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# @Halal

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## Poised for global dominance

Halal Development Corporation (HDC) Chairman Khairul Azwan Harun says Malaysia's participation in the halal industry globally is to position the halal industry as a lucrative and competitive opportunity. **p08-10**

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Halal Digest: Ramadhan  
March-April 2024  
MUSLIM-FRIENDLY TOURISM DIGEST  
ISLAMIC CENTRE  
A UNIQUE Ramadan Experience  
Islamic Tourism Centre and Tourism Malaysia  
Introducing My Ramadan Experience on Kallista



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@Halal says ...

## Of traditions and unity

**A**S Malaysians, Ramadhan holds a special place in our hearts. It is not just a Muslim affair but a celebration of diversity and inclusivity for everyone here.

Growing up, living in a racially mixed neighbourhood meant a few things: the transformation of Ramadhan into a tapestry of sights, sounds and flavours, the bustling bazaars coming alive with the aromas of mouthwatering dishes like rendang, lemag, lontong and kuih-muih, and the call of prayers echoing through the streets.



It also facilitated multicultural exchanges between religious backgrounds, fostering dialogue, understanding, and friendship during Iftar.

What makes buka puasa special for our community is the symbol of generosity and community spirit. Buka puasa gatherings were not only for their families but also to extend a hand of friendship and support to the less fortunate - regardless of race or religion.

This communal buka puasa underscores the importance of compassion and solidarity during Ramadhan. The one saying stuck through the years was: "You won't reach people through God; you shall reach God through people".

More so, the act of fasting was indeed a sight to respect. The encouragement of self-discipline and mindfulness was not something a person can do daily, let alone for 30 days.

What's delightful is that non-Muslims nowadays have taken it upon themselves to fast alongside their peers and family, to show their respect silently and showcase what it feels like to be a united nation. It's just the icing on the cake.

May this year's Ramadhan genuinely remind us of what it means to be consumed by memories, culture and the ever-growing love and support Malaysians have for each other.



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#### Feast of faith

The duality of Ramadhan buffets

# Feast of faith

The duality of Ramadhan buffets



BY **ANIS NAJIHA AHMAD**

AND



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**R**AMADHAN, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar, is a period of profound spiritual reflection for Muslims worldwide.

In Malaysia, Ramadhan holds particular significance and is characterised by vibrant cultural traditions and culinary delights. Among these traditions, the Ramadhan buffet, offered by hotels and restaurants across the country, has become emblematic.

These buffets cater to the physical needs of fasting individuals and serve as a platform for people of all faiths, including office workers, to come together and share blessings.

Friends, family and community members from different faiths also frequently participate in these gatherings, fostering intercultural understanding and unity among diverse communities.

## ALLURE OF RAMADHAN DINING EXPERIENCE

Ramadhan buffets in Malaysian hotels offer more than just food; they create a unique atmosphere with festive decorations, including vibrant lights and traditional displays.

As the call to prayer signals the end of the fast, guests gather at communal tables to enjoy the iftar, the meal Muslims share to break their fast after sunset. Guests are welcomed with dates and refreshing beverages, symbolising the breaking of the fast.

Live cooking stations and interactive counters add excitement, allowing guests to witness their favourite dishes being prepared. From classic Malay dishes like grilled satay and rendang to Middle Eastern delights such as kebabs and baklava, and from Indian curries to Western pasta and salads, Ramadhan buffets offer diverse options.

Ramadhan buffets in Malaysian hotels provide a convenient and luxurious dining option for fasting individuals and their families. Hotels compete to outdo one another each year with menu variety, culinary creativity, and lavish presentations.

These buffets support the local economy, particularly the hospitality and food industries. They create employment opportunities for chefs, cooks, servers, and other hospitality professionals while stimulating tourism.

Recognising the significance of Ramadhan buffets in promoting gastronomy tourism, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture, in collaboration with key partners such as Tourism Malaysia, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH), and the Malaysian Association of Hotel Owners (MAHO), introduced the MY Ramadhan Experience packages in 2024.

This immersive programme not only provides a glimpse into the vibrant Ramadhan festivities but also offers guests the opportunity to indulge in complimentary iftar meals and experience the delights of Ramadhan buffets (Tourism Malaysia, 2024).

## CRITICISM OF RAMADHAN BUFFETS

While immensely popular, Ramadhan buffets have not escaped criticism. One prominent concern, as articulated by the Perak Religious Council President, is their departure from the actual Islamic teachings. This departure manifests in several ways, including food waste and commercialising Ramadhan buffets (Leong, 2022).

One significant concern is the potential



**“These buffets support the local economy, particularly the hospitality and food industries. They create employment opportunities for chefs, cooks, servers, and other hospitality professionals while stimulating tourism.”**

for food wastage, as hotels often prepare large quantities to cater to diverse tastes and preferences. This contradicts the Islamic principle of avoiding excess and contributes to environmental degradation and resource depletion.

Being wasteful is an act abhorred in Islam, as attested in verses 26 and 27 of Surah al-Isra’ in the Quran.

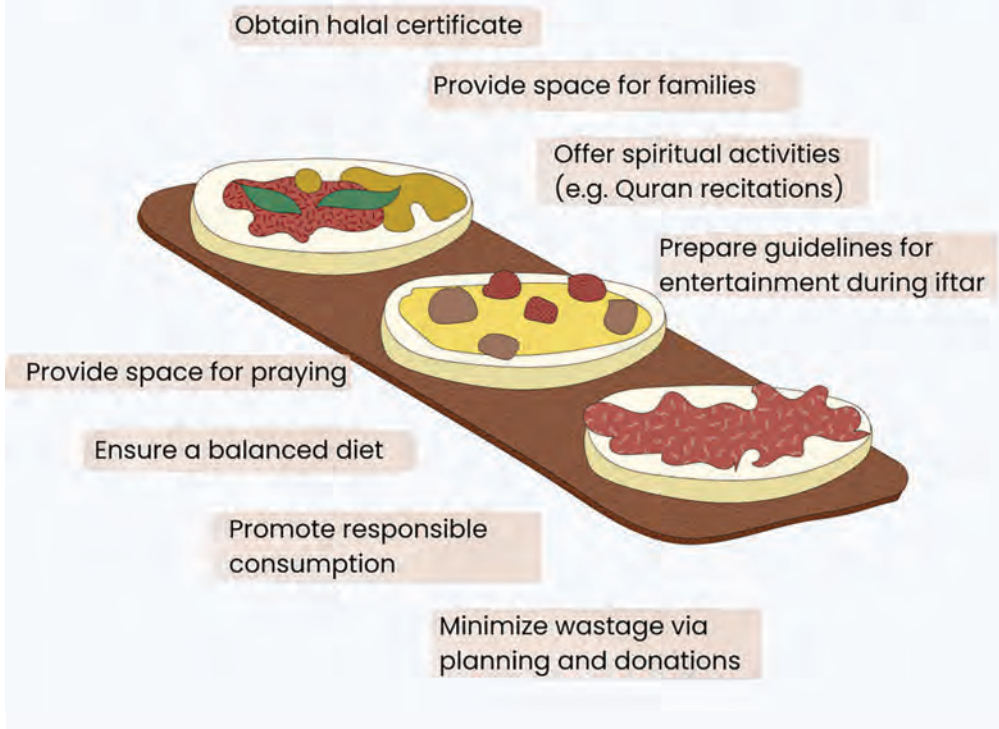
*“Give to close relatives their due, as well as the poor and ‘needy’ travellers. And do not spend wastefully. Verily spendthrifts are brothers of Satan; and Satan is to his Lord (himself) ungrateful.”*  
(Quran, Surah al-Isra, 17: 26 and 27)

Another criticism is the commercialisation of Ramadhan, with restaurants and hotels capitalising on the spiritual season to maximise profits. Some establishments charge exorbitant rates for their buffet offerings, reaching financially burdensome levels for many individuals and families.

This exploitation for profit-seeking purposes is viewed as antithetical to the principles of compassion, generosity, and

## FEAST OF FAITH: THE DUALITY OF RAMADHAN BUFFETS

*What actions should restaurants and hotels take?*



social justice emphasised during the holy month.

Additionally, the term “Ramadhan buffet” is often used indiscriminately to boost sales or profits without adhering to halal standards and quality or having halal certifications, which can be confusing for Muslims.

Additionally, entertainment distractions during Ramadhan buffets have also raised concerns. It is typical for hotels and restaurants to feature live music performances and singers during Ramadhan buffets to enhance the ambience and create a lively atmosphere.

However, this practice has been criticised for contradicting Ramadhan’s solemnity and spiritual focus. Instead of fostering an environment conducive to reflection and worship, these distractions may promote frivolity and indulgence, undermining the

intended purpose of Ramadhan observance.

### STRIKING A BALANCE

Ramadhan buffets can offer a meaningful and enriching experience when approached with mindfulness, even in light of these criticisms. These strategies include:

- Ensuring halal certification and standards: Restaurants and hotels must ensure their premises are certified halal to avoid confusion among Muslim consumers. By upholding halal standards, hotels can build trust with Muslim customers and uphold the values of honesty and integrity in business practices.
- Enforcing penalty for deception: Authorities should enforce stringent penalties to deter intentional deception of business owners targeting Muslims, including

false claims of halal certification. Such measures are crucial to prevent recurrent misconduct and safeguard the sanctity of halal dietary practices.

- Promoting responsible consumption and minimising wastage: Efforts should also be made to minimise wastage through effective planning, portion control, and donation initiatives. Restaurants and hotels can take orders from visitors early to provide sufficient supplies. Additionally, they can partner with local communities and charitable organisations to distribute surplus meals to those in need, embodying the spirit of generosity and altruism that defines Ramadhan.
- Upholding the solemnity of Ramadhan: Restaurants and hotels should consider restricting live entertainment during iftar times and ensuring any performances are culturally and religiously appropriate. Alternative activities such as religious lectures and Quran recitations can enhance the spiritual atmosphere. Integrating congregational Tarawih prayers into the Ramadhan buffet experience can enhance the spiritual atmosphere and encourage guests to engage in acts of worship and reflection.
- Enhancing the dining experience for Families: Providing extra space for families to break their fast peacefully can significantly improve their dining experience.
- Ensuring a balanced diet: Offering a balanced diet with necessary nutrients is crucial for promoting overall well-being during Ramadhan. This ensures guests have the energy they need for fasting and worship.

### MORE THAN JUST A CULINARY FEAST

Ramadhan buffets in Malaysian hotels offer a unique opportunity to celebrate the holy month’s blessings within a communal setting.

However, this celebration is accompanied by a dual perspective, encompassing both the opportunities and the criticisms.

By carefully addressing these dualities, restaurants and hotels can create an experience that not only honours the traditions of Ramadhan but also mitigates concerns surrounding issues such as food waste and commercialisation.

This approach transforms Ramadhan buffets into an integral part of the Malaysian hospitality experience, significantly contributing to the country’s tourism industry and promoting compassion and spiritual growth among guests while serving as a platform for cultural exchange, unity and understanding. - (h)

**“By carefully addressing these dualities, restaurants and hotels can create an experience that not only honours the traditions of Ramadhan but also mitigates concerns surrounding issues such as food waste and commercialisation.”**



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Seri Malaysia has Gurindam Ramadan as the theme of its Ramadan buffet.



Nasi Bukhari set.

# A taste of Malaysia

Hotel Seri Malaysia Kangar is a Gold MFAR recipient.

Seri Malaysia's Gurindam Ramadan buffet celebrates local flavours

BY FATIHAH MANAF

AS the holy month of Ramadan graces Malaysia with its presence, the country transforms into a vibrant tapestry of cultural and culinary experiences, making it an increasingly appealing tourist destination. The Ramadan buffets hosted by hotels in the country stand out as an attraction, drawing international tourists to experience the unique offerings, much like how these buffets have consistently appealed to locals each year.

“The MY Ramadan Experience campaign by Tourism Malaysia and Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) is an excellent offering. Apart from the many tourism products we already have in place, I see it as an opportunity to expose and introduce tourists from other parts of the world to enjoy and immerse themselves in Malaysia’s rich culture and diversity. They can observe how a multicultural society respectfully, caringly, and understandingly goes through the month cordially and enjoyably,” said Rangkaian Hotel Seri Malaysia Chairman, Dr Zaharudin Othman.

“We at Seri Malaysia are no exception. We definitely will give our full support to this initiative. We offer a special package for those looking to stay with us and embrace the spirit of Ramadan.

“Our special rate starts as low as RM95 per day throughout Ramadan until April 7, 2024. In line with our annual tradition, we will host a delightful Ramadan buffet at 16 of our hotels across Malaysia, with prices starting as low as



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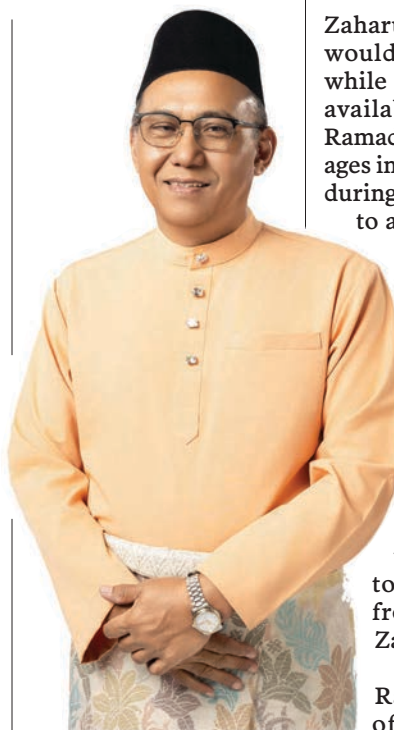
RM55 for adults. Four of our 20 hotels will also offer an à la carte dining option.”

Dedicated to offering premier Muslim-friendly hospitality experiences, 16 out of 20 Hotel Seri Malaysia establishments have recently been awarded the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition (MFAR) by ITC.

## MALAYSIA'S RAMADAN IS A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE

Zaharudin emphasised that Ramadan was a unique time where people could witness numerous acts of kindness and see how individuals come together to help those in need. People can observe a lively nightlife where Muslims gather to pray Tarawih at night and share food afterwards. The month is characterised by increased social interaction, providing opportunities that may not arise in other months outside of Ramadan.

“I’ve observed Ramadan in various countries, including the Middle East. However, in Malaysia, the experience that feels truly unique to me is the food bazaar. On the first day of Ramadan, you will witness the emergence of food bazaars offering unique local



Dr Zaharudin Othman

cuisines you won’t find during other months,” he shared.

Zaharudin opined that Ramadan offers a distinctive chance to appreciate various cultures and religious practices. He shared that several of his non-Muslim friends tried to engage in the dynamics of Ramadan, with some even opting to fast to fully embrace the environment.

## SERI MALAYSIA'S RAMADAN BUFFET

Zaharudin highlighted that Seri Malaysia would provide Sahur for Muslim guests while keeping the regular breakfast menu available for non-Muslim guests during Ramadan. This inclusive approach encourages integration, as everyone comes together during the breaking of the fast. The idea is to accommodate the different needs and cultures, fostering understanding and appreciation throughout Ramadan.

“In addition to our regular food offerings, Seri Malaysia, being situated throughout Malaysia, provides specific locations with their unique delicacies. We are incorporating these special delicacies into our Ramadan buffet. This way, tourists not only enjoy the Ramadan ambience during the breaking of the fast but also have the opportunity to savour the distinct local flavours from each specific location,” shared Zaharudin.

“Our theme this year is Gurindam Ramadan. We are concentrating on offering local cuisine, taking into account the preferences of the local context and the market trends at each hotel. This gives them the freedom to choose.

“For example, in Terengganu, we may have Nasi Kerabu and Nasi Dagang; in Melaka, Asam Pedas; in Temerloh, Pahang, Ikan Patin. In certain places, we also offer Middle Eastern cuisine as an additional unique experience for people to enjoy.”

In addition to the food, Zaharudin also pointed out that the Ramadan buffet could attract tourists to Malaysia as they witness diverse individuals, irrespective of their religion and race, enjoying each other’s company during the buffet.

“We provide comfortable prayer facilities for our guests. We plan to integrate the environment with local music such as Ghazal, Dikir Barat, and others, creating a tranquil atmosphere and fostering togetherness while maintaining the Malaysian experience for our guests during their stay.” – RnR



Rasa Rasa, Seri Malaysia's cafe.



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