



JOURNAL OF EVENT, TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY STUDIES

<https://e-journal.uum.edu.my/index.php/jeth>

How to cite this article:

Ismail, A., & Nazari, N. M. (2026). Mapping the Community-Based Tourism in Malaysia: Scoping Review and Bibliometric Analysis of Research Trends. *Journal of Event, Tourism and Hospitality Studies*, 6, 54 - 67. <https://doi.org/10.32890/jeth2026.6.4>

MAPPING THE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN MALAYSIA: SCOPING REVIEW AND BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH TRENDS

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Received: 11/10/2025

Revised: 8/7/2026

Accepted: 9/7/2026

Published: 31/7/2026

ABSTRACT

Community-based tourism (CBT) has gained growing recognition as a key approach to promoting sustainable tourism through stronger local involvement, cultural heritage conservation, and responsible environmental stewardship. While Malaysian CBT research has increased substantially over the last two decades, its overall knowledge development has not been systematically consolidated. To address this gap, this study integrates a scoping review with descriptive bibliometric analysis to investigate the development, dominant themes, and emerging research gaps within Malaysian CBT scholarship published from 2009 to 2025. In total, 49 Scopus-indexed publications were identified and examined using a structured scoping review framework, supported by bibliometric indicators generated through biblioMagika® version 2.9 to assess publication trends, citation performance, and keyword patterns. The findings indicate that CBT research in Malaysia has increasingly centred on socio-economic empowerment, community participation, cultural heritage conservation, and environmental sustainability. However, several areas remain underexplored, particularly digital transformation, adaptive governance, policy integration, and long-term community capacity building. The thematic synthesis also highlights the need for stronger collaboration among policymakers, researchers, tourism practitioners, and local communities to support more resilient and inclusive CBT initiatives. By synthesising existing evidence and outlining future research directions, this study enhances understanding of the progression of CBT scholarship in Malaysia and offers practical insights for sustainable tourism policy and the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Community-based tourism; sustainable development; scoping review; sustainable tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism (CBT) has become one of the most widely recognised initiative to promoting sustainable tourism because it positions local communities as central actors in tourism development. Rather than treating residents as passive beneficiaries, CBT encourages them to participate in planning, decision-making, and the management of tourism activities while ensuring that economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits are shared more equitably. Consequently, CBT is increasingly viewed as an effective mechanism for strengthening local livelihoods, conserving cultural heritage, and protecting natural resources (George, 2022; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2023).

Unlike conventional mass tourism, which is often characterised by external ownership and unequal distribution of benefits, CBT emphasises community ownership, local entrepreneurship, and collaborative governance (Pramono & Juliana, 2025). This approach has increasingly catch attention because it supports rural development, strengthens social cohesion, and enhances community resilience. Previous studies have shown that effective CBT initiatives can raise household income, generate employment, empower women and youth, and support the conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2022).

Malaysia has consistently acknowledged the importance of community involvement in tourism development. The introduction of the Malaysia Homestay Experience Programme (MHEP) in 1995 marked one of the country's earliest efforts to integrate tourism with rural community development. Supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Cultural (MOTAC), the programme has evolved into an important national initiative that promotes authentic cultural experiences while generating economic opportunities for local communities. Research consistently reports that participation in the programme has contributed to income diversification, strengthened community identity, and encouraged greater appreciation of local traditions and heritage (Kunjuraman & King, 2022).

Despite the growing volume of research about MHEP and CBT, the literature in Malaysia about CBT remains fragmented. Existing studies have largely focused on individual destinations, homestay programmes, indigenous communities, rural entrepreneurship, or community participation, with relatively little attention given to how the field has evolved as a whole. As a result, there is still limited understanding of the dominant research themes, emerging trends, methodological developments, and areas that require further investigation. This lack of synthesis makes it difficult for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to identify research priorities and formulate evidence-informed strategies for strengthening CBT in Malaysia.

Review-based research has become increasingly important in tourism studies as a way to organise fragmented evidence and clarify the development of emerging fields. Among the available approaches, scoping reviews are particularly appropriate for areas shaped by diverse concepts, varied research designs, and expanding knowledge bases (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Peters et al., 2020). Unlike reviews that assess the effectiveness of specific interventions, scoping reviews map the breadth of existing evidence, identify key themes, highlight research gaps, and guide future inquiry. This makes the approach especially useful for examining multidisciplinary topics such as sustainable tourism, destination governance, community resilience, and rural development.

Moreover, bibliometric analysis offers a complementary perspective by revealing publication trends, citation performance, collaboration patterns, and thematic evolution within a research field. While several bibliometric studies have examined CBT from a global perspective (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023), they provide only limited insight into the Malaysian context, where tourism development is strongly influenced by national policies, community institutions, and programmes such as the Malaysia Homestay Experience Programme. A country-specific synthesis is therefore needed to better understand how Malaysian CBT research has developed and where future scholarly attention should be directed.

Against this background, the present study combines a scoping review with descriptive bibliometric analysis to examine Malaysian CBT research published between 2009 and 2025. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Map publication trends and the characteristics of CBT research in Malaysia;
2. Identify the dominant research themes and their evolution over time;
3. Synthesise existing knowledge gaps and emerging research priorities; and
4. Propose evidence-based recommendations to support future research, policy development, and sustainable community-based tourism practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a scoping review to examine the development of community-based tourism (CBT) research in Malaysia. The approach was selected because it is well suited to research areas characterised by diverse concepts, methodological approaches, and fragmented evidence. Rather than assessing the effectiveness of specific interventions, a scoping review aims to map the breadth of existing knowledge, identify dominant themes, and reveal areas that remain underexplored (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Peters et al., 2020).

To enrich the review, descriptive bibliometric analysis was incorporated as a complementary technique. Whereas the scoping review provided an interpretive synthesis of the literature, the bibliometric analysis offered quantitative evidence on publication trends, citation performance, disciplinary coverage, and keyword patterns. Combining these two approaches enabled a broader understanding of how CBT research in Malaysia has evolved over time while highlighting emerging research directions.

The review was completed in four sequential stages: identifying relevant literature, screening records against the eligibility criteria, conducting bibliometric profiling, and synthesising the selected publications thematically. Together, these stages provided both a descriptive overview of the literature and an interpretive understanding of its intellectual development.

Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using the Scopus database because of its comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed journals and its widespread use in bibliometric and evidence synthesis studies (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). To ensure broad retrieval of relevant studies, the search strategy incorporated several synonymous terms associated with community-based tourism. The search string was applied to article titles, abstracts, and keywords using: ("community-based tourism" OR "community tourism" OR "rural tourism" OR homestay OR "community participation") AND Malaysia. The initial search retrieved publications published between 2009 and March 2025. The year 2009 was selected because it represents the earliest Scopus-indexed publication meeting the study criteria, while 2025 represents the most recent publications available during data collection. This period therefore captures the complete evolution of Malaysian CBT research indexed in Scopus. The retrieved records were exported into biblioMagika® version 2.9 for descriptive bibliometric analysis.

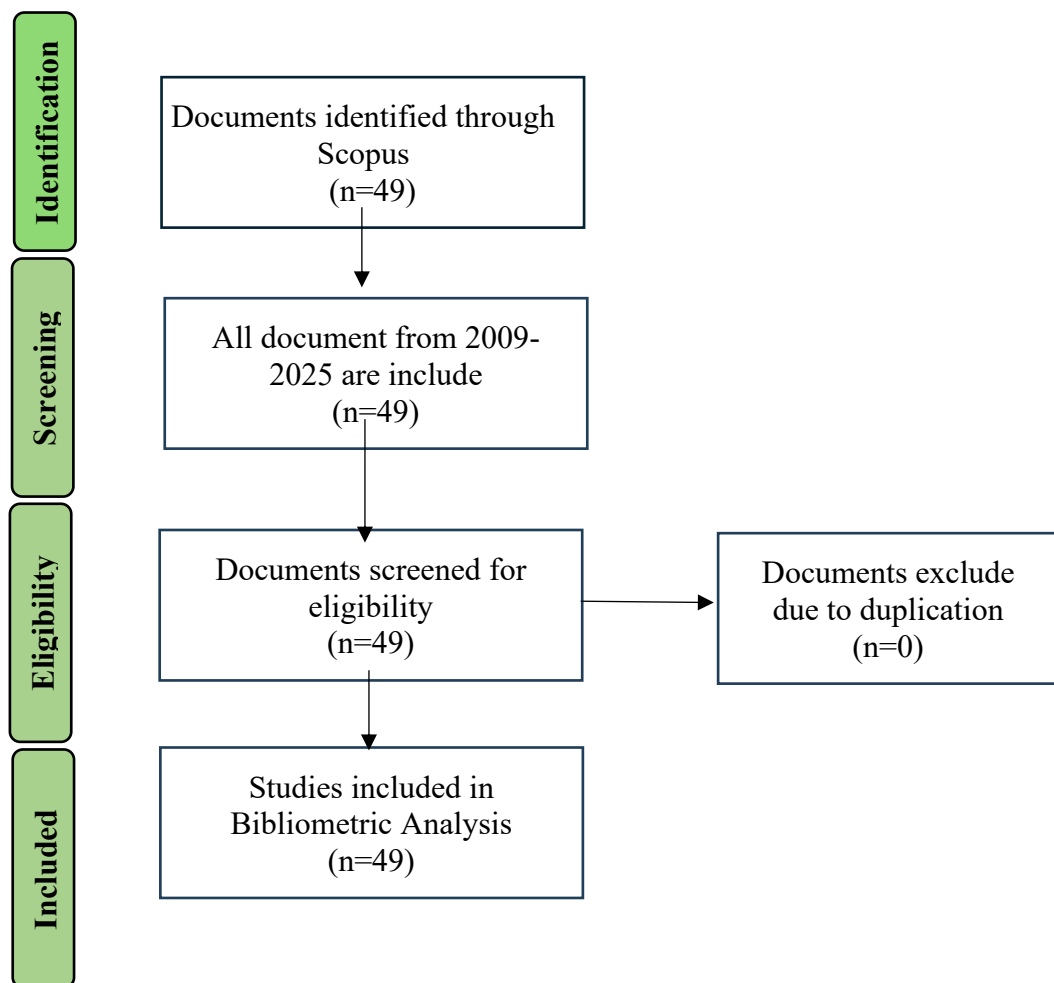
The following inclusion criteria were applied; (i) publications focusing on community-based tourism in Malaysia; (ii) peer-reviewed journal articles indexed in Scopus; (iii) publications available between 2009 and 2025; (iv) empirical and review studies relevant to CBT. While for the exclusion criteria the following were excluded; (i) conference papers; (ii) book chapters; (iii) editorials; (iv) notes; (v) publications unrelated to Malaysia; and (vi) studies without substantial focus on community-based tourism. Following the screening process, 49 publications satisfied all eligibility criteria and were included in the final analysis.

PRISMA Procedure

Figure 1 illustrates the document selection process adapted from the PRISMA framework (Moher et al., 2009). After identifying publications from Scopus, duplicate records were checked and removed. Titles and abstracts were subsequently screened to determine their relevance to Malaysian community-based tourism. Full-text assessment was then conducted to confirm compliance with the inclusion criteria before the final dataset of 49 publications was established.

Figure 1:

PRISMA diagram of sources identification procedures used in CBT review (Moher et. al., 2009)



Data Collection and Analysis

Analysis was carried out in two complementary phases.

The first phase used descriptive bibliometric analysis with biblioMagika® version 2.9 (Ahmi, 2025). This analysis helped to show how CBT research in Malaysia has developed by examining publication output, citation performance, subject areas, prolific authors, and keyword patterns. Together, these indicators offered a clear picture of the structure, visibility, and growth of the field. The second phase involved thematic synthesis, which formed the main component of the scoping review. Each publication

was read to understand its research focus, methodological approach, and key findings. Where needed, full-text articles were examined more closely to ensure that important themes were not missed. Similar ideas were then grouped and refined through an iterative process, allowing broader themes to emerge from the evidence. By combining bibliometric profiling with thematic synthesis, the study was able to go beyond reporting publication patterns. It also provided a deeper understanding of how research priorities have shifted over time, where key knowledge gaps remain, and which areas need greater scholarly attention in future CBT studies.

3. Result and Discussion

This section brings together descriptive bibliometric evidence and thematic interpretation to explain the main findings. It goes beyond simply presenting publication statistics by showing how community-based tourism (CBT) research in Malaysia has developed over time, what research directions have become most prominent, and which areas still require further scholarly attention.

3.1 Document Profiles

Table 1 presents the overall citation profile of the 49 publications included in this review. Although the dataset is relatively modest, the citation indicators demonstrate that Malaysian CBT research has established a meaningful scholarly presence. The h-index of 20 indicates that at least twenty publications have achieved substantial academic influence, while the g-index of 36 reflects the concentration of citations among several highly influential studies. These findings suggest that Malaysian CBT research has gradually developed a core body of literature that continues to shape subsequent investigations. Nevertheless, the relatively limited number of publications also indicates that the field remains in a developing stage, providing opportunities for further theoretical and methodological advancement.

Table 1

Citation Metrics. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2025)

Main Information	Data
Start Year	2009
End Year	2024
Total Publications	124
Number of Contributing Authors	309
Number of Cited Papers	89
Total Citations	1,557
Citation per Paper	12.56
Citation per Cited Paper	17.49
Citation per Author	5.04
Citation sum within h-Core	1,481
Citable Year	34
h-index	20
g-index	36
Publication Years	1992 - 2024
Citation Years	32
Citation per Year	48.66
Author per Paper	2.49
m-index	0.588

Continually, Table 2 as illustrated below provides an overview of the subject areas covered by the 49 documents, with Business, Management and Accounting dominating the field at 53.06% of

publications, followed by Social Sciences at 46.94%. There is also a strong representation from Economics, Econometrics and Finance (18.37%) and Environmental Science (16.33%), highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of research in community-based tourism.

Table 2

Subject Area. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika®

Subject Area	TP	%
Business, Management and Accounting	26	53.06%
Social Sciences	23	46.94%
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	9	18.37%
Environmental Science	8	16.33%
Engineering	5	10.20%
Agricultural and Biological Sciences	4	8.16%
Arts and Humanities	4	8.16%
Earth and Planetary Sciences	3	6.12%
Physics and Astronomy	3	6.12%
Computer Science	2	4.08%
Decision Sciences	1	2.04%
Mathematics	1	2.04%

Publication Trends

The yearly publication pattern shows that scholarly interest in Malaysian CBT has generally grown over time, although the rate of growth has not been consistent throughout the review period. Citation activity was strongest in 2015 and 2017, suggesting that several earlier studies have continued to shape discussions in the field. By comparison, more recent publications have recorded fewer citations, mainly because they have had less time to be noticed, used, and cited by other researchers. The rise in publications after 2020 points to renewed academic interest in CBT. This increase may be linked to wider changes in sustainable tourism research, particularly the growing attention given to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), community resilience, and destination recovery after the pandemic. These priorities have encouraged researchers to view CBT not only as a tool for rural development, but also as a pathway for promoting social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and the ability of local communities to adapt to change. Therefore, the lower citation counts for recent publications should not be viewed as a sign of weaker scholarly value. Citations take time to accumulate, and newly published studies usually need several years before their wider academic influence becomes visible.

Table 3

Publication by Year. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika®

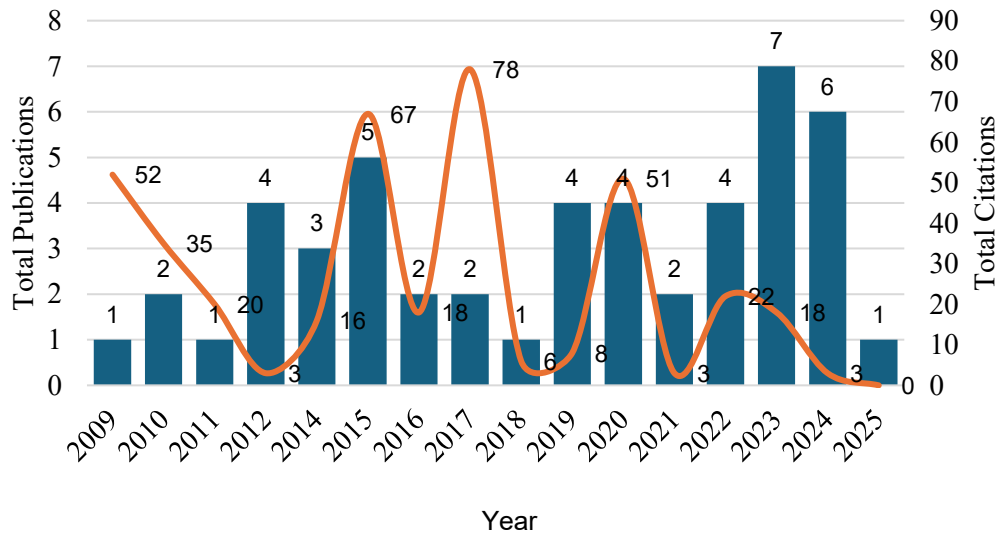
Year	TP	NCA	NCP	TC	C/P	C/CP	H	g	m
2009	1	1	1	52	52.00	52.00	1	1	0.059
2010	2	1	1	35	17.50	35.00	1	2	0.063
2011	1	3	1	20	20.00	20.00	1	1	0.067
2012	4	16	3	3	0.75	1.00	1	1	0.071
2014	3	12	3	16	5.33	5.33	2	3	0.167
2015	5	16	5	67	13.40	13.40	4	5	0.364
2016	2	6	2	18	9.00	9.00	1	2	0.100
2017	2	7	2	78	39.00	39.00	2	2	0.222
2018	1	4	1	6	6.00	6.00	1	1	0.125
2019	4	13	3	8	2.00	2.67	2	2	0.286
2020	4	12	4	51	12.75	12.75	3	4	0.500
2021	2	7	2	3	1.50	1.50	1	1	0.200
2022	4	7	3	22	5.50	7.33	2	4	0.500
2023	7	28	5	18	2.57	3.60	3	4	1.000
2024	6	23	2	3	0.50	1.50	1	1	0.500
2025	1	2	0	0	0.00	0.00	0	0	0.000

*TP total number of publications, NCA Number of contributing authors, NCP number of cited publications, TC total citations, C/P average citations per publication, C/CP average citations per cited publication, h h-index, g g-index, m m-index

Figure 2 shows the yearly pattern of publications and citations on community-based tourism (CBT) research in Malaysia from 2009 to 2025. Overall, the data highlight several important trends. Citation activity reached its highest point in 2017, with 78 citations, suggesting that earlier publications had gained strong recognition and continued to influence later research. The year 2015 also recorded notable citation performance, indicating that studies published around this period attracted attention and became relevant to subsequent discussions in the field. After a slower period of citation growth between 2018 and 2020, publication output increased again in 2023 and 2024. This renewed activity may reflect growing academic interest in CBT, particularly in response to wider concerns about sustainable tourism and community recovery after the pandemic. At the same time, the lower citation counts for these recent publications are expected, as newer studies usually need more time to be read, used, and cited by other researchers.

Figure 2

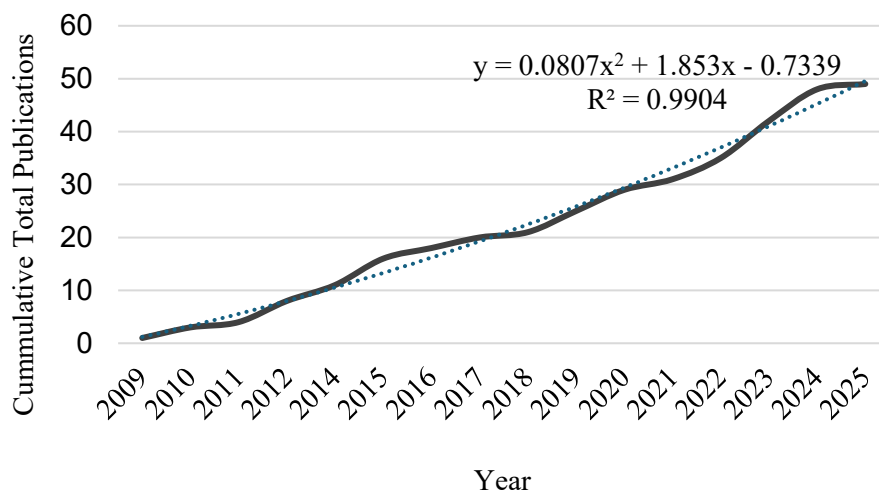
Total Publications and Citations by Year. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2025)



Although recent publications have received fewer citations, this should not be seen as a reflection of lower academic quality. Citations usually take time to build, and newly published studies often need several years before they gain wider recognition among scholars. The changes in citation patterns over time suggest that interest in CBT research tends to rise at particular moments, possibly influenced by policy changes, national tourism priorities, or broader global concerns such as resilience, digitalisation, and sustainability. Overall, the recent increase in publication output shows a positive direction for CBT research in Malaysia, with newer studies likely to achieve greater scholarly influence as they become more visible. Figure 3 presents the cumulative growth of publications in the field of community-based tourism, showing a steady upward trend. The curve demonstrates a near-perfect fit to a quadratic function ($R^2 = 0.9904$), indicating consistent and sustained growth in publication output since 2009. This pattern reflects a growing academic interest in community-based tourism research over time.

Figure 3

Publication Growth. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2025)



The cumulative publication curve shows a clear and steady increase across the review period. The near-perfect quadratic trend ($R^2 = 0.9904$) suggests that Malaysian CBT research has grown consistently over time, rather than emerging only in occasional bursts. This growth reflects the increasing recognition of CBT as a multidisciplinary area that draws interest from tourism, environmental management, economics, social sciences, and community

development. As sustainability and community resilience continue to shape tourism policy and practice, research on CBT in Malaysia is likely to keep expanding.

Citation Metrics for Highly Cited Documents

Table 4 presents the ten most-cited documents in community-based tourism research. Kunjuraman's work received the highest number of citations with 69 citations, followed by Harris with 52 citations and Nair with 36 citations. These studies can be regarded as important early contributions because they address central issues in Malaysian CBT, including cultural tourism behaviour, rural development, and the use of technology in cultural heritage tourism. Taken together, the highly cited publications show how Malaysian CBT research has gradually moved from descriptive case studies towards wider discussions of sustainability, governance, community participation, and destination resilience. Earlier studies tended to focus on homestay programmes and rural development, while more recent work has paid greater attention to stakeholder collaboration, environmental management, digital transformation, and sustainable destination governance. This shift suggests that CBT research in Malaysia has become more mature and more responsive to current tourism challenges.

Table 4:

Citation Metrics for 10 Documents Analyzed in the Study. Source: Generated by the author(s) using biblioMagika® (Ahmi, 2025)

No.	Author(s)	Title	Source Title	Cites	Cites per year
1	Kunjuraman V.; Hussin R. (2017)	Challenges of community-based homestay programme in Sabah, Malaysia: Hopeful or hopeless?	Tourism Management Perspectives	69	7.67
2	Harris R.W. (2009)	Tourism in Bario, Sarawak, Malaysia: A case study of pro-poor community-based tourism integrated into community development	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	52	3.06
3	Nair V.; Hamzah A. (2015)	Successful community-based tourism approaches for rural destinations: The Asia Pacific experience	Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes	36	3.27
4	Kayat K. (2010)	The nature of cultural contribution of a community-based homestay programme	Tourismos	35	2.19
5	Jaafar M.; Md Noor S.; Mohamad D.; Jalali A.; Hashim J.B. (2020)	Motivational factors impacting rural community participation in community-based tourism enterprise in Lenggong Valley, Malaysia	Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	29	4.83
6	Jamal S.A.; Othman N.; Muhammad N.M.N. (2011)	The moderating influence of psychographics in homestay tourism in Malaysia	Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	20	1.33
7	Inversini A.; Rega I.; Gan S.W. (2022)	The transformative learning nature of Malaysian homestay experiences	Journal of Hospitality and	19	4.75

Top Author and index keywords in Cultural Tourism and Performing Arts Research

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the top 15 author keywords used in publications related to community-based tourism (CBT). The most frequently occurring keyword is “community-based tourism” with 20 mentions, followed by “rural tourism” and “homestay”, each appearing 8 times. Other prominent keywords include “community participant”, “Malaysia”, “homestay program”, and “sustainable tourism”. These keywords reflect the dominant themes in the field and indicate the diverse research interests shaping CBT scholarship in Malaysia.

Figure 4

Frequency distribution of the top 15 author keywords in community-based tourism research in Malaysia

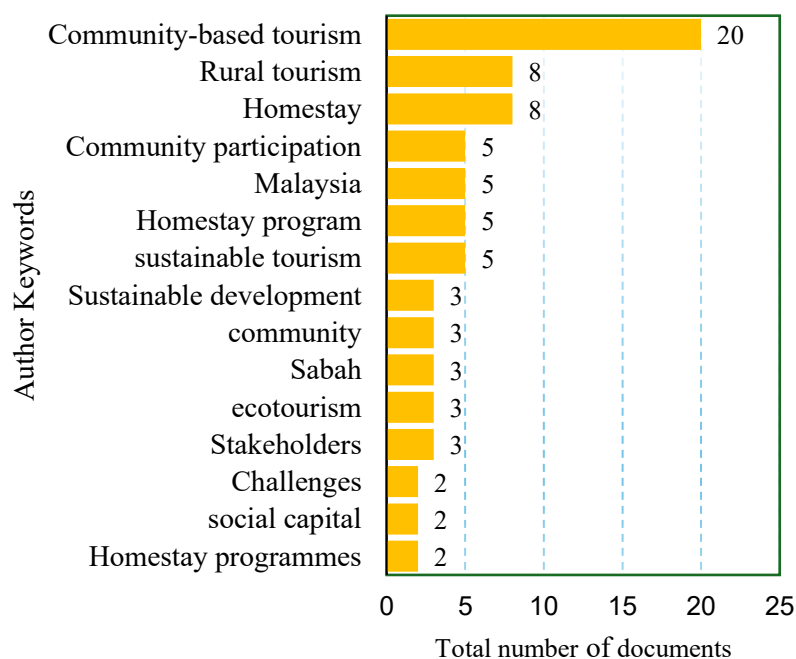
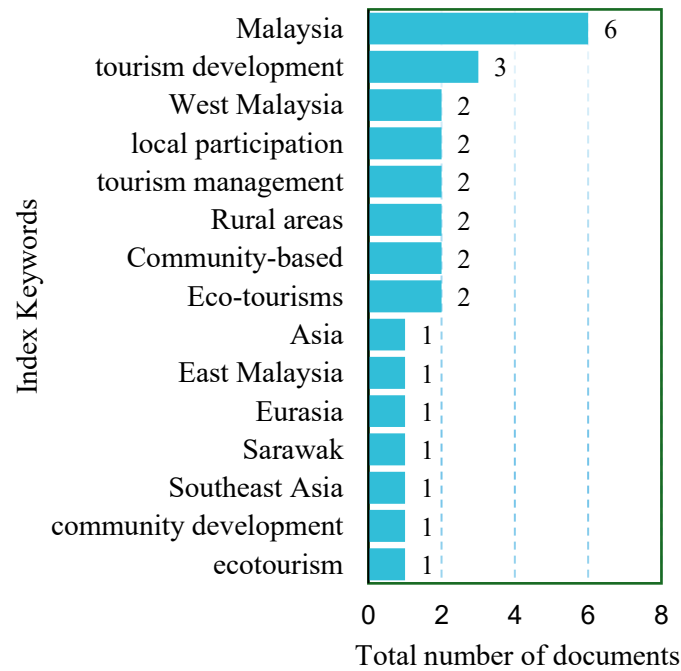


Figure 5

Frequency distribution of the top 15 index keywords in community-based tourism publications



In addition to the author keywords, Figure 5 highlights the top 15 index keywords found in the analysed publications. The keyword “*Malaysia*” appears most often, with 6 occurrences, which reinforces the strong geographical focus of this review. Other keywords, including “*West Malaysia*”, “*tourism management*”, and “*community-based tourism*”, each appear twice. These terms suggest that Malaysian CBT research is increasingly concerned with governance, regional development, and the management of tourism within local community settings.

Summary of Key themes of all 49 Documents

A thematic analysis of the 49 selected publications reveals several interconnected domains that shape the discourse on community-based tourism (CBT) in Malaysia. The most prominent themes include socio-economic empowerment, cultural heritage and identity preservation, stakeholder engagement, environmental sustainability, and governance-related challenges. These themes reflect the evolving priorities of researchers in assessing both the benefits and barriers of CBT implementation in diverse local contexts.

These themes, as illustrated in Table 5, encompass various dimensions of community-based tourism, including socio-economic empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, stakeholder participation, environmental sustainability, and challenges in governance and digitalization. These insights will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections to provide a deeper understanding of the strategic directions and research gaps within Malaysia’s CBT landscape.

Table 5

Key Themes in Malaysian CBT Research

Theme	Focus Areas	Key Insights
Socio-Economic Empowerment	Income generation, employment, rural development	CBT helps alleviate poverty and foster rural entrepreneurship, especially for women and youth.
Cultural Heritage and Identity Preservation	Preservation of traditions, cultural festivals, homestay programs	CBT safeguards intangible cultural heritage and supports intergenerational knowledge transfer.
Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation	Leadership, participatory planning, multi-stakeholder roles	Active community leadership and clear governance are essential for sustainable CBT projects.
Stakeholder Engagement and Community Participation	Leadership, participatory planning, multi-stakeholder roles	Active community leadership and clear governance are essential for sustainable CBT projects.
Environmental Sustainability and Resource Management	Eco-tourism, conservation, environmental awareness	CBT promotes environmental education and low-impact tourism in sensitive ecosystems.
Challenges in Governance and Digitalization	Policy coherence, digital platforms, monitoring systems	CBT's growth is limited by weak policy integration, digital gaps, and poor evaluation mechanisms.

The thematic synthesis shows that Malaysian CBT research has developed noticeably over time. Earlier studies mainly focused on socio-economic benefits and cultural preservation, particularly through homestay programmes that reflected government efforts to promote rural tourism. In contrast, more recent studies have expanded the discussion to include governance quality, stakeholder collaboration, environmental sustainability, and digital transformation. This shift suggests a broader understanding of sustainable tourism, where CBT is viewed not only as a source of economic benefit but also as a way to support stronger, more inclusive, and more resilient communities (Ismail et al., 2024). However, several important gaps still need attention. Few studies have examined the long-term effects of CBT through longitudinal research, making it difficult to understand how benefits and challenges change over time. Digital technologies, such as smart tourism applications, digital marketing, and artificial intelligence, also remain underexplored in Malaysian CBT settings. In addition, governance studies still tend to focus mainly on community participation, with less attention given to institutional coordination, policy integration, and adaptive governance mechanisms (Martínez-Peláez et al., 2023). Addressing these gaps would strengthen both the theoretical development of CBT and its practical implementation in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive synthesis of Malaysian community-based tourism (CBT) research through a scoping review complemented by descriptive bibliometric analysis. By reviewing 49 Scopus-indexed publications published between 2009 and 2025, the study maps the intellectual development of CBT research, identifies dominant research themes, and highlights important knowledge gaps requiring further scholarly attention. The findings demonstrate that Malaysian CBT research has evolved from an early emphasis on rural income generation and homestay development towards broader discussions of sustainability, stakeholder collaboration, cultural heritage preservation, governance, and environmental management (Verhoef et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the review also reveals persistent gaps in digital transformation, adaptive governance, long-term impact evaluation, and evidence-based policy integration, indicating opportunities for future research.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide useful insights for policymakers, tourism agencies, and local communities in strengthening community participation, improving institutional coordination, and promoting more resilient and inclusive CBT initiatives (Pramanik & Rahmanita, 2023). For researchers, the thematic synthesis offers a research agenda that encourages greater interdisciplinary

collaboration, longitudinal investigations, and the integration of emerging technologies within community-based tourism. This study is not without limitations. The review was restricted to publications indexed in the Scopus database and therefore may not capture relevant studies published in other databases or grey literature. Future reviews may incorporate multiple databases and comparative international analyses to provide a broader understanding of CBT development across different contexts. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on sustainable tourism by providing an evidence-based overview of Malaysian CBT research and identifying strategic directions that support sustainable destination development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was supported by Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Malaysia, through The Fundamental Research Grant Scheme for Early Career (FRGS-EC/1/2024/STG06/UUM/02/3).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ismail, A. conceptualized the study, interpreted the findings, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Mohd Nazari, N. designed the methodology, performed the bibliographic data retrieval, and conducted the data analysis. All authors contributed to manuscript revision, read, and approved the submitted version.

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