

HOMESTAY CHARM: UNVEILING KEY DRIVERS OF REVISIT INTENTIONS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

This study examines factors that affect revisiting Malaysia's homestay intention, a key segment of the country's tourism industry. The research examines how service quality dimensions, particularly tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy, affect tourism's willingness to return to accommodation. The SERVQUAL model was used to conduct surveys of 150 respondents and analyse the data using SPSS software. The results show that tangibility and empathy significantly impact the revisitation of intentions, but other dimensions have no significant impact. The study provides useful insights for home-based operators and policymakers, suggesting that improving tangible aspects and sympathy for customers can effectively drive customer loyalty. By focusing on these important factors, the housing sector can better meet the expectations of tourists and contribute to Malaysia's sustainable tourism development. Future research may extend the scope of research to other variables and different demographic contexts, further enriching the understanding of the purpose of reconsideration in this area.

Keywords: Homestay tourism, Revisit intention, SERQUAL model

Introduction

Tourism has been a vital contribution to Malaysia's economy for a long time, with a variety of cultural, natural and heritage attractions that attract millions of visitors annually. Among the various accommodations, homestays are increasingly popular due to their unique ability to provide a genuine cultural experience, which fosters a meaningful connection between tourists and local communities. This is consistent with Malaysia's broader tourism objectives, which emphasize sustainability and cultural conservation.

Revisit intentions, defined as travelers' willingness to return to specific destinations and accommodations, are a key metric for the success of the homestay sector. The returning guests not only generate consistent revenues, but also act as informal ambassadors and improve the reputation of a destination through positive word-of-mouth advertising. Therefore, understanding the factors that drive the re-intention is vital to the maintenance and growth of this segment of the tourism industry by homestay operators and policy makers.

Despite its importance, there is limited empirical research exploring the intention to reconsider homestays in Malaysia. Factors such as service quality, price, location, perceived value and cultural authenticity can play a role, but their relative influence is still underexplored in Malaysia's context. Furthermore, the changes in preferences of travelers after the epidemic highlight the need to re-evaluate these determinants in the light of increasing expectations of safety, cleanliness and personalized experiences.

The aim of this study is to bridge this gap by investigating key factors that influence the reconsideration of Malaysian homestay intentions. The research identified these determinants and provided insight into the effectiveness of homestay operators to improve the service offerings and develop strategies to increase guest loyalty. It also contributes to academic discussions on tourism management and is consistent with Malaysia's ambitions to promote its homestay industry as a sign of sustainable tourism.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between tangibility and revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia.
2. To analyze how reliability influences revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia.
3. To investigate the effect of responsiveness on revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia.
4. To assess the impact of assurance on revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia.
5. To evaluate the role of empathy in shaping revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Lynch (2005) says that homestays are a type of lodging where tourists or guests pay to stay in private homes and share the living space and connect with the host and their family. In Malaysia, homestay programs let guests become fully immersed in the countryside and the way of life there. These programs focus on giving guests an experience- and lifestyle-focused stay, including economic and cultural events, rather than just a place to stay (Malaysia Ministry of Tourism Report, 2021). Homestay is an alternative tourism product that can attract tourists because it shows a significant increase in international demand for tourism that improve tourist knowledge by allowing them to observe, experience and learn about the way of living of the local people.

Revisit Intention

Revisit intention refers to the likelihood of a customer returning to a specific destination or accommodation based on prior experiences. This concept has gained significant attention in tourism and hospitality research due to its strong link to customer loyalty and sustainable business growth. Revisit intention often serves as a predictor of a business's long-term success, as satisfied customers are more likely to return and recommend the service to others (Jang & Feng, 2007).

In Malaysia, homestays play a significant role in promoting rural and community-based tourism. The Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture highlights homestays as a key driver of sustainable tourism development. Studies on Malaysian homestays emphasize the importance of cultural authenticity, affordability, and host-guest relationships in fostering positive revisit intentions (Othman & Osman, 2024). Additionally, the growing influence of social media has amplified the role of online reviews and visual content in shaping tourists' perceptions and decisions.

SERVQUAL

The SERVQUAL model, created by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry in 1988, serves as a prominent instrument for assessing service quality in diverse sectors, such as tourism and hospitality. The assessment involves analyzing customers' perceptions of service quality through a comparison of their expectations against the actual performance of the service provided. The model is based on five dimensions that together impact customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Tangibles

Tangibles refer to the physical attributes of a service provider, including facilities, equipment, and the appearance of staff. These elements form the first impression and are crucial in setting customer expectations. In the tourism and hospitality context, tangibles encompass cleanliness, aesthetics, and the overall ambiance of the accommodation (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In homestays, tangible factors such as well-maintained rooms, comfortable furniture, and culturally authentic decor significantly influence guest satisfaction. Research by Chen and Chen (2010) highlights that aesthetically pleasing and hygienic environments enhance perceived value and satisfaction among tourists. Homestay operators who invest in quality infrastructure and upkeep are more likely to attract repeat visitors. Additionally, for homestays in Malaysia, the integration of local cultural elements, such as traditional furnishings or regional artwork, creates a unique and memorable experience. These tangible aspects are often cited as key differentiators between homestays and other forms of accommodation (Teong-Jin et al., 2019).

Reliability

Reliability is the ability to deliver promised services accurately and consistently. This dimension is particularly important in establishing trust and meeting customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). In homestay operations, reliability involves accurate reservation systems, adherence to advertised amenities, and delivering on promises such as meal provisions or cultural activities. A study by Yanes et al. (2020) found that tourists value dependable services, especially in rural settings where logistical challenges can arise. Reliability fosters customer trust and confidence, which are critical for developing long-term relationships. In the Malaysian homestay program, consistent service delivery has been shown to positively influence revisit intentions (Ismail et al., 2016).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness measures the willingness and ability of service providers to assist customers and address their needs promptly. This dimension emphasizes proactive and timely communication (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Responsiveness in homestays is demonstrated through efficient communication, swift resolution of guest issues, and readiness to go beyond standard offerings. For instance, guests may require immediate assistance with transportation or local recommendations, and prompt responses enhance their overall experience. Studies by Akama and Kieti (2003) show that quick and effective responses to guest inquiries significantly improve satisfaction levels. In homestays, responsiveness also builds a personal connection between hosts and guests, strengthening loyalty and positive word-of-mouth referrals.

Assurance

Assurance refers to the ability of service providers to instill confidence through knowledge, courtesy, and professionalism. This dimension is critical in building trust, particularly for first-time visitors or those unfamiliar with the destination (Parasuraman et al.,

1988). Assurance in homestays involves hosts providing clear information, demonstrating hospitality, and ensuring guest safety. For example, hosts with strong local knowledge who can recommend cultural sites, or safe activities contribute to an enhanced sense of trust and comfort. Assurance is particularly valued by international tourists seeking authentic yet safe cultural experiences. Research by Teong-Jin (2019) found that perceived assurance strongly correlates with tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to provide personalized attention and cater to individual guest needs. This dimension reflects the host's commitment to understanding and meeting unique customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Homestay operators often cater to diverse guest preferences, such as dietary restrictions, accessibility needs, or specific cultural interests. Providing such personalized attention creates a sense of belonging and enhances the guest experience. Empathy has been identified as a critical factor in fostering customer loyalty. A study by Kim et al. (2013) revealed that empathetic interactions between hosts and guests significantly influence satisfaction and the likelihood of revisiting. In the Malaysian context, operators who actively engage with guests to share cultural insights and adapt to their preferences receive higher satisfaction ratings (Razali et al., 2019).

Research Methodology

The study was conducted to understand the behaviour of tourists towards revisit intention on homestay, in Kuala Lumpur, Pulau Pinang and Johor Bahru. The sample size of 150 respondents was sufficient to meet the minimum sample size requirement of 138, as determined by G-power with an effect size of 0.15, alpha of 0.05, and power of 0.95. The response rate of 75% was considered high, indicating a good level of participation in the survey. The questionnaire utilised in this study was derived from a previous research study, with modifications made to align it with the specific context of this investigation. In total, thirty-four items were included in the questionnaire to gather data and insights relevant to the research objectives.

Research Results

The demographic profile of respondents (see Table 1) reveals key insights into factors influencing revisit intentions for homestays in Malaysia. The majority, aged 21 to 30 (80.7%) and predominantly students (78.7%), highlight a youthful, budget-conscious group that values affordability and cultural experiences, aligning with the homestay model. With most earning below RM900 (71.3%) and holding at least a bachelor's degree (89.3%), this educated demographic appreciates the unique and authentic experiences homestays offer, which enhance satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat visits. Ethnic composition, primarily Chinese (92.7%), underscores the need for culturally resonant offerings to cater to specific preferences and foster loyalty. These findings indicate that catering to groups' needs of this young, educated, and culturally diverse group can significantly increase the likelihood of repeat visits.

Table 1: Frequency and the percentage analysis of the respondents

	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	70	46.7
Female	80	53.3
<u>Age</u>		
Below 20	20	13.3
21 to 30	121	80.7
31 to 40	8	5.3
41 to 50	1	0.7
51 and above	0	-
<u>Nationality</u>		
Malaysia	149	99.3
Non-Malaysian	1	0.7
<u>Occupation</u>		
Student	118	78.7
Doctor	0	-
Lawyer	1	0.7
Engineer	2	1.3
Accountant	1	0.7
Lecturer	2	1.3
Others	26	17.3
<u>Income Level</u>		
Below RM900	107	71.3
RM901 to RM2000	14	9.3
RM2001 to RM3500	12	8.0
RM3501 to RM5000	11	7.3
RM5001 and above	0	-
<u>Education Background</u>		
Primary School	0	-
Secondary School	12	8.0
Bachelors	134	89.3
Master	3	2.0
PhD	1	0.7
Others	0	-
<u>Ethnics</u>		
Chinese	139	92.7
Malay	5	3.3
Indian	5	3.3
Others	1	0.7

*Sample size = 150

*Source: Analysis of data collected

Table 2 shows that tangibility and empathy significantly influence revisit intention, with p-values of 0.004 and 0.000, respectively, indicating strong positive effects. Among these, empathy has the greatest impact, with a standardized coefficient of 0.408, highlighting the importance of personalized care and understanding in fostering guest loyalty. Tangibility also plays a key role (Beta = 0.385), emphasizing the value of well-maintained facilities and

attractive environments. In contrast, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance show no statistically significant effects, with p-values greater than 0.05, suggesting they are less critical in predicting revisit intention. This analysis underscores the need for homestay operators to prioritise tangible improvements and empathetic interactions to encourage repeat visits.

Table 2: Coefficient Table

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Remarks
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	0.534	0.223		2.400	0.018	
Tangibility	0.386	0.130	0.385	2.969	0.004	Supported
Reliability	-0.132	0.137	-0.134	-0.963	0.337	Not Supported
Responsiveness	0.177	0.125	0.174	1.420	0.158	Not Supported
Assurance	-0.051	0.134	-0.050	-0.381	0.704	Not Supported
Empathy	0.423	0.112	0.408	3.789	0.000	Supported

a. Dependent Variable: Revisit Intention

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the factors influencing revisit intentions for homestays in Malaysia, with a particular focus on the dimensions of the SERVQUAL model: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The discussion of the results sheds light on the relative importance of these factors in shaping tourists' decisions to return to a homestay.

The results indicate that tangibility has a significant positive effect on revisit intention ($p = 0.004$, $\text{Beta} = 0.385$). This finding underscores the importance of physical attributes, such as the cleanliness, aesthetic appeal, and functionality of facilities, in influencing guests' satisfaction and loyalty. Tourists often perceive tangible aspects as a reflection of service quality, which directly impacts their willingness to return. In the context of Malaysian homestays, providing well-maintained accommodations that incorporate authentic cultural elements can enhance the overall guest experience and encourage repeat visits.

Empathy emerged as the strongest predictor of revisit intention ($p = 0.000$; $\text{beta} = 0.408$), highlighting the critical role of personalized attention and care in fostering guest loyalty. This result suggests that homestay operators who actively engage with their guests, understand their unique needs, and provide tailored experiences are more likely to cultivate positive relationships and long-term loyalty. Empathy's strong influence aligns with prior research that emphasizes the value of emotional connections and personalized interactions in the tourism and hospitality industries.

The dimensions of reliability, responsiveness, and assurance did not show statistically significant effects on revisit intention, with p-values of 0.337, 0.158, and 0.704, respectively. While these factors may contribute to the overall service experience, their lack of significance suggests that guests prioritize other aspects, such as tangible elements and empathic service, when deciding whether to return to a homestay. For example, although reliability is essential for ensuring accurate and consistent service delivery, its limited impact in this study may reflect a baseline expectation among tourists, making it less influential in driving revisit intentions.

Implication of study

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors influencing revisit intention for homestays in Malaysia. Additionally, the study establishes the relationship between independent and dependent variables, providing a valuable reference for future research. Other researchers can utilize this study to compare their findings or build upon the insights presented. Beyond academic contributions, this research offers practical advantages to various stakeholders. For the Malaysian government, the findings can support efforts to promote the country as a tourist destination while encouraging community involvement in the homestay industry. Homestays not only generate national income but also contribute to achieving government objectives such as poverty alleviation and job creation. By prioritizing the development of homestays, the government can further promote Malaysian culture and heritage, fostering sustainable tourism.

Homestay operators also stand to benefit significantly. Participation in the homestay program provides an opportunity to generate additional income and sustain employment, thereby improving their quality of life. By diversifying their offerings, such as selling local crafts or providing cultural experiences, operators can further enhance their earnings. Since homestays involve close interactions between tourists and hosts, operators play a crucial role in fostering cultural exchange and mutual understanding. It is imperative for operators to be hospitable, helpful, and equipped with effective communication skills, including proficiency in multiple languages, to facilitate meaningful interactions with guests from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, the rapid development of the homestay program as a unique tourism product in Malaysia has brought significant benefits to the tourism industry. Malaysia's cultural diversity, with its harmonious coexistence of various ethnicities such as Malays, Chinese, and Indians, offers a unique appeal to tourists. This cultural richness, combined with the country's natural heritage, drives strong demand for the homestay program. Such initiatives not only boost the economy of specific homestay locations but also contribute to the development of rural communities. To further enhance revisit intentions, the tourism industry should leverage social media platforms like Facebook to effectively advertise homestay offerings, make bookings more accessible, and leave a lasting positive impression on potential visitors.

Limitations of the Study

While conducting this research, several limitations were encountered that warrant attention for future improvements. One significant limitation was the sample size, with only 150 respondents participating in the survey, most of whom were Malaysians. This limited sample size may reduce the accuracy and generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the lack of responses from foreign tourists restricts the ability to gather diverse perspectives and compare their views with those of local respondents.

Another limitation was restricted access to journals and articles. Many relevant resources were behind paywalls, limiting the researcher's ability to access valuable information. As a result, some areas of the study may lack comprehensive explanations due to insufficient access to high-quality academic literature.

Future Research

Future research should aim to address the limitations identified in this study. A larger sample size, including more foreign respondents, would enhance the accuracy and generalizability of the findings. Gathering insights from international tourists would provide a broader perspective on their experiences and expectations regarding homestays in Malaysia.

Additionally, there should be greater accessibility to academic journals and articles. Open-access publications would enable researchers to obtain relevant information without financial barriers, fostering a more inclusive and comprehensive research environment. Moreover, ensuring that these resources are frequently updated would provide researchers with the latest insights, enhancing the quality and relevance of their studies.

By addressing these areas, future research can build upon the findings of this study and provide more impactful and inclusive insights into the factors influencing revisit intentions for homestays in Malaysia.

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