

China Tourists' Experiences with Longhouse Homestays in Sarawak

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ABSTRACT

There are many types of eco-cultural tourism products and the homestays are popular in Malaysia. In Sarawak, the Longhouse homestay programmes are attractive to foreign tourists and the tourists from China are great potential customers. Hence, the expectations and experiences of the China tourists need to be well-understood as they might have different expectations. The main objective of this exploratory research was to identify the important dimensions and specific aspects of the China tourists' experiences with the longhouse homestays, specifically with a Bidayuh longhouse in Kuching. It was a qualitative research using site visits and focus group interview. The visits and interviews involved five China tourists. The contents of the interviews were analyzed and their experiences were categorized to form more than 15 dimensions with the respective items. The fifteen dimensions were, namely: Journey, ICT, Communication with Tourist, Culture, Moral, Education, Tourist Service, Tourist Engagement, Homestay Management, Food and Beverages, Cleanliness, Nature, Built Environment, Art, and Security. Besides, their suggestions were also obtained for the homestay programme to be improved. The



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limitations of this research and direction for future research were also discussed.

Keywords: *Tourist experience; longhouse; homestays; Sarawak; China*

INTRODUCTION

The tourism service sector is important in generating income for many stakeholders in Sarawak. It helps to boost the local economic development and improve the quality of life for the related communities. In the early days, the homestay programme was known as a vacation concept started in the late 1970s in Europe (Jabil & Che Ismail, 2012). In Sarawak, the homestay programmes are essential for tourists to experience the Sarawakian way of life. It provides tourists with the unique multi-ethnic culture, experiences with the nature and economic activities (e.g. farming, cooking, dancing). Visitors also have the opportunity to visit rural villages and experience the nature, local culture in local community houses. Previous research into tourists' experiences during a trip has mainly been concerned with visiting, seeing, learning, enjoying and living in different lifestyles (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003) and has been deemed a crucial construct in travel and tourism research (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007).

Sarawak, "Land of the Hornbill", has the unique elements required to become the desirable tourist destination. The authenticity which attracts many tourists includes natural beauty, history, heritage, festivals, and garden-like modern city living. Indeed, it has become a memorable experience appreciated by travellers from all over the world, especially with the traditional longhouses located in different parts of Sarawak. Through the homestay programmes, tourists have the opportunity to visit rural villages, longhouses as well as experience the hosts' culture in their homes. The tourist's experiences are important for the operators to improve themselves. The tourists' evaluations of each aspect of their experiences were important because they will subsequently affect variables such as satisfaction and behavioural intentions (Mariam Norain & Abdul Rahim, 2012; Voon & Lee, 2009). The number of tourists from China has been increasing. However, limited studies are found on the China tourists' experiences and their expectations. Hence, the main objective of this

exploratory research was to identify the important aspects of China tourists' experiences with the longhouse homestays in Sarawak.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Tourist Experience

Tourists from different countries have different opinions, experiences or suggestions after visiting a scenic spot or destination. They would express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction after experiencing the tourism products and services (Zeithmal, Bitner & Gramier, 2009) and tourists' satisfaction is an assessment of tourists' experiences and has been extensively studied in tourism marketing literature (Macek, 2012). Research and study on tourist experience is important for the tourist industry for continuous improvement and sustainability. As Xing and Li (2014) pointed out, the evaluation of tourist satisfaction on a scenic spot was an influencing factor for the sustainable development of the scenic spot. It might be the same in the homestay context. As the previous study demonstrated (Gon, Voon & Jamali, 2016), the tourists' experiences, which included people, culture, cleanliness, food and beverages, as well as nature and safety aspects, in Sarawak's homestay could contribute to the increase in the number of domestic and international visitors to the homestay program. The measurement of the overall experience with tourist satisfaction on the scenic homestay is an important point for developing a more successful homestay program.

Dimensions of Tourist Experience

There are various facets of the tourist experiences as found in the literature. Among the common dimensions of tourist experience are as follows:

Culture. Liu Yuxi, poetry of Tang Dynasty composed that “the fame of a mountain lies not on its highness but on fairy tales”, which demonstrated the relationship between culture and tourism. Gao, Zhang and Huang (2018) suggested that Chinese tourists had a preference for cultural interpretations of natural landscapes. Homestays or house accommodations allow tourists a chance to experience local culture firsthand. Macek (2012) pointed out that homestays are distinct from typical accommodations by

offering travelers unique experiences that combine basic needs with the host's culture. He also said that travelers that choose to participate in a homestay already have an appreciation for the local culture and a desire to learn more. A sustainable growing tourism economy generally pays attention to preserve natural resources including local cultures and traditional lifestyles. Just like Seubsamarn (2009) introduced, the homestay which refers to a stay at a residence by a traveler is viewed as a mean of culture and heritage tourism emerging with traditional houses and culture of residents achieving two goals at the same time: increasing the income of host country's families and encouraging them to preserve their cultural heritage by presenting their traditional houses.

Food and Beverages. Food and beverages are very important part of tourist experience. Food is not only a product component or part of an experience, but also an attraction, a cultural phenomenon (Tikkanen, 2007). In tourism activities, food and beverages are not only basic necessities of the body. Tourists also purposefully taste the local specialties with a high expectation. There is a Chinese saying: People regard food as their heaven. Food culture and tourism culture are inseparable. They interact with each other. Food culture is a demonstration of regional characteristics and folk customs. Yang (2001) even referred to food and tourism as leaves and flower, adding that there would be a vast market prospect with the combination of food culture and tourism activities, which would raise the economy value of national cultures and promote the development of catering and tourism industry. Besides, food items are bought as gifts for friends back home (Prebensen & Foss, 2011). Earnings from food encourage local residents to promote homestay industry.

Tourist Engagement. While managers are thinking about the operation of homestays, how tourists are interacting with the local people should be taken into consideration. Previous research showed that customer satisfaction depended on the degree of customer participation in the production process (Bendapudi & Leone, 2003). Prebensen and Foss (2011) mentioned that tourists prefer slower time, being able to participate in producing the experience. They also pointed out that tourists have the need to learn, not only to be passive onlookers.

Cleanliness. The cleanliness or hygiene of a scenic spot has a very important impact on the development of a tourist destination. If tourists are

satisfied with the cleanliness, they will have a good impression on the homestay, which generally attracts them to revisit or promote the advertisement of the homestay. Mostly the owners of homestays are not alert about cleanliness, especially concerning the toilet and bathroom. The hygiene of the toilet is still the most unpleasant experience faced by tourists. The unpleasant moment such as bad hygiene and smelly toilet will distract them during the stay (Hamzah, 2008). It is supported by the previous research (Gon, et al., 2016), tourists complaining that “the toilet is dirty and not functioning (cannot flush and no hose).”

Tourist Service. The hosts, including front line personnel and the tour guide, are shown to play an extremely important role in co-creating valuable experience atmospheres in tourism (Mossberg, 1995; Ap & Wong, 2001). How the local homestay operators play their roles is highly important in order to secure a continuous visit from tourists. The more unique the experience that visitors can get from a tourism product, the more potential it would be in attracting future and repeat customers, and the more independent is the provider in its business (Gon et al., 2016). The tempo that the operators offer their services is also of great importance. As mentioned in *Coping and Co-creating in Tourist Experiences* (Prebensen & Foss, 2011), tourists prefer longer stops (slow time) and long to see, touch and smell the nature. They feel trapped when it's not up to them to decide on a slower pace or to experience genuine nature.

Environment. As Osman and Sentosa (2013) pointed out, the conservation of environment and environment protection are the backbone of rural tourism in Malaysia. Homestays are usually located in rural areas. Tourists would like to travel a long way and pay for the beauty of environment which consists of historical or natural attractions. With the devotion to preserve the surrounding environment, homestays could directly benefit the local residents (Macek, 2012). Gon et al. (2016) stated that the longhouse possessed a rich diversity of natural resources, making them appropriate venues as tourist destinations. In the mean time, the longhouse homestay owns a special built environment. The local tropical climate is also an active component in the natural environment that affects or shapes the unique architecture of the longhouses. Lo, Songan, Mohamad and Yeo (2013) suggested that the environment or nature of the destination is the main attraction for tourists to visit. The unique built environment of the longhouses motivates most tourists to visit and/or stay.

The Chinese Values

Gao, Zhang and Huang (2018) investigated Chinese tourists' views of nature and found that the Chinese traditional cultural values and beliefs, notably the thinking of '*tian ren he yi*' (天人合一, oneness of nature with humans), still have considerable impacts on the China tourists. Previous findings by Xu, Lebel and Sturgeon (2009) indicated that the people from China were eager to learn about other cultures and history while visiting places and this was in accordance with a Chinese proverb, "read ten thousand books, travel ten thousand miles." Their motivation to seek knowledge and visit historical attractions could also be explained by the principles of Confucian teaching, which was written in The Analects of Confucius, "isn't it a pleasure to practice in due time what one has learnt?"

As Ma, Zhang and Wang (2019) said, study combined tourism was of big importance to the development of both education and tourism. Chinese people are inclined to get educated not only intellectually but also morally in sightseeing. Filial piety was one of the spirits many tourist destinations tried to convey from the consuming of tourism package. In the Analects of Confucius, when Tsze-you asked what filial piety was, the master said, without reverence, what is there to distinguish our parental support from that of some other animals? Liu (2015) advocated in her essay to inherit filial piety culture and promote its contribution to the tourism industry. Filial piety with local features could be a special tourism resource and the spread of filial piety is beneficial to the society.

Relationships among Tourist Experience, Tourist Satisfaction and Behavioural Intentions

Tourist experience consists of the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of a tourist. The satisfactions of a tourist attribute to a good fame for a tourist destination while dissatisfactions, if well collected and analysed, could help the managers to modify facilities and improve services. Many managers and owners are waking up to the idea that enhancing customer experience is the key to their business' success (e.g. Chepngetich, Ouma & Aila, 2019) since customer experience is found to be very important in explaining behavioural intentions. Tourist satisfaction often leads to a positive word-of-mouth communication and revisit intentions which often brings new customers to the tourist destination (Ma et al., 2019).

Dissatisfied tourists, assuming tourists who participate in homestay programme, would prefer to choose other kinds of accommodation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of this exploratory research was to identify the important tourist experience dimensions among the China tourists who had recently visited the Bidayuh longhouse homestay in Kuching, Sarawak. Qualitative research techniques were used. The focus groups interviews and site visits to the longhouse homestays were carried out and participated by five China tourists. These tourists were the visiting scholars from Zhejiang Province, China.

A focus group interview was conducted and it lasted for about two hours. Two site visits were conducted. The process of transcribing the recorded interviews involved identification of keywords, which were then grouped and interpreted accordingly. A content analysis was done. The researchers also visited the selected longhouses in Kuching and Sebuyau to further experience and understand the longhouse living conditions, culture and environment. The literature-based research process also involved the identification of the various related dimensions of tourist experience from the services marketing and hospitality literature.

FINDINGS

The results are based on qualitative study findings. Based on the focus group discussion and visitors' visits to Annah Rais Longhouse (Kuching, Sarawak), the findings are presented herewith. The aspect of tourist experience has been identified in which the critical attributes of fifteen (15) dimensions are used. The results of the findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Dimensions of China Tourist Experience

1. Journey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature and refreshing - Trip cannot be in a hurry - Natural resources - Simple and peaceful life - Nice scenery along the journey 	2. ICT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need electronic screen - No e-ticketing system - QR codes & payment Schedule - Inadequate use of social media - Weak e-commerce 	3. Communication <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With body language - People always smiling - Guide knows my language - Dance - Bidayuh's ethos
4. Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relate well among locals - Human touch, <i>ren qing wei</i> - Unique local language - Bamboo culture - building - Head-hunting history - multi-cultural elements 	5. Moral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcoming dance - With craftsman's spirit - Bidayuh's self-sacrificial spirit - Thresholds show respect for the owner/deceased - Strong family values and ties 	6. Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to educate tourists - No education base (<i>jiao yu ji di</i>) - No industry-academic cooperation for education - No information card for plants or architecture
7. Tourist Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome wine (<i>Tuak</i>) - The guide with patience - Informed in details - Less modern equipment - Less recreation facilities 	8. Tourist Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Available to book the trip - More activities by booking - Meal needs to be pre-booked - Tourists can choose preferred activities 	9. Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have management committee - Manager operates effectively - Incentives and rules - Service management – using MyServEx Scale
10. Food & Beverages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet physiological need - Foods are delicious - Balanced nutrition - Fresh food and beverages 	11. Cleanliness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neat and tidy - Kitchen is clean - Fresh air - Take off shoes - clean 	12. Nature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Located in rural area - Beautiful scenery - natural and original - Relax body and mind
13. Built Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - British Colonialism style - Long and wide spread - Masters of bamboo use - In accordance with Belief - <i>Feng Shui</i> 	14. Art <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unique musical instrument - Traditional dances - Paintings on the longhouse walls/murals - Handmade crafts 	15. Security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building - can catch fire - Need more fire-fighting equipment - Need Surveillance cameras - Warning information

i. Journey

The Longhouse, which the Bidayuh people called Annah Rais Longhouse, is located in the southern part of Sarawak, the northwestern part of Borneo. Along the journey, tourists can enjoy Sarawak's tropical rainforest resources, unique cultural atmosphere, traditional etiquette and delicacies.

The whole journey of the Longhouse homestay trip made tourists feel really different and special. The Bidayuh people have always followed their simple way of life for many years. We temporarily put aside (did not engage much with) our mobile phones and computers and went to the longhouse to have a close contact with the natural environment, trees and rivers.

During the journey, the longhouse leader explained the history, rules and regulations, and all these things were really stunning. Compared with the homestays in China, Annah Rais Longhouse homestay is more aboriginal and authentic. So one day was not enough to enjoy it and that was a bit of a pity. And the visit could have more activities to let the guests involve in and it should be more interesting and fun. It would be even better if there are some projects to let the guests do on their own in order to know more about the Bidayuh's history and life. Once completing this visit, the tourists would have fallen in love with this place, loved the warm and simple life of the people.



Figure 1: The Journey and Accessibility

ii. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Information and communication technology in the Longhouse was weak just because the Longhouse was really original, that was why there was not much information to let the tourists know more. The Longhouse did not

have a payment or fee schedule (Notice Board) at the front gate which could show the various prices (e.g. single ticket price, family ticket price, ticket and food package price and so on). There was no modern technology used for ticketing purposes. Therefore, when the tourists passed the gate, they could not be scanned by the mobile phone because the Longhouse did not have any E-ticket. The chart showing location was not updated. The internet connectivity could be better for more effective online communication. The Longhouse's online information system was not consummate. Even there was no personal website which included introducing, booking, opening time and so on. The modern social media about the Longhouse was not enough, such as Instagram, Wechat, QQ, Agoda. Furthermore, they could have the popular and modern payment methods (e.g. Alipay, Union pay, Boost).



Figure 2: Information and Communication Facilities

iii. Communication with Tourists

The owner of the Longhouse homestay knew different kinds of languages, so there were no communication barriers between China tourists and him. Even though the local people there did not know other languages, they still had diverse ways of communication, such as smiling, body language. Thus, the communication barrier between Chinese tourists and local residents was reduced. All the local people tried their best to help us and met our individual's needs when we faced troubles in the Longhouse, especially the Longhouse leader who did well in explaining the local traditions. By talking to him, we knew the Longhouse more than searching

from the internet. By the way, if the local people there could speak Chinese, it would be easier for them to communicate with China tourists. If the goods or services they sold or some explanations (writings) were in Chinese, then the China tourists would be happier. The Longhouse local people showed us the Bidayuh's Ethos by the eagle dance. All these unique communications were so touching to us.



Figure 3: Communication with Tourists

iv. Culture

Among the minority cultures in Malaysia, the most fascinating culture was the 'Longhouse culture,' as it was full of national colours. People living in the Longhouse had a close relationship with each other, whenever they were imported, they would continue to build a house linking to the original one. Therefore, the longer the Longhouse, the stronger the family is. At the same time, there was a manager and resident committee who were responsible for managing the Longhouse. The relationship between the relatives was harmonious and full of human touch (*ren qing wei*, 人情味), which was rare in other places. In the mean time, Chinese tourists could not understand the local language because it was very unique from other races.

Tourists could see the high individual wood stairs and the bamboo fences when they arrived in front of the Longhouse. Traditional building is a point which reflects the bamboo culture in the Longhouse homestay, even the whole bamboo structure could be seen in the Longhouse construction. 'Tuak', the welcoming wine provided to Chinese tourists also reflected the friendly culture in the Longhouse. Moreover, the hoes hoisted with straw ropes could be seen in the Longhouse, called head-hunting

culture. The culture came from the historical tradition, that a boy would learn martial arts to hunt the enemy's head. After that, the boy hung the hoes outside the door, showing that he has grown up.



Figure 4: The Longhouse Authentic Culture

v. Moral

Eagle dance, a kind of welcoming dance performed by a female local resident, showed her bravery and strength. Meanwhile, the bamboo instrument required zero error operation which reflected the craftsman's spirit. The Longhouse's living room was divided into three parts, the parents and their adult sons slept at the outermost one, the grandparents and children in the middle, and the guests at the innermost part at night. In this way, when they were attacked by enemies, the old, the young and the guests could evacuate at once. It reflected the Bidayuh's self-sacrificial spirit. The Longhouse has two thresholds, which were very short. When the guests enter the house, they must bow their heads to show respect for the owner. Besides, the local residents united to resist enemies to protect their home in the past, which reflected their solidarity and mutual assistance spirit. Moreover, the young generations still came back at the weekend even though they worked or married outside, reflecting their strong family values.



Figure 5: Moral and Customs

vi. Education

A longhouse is a unique and rare living habitat and it has rich historical background. This is meaningful to educate people from outside in order to learn their local traditions. But this kind of education cannot be effectively experienced by the visitors because the homestay operators do not have the education base (*jiao yu ji di*, 教育基地) or platform to educate the visitors, and also there is no tangible industry-academic co-operation to provide the necessary educational service. Besides, the Longhouse residents speak the native language, and only the manager can speak multiple languages and explain to the visitors. The plants and the architecture also did not have any information card to be introduced to the tourists. Therefore, the tourists could not easily know the history of the house, the name and age of the plants, and the style of the architecture. Furthermore, consumers all over the world could not buy local products online because they knew little about e-commerce.

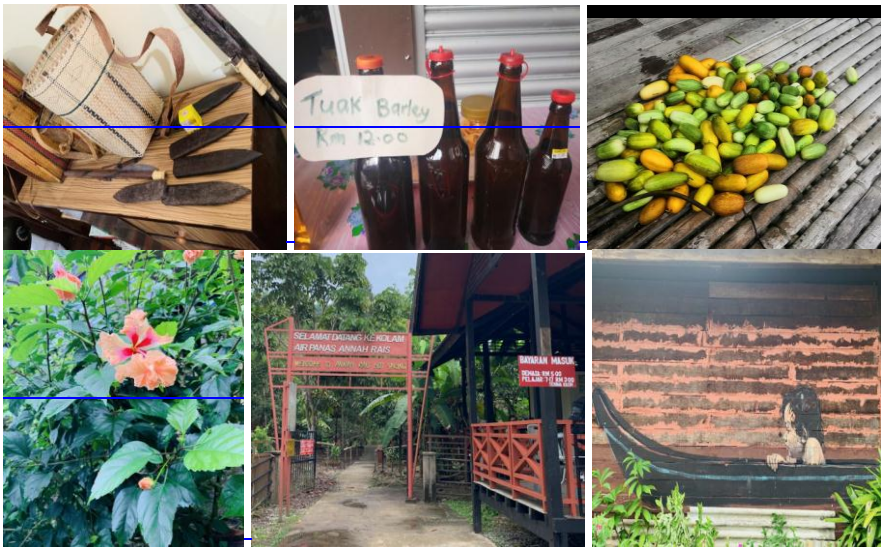


Figure 6: Information and Education

vii. Tourist Services

The tourist service is another point which should be mentioned here. In general, service from the longhouse homestay was satisfied, including

following aspects for the detail. Welcoming wine, *Tuak*, was the first thing that needs to be highlighted, which made the tourists feel comfortable when visiting a strange place for the first time. Language barrier was a problem for China tourists and that meant the language translation service is needed. In terms of longhouse homestay, the guide showed his ability in language, providing the English, Mandarin services for tourists. Besides, the guide explained the culture and history of the longhouse patiently. The third point was facilities for tourists were organized well, the Rattan mat was always available for tourists to sit down and rest. Native culture explanations also reflected the tourist service quality in the longhouse homestay, because the culture is quite different from China tourists' experiences.

On the other hand, there are still a few aspects which made tourists feel uncomfortable when traveling. Internet signal may be the key issue. As Chinese visitors spend much time on the Internet for leisure, Internet service is quite an important thing for them. However, Internet facilities were not conveniently found in the longhouse homestay. Moreover, tourists may feel bored when they finish the tiring trip, as interesting recreational facilities are not found around the longhouse homestay.



Figure 7: Serving the Tourists

viii. Tourist Engagement

Tourist engagement is an important point to run the longhouse homestay business. The tourist engagement links to tourist booking, also reflects the pre-visiting experience for China tourists. For the longhouse homestay, the booking journey is available in the travel agency or contact with homestay managers, while the second method is more recommended as more information can be understood. For the tourists who have contacted the

homestay managers previously, additional activities would be provided as required during the trip. The additional activities include traditional dancing, local culture building visiting and jungle adventure, some were experienced during the visit. However, there are some weaknesses of the longhouse homestay tourist engagement. One thing must be highlighted here is the homemade food would not be provided if the trip is not booked. It makes visitors feel inconvenient to find the various food and drinks around the homestay. The second point is details of the additional activities cannot be gathered by tourists before visiting, which may result in misunderstanding. For the China tourists, they tend to get information from websites and previous visitors' comments online when they plan their travel. The lack of information and misunderstanding may make them feel the trip not up to their expectations. Lastly, room and food bookings if were pre-arranged by the managers, tourist cannot freely choose by themselves, which also make tourists feel uncomfortable.

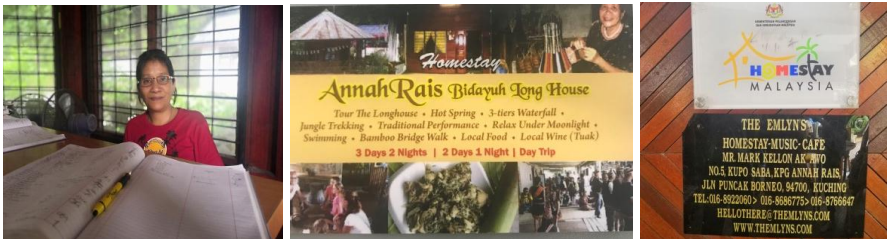


Figure 8: Informing and Engaging the Tourists

ix. Homestay Management

Tourism management requires the professional knowledge, including Tourism enterprise management, tourism marketing and Exhibition services. In terms of longhouse homestay, managers have already paid more attention on group management, regarded as management committee exactly, and tourism marketing management. Through the longhouse homestay experience, the management committee played a key role in daily management, led by the longhouse homestay project sponsor. From the experience in visiting, the leader was fair to the homestay operators in terms of allocating the tourists to them. Tourists from outside bring revenue for local people without influencing the traditional way of local life. Furthermore, conflicts of interests and disputes in the process of

homestay operations are also challenges which the managers need to be concerned about. Because of the good relationship among the longhouse residents, the managers set rules effectively. Managers also formulated the rules with incentives and punishments. The local residents who provide the high quality services have more chance in the future, while the poor service providers might not be able to receive the tourists in the future. One of the weaknesses of the management was tourism product development and the necessary marketing management activities (e.g. promotions, tourist service management). As longhouse homestays still stay in traditional way, modern management tools and methods could not be found.

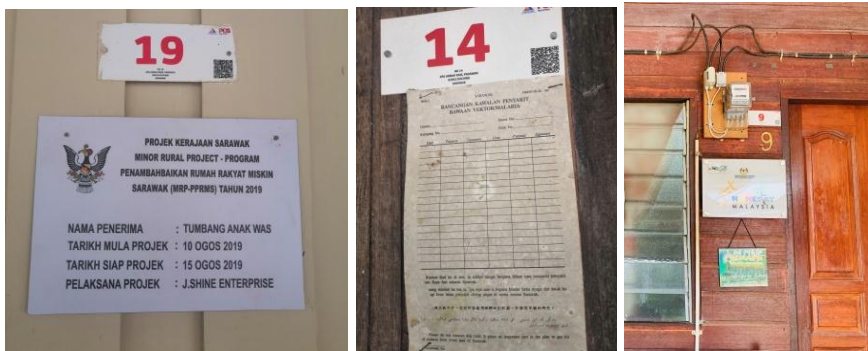


Figure 9: Managing the Longhouse for Homestays

x. Food and Beverages

The local food and beverages supplied by the host was satisfying. After a long and tiring journey from the city centre to the rural area, tourists needed refreshments to energize themselves. Generally, they were eager to know when and what kinds of delicacies they would be treated. At the gate of the Ticket Office, tourists were invited to have a drink of a homemade rice wine called '*Tuak*'. The wine was very sweet because the villagers added sugar into it. Tourists could also have a taste of a kind of tree bark beverage with red colour which looked appealing and tasted original. People here boiled certain herbs to make special beverages. Dried herbs were packed and placed on tables in front of some houses for sale. These were appropriate gifts to be taken back to China because of their originality and health benefits. It was said that the herbs could lower blood pressure, sooth arthritis and etc. Fried Taro chips were common in the food

stalls. The villagers planted taros by themselves and sliced them to fry. The chips were crispy and cheap (RM2 for each pack). Some tourists bought the chips to share at home. Tourists could have a taste of newly-picked crystal fruits when they are ripen. The fruits were fresh and juicy and exotic. The lunch was prepared a bit late but abundant in quantity and delicious in taste. Bamboo rice, rice put into bamboo and cooked on fire, scented the fragrance of bamboo, so was the bamboo chicken. The bamboo chicken, flavoured by the manager before being put in bamboo, was a local specialty. Rice was planted by villagers but chicken were bought from the market. Local vegetables were served and fish was baked with regional characteristics.



Figure 10: Some Authentic Food and Beverages

xi. Cleanliness

With the development of economy and rising of people's living standard, Chinese tourists paid more attention to the cleanliness of a tourist destination than before. Generally speaking, the hygiene of the longhouse was agreeable. The kitchen was very clean. The food was stored in stainless steel utensils with lids covered to keep away dust and insects. Fruits were preserved in plastic wraps. The plates were gleaming, and it was the same with the knives and forks. The villagers in the longhouse drink natural water from the mountains. The mountain spring with plenty of natural minerals is far from pollution and is good for health.

The rooms on the second floor were tidy. Since both hosts and tourists should take off their shoes to enter the house, the floor inside was almost spotless. Although the accommodation facilities were simple—only one or two beds in a room – sheets, pillows and blankets looked clean.

There was a bathroom which was spacious and clean. Several pairs of slippers were put at the gate for customers to wear in case of wetness in the bathroom. Outside the house, tourists could scarcely catch any refuse in sight. The total hygiene of the longhouse homestay was satisfying.

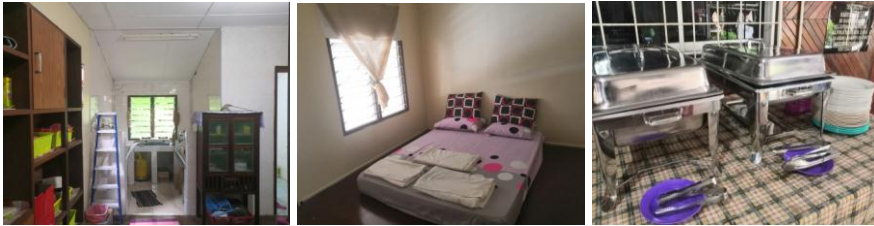


Figure 11: Cleanliness and Safety for Better Tourist Satisfaction

xii. Nature

The Annah Rais longhouse homestay is located in the rural area, which is full of natural scenery. Tourists were embraced by a whole view of greenness when they alighted from the transportation vehicles. The unique characteristics of the tropical rainforest attracted the tourists, especially tourists from urban places. In Annah Rais Longhouse, tourists could see all kinds of local vegetables such as taros and lemon grass. Various types of fruit trees could be seen anywhere, like banana, cocoa, durian, pineapple, papaya and so on. There was a river across the village. The water in the river was so clean that sand and gravels beneath the water level were clearly seen. The water flowed over the stones and ran in all directions out of the village. There was a natural hot spring in the Longhouse. Nature bestowed the longhouse abundantly. The fresh air with high content of negative ion relaxed the body and mind of tourists.



Figure 12: Nature, Green and Organic

xiii. Built Environment

Not all homestays have such architecture heritages as the Annah Rais Longhouse homestay. With a British Colonialism style, the longhouse had been kept original for hundreds of years. The Longhouse is quite different from the photos one can obtain from the websites. Instead of one building with several houses connected in one line, the Longhouse is so long and wide spread that visitors could hardly take an overview picture without the aid of drones. The well-preserved buildings of the longhouse show that the residents are the real masters of bamboo using. They designed dry areas and sanitation areas in the house, dry areas for resting and sleeping, with an upper floor for storing, and sanitation areas for cleaning and bathing. The sanitation measures also helped to keep the house dry in rainy seasons. The longhouse is high above the ground on the support of numerous pillars. Its bamboo structure holds no water which drops through the leaks almost simultaneously as it falls on the bamboo-combined floor. The bamboo floor, which experiences sunbathe and rain-flush day after day, is in constant amendments due to the booming of tourists. The total design is in harmony with the nature and corresponds to the local environment. With rivers passing through the village and mountains like shields (前有照后有靠, *qian you zhao hou you kao*), the landscape and and locality of the longhouse are good for prosperity and sustainability.



Figure 13: Built Environment and Architecture

xiv. Art

According to what they learned from the website, the tourists went to the Longhouse with an expectation of original art forms owned by original tribes. Nevertheless, the Longhouse did not disappoint visitors with its unique music and traditional dance. The musical instrument is handmade on a separate bamboo. One mistake would totally ruin the instrument. Hence, the process should be under extreme prudence which did not allow any mistake. The music is simple but full of rhythms. While music rose, an old man chanted his high and lonely melody and the eagle-dance began. The performer was barefooted and dressed in local costumes. She acted like an eagle swaying wings in high sky and her steps were in tempo with the music. The eagle-dance was easy for tourists to follow. There are three meaningful paintings on the longhouse walls. The paintings related stories in silence. But with the colour of the painting similar to that of the wooden or bamboo wall, they might escape tourists' eyes. Or, it was probable that tourists paid attention to the paintings but they did not understand the meanings. People there make crafts like purses, cotton bags, stone necklaces and bamboo baskets. The patterns are of traditional design and the colours are coordinated with the characteristics of the long house.



Figure 14: Art, Design and Culture

xv. Security

The roads from Kuching to Annah Rais Longhouse are good and safe. Though tourists started off with a settled feeling of safety on the road, they might be a little bit worried during the sightseeing. Annah Rais Longhouse is of bamboo construction which is easy to be on fire and quick to burn since the houses are connected together. There are fire-fighting equipments available in the Longhouse though there can be more fire extinguishers placed at different strategic locations. Huge water tanks could be seen in many corners. It could help to get water if a fire explodes, but these water tanks, whether they are full of water inside or not, would not be very effective because of the materials used for the buildings. Surveillance cameras are not available for inspection and supervision. All the properties of the local people even lives of tourists are exposed to hidden danger of fire. In China, cigarettes are banned in ancient buildings, but in Annah Rais Longhouse, cigarettes can be bought and consumed carefully, especially by the residents. Although local people had applied some ways to keep away from fire, some families boil water outside the house and store barbecue utensils in cement cupboards. Besides, there must be clear signs of exit routes to facilitate the evacuation processes in the event that was a fire broke out.



Figure 15: Security and Precautions

Furthermore, as a tourist destination, especially a hot spot, there occasionally might be quarrels even fights, hence security guards or even a police station nearby will be necessary. In addition, there should be first aid kits in the homestay and/or emergency medical centre in case of injury.

Suggestions for Further Improvement

According to the findings above, also compared with the Chinese homestay experience, the Annah Rais homestay could improve more to suit the China tourists. Initially, the Longhouse should build more signal towers so that at least the tourists could have easy internet connection. In this way, it could be more convenient for the guests. Furthermore, digital technology could be used wildly. The show-house could be built in front of the Longhouse which displays repeatedly the history and information about Annah Rais Longhouse. Additionally, more news or activities about the Longhouse could be posted and shared on social media (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Douyin, Wechat).

To extend more services to the tourists, more entertainment facilities should be constructed in the future. Apart from that, modern equipment like TVs, play station and home theater also could be prepared for the homestay tourists. Online booking system should be enhanced in later longhouse homestay business running. The homestay owner could take the pictures of night-stay rooms, which should be professionally checked and thereafter uploaded on the Internet with text descriptions in detail. In this case, tourists can choose the types of houses to stay, and also can make comments for interested visitors as recommendations. Besides, modern management methods should be taught to the homestay operators, working out an effective plan to catch the direction of tourism boom and tourism trend. While the elderly residents in the longhouse may find it difficult to catch up, which means the management committee needs to train the younger generation to improve the management quality.

For education, the operators of the longhouse homestay may consider setting up an Education Base (*jiao yu ji di*, 教育基地) or enterprise co-operation to provide educational services. It is necessary to train the residents to learn other languages (e.g., Mandarin) so that they could provide the guiding service for the foreign tourists (e.g., China tourists). The plants and the architecture need information card to be

introduced to the guests. In this way, the tourists can easily know the history of the house, the name and age of the plants, and the style of the architecture. Besides, campus intelligence can be used to develop online marketing.

Chinese people are getting sensitive about food safety. It is assuring if Hygiene Certificate of the homestay restaurant and Health Certificates of the cooks are posted on apparent places. Meanwhile, traditional food making and demonstration would attract tourists to stop and observe. Tourists prefer to see with their own eyes than being told the procedure. There could be more homestay restaurants providing meals for independent travelers. Hygiene Certificates and Health Certificates are necessary for the restaurant and employees correspondingly.

The longhouse management should appoint at least one safety guardian. Tourists would feel secured seeing a guardian patrolling or standing at his post. A small-scale emergency medical centre could be established to provide aids when sudden accidents happen. Run-away routes or safe exits should be designed and posted in apparent places for the safety of tourists. Smoking areas should be set up and rules about using fire (smoking included) should be strictly forbidden by.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative research has discovered the tourists' experiences and expectations of the Longhouse homestays, specifically from the China tourists' viewpoint. Fifteen dimensions were identified. These tourist attractions can really enable them to experience the unique way of the local people in Sarawak (i.e., Bidayuhs). Nevertheless, the tourists would like some improvements to be done. Among the suggestions are: providing more activities to tourists such as outdoor activities; improve on marketing activities like having own website, Facebook, Wechat, Twitter, Instagram and others; the digital or Electronic technology should also be improved; can have e-Ticket, QR Code, E-payment, Electronic screen and others. The Longhouse also needs to have more fire equipment, surveillance cameras to protect personal and property safety. Linking with the universities will make the local children and city children closer, and it also can be the school or university's training place. The Longhouse's internet

accessibility and connectivity need to be strengthened which can help people easier to find its geographical location and performing the various ICT applications. Hopefully, the findings and recommendations resulted from the site visits and focus groups interview can help to improve the performance of the Longhouse homestay programme, enhance quality of life of the homestay operators and local community, and enhance the eco-tourism in Sarawak.

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