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Review Article

Rethinking the Strategies of Islamic Tourism Development in Malaysia

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Abstract: The tourism industry is one of the contributor on economic growth which has contributed about RM 60.6 billion in tourist arrival from 25.03 million comer in 2012 (Tourism Malaysia, 2013). Luckily, about 55% of the comer were Islamic tourists mostly from Islamic countries. On that case, it can be seen that the demand of Shariah Compliant on tourism industry is expecting increase. The purpose of this study is to point out several rethinking strategies of Islamic tourism development and hospitality which interrelated towards various side of issues in Malaysia. Based on reading various case study and article, the descriptive analysis was used in this study and yet appoint the strategies to enhance the capability of Malaysia in order to ambush the ambition of Islamic tourism development and hospitality. This study also evaluate on several strategies which are the activities (destination), food and beverages and dress code management. From these strategies, the objective of making the Malaysia as Islamic Tourism will accommodate the best services towards Muslim tourist.
Keywords: Strategies, management, activities, food and beverages, dress code.

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, tourism industry has been identified as the main contributor to the social and economic growth of the country. Therefore, the Malaysian government provides variety of facilities to travel agencies in the efforts of developing unique traits of attraction in the tourism industry such as Muslim tourism, homestay, eco-tourism and many more [1]. Nowadays, Muslim tourists looks for destination that consist of majority Muslim community [2] that can offer halal-friendly services and facilities in the tourism environment. As mentioned by Kamarudin and Ismail [3], the term 'Muslim-friendly' or 'Muslim tourism' is used widely in Malaysia for all the products and services provided in the country, including in the promotional activities. Instead of using the motto 'Truly Asia', the right marketing strategies in 'Halal Hospitality' is applied in order to brand Malaysia in the worldwide market [4].

Stated by Kamarudin and Ismail [3], prior to the increasing number of Muslim travellers from OIC countries, the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia has encouraged the development of Muslim-friendly hospitality and services to cater to the demands of the travellers. On March 16th 2009, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) has been established with the intention of developing and promoting Islamic tourism activities [1]. The Islamic features of tourist destination have attracted the Muslim travellers to travel in order to meet their various needs, including religiosity needs [5]. In addition to promoting and marketing Islamic hospitality and services, there are trade shows held in dedication to this program, such as Bmitra Islamic Tourism Expo in Malaysia and the annual International Halal Product Expo at Brunei [6].

Demand for Shariah Compliant hotels are getting higher but unfortunately the lack of Syariah compliant criteria in hotel management has been the main problems among hotel managers [7, 8]. Referring to the above statement, this study focuses on the issues and problems that exists in the management of hotels in Malaysia in terms of the operation of hotel staffs and the food and beverage section that lacks of Syariah compliant criteria. The issues in the operation of hotel staffs will be observed through two divisions, which includes the dress code of the staffs and employees, and the social interactions and behavior of the hotel employees and the customers and clients of the hotel.

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Social Interaction and Behaviour in Hotel Management

The demand for Syariah compliant hotels is increasing but the practices in implementing Syariah compliant criteria are low in hotel management. In the hotel industry, management is a vital operation which covers the many aspects of management activities that follows the Syariah principles. The criteria and the implementation of Syariah principles in hotel management are still underdeveloped in Malaysia due to not many researches have been done on the Syariah Compliant in hotel management as not many people specializes and have the knowledge and awareness regarding this matter [9]. The objective of the management of a hotel is to ensure all operations run smoothly and progressively within the organization, which includes the hotel operation. To be considered as a Syariah compliant hotel, the operation, design of the hotel and the financial system of the hotel must be in line to the Syariah rules and principles.

The most apparent operation that should operate by following the Syariah principles would be the hotel facilities. In most cases, the facilities provided in hotels would be in a manner of providing access to both male and female individuals. However, a Syariah compliant hotel would separate the facilities for both genders as per adhering to the Syariah principles of segregating the facilities for male and female individuals. Facilities such as spa, sauna, gym facilities, swimming pool, guest and function room for male and female should be separated [7].

Another example is for the hotel management to prohibit sexual permissiveness. The Syariah of Islam forbids Muslims from engaging in fornication or adultery, and activities that can lead to sexual permissiveness are not allowed to take place in public. This prohibition can be seen in the verses of Quran one of which includes: *'Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)'* (Holy Qur'an, 17: 32). Most Muslim countries, Malaysia being one of them, forbid adultery. In fact, the Malaysian licensing policy prohibits prostitution and behaviours such as public or indecent displays of affection [10-13]. In addition, a few Malaysian cities implements municipal enactments for lodging establishments which openly forbid unmarried couples from being in close proximity [10]. Other than that, the marketing and promotion activities on tourist destinations using sexually provocative images to customers are not appropriate and can be offensive. According to Syariah, promotion techniques must not use sexual appeal in international marketing [14].

Restrict on Halal Food and Beverages (F&B) in Hotel Management

First of all, hotel is the main type of accommodation needed in tourism industry. Equally important, hotel industry also act as complementary attributes towards tourism destination. Without this particle, tourism destination will face difficulty to receive overnight tourist arrival. In terms of tourist arrival needed, this type of accommodation indirectly receive domestic and international tourist which contributes in economy and social side. Based on article Perspectives on Islamic Tourism and Shariah Compliance in Hotel Management in Malaysia [15] it stated that even though demand for Shariah Compliant hotels is increasing, the deficiency of Shariah Compliant Criteria in hotel management still contribute in first place of problem among hotel manager. This happen regarding to international tourist demand on non halal food and beverages serve in hotel industry at Malaysia. Unfortunately, this case is still applicable at Malaysia in order to fulfill the demand. Paying attention of Malaysia as Islamic country, this situation should not take place here which is ambitious to promote the Islamic Tourism and Hospitality. *The stakeholder of hotel industry must play the role to conquer this problem which enroll a strict rules and regulation of halal food and beverages served in hotel*. Halal food and beverages is the major factor of Muslim country as the leading Islamic tourist destination. Hence, this factor should emphasize on how the management lead and take an action of this implementation. In that case, alcohol is one common beverages served in hotel industry and it also rank as the higher demand of international tourist purchasing the hotel services at Malaysia. In the Middle East, the number of alcohol-free hotels was grown highly in Mecca, Madinah and Dubai. As we can seen, these three majoring of Islamic country proof it that they still can survive as successful business in hotel industry without consuming or served the alcohol. Therefore, hotel management in Malaysia or directly appoint the Ministry of Association Hotel should implement this current situation before the unintended impact occur towards society. As mention from our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said "Allah has cursed alcoholic drinks and: the one who sells it, the one who purchases it, the one who squeezes (the brewer), the one who carries it and the one to whom it is carried." (Abu Dawud), it strictly said alcohol is the prohibited beverages even for Muslim to carry it. So, how it can be presence in hotel industry which located in Muslim country whereas the Islam ban of this kind beverages on Muslim life. The stakeholder of hotel industry should point out a strict rules and regulation of ban this beverages in it management.

Dress Code in Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The dress code is a one of the important elements in the tourism industry as it will show the professionalism of the workers. In addition, the dress code will also show that the company is a proper and high status. Moreover, in developing an Islamic Tourism in Malaysia, the dress code is vital in order to shows the way Islam taught the Muslim to dress. The Muslim dress code is easy whereby the woman have to

cover all their body part except for the face and the hand palm and for the men starting from the belly button to the knee. In addition, the clothes that will be wear should not too tight until exposing their body shape. Next, move to the issues that always arise in Malaysia regarding the dress code of the Muslim. In Malaysia there is a case where 13 hotels in the peninsular make a rules where the Muslim Female workers are not allowed to wear scarf to cover their aurah [16]. This has indirectly disturbed the initiative of the Malaysia government to promote Malaysia as the Islamic Tourism destination whereby it prevents the workers right from covering the aurah. Next, the issues regarding the dress code in Malaysia is the uniform is to fit and tight. Moreover, in this case the aurah is being cover but the uniform is to tight until exposed their body shape. This is because a fit dress will be assumed as a neat and have a smart outfit to be shown to the customer.

After that, in order to overcome this problem, there should be a law that protect the rights of the Muslim workers to cover their aurah. Moreover, this initiative can help Malaysia to portray itself as an Islamic Tourism destination due to the worker are wearing a proper covering aurah attire. Moreover, even though there are hotel or any part of the tourism industry that are not Muslim owned, but they should make the Muslim workers to cover the aurah and the Non-Muslim should wear proper as being implement by Perdana Hotel in Kelantan in order to respect the hotel image as a Shariah Compliant hotel [17] and helping Malaysia to increase the development of Islamic tourism in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are a lot of matters that should be revise by the government or the management level regarding the strategies of portraying Malaysia as an Islamic Tourism Destination. In addition, the collaboration between these two stakeholders are really important so that the goal to portray Malaysia as Islamic Destination will succeed. Furthermore, the elements of tourism such as the food and beverages, the activities, and the dress code of the workers are very important in ensuring the success of the Islamic tourism development in Malaysia. This is because these elements are the main things that will be evaluated by the Muslim travelers in determining whether the country is Islamic destination or not. Therefore, the management of every of this sectors have to be more rigid on serving and providing all of these elements and should not only focused on the profit but rather focusing on obtaining the barakah and blessing from Allah SWT. Everything we do should always be returned in the right path which is the one is blessed by Allah SWT. Lastly, Islamic Tourism or Halal Tourism is the future of tourism demand and Malaysia should be prepared to cater the demands of this tourism by

rethinking the strategies to develop the Islamic tourism in Malaysia becoming more solid.

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