THE CONCEPT OF MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN MALAYSIA

Zahrah Fatimah Ariff Irshad[1a]*, Noorul Huda Sahari[2b] and Anis Husna[3c]

[a] Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, MALAYSIA
E-mail: zahrahfatimah1196@gmail.com
[b] Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
E-mail: nooru088@gmail.com
[c] Academy of Contemporary Islamic Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA,
E-mail: anisshusna@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Muslim friendly tourism (MFT) is famous for the services and facilities in compliance with Shariah. Malaysia has developed an impressive tourism but there is lack of awareness among industry players where some of them still do not show interest to implement MFT. The scope of this research covers on the implementation of MFT in Malaysia. The objective is to examine the concept of MFT implemented in Malaysia and its services and facilities provided by the agency. The conceptual study adopts a qualitative method where the data are collected through library research such as from books, articles, journals, reports, and online resources. The collected data were analysed by using content analysis. The finding of this study discovers on the implementation of MFT in services and regulation standards. By understanding the actual concept, it can enhance the opportunities of MFT and attract key players to invest.

Keywords: Halal, Muslim Friendly, Services, Shariah Compliant, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

The Muslim population is growing at the fastest rate around the world. Most Muslim countries are increasingly adopting the growing trend of Muslim-friendly tourism. As a result, more Muslims are willing to travel to other countries, whether they are Muslim or non-Muslim countries (Hasanah & Harun, 2020). According to Global Muslim Travel Index (2017), the Muslim international tourists estimated about 121 million in 2016 and is expected to grow to 156 million by the year 2020. Nonetheless, the worldwide Muslim

population is vast and expanding, with an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in 2010 and a predicted 2.2 billion Muslims by 2030, accounting for 26.4 percent of the global total. Malaysia is a moderate Muslim country with multi-faith and multi-races in the society where Islam is constitutionally the country's official religion (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016). Muslim friendly tourism refers to the provision of tourism goods and services in response to Muslim visitor demand. It facilitates Muslim consumers' respect and dietary requirements that are compliant with Islamic teachings as defined by Islamic Shari'ah law, which is based on the Quran (the divine book), Hadith (the compilation of Prophet Muhammad's traditions), and Fiqh (a group of Islamic scholars' consensus opinions) (S Bangsawan, Ms, Rahman, & Razimi, 2019). In Islam, tourism activities are highly recommended; this tour instruction is found in various verses of the Al Quran. Among the terminologies that significantly used to refer as Islamic tourism are siyar, safar, al-siyahah al-ziyarah, or al rihlah (Ahmad, Hermintoyo, & Maghfiroh, 2021).

To implement Muslim friendly tourism, there are basic items or things that to be included such as the transportation, food premise, finance, travel packages and hotel and this thing shall he operated and fullfill the Shariah compliant requirements. The Muslim Friendly Tourism nowadays become prominent attractions to Muslim travellers to choose for. Due to higher numbers of Muslim travellers from OIC nations, Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism has supported the development of Muslim-friendly hospitality and services to meet their needs.

The Islamic Tourist Centre (ITC) was founded on March 16th, 2009, with the goal of developing and promoting Islamic tourism activities (Jamil, Mohd Reazal, i Haziz, & Md Sawari, 2019). The ITC provides training and capacity-building services in respect to Islamic tourism in addition to offering recommendations. In 2012, ITC prepared a blueprint paper named "Strategic Plan for Islamic Tourism Development" through stakeholder engagements and dialogues. This publication described the path ahead for Islamic tourism in Malaysia and served as a guide by outlining the essential characteristics and requirements for implementing Islamic tourism in Malaysia (Strategic Roadmap for Development of Islamic Tourism in Oic Member Countries, 2018). The Muslim friendly tourism is a valuable resource, especially in Muslim nations with a rich and diverse past cultural. In the context of Islam, MFT must be respectful to Islamic principles and human beings. It might bring wealth to Muslim nations while also demonstrating concern and respect for their tradition (Hossain Bhuiyan, Siwar, Mohamad Ismail, & Islam, 2011).

One of the issues that might obstruct Muslim-friendly tourism implementation is lack of understanding and knowledge among service providers in MFT

which could limit Muslim-friendly tourist options. According to Ab Hamid, Abdul Aziz, Abd Rahman, and Ali (2018), certain people in the industry's lack of sensitivity causes travellers from other nations who don't know much about halal in Malaysia to be wary. For example, several Muslim-owned restaurants lack halal certification yet display Quranic passages on their walls. Some of Muslims were confused about the halal certification status on the premises as it can be misunderstood as there are Quranic verses which can make people confuse. It means that, the concept of Muslim friendly tourism must be understandable not only for the travellers but service providers as well so that there will be no misconception in future about halal food or Muslim friendly tourism. The lack of halal standards across countries with a single well-established worldwide certification and/or accreditation organisation is one of the biggest challenges facing the halal market, and no certification institution offers Halal certification to companies providing Halal travel or tourism products (Gohary, 2020). There are some challenges in implementing Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia but there are a lot of opportunities that can be gained by establishing MFT. Thus, this paper aimed to highlight Muslim friendly tourism as a recent trend in the tourism industry, analyses its patterns, as well as discussing what are the opportunities of Islamic tourism and how it offers for growth, development and economic prosperity are unpacked. It is hoped that this study able to provide enough information about Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia.

2. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this study is to examine the concept of Muslim Friendly Tourism that has been implemented in Malaysia includes its services and facilities provided by the agency. This article used qualitative method to gain information and opinions from the previous research on the related field. To achieve the objective, the research data began with collecting data through library research. The data is gathered from several resources including from books, article journal, newspaper, journal data based and reports. From the obtained data, researcher analyses all the available information related to the study by using content analysis. Through content analysis, researcher can examine the concept and determine the theme. Other than that, to understand the concept of Muslim friendly tourism, the primary sources of Shariah like al Quran, al Hadith and opinion of scholars is referred to. Inductive was made to Quran and Hadith to examine the basis on the concept of Muslim friendly tourism according to Shariah perspective. Preliminarily, this article overviewed on the comprehensive concept of Muslim Friendly Tourism from the edge of Shariah and practices in term of its implementations, services and facilities provided in Malaysia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Muslim Friendly Tourism is an industry that is well known of its services and facilities. Based on the content analysis conducted on the data collected from library research, MFT always offer services and facilities that are Shariah compliant. The analysis of the data is discussed as follow:

a. *Muslim friendly services and facilities*

Muslim friendly tourism has been identified as all tourist-related services and facilities that comply to Shariah law, with a focused-on hotels, food and beverages and travel events (Abdul Aziz A., 2018). The developing worldwide ecosystem of MFT goods and services, marketing trends for MFT products and services, government regulations supporting MFT and more are included in the scope of MFT. Halal products and services are getting more popular among people of all religions and philosophies, since halal products are renowned for their excellence and the halal business has been establishing an enabling environment for mutual respect and honest interaction (Ahmed & Akbaba, 2018). Muslim-friendly products and services should be included in tourism destination planning (e.g., prayer rooms in airports and public places, Ramadan meal plans), while preserving the quality of experience that the location provides to other visitors (Cetin & Zeki Dinçer, 2016). The hotel accommodations are the most prominent activity that should act according to Syariah principles (Jamil, Mohd Reazal, i Haziz, & Md Sawari, 2019). In most scenarios, hotel amenities are designed to be accessible to both male and female guests which they must be separated such as gymnasium, spa and swimming pools. This is important to avoid any misunderstanding or issues that may arise later. In Malaysia, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) and the Halal Hub Division under JAKIM have collaborated on a program for the MFT industry products and services providers on Halal certification and standardization.

b. *Regulations and standard on Muslim Friendly Tourism*

The rapid expansion of Muslim-friendly hospitality and the expansion of the Muslim-friendly hotel idea need the intervention of the appropriate authorities to supervise and monitor its implementation and dissemination. Working on the formulation of Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services-Requirements in accordance with Malaysian Standard (MS) has been started. Ahmad Ibrahim Kulliyyah of Laws, IIUM, in collaboration with the Islamic Tourism Centre, the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, the Department of Standard Malaysia, the Ministry of Science and Innovation Malaysia, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the Ministry of Education Malaysia

(for the research grant NRGS 130010001), and the Malaysian tourism industries, successfully completed the draught that was accepted and approved by the Islamic Standard Committee in December 2014. A standard is necessary to assure and maintain the integrity of goods and services that are tailored to Muslim customers, even if the Muslim friendly hotel idea is optional. Specifically, the Malaysian Standard (MS 210:2015) was designed with the goal of ensuring that goods and services targeted to Muslim travellers are in compliance with Shariah principles.

Likes others tourism sector, Muslim Friendly Tourism is also subjected to several acts and regulations that are related to tourism in Malaysia. The acts include Tourism Industry Act 1992 and Tourism Vehicle Licensing Act 1999. The regulations related to Tourism Industry namely Tourism Industry (Tour Operating Business and Travel Agency Business) Regulations 1992, Tourism Industry (Licensing and Control of Tourist Guides) Regulations 1992, Tourism Industry (Licensing of Tourism Training Institutions) Regulations 1994, Tourism Industry (Compounding of Offences) Regulations 1992. Whereas for regulation under the Tourism Vehicles Licensing namely Tourism Vehicles (Licensing and Control of Tourism Vehicles) Regulations 2000.

Tourism Industry Act 1992 is an act allowing for the authorisation and control of tourism enterprises and relevant or accidental aspects thereof. It consists of five parts and each section has different approaches. For examples, section 5 of The Tourism Industry Act 1992 stipulates the requirement for tourism operators and agency to operate the tourism business after obtaining the licence from the ministry. Beside it highlight an undertaking authorised for tourism shall always show its license in a prominent location at its principal place of business and in every section the authorised tourism business brings the company operates on or in. It shows that it is important to have license if people are doing business under tourism. The act is pertinent in order to protect the travellers' interest in case there is any issues arisen from the tourism provider.

Besides, The Muslim Friendly provider also subject to the requirements provided in halal related standards used for Muslim friendly tourism such as standard for halal food as in MS1500:2019: Food Product. This standard is a guideline for the food operator and manufacturer in order to certify their food produce as halal and the standard is regarded as important information for people to refer at in order gain information and knowledge on halal food in term of the food, store, and distribution and so on. This information is important to avoid any misleading or confusion regarding the halal status of the food consumed. All the regulations and standards are important to ensure that tourists and service providers have something to refer and manage to

handle any problem arisen based on the law and standard provided. By having these regulations, it shows that Malaysia is a country that prioritises and protects the consumer rights.

c.   *Economic Contributions*

The Tourist Development Corporation was formed in 1972, and the government took several important efforts to acknowledge the tourist sector's potential in Malaysia. Later, the government developed plans to boost the tourist industry by implementing a variety of measures during the duration of the five-year economic plan (Habibullah, Haji Din, Wei-Chong, & Siow-Hooi, 2019). Tourism is Malaysia's most profitable service industry in terms of foreign exchange profits. There were ten nations where foreign tourists were expected to arrive and to hit the target, non-Muslim visitors, as well as Muslim tourists must be encouraged (Hossain Bhuiyan, Siwar, & Mohamad Ismail, 2013). One of Malaysia's economic contributions came from the tourism industry, where the government prioritised the development of several tourist-related projects to boost the country's economic future (Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail, & Islam, 2011).

Muslim-friendly tourism provides several work opportunities for people who are familiar with Shariah laws and live an Islamic lifestyle. The tourism sector not only offers services but also produces jobs and boosts the Malaysian economy (Samori & Rahman, 2014). It means that by implementing Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia, it can provide job opportunities and at the same time increase the economy of Malaysia by having travellers from other countries especially Muslims to use the services and facilities. Not only that, but there are also many sectors that are involved directly and indirectly while establishing Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia.

d.   *Halal food*

Malaysia is regarded as one of the best Muslim tourist destinations in the world, with a variety of Muslim-friendly facilities and services (Zainol, Mustafa, & Willibrod, 2021). Halal food is one of the main things in implementing Muslim friendly tourism. It is because Halal food is not only lawful, it also must safe and free from any contaminations. 75% of Muslims choose to consume halal food when travelling due not only to religious guidelines but also to the perception that halal food is healthier, cleaner, and tastier. One of the most important Islamic characteristics of an Islamic tourist resort is the availability and accessibility of halal cuisine (Hassan, 2015). When Muslims travel, concerns such as the availability of Halal cuisine, conservative entertainment, and the provision of separate facilities for men and women will

all be important aspects. By establishing more Halal restaurants/outlets and Halal food, it could make the Muslim tourists feel more at ease and less doubtful regarding local Halal food (Zainol, Mustafa, & Willibrod , 2021). In Malaysia, there are many halal restaurants and café that provide halal food as they get the halal certification from Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM). For examples, The Chicken Rice Shop, McDonalds and others. Availability of Halal food, prayer areas, segregated entertainment facilities, and not offering alcohol, gambling and adult channels are among the list of Muslim traveller needs.

According to Samori and Rahman (2013), Malaysia was a pioneer in introducing a comprehensive standard for halal products through the Malaysian Standard: Halal Food-Production, Preparation, and Storage-General Guidelines, which allowed Malaysia's Islamic tourism sector to market and position itself as a unique destination among other countries due to the existence of Halal standards that were monitored and controlled by government authorities. Access to Halal food is easy and has been one of the top reasons why Muslim tourists feel at home in Malaysia. Almost all types of cuisine (Malaysian, Korean, Japanese, etc.) and all types of fast food are available (Eddahar, 2016). Halal food is another industry that has the potential to provide numerous opportunities not only for travellers but also for citizens. It is because halal-certified restaurants and food items can be one of the sectors that provide opportunities for people and the food business to make a good living. It's essential to highlight that the Halal market affects not just Muslims, but also non-Muslim visitors, since it's a global symbol of quality assurance and lifestyle preference.

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e.   *The implementations of Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia*

Nowadays, Islamic hospitality is ingrained in the faith, culture, and lifestyle of Muslims. The government has made several efforts to make Malaysia one of Asia's most developed countries. The tourist industry has become one of the most important contributors to the country's economy. In 1980s, tourism has more potential to boost the economy due to global recession at that time (Mazumder, Ahmed, & Al-Amin, 2009). Malaysia was named one of the world's top rising tourism destinations by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in December 2004. Malaysia has a lot of potential to

enhance Islamic tourism for economic sustainability and religious fulfilment (Hossain Bhuiyan, Siwar, Mohamad Ismail, & Islam, 2011). Prior to the rise of Muslim tourists from OIC nations, Malaysia's Ministry of Tourism pushed the development of Muslim-friendly hospitality and services to meet the needs of the visitors. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) was founded on March 16th, 2009, with the purpose of improving and promoting Islamic tourism activities (Jamil, Mohd Reazal, i Haziz, & Md Sawari, 2019). Some of the efforts made by Tourism Malaysia to promote Muslim friendly tourism are by making The Halal Master Plan. They also catered to Muslim needs in the hospitality industry and be the host for the first OIC Global Islamic Tourism Conference and Exhibition in 2008. It shows that the implementation of MFT had to take a lot of efforts and Malaysia is one of the countries that made a lot of initiatives to implement MFT.

Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board (MTPB) is the department who is responsible to promote Malaysia as destination of choice on international level. By launching Visit Malaysia Year (VYM) Campaign in 1990, followed by the State Visit Year (SVY) in 1991, Malaysia started taking tourism more seriously. Malaysian Plans (MPs) were the first initiative to demonstrate a significant interest in tourist products and services over a five-year period. This plan was created by the National Tourism Policy (NTP) in 1992, the Ecotourism Plan (NEP) in 1996, and the Malaysian Tourism Transformation Programme (MTTP) in 2010 (Mosbah & Mohamed Saleh, 2014). If effectively marketed, Muslim-friendly tourism is one of the most competent industries for generating income for a country especially in ASEAN (Nurrachm, 2019). One of the efforts to promote Islamic tourism is by creating websites that are dedicated to Islamic arts, Quranic calligraphy, and mosque architecture (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015). In Surah Al Rum verses 42, Allah says, travel through the earth and see what the end of those was before you: most of them worshipped others besides Allah." Based on the above verse Allah wants people to see the world and worships Him by looking at all His beautiful and different kind of creations with different purposes. It means that travelling is something that is allowed for people to do to see Allah's creatures and appreciate what He has created for humans.

4.   CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss on Muslim friendly tourism and its implementation in Malaysia. The Muslim travel market will be one of the largest contributors to the travelling market. By having Islamic Tourism Centre, it helps to improve the quality of MFT in Malaysia. It includes food, hotel, transportation and entertainment. Muslim Friendly tourism has many

benefits and advantages to help our economy sector as well as people too. It also assists in promoting Islamic culture and creates awareness among people about travel but Shariah compliant. Muslim friendly tourism has been implemented since along way and there has been many improvements made to make sure that it is comply with Islamic law and easy for tourists to follow the guidance. This research can assist future tourism and hospitality research, particularly regarding the long-term viability of Muslim friendly tourism and Muslim travellers. It may also help future studies in understanding more about MFT most prevalent services, which include not just food and beverage but also lodging and destination attraction services for Muslim travellers. It means that people need to understand the concept of Muslim friendly tourism so that they can experience and know how it works. This big opportunity of the implementation of Muslim friendly tourism concept comes with big challenges in terms of its implementation and acceptance among the consumers and traders. In Malaysia, the degree of compliance should be further upgraded to meet the purely Islamic rules and principles.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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