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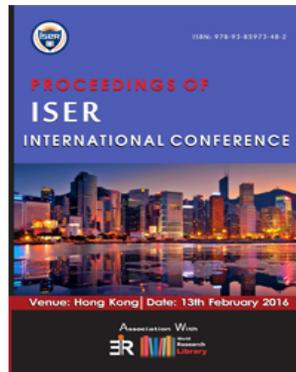
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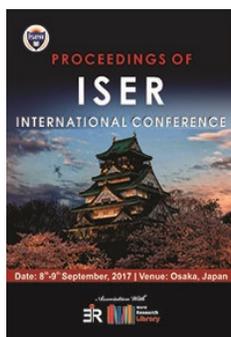
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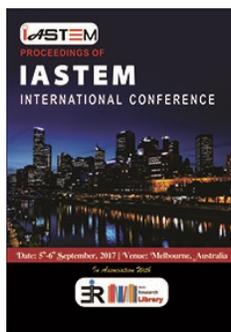
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ISSUES AND POTENTIAL OF MOSQUE AS A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract— Spiritual tourism is a new discovery area in the field of Religious Tourism, for example Islamic Tourism. The emergence and development of Islamic Tourism has encouraged people to travel to Islamic countries for many reasons, including educational, religion and spirituality purposes. Some people are travelling for spirituality of a place, but some are looking for educational aspects of the place. In Malaysia, Islamic Tourism is drastically developing since the country has the various assets for Islamic destination to exhibit their religion and culture like mosque, university and museums. Being an Islamic country, one of dominant Islamic tourism destinations in Malaysia is the mosque. Mosque is a ‘concrete symbol’ and ‘cultural pride’ of the country as it portrays the Muslim society and nationhood in Malaysia. Besides, since the early days, mosque plays pivotal roles by serving a comprehensive function to the community including educational, cultural and political matters. Unfortunately, in the current scenario, it does not really function as it was before. Therefore, the paper intended to discover issues and potential of mosque as a tourism destination pride in Malaysia through document analysis and interview with the mosque officers. Through the issues identified, a structural research framework could be developed to maximize mosque’ role and function as a tourism destination in Malaysia. This writing is beneficial for the researchers as well as destination planners to develop research in discovering tourists’ needs and satisfaction on mosque’s condition and management in Malaysia, more specifically in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya.

Keywords- Spiritual Tourism, Mosque, Malaysia, Issues and problem

I. INTRODUCTION

Travel and religion are interrelated since antiquity. Discussion on the Muslim world tourism is not just limited to hajj and pilgrimage, but it covers a wider scope. People travel for sacred places, like the obvious example; people travel for pilgrimage to Amritsar (Sikhism), Mecca (Islam) and Jerusalem (Abrahamic Faiths). Believers realized by visiting religious places can increase their awareness and faith to God (Norman 2011). In these recent years, religious tourism is widespread but it presents the least research interest among scholars in the tourism research (Timothy & Olsen 2006). There are numerous sites to be visited for religious tourism, among them are mosque, chapels, temples, museum and universities.

Tourism is an unexhausted activity and it will dynamically grow through years. Based on an analysis, World Tourism Organization (2011) forecasted approximately 300 to 330 million tourists visiting religious sites around the world every year. Based on their forecasting until the year 2020, East Asia country will continuously receive the rate of 5% tourists increase per year, the second highest after Europe. The number is estimated to increase through years and the number of destinations will also increase. This estimation indicates the dynamic and fast growing phenomenon of religious tourism

segment in the future (Kamenidou and Vourou 2015). It is important to develop research in this area as it can figure the potential of religious places for religious/spiritual tourism marketing and promotion.

II. THE GLOBAL SPIRITUAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Spiritual tourism is a new growing sub-field of religious tourism which is promoted to be known in the business and research area coincided with the development of global tourism phenomenon. Though the phenomenon is not new, but it is just started to be discovered in these few years as it has the bright economic, cultural and educational benefit to all. Specific definition of spiritual tourism remains a debate among scholars. (Haq 2011). However, based on experts’ conclusion, Haq and Jackson 2009 define spiritual tourism as follows:

“...someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred, or experiential in nature, but within a Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling.” Movement after postmodernism era has promoted spirituality wider as people are becoming alert and aware to discover themselves and their origin.

Theories and observation show that people are becoming enthusiast in searching the meaning and awareness towards spirituality to resolve their quests and confusion yielded by the rapid development of the modern world (Bloomfield 2009, Brownstein 2008, through Haq 2013). This development has positively encouraged more researchers to discover more on this segment for the nation of promotion, marketing and education. Though spiritual tourism is a new segment recognized, apparently this interweaving of travel and spirituality is not a new phenomenon. The concept of 'ziyara' has long been practiced since the early days of Islam ('hajj', 'umrah', 'rihla' and 'ziyara'), also been practiced in other religion as well (Haq 2013). Spiritual tourist might be diverse. They might call themselves as 'travelers', 'researches' 'pilgrims', 'seekers', 'adventurers' or 'devotees'. Haq and Wong 2013 further described, anybody could be a 'spiritual tourist'. A tourist does not have to be a Muslim to visit all the religious sites. But they are divided into 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' types. In another opinion, (Jafari and Scott, 2010) stated that visiting a sacred place like mosque does not require tourists to have a thorough understanding into that place.

III. SPIRITUAL TOURSIM; SCHOLARS' REVIEW

Scholars' point of view on spiritual tourism are varies and they are interrelated to each other. The current prolific authors in 'spiritual tourism' area such as Farooq Haq and Alex Norman explained this type of tourism as self-exploration experience. Farooq Haq and Jackson in another view agreed that 'spiritual tourists' are people who travel to search for 'authentic sense of self'. Farooq Haq in his researches discover the importance and benefit of 'spiritual tourism' for the economic means, while Alex Norman is a researcher who works towards exploring the diverse characters and division of 'spiritual tourist' in creating taxonomy for spiritual tourism experiences. All these three scholars again agreed that spiritual tourists are travelling for the 'spiritual benefit'.

IV. MOSQUE AS A SPIRITUAL TOURISM DESTINATION

Large, iconic and heritage mosques serving as a the hub of spiritual activity for communities in a city, yet their iconic architectural features, heritage value, unique characteristics and accessibility, make them a magnet for large scale tourist visits. Some tourists may visit sacred places out of curiosity or because the site is a 'must see' destination. In the case of mosques, such as in other religious sites, the space for worship how now turned into a kind of 'commodified' place. Islam prompted Muslim to learn and knowing each other. Religious tourism is substantial and vibrant in

Malaysia and the country is now fast becoming a major tourist attraction. Spiritual tourism is another subfield of religious tourism in Malaysia as this country own varies destinations for spiritual tourism purposes. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ICT) Malaysia has been launched 67- package booklets to promote Islamic tourism in Malaysia including mosque as one of the destinations besides museums, university, events and programs (Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia, 2014).

During the Prophet's time, mosque is the higher institution playing integral roles and functions to the Muslim community. Then, it was a multifunction institution, not only mend for congregational prayers, but it is also functioned as the center for various political and non-political purposes. Become a 'concrete symbol' of Islam, mosque in the early days has significantly promoted and being the role model to promote Islam to the other nations and races. More significant, mosque has played a wider role to spread Islam to the other places. Until today, mosque has still standing as a pivotal institution to Muslim community, but it does not really works as it was before (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014).

V. ISSUES AND POTENTIAL OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA

There has been a trend away from the three 'sss' and rural forms of tourism given the ecological impact and degradation of sites as a result of tourism activities which Malaysia, has been promoting recently more urban and architectural tourism in the form of trails and visit packages in urban areas including mosques to tourist.

In conjunction with the rapid tourism development, Malaysia in these few years is well-known for its famous tangible and intangible Islamic tourism products. Many initiatives have been launched in enhancing the tourism sub-sector performance in the world's eye (Badarudin and Shafaei, 2015). Improvement on mosque and prayer facilities has positively encouraged Muslim tourists to enter or visit mosques (Battour et.al, 2011, 2013). As the result, Muslim tourist's arrival increase year by year, and has placed Malaysia at the first top Halal-Friendly Muslim Destinations in the world.

Parallel to the rise of both Islamic and spiritual tourism throughout the whole world, the role of large modern purpose-built mosques have not yet been fully exploited and maximized to draw both new and returning tourist and even locals from the younger generation for increased visits and later, a greater understanding of Islam and its civilization. Malaysia stands at the point in the world as creating a correct understanding of Islam in the midst of global rise of Islamophobia. Tourists visiting KL's central mosques such as The National Mosque, Wilayah Mosque and

Jamek Mosque have remarked how visiting the mosques in Malaysia's cities have given them a totally different picture and enlightenment of Islam and Muslims (Trip Advisor Content Review, 2015).

There is further potential in folding an understanding of the masjid (mosque), and its features into principles of Islamic and Quranic wisdom, such that there is no significant split between the masjid architecture and its location in terms of specific spiritual cultural roots. The richness of the mosque experience can be maximized into multiple objectives of religious and spiritual tourism.

This is in line with current developments which see the area of cultural and architectural tourist being discusses in response to the rise of global phenomenon of religious tourism. Religious tourism is a phenomena on the rise in many parts of the world, with substantial interest in all religions, not only Islam, but laso Hinduism, Taoism, Judaism, Sikhism, Buddhism and the spiritual philosophies of East Asia. This trend can be seen also in the introduction of the controversial project of 1Malaysia Spiritual Tourism project which is heatedly objected by Islamic organizations in Malaysia.

Some of related issues and potentials on mosque development for tourism in Malaysia are:

i. The basic function of mosques has been maximizing through time

In this modern era, when people talk about education, they seldom think about mosque (Ahmed Khan, 2015), though tourists do visit mosque for tourism purposes. In the early days, Islam means everything to the Muslim life, however nowadays; mosque is seems only the symbol of 'architectural pride' of the Muslim society. In the current scenario, the institution of mosque has come under serious criticism among Muslim scholars as the function of mosque in developing society to Muslim and non-Muslim as mosque doesn't really function to creating consciousness and understanding about Islam is not become the priority and intention. In short, in line with the dynamic development in design and mosque construction, mosque should not only be the architectural marvel to tourists, but it should serve as a community center to spread knowledge and education (Mohamad Rasdi, 2014).

ii. Criticism among Muslim adherents

Same to the other countries initiatives, Malaysia is also promoting mosque as the religious tourism asset. Promoting mosque as a tourist destination has invited issues and debates among Muslim especially the elders. To the local community, mosque represents a sacred part of their spiritual belief system and way of life, yet to outsiders and non-Muslim's view, mosque is a part of the tourists' gaze, a cultural place of interest. Among the issues arise is, Muslim, worry on

the purity of mosque if it is promoted as a destination of tourism to non-Muslim (Mutallib 2015). However, according to Islamic theology and theories, non-Muslim are allowed to visit/enter mosque as long as it promotes Islam to them. Non-Muslim is permissible to enter a mosque with good intention. The beauty of Islam could be exposed to non-Muslim as long as the intention is parallel to the guideline delineated by the mosque's management. To a Muslim, mosque is a normal/typical place, but for non-Muslim, it is an 'unusual place' to discover.

However, this scenario does not occur in every area and community in Malaysia. Many Muslims are delighted to welcome visitors/tourists/ non-Muslim to enter mosque to see their place of worship. Back to the early days, Muslims are relatively tolerant to welcome non-Muslim to enter mosque and this tradition should be continued with a proper policy (Pennington 2008).

iii. Islamophobia

The 9/11 incident has brought about a new dimension and misconception in global Islamic tourism where there has been a shift towards Islamic countries and the pattern and arrival flow of international tourists have undergone a shift in favour of Islamic countries. Malaysia has undergone unprecedented rise in the number of international tourists from Islamic countries. Various initiatives has been undertaken to promote Islamic tourism. As part of the tourist experience, mosque has been identified as one of the key attractions of tourists and has been part and parcel of various initiatives such as trails and tour packages. Islamic tourism is seen as a potential initiative to dispel Islamophobia by creating the better understanding about Islam and its culture through destinations development and management (Halal Media, Malaysia 2013).

iv. Tourists' Interest in Mosque

Concurrent to the world Islamic tourism development as other Islamic countries are promoting religious tourism in the earnest effort, this has increases foreign tourist intention to visit mosque. Contradict to the ancient time; mosque in the modern world is ta representative of nationhood in a modern society. Mosque is supposed to be an 'International Source of Knowledge' among Muslim and Non-Muslim tourists to study about a local Muslim culture as mosque represents religious expression of a place and culture through their architecture, programs and events (Rizvi 2010).

This is also based on tourists review/comments in the Trip Advisor webpage. Most of the tourists shared their positive impression on the tourism mosques in Malaysia. Below are some example of the local and international tourists' comments on the three tourism mosques in Kuala Lumpur and Putrajaya:

A. Review on the National Mosque Malaysia

Built in 1965, The National Mosque is located in the heart of Kuala Lumpur City Centre. The mosque was built with collaboration of local and western architects. Being an important national legacy in Malaysia after independence, a new breath was given to the design towards modern concrete architecture as the mosque symbolized Malaysia's transformation after colonial. The mosque is also unique and known for its special umbrella shape of roof (Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia 2014).



Figure 1: The National Mosque Kuala Lumpur (Sources: Researcher 2015)

- **“Modern, Sleek and Impressive”**
“Very impressive mosque that is modern, sleek, clean, and very refreshing in general. Though I am not Muslim, it was great to visit this place.” (David F, New York City)
- **“A Great Way to Learn More about Islam”**
“A modern construction of mosque which is interesting for Non-Muslims. They have guides that tell you all about their beliefs and religious practices. There is also printed material to take away for free. Guaranteed you will satisfy your curiosity.” (Sarmiento, Singapore)
- **“Nice place to know about Mosque”**
“I and my friend went down the hill and then caught this mosque. I really like the construction and the way the receptionist asked us to fill in the name and the nation.” (Thi, Danang, Vietnam)

B. Review on Masjid Jamek, Kuala Lumpur

Located at the split point of Gombak River Masjid Jamek (Jamek Mosque) was built in 1909 by Arthur Benison Hubback. The architecture is the blend of Moorish, Indo-Saracenic or Mughal architecture. This mosque is one of the tourists' attractions as it is situated next to famous Sultan Abdul Samad building. This mosque is opened for Muslim and a non-Muslim tourist as it is survive for its history and stood as one of the oldest mosque in Malaysia (Khazae et.al. 2015).



Figure 2: Jamek Mosque Kuala Lumpur (Sources: www.backpacking Malaysia.com)

- **“Great, New experience for non-Muslim”**
“As long as you are wearing long pants and behave politely, you are allowed to go inside the mosque to enjoy the extraordinary architecture and atmosphere in a real, long-life Muslim mosque. “ (DHTN, Hanoi, Vietnam)
- **“Interesting Mosque”**
“We enjoyed this mosque. As non-Muslims, we could not go inside , but we could see most of it. Women need to be covered, but they provided a complimentary robe with hood. It actually added to the photo op since my wife looked completely different than normal. The mosque is beautiful. (Jack D, South Carolina)
- **“Educational”**
“... There are lots of leaflets about Islam and visitors are welcome to ask questions. Donations are welcome. Non-Muslims are not able to enter the prayer halls but they can see them from the outside and photos can be taken...” (laNyonsaise, United Kingdom)

C. Review on Putra Mosque, Putrajaya

Masjid Putra is a mosque built in Putrajaya in 1997. Named after the First Prime Minister's name, the mosque is a baby brainchild in mosque development is Malaysia. Designed by a brilliant architect, Dato' Hajeedar Abdul Majid, it is well-known for its famous great architecture with the pink dome and magnificent decoration, Masjid Putra is one of the must visit destination in Putrajaya among tourist. Robe and guide tour are provided to tourists (Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia 2014).



Figure 3: Putra Mosque in Putrajaya (Sources: Researcher 2015)

- **“Another Malaysian Architectural Marvel”**

“I had the opportunity to travel to the Mosque in 2000 and it was just open then. The cooling/ventilation system using natural draft is something everyone must admire. It is an architectural marvel.” (Mahendra, Sri Lanka, India)

- **“Beautiful Mosque & Friendly People”**

“The Mosque itself has a beautiful exterior and interior and is well worth a visit. There are volunteers who are experts on the building who will tell you about the history for free when you go inside as well. Outside the building are also very friendly muslim volunteers who will take you through Islam and give you information leaflets for free to gain a greater understanding of the religion!” (Ctaylor, Bangkok, Thailand)

- **“Spiritual”**

“Beautiful mosque, very large. We went there at 3pm after the prayer. They provide a head cover and robe if you need it. I am not Muslim but walking around felt very spiritual. There is a school and we got to see kids in uniform.”(Magali D, Canada)

Tourists have the different views on a destination and its attributes affects tourist perception and experiences (Battour et.al, 2011). According to Abdul Rahman (2014), study on tourist’s behavior, needs and perception are crucial in order to improve the quality of a tourist’s destination.

The comments portray tourists’ response and potential of mosque to be a medium of educational among tourist. Tourist point of view are varies to some attributes like architecture, management, events and program. Some of the comments also revealed the effectiveness of educational and enlightenment aspects of mosque as a tourist destination in Malaysia. Positive comments on the mosque ambience and the management/other Muslim attitude are also effective in giving the impact of spirituality to them.

v. Government effort to promote mosques

The government and political leaning in Malaysia is positive towards promoting tourism marketing and development. The government of Malaysia has seriously proposed mosque as one of the religious tourism destination since the early 2000’s. Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia (ITC) is the responsible governmental institution to serve and develop Islamic and spiritual tourism in Malaysia. Until now, this organization has produces a standard Mosque Trails in Malaysia while at the same time they are also developing tourism mosques’ profile for tourist’ reference.

Only recently have scholars, governments, and tourism agencies taken notice of the increasing numbers of religiously motivated travelers, with the

continuing growth of cultural and heritage tourism. There is an economic potential of religiously-motivated tourists or tourists who do not consciously travel for religion yet find religious enlightenment through their journey.

Although mosques have been used as imagery and iconography associated with creating good memories of the place and branding of the country, it must be seen also in the context of cross-cultural understanding in the global context and as pathways to economic drivers of the nation.

Only the issue is, some of tourism mosques in Kuala Lumpur are not fully promoted and facilitated for education yet. This is based on the Trip Advisor content review and acknowledged by the mosque’s officer. Besides positive and impressive comments from the tourists there are still negative reviews remarked for enhancement. Below are some of the examples:

- **“Not Much to See From Inside the Mosque”**

“The architecture is nice but unfortunately there is not much for tourists there...” (Sam D, Tehran, Iran)

- **“Nothing Special”**

“Visitors should cover their hair and body for arriving, it's a mosque built on water of pink marbles and designed by pink carpets ,some areas can visit only without shoes” (Salma A, Tehra)

- **“Outside Only Seen”**

“We visited of an evening as Ramadan festivities were ongoing so only saw outside. The folk around were really friendly and the walk at sunset is sensational and a photographers dream.” (Ade Wotton, Bristol, United Kingdom)

CONCLUSION

To counter respond to increased Islamophobia and other related issues mentioned in the previous part of this paper, there must be effort to take the beauty of Islamic architecture and symbol, especially mosque beyond the image and hence to create a value of the image and the architecture through a more spiritual, genuine and meaningful experience, amongst the immense pressure to market and commodify. Hence places including mosque should be represented with less in terms of outward appearance than impression, fee, significance or meaning.

The future research development focuses on the role that has been played by mosque, not only as a cultural vehicle to promote a better understanding of Islam via non-Muslim tourists, but to reaffirm the role of religion concrete structure and its imagery cannot be disputed as these again represent experiential potentials which can engage and carry more educational messages. Therefore, this is a beneficial

stage to the researcher and destination planner to develop the research by exploring tourists' needs and satisfaction on mosque in Malaysia on the next stage. In any case, as long as the human thirst for meaning and wisdom remains, spiritual tourism can only grow and if well managed can bring many layered benefits such as personal spiritual development, increased inter-cultural understanding and inter-faith literacy, sustained economic growth and a deeper appreciation of the rich and brilliantly diverse spiritual heritage of humanity.

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