

Malaysian homestays from the perspective of young Japanese tourists: the quest for furusato

Introduction:

The evolution of the homestay programme in Malaysia can be traced back to the early 1970s at the then 'drifter enclave' of Kampung Cherating Lama in Pahang, when a local lady by the name of Mak Long Teh took in long-staying 'drifters' and provided breakfast, dinner and a space to sleep within her humble kampung (Malay village) home (Hamzah, 1997). Essentially, the pioneer homestays were mostly located along the beach and the kampung ambience merely provided the backdrop to an otherwise typical holiday by the beach. In the late 1980s, the homestay concept took on a different dimension with the arrival of Japanese youths on exchange/field programmes. The current President of the Malaysian Homestay Association (MHA) was the pioneer of such programmes, in which Japanese youths stayed with their 'adoptive family' and participated in communal activities related to the pastoral way of life. Since then the homestay programme has been used by the Ministry of Agriculture as a catalyst for revitalising the rural economy in tandem with its agrotourism programme. In 1993, another Federal ministry, the then Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism (MOCAT) formed a special unit to oversee the growth of the homestay programme in Malaysia. Homestay is a generic term used to describe a form of holiday that involves staying with the host's family. While the 'Bed and Breakfast' concept also involves the guest staying within the host's dwelling, the homestay is characterised by the guest's participation in the host's way of life. This contrasts with the working definition of homestay in Indonesia, which is budget accommodation constructed within villages or small towns and operated by local people; another term for these is losmen. In essence, the homestay in Malaysia bears many similarities with the farmstay concept practised in Germany and New Zealand