockwedding and Hari Raya celebration are also held upon request. The activities held could benefit the local communities, where the traditional culture and rituals in the village were preserved.

## **IMPACTS OF HOMESTAY PROGRAM IN KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH FROM THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS**

Prior to the homestay program, most of the local communities in the rural area depend solely on the agricultural activities as the main source of earnings. However, after "Inap Desa" Program was established, the villagers and suburban communities were given opportunities to participate in the new economic activities that are related to tourism sector where they were able to gain extra income (Mohamad Zaki et al., 2011).

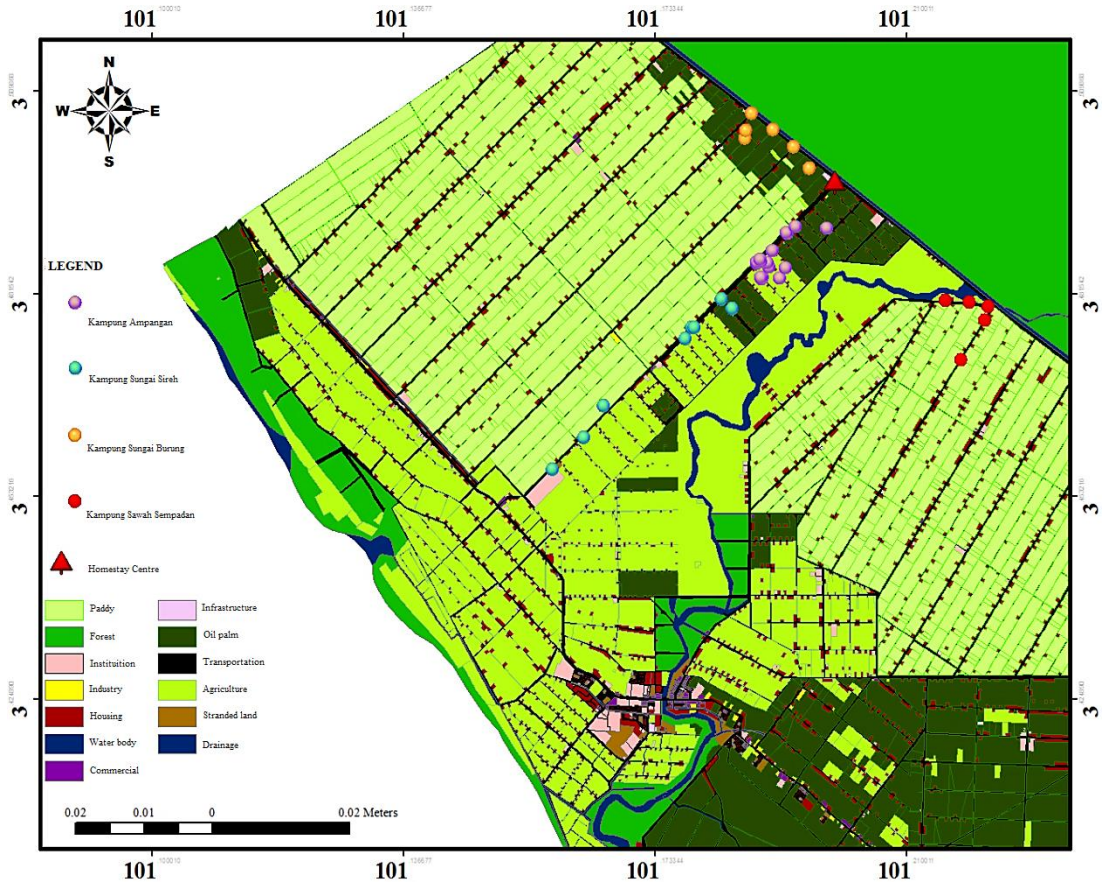


Figure 2: Distribution of the houses of the homestay owners of Kampung sungai Sireh Homestay.

Table 2 shows the monthly statistics of domestic and international tourist arrival and income of Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay for 2012 and 2013. The arrival of tourist in Homestay Kampung Sungai Sireh shows a decrement of 17.6% in 2013. However, there was an increment of 5.6% from the total income. The total income for homestay package increased to 10.7% in 2013 as compared to 2012 accumulating to RM 33, 939.70. This indicates that homestay package capable to generate a substantial income for the owners.

Tourism activities could also benefit the local community by improving the basic facilities provided by the local government. Through this program, the government have taken initiatives to improve the basic facilities and infrastructure of the area for better comfort and ease among the visiting tourists but also the local residents (Yahaya and Razzaq, 2010; Clayton and Jose, 1999).

**Table 2: Monthly statistics on the arrival of domestic and international tourist and income of Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay for the year 2012 and 2013.**

Month	2012				2013			
	Domestic	International	Homestay Package (RM)	Others (RM)	Domestic	International	Homestay Package (RM)	Others (RM)
Jan	191	0	1 888.00	1 300.00	28	59	2 800.00	5 928.00
Feb	555	11	3 218.00	15 612.00	166	37	15 307.50	5 300.00
Mar	172	31	7 679.50	6 352.00	82	20	85 590.00	10 148.50
Apr	404	61	34 000.00	6 300.00	852	56	77 383.80	17 224.00
May	429	40	24 605.00	23 195.00	305	11	14 675.00	12 951.50
Jun	401	9	11 880.00	0	258	99	29 833.00	18 135.00
Jul	799	25	28 690.00	22 320.00	218	43	34 037.00	3 337.00
Aug	115	48	3 986.00	4 210.00	223	35	0	8 799.00
Sep	1 287	104	54 107.00	19 465.00	675	70	17 290.00	26 273.00
Oct	695	7	31 186.10	33 374.00	542	35	15 650.00	19 163.00
Nov	838	110	99 085.00	7 052.00	1 148	180	46 929.00	2 150.00
Dec	287	12	16 679.00	800.00	255	65	11 448.00	2 360.00
<b>Total</b>	6 234	397	317 003.60	139 980.00	4 752	710	350 943.30	131 769.00
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6 631</b>		<b>456 983.60</b>		<b>5 462</b>		<b>482 712.30</b>	

Source: Management records of Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay



Generally, the homestay program has a positive outcome to the owners and residents of Kampung Sungai Sireh. This program has improved the reputation of Kampung Sungai Sireh and the homestay program is well known to tourists. The program has also help to positively develop an interpreneurship and communication skills among the local communities. Kampung Sungai Sireh homestay owners agreed that the homestay program allows them to improve their knowledge in entrepreneurship and leadership. All homestay owners in Kampung Sungai Sireh agreed that the implementation of such program has improved their communication skills, with 91.4% strongly agreed and 8.6% agreed.

Communication between the host and tourist is very important because the host hospitality is essential to welcome the tourist warmly. It is important to enhance the adaptation of the tourists to the homestay environment so that they can acclimatise quickly with the homestay environment and gain knowledge and experience from the program. The tourists could also share their experience with the hosts and a good communication could build a closer relationship and trust between the hosts and the tourists.

Besides that, the homestay program has fabricated more job opportunities to the local communities. The socio-economic activities for the villagers were more focused on agriculture and wage employment preceding the homestay program. However, since the homestay program existed, this has open up opportunities to the local residents to involve in other socio-economic activities directly or indirectly related to this community based tourism industry. Local communities support the program by opening food stalls, boat and kayak renting, tour-guiding for jungle trekking and hiking. Others involved in producing local delicacies and products such as *kerepek*, *kuih sepit*, *kuih bahulu* and *jamu*, which surprisingly in high demand.

## **LIMITATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF HOMESTAY PROGRAM IN KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH**

Alongside with the positive contributions, the Homestay Program in Kampung Sungai Sireh is not excluded from setbacks such as difficulties in homestay management, scarce of budgets, lack of youth participation and the owner's time constraint.

### **Management Practises**

Management is an important element and plays a major role in determining the success of a homestay program. The main problem in implementing homestay program in Kampung Sungai Sireh is lack of a proper management system. The local communities of Kampung Sungai Sireh Homestay voluntarily manage this community-based tourism. At present, there is no specific and exclusive committee team for the management of the homestay program. Most homestay owners are also involved in the Villages Committee of Development and Safety (JKKK), which makes it difficult for them to do two things at one time.

One of the functions of having a specific management team for the management of the whole homestay operations is to ensure the sustainability of the homestay program in long run. Basically, there are a few complaints received from the owners regarding the payment method. Some of these complaints are related to the late payment and the need of providing advanced money for services offered such as food, toiletries, and others. There were also complaints of unfair treatments by the existing management team on the delegation of tourists and last minute changes on the tourists' arrival schedule. At times, owners suffered loss when the arrival of the tourists were cancelled. If the management of Kampung Sungai Sireh homestay is not executed in a systematic way, this gives impact to the future of this program especially in terms of the sense of secure among the operators to continue their involvement.

### **Lack of funding**

The growth of a homestay program requires a huge capital to begin with. The government has contributed a large amount of funding to enable the owners to upgrade their houses into a better shape in order to participate in the homestay program. However, there were a number of irresponsible members who took the fund by advantage, renovated their houses but refused to accept the tourists to stay in and have been inactive in the homestay program participation. This negative attitude has caused the government through the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia to freeze the allocated funding. This has affect other prospective participants to get involved in the homestay program, whereby they have to come out with their own funding to upgrade their houses.

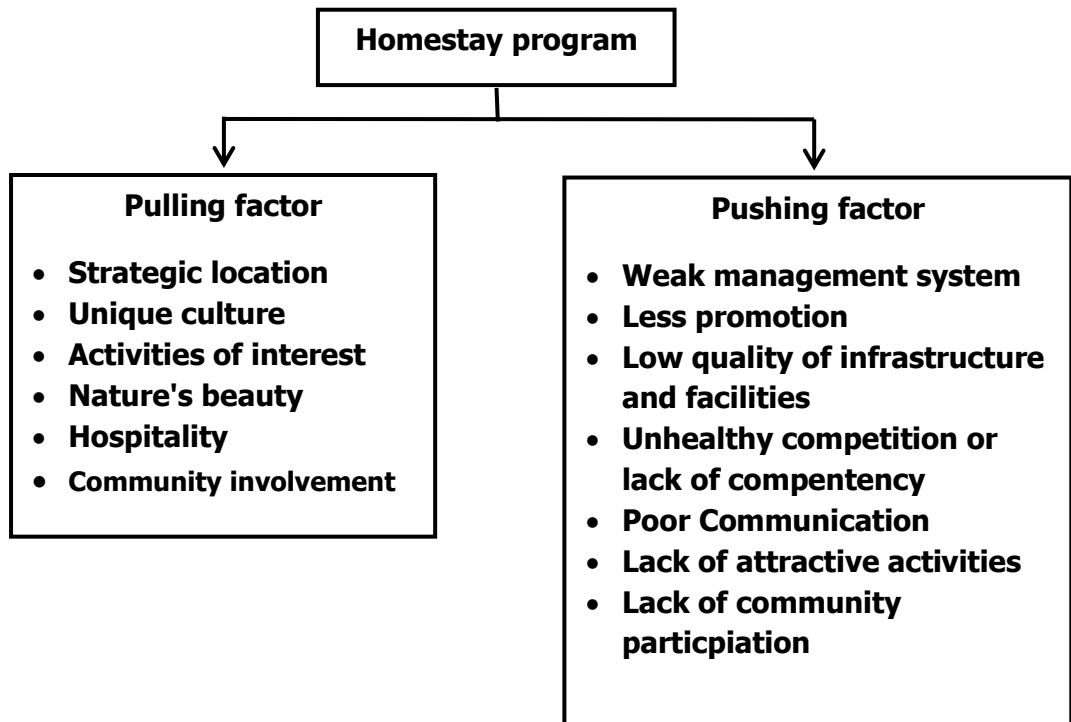
### **Lack of youth involvement**

Involvement and support by the youth for a homestay program is important to ensure the continuous development and sustainability of the program. However, most owners aged 46 years old and above. The youths in Kampung Sungai Sireh have mostly migrated to the cities such as the Kuala Lumpur and Johor Bahru for better job opportunities. This is not a good scene to the sustainability of the homestay program because it needs young and energetic people to execute the adventurous outdoor activities like kayaking, jungle tracking, cycling, and hiking. Currently, this has caused problems to the management of the program in finding the right people to carry out these jobs.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF KAMPUNG SUNGAI SIREH HOMESTAY**

Homestay program in Kampung Sungai Sireh has a potential to become the major tourist attraction. It is able to compete with the other tourism products and could give huge profit to our society and nation if an extensive development is executed and succeeded. The success of implementation of homestay program in rural or suburban area requires changes and transformations of the industry itself.

Homestay program is a rural tourism program and it requires participation, support, and willingness of the member of community to ensure that it can be sustained (Mahathir Suhaimi, 2013; Kayat, 2006). Mohamad Zaki et al. (2011) added that the efficiency of a homestay program can be measured through two factors i.e. the pulling factor and the rejection factor (Figure 3).



Source: Mohamad Zaki et al. (2011)

**Figure 3: Pulling and rejection factors that influence the efficiency of a homestay program.**

There are several suggestions identified to improve the existing homestay program in Kampung Sungai Sireh.

### **Online System**

Parallel with the current technology development, homestay-based tourism is also required to intergrate the available tourism information into a more systematic format. Online booking with map-based facilities and information on the homestay would give better information about their expectation to the prospective tourist. Tourists can estimate the closest distance from the homestay and the other attraction destinations like the city, town, historical areas and beaches. This would enable the tourists to plan their schedule and activity plan accordingly.

### **Improvement on the promotion strategy for the homestay program**

Promotion strategy is the most important method to attract tourists to participate in the homestay program. The government, homestay owners, and local residents are the main stakeholders to involve in the promotion of the homestay program. Outreach programme to schools and universities could also encourage and increase the visibility thus encouraging better participation of local tourists in this program.

Promotion strategies can also be performed using websites and social media including facebook, instagram, twitter and mobile applications. A specific website is the best way to reach out to potential tourists; integrate with an online booking and review system.

### **Provision of language class**

Communication is an important medium to connect the homestay owner who would play a role as a foster family with the tourists. Communication breakdown could be one of the factors that prevent the tourists from revisiting. Most residents do not speak other languages besides Malay and it is obviously a barrier of communicate if the host family is having foreigners who may only speak English when visiting. Therefore, the homestay committee at Kampung Sungai Sireh could improve the number of foreign language speaking people (especially English) by conducting language class for the participating home owners.

### **Improve management system**

Since there were reports on lack of a proper management system of the homestay program, an intervention through the establishment of a specific management team amongst the owners is essential. The homestay program not only involves the local residents but also the authority at the local level known as Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK) (Village Development and Security Committee) which is responsible for the overall development and management of a village. Therefore, a better arrangement to the homestay program management should be proposed to ensure an adequate level of monitoring on the tourist arrival schedules and a fair tourist distribution schedule among the participating owners. A proper financial management is also crucial to ensure that the smooth running of the tourism activities organized by the homestay. Besides, the owners must also take responsibility on taking care of the welfare of the tourists and not misuse the allocated funding for personal use.

## **CONCLUSION**

Homestay program is not unusual for the residents in villages and suburban areas in Malaysia. The government has also taken a consistent initiative to promote the tourism through Visit Malaysia Year that was launched for four times that was during the year 1990, 1994, 2007, and 2014 with specific themes. This may be a platform to introduce and promote homestay programs nationwide. Homestay program offers a wide range of packages for the tourists to participate in the

program and tourism activities of their choice. The promotion of homestay is parallel to the country's development agenda that is to transform the rural area into a live living environment and to achieve the objective of community-based program which intends to increase the income of rural residents. To ensure the success of the homestay program, the leadership and high motivation is the most important quality to be induced into the homestay owners.

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