



EXPLORING ISLAMIC TOURISM IN MALAYSIA



 **Suhaimi Ab Rahman^{1*}**

¹Faculty of Economics and Management & Halal Products Research Institute, Universiti Putra Malaysia

 **Siti Anis Laderlah²**

²Halal Products Research Institute, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia



(+ Corresponding author)

ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 26 December 2017

Revised: 16 July 2018

Accepted: 20 July 2018

Published: 24 July 2018

Keywords

Islamic tourism
Islam
Ibadah
Halal Industry
Shariah, Malaysia
Maqasid al-Shariah
Islamic tourism centre Malaysia

Malaysia aims to be the global halal hub by 2020. Halal does not only cover products but also services. Tourism is part of services and becoming one of the major income for the country. In order to sustain the receipt of Muslim tourists, the government has announced Islamic tourism as one of tourism products in Malaysia. As such, there is no clear guideline on the concept of Islamic tourism to be offered to prospective tourists. This paper is an attempt to develop the concept of Islamic tourism and the practice as experienced by Malaysia will be indicators for future development of the concept of Islamic tourism. The data gathered and analyzed primarily based on qualitative method. Both observation and content analysis have been used to understand the acceptable practice of Islamic tourism. We propose that Islamic tourism is established upon economic, cultural, religious, social, spiritual and physical dimensions. It is also found that the government was very serious to develop Islamic tourism as one of tourism products and the establishment of Islamic Tourism Centre in 2008 was the proof. The initiative taken by the government was successful when a total of Arabs came to Malaysia in 2009 was 284,890 and increase year by year.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes in the existing literatures of Islamic tourism by proposing a new concept of Islamic tourism. We propose that Islamic tourism is a purposeful activity which is based on economics, cultural, religious, social, physical, and spiritual dimensions. Islamic tourism has its own goal and should benefit the travelers on their economics, cultural, religious, social, physical, and spiritual demands. Hence, practicing a true Islamic tourism would result to a sustainable development of tourism industry.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a focus for economic development in most of developing countries in the world. This is due to the reason that movement is one of the natural tendencies of human. Human creates and develops ideas related to tourism and these include accommodation, attraction, transportation and travel agencies. A lot of theories and knowledge has been introduced by scholars in order to expand the understanding of tourism and this has been done through the introduction of cross-discipline such as psychological tourism, historical tourism, cultural tourism and religious tourism.

Malaysia is one of the OIC members who declares Islam as the official religion of the country. Islam is universal and when we talk about tourism it does not limit to places as such but include other motivations such as

shopping and business. It is undeniable that the holiest places to visit for Muslims are Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. The Prophet Muhammad SAW said, there are 3 holiest mosques for the Muslims, and they are *Masjid al-Haram*¹, *Masjid al-Nabawi*² and *Masjid al-Aqsa*³. Muslim countries have been blessed with not only holiest places but also other attractions such as historical sites in the East Asia like Turkey, Yemen Iran and Iraq. Down to the South East Asia, Malaysia has been blessed with most beautiful natural view as compared to the historical sites as found in the East Asia.

Malaysia which comprises of 13 states is rich with natural places and this includes islands, beaches, parks, lakes, forests and mountains. In addition, Malaysia also has several attractions where buildings were developed based on the Islamic architecture and this includes Putrajaya Mosque, National Mosque, Islamic Arts Museum and Islamic Civilization Park. Culturally, Malaysia has been dominated by the Muslims where one of the states, i.e., Kelantan declares itself as an Islamic state (Suhana and Marsitah, 2009) and the state government implements Islamic values in its rules and regulations. In order to promote Malaysia as the preferred destination, the Tourism Malaysia under the Ministry of Tourism Malaysia offers several Islamic festivals such as Halal food festival, Islamic Tourism Conference, Islamic fashion shows. These activities promote Malaysia as the best destination for Muslim travelers and Malaysia as a Global Halal Hub.

2. WHAT IS TOURISM?

Tourism is the processes, activities and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). Tourism may be divided into three categories, i.e., inbound tourism, outbound tourism and domestic tourism (Rowe *et al.*, 2002). The word tourism originated from Latin; and 'tornare' and 'tornos' from Greek. It means around a central point. Thus, the combination of 'tour' and 'ism' would mean 'the action of movement around a circle' (Kurtzman and Zauhar, 2005). When person goes to travel, he or she will be called as tourist, traveler or visitor. There is no single definition given to tourism but a number of definitions has been proposed. Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) defined tourism based on group of people while Gartner looked at tourism from various disciplines of studies. All of the above views and ideas are supporting to each other in the understanding the term tourism. The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), however has defined the word tourism as 'the activities of persons traveling and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes' (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009).

3. ISLAMIC TOURISM

The most common word used for the term tourism in the Arabic is '*siyahah*'. However, there are other names that connote the same meaning and they are *safarah*, *riyadah*, *hajj*, '*umrah*', *masyiah*, *reblah*, *hijrah* and *ziyarah*. In its literal meaning, tourism may be understood as continuously going to, walking, fasting and traveling for worshiping and religious purpose. It also means touring on the earth for worshiping fulfilling religious duties or moving to other country for leisure, exposure and observation.

Traveling may be considered as '*ibadah* or worship in Islam if it is done in accordance to the Islamic teachings. As far as '*ibadah* is concerned, the travelers fulfill their obligations and follow the rules that have been made by lawgiver, i.e., Allah SWT unto the followers. '*Ibadah* may also be defined as an activity of worshiping to Allah SWT

¹Also called as The Sacred Mosque, the Great Mosque of al Haram and Haram Sharif. It also the largest mosque in the world

²The Prophet's mosque at Medina, the first mosque built by Him and the final resting place of the Messenger of Allah.

³The first qiblah (prayer direction) before Kaabah

following His commands together with the feeling of obey, loves and low in position upon Him. The concept of worshipping in Islam is very broad and it does not focus on the five times prayers only. *Ibadah* covers three categories, which include the practices of faith or inner soul, external worship and activities that may result a reward (Bulletin Darul Qur'an, Undated). Thus, it shows Islam is very simple and practical religion.

Islamic Tourism is a combination of two disciplines, i.e., tourism and the element of Islamic teachings. The former Minister of Tourism Malaysia said "collaboration and concerted efforts by all stakeholders such as travel and tour agencies, homestay operators, hotels, food industry members, transport companies, airlines and restaurant are the way forward for the success of Islamic tourism".⁴

The fundamental concept of Islamic tourism has been highlighted in the Qur'an. There are many scholars who have explored and discussed Islamic Tourism. Among the scholars include Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004); Haq and Jackson (2009); Hazarina *et al.* (2006); Henderson (2010) and Kadir (1989). Nevertheless, the definition of Islamic Tourism itself is not standardized because the way the people perceive something is not similar. Kadir (1989) for example, defined tourism in Islam as a spiritually purposeful to make Muslims aware of the greatness of God, through observing the signs of history and natural and manmade wonders, all of which are gifts of God. Although his definition is looked wide-ranging, the hidden meaning of Islamic tourism mostly covers Islamic teachings. Then, he highlighted 3 main components of Islamic teachings that associated with tourism and they include physical, social and spiritual. The ideal tourism concept in Islam should cover all this three components. It is proposed that if all components are fulfilled then the good effects of travelling will have an impact on all levels of the society, i.e., individual, family and community.

Islam is a comprehensive religion and it is a way of human life. Islam is a monotheism religion, which means that beliefs in the existence of the one God (Allah SWT). The approaches of worship to Allah SWT include physical, social and spiritual engagements. Usually, actions done by human are centred around these three approaches. Based upon the Qur'an, the Sunnah, ijma' of Muslim scholars and some of past literatures, examples of the approaches that relevant to tourism could be summarized as below.

Table-1. The Example Approaches of Tourism in Islam

Physical	Traveller	Health, relax, calmness
	Society	Improve a better way of life
	Sites	Development and improving places
Social	Traveller	Widen the network and relationship
	Society	Strengthen the relationship
	Sites	Activities offered in the Islamic supervision
Spiritual	Traveller	Thankful to the Creator, who creates the beautifulness
	Society	The spirit of brotherhood
	Sites	Filled up with the spiritual activities- educational camp, religious speeches

Source: The Qur'an, the Sunnah, ijma' of Muslim scholars and some past literatures

Islam propagates the relationship between human and God (*Habl min Allah*) and a relationship amongst themselves (*Habl min al-nas*). Both relationships are the natural tendency (*fitrah*) of human because human are unable to live alone and dependent upon each other. Muslim scholars claimed that the relationship between human and God would be the most significant relationship hence achieving a better relationship between human in this world. Islamic tourism must have these two relationships; travel for developing and increasing the beliefs towards Allah SWT and to expand the spirit of brotherhood in this world.

Beside, destination also plays an important role in the concept of Islamic tourism. As such, according to the ITC News Online (2011) (ITC), Islamic Tourism is a sphere of interest or industry or activity related to travel to explore Islamic sites, culture and heritage and to experience the Islamic way of life. ITC looks tourism as a type of

⁴ (ITC news online, at <http://www.itc.gov.my/news/view.cfm?id=2640C9CD-188B-76AA-002515CB53D519CA>)

industry, interest and also as an activity of travel for exploring places, study local culture and also experience the Islamic lifestyle. There are some descriptions of sites that may help to achieve the objectives of travel in Islam. For instance, visit historical places in order to remind and take a lesson from the past, visit communities for studying their culture, language and taboos, going to natural sites in order to be grateful to the Creator and also visit the Islamic village for experiencing and exploring the truth way of life in the world.

At this point, the World Islamic Tourism Conference and Expo (WITCX) categorized the concept of Islamic Tourism into three branches, i.e., economic, religious and cultural.

4. ECONOMIC

Tourism is one of the main revenue in most countries in the world. At this point, tourism receives a lots of profits compared to the other industries as it covers almost all sorts of sectors such as laws, businesses, authorization and welfare. Based upon our research, we could summarized an example of tourism products that involve government and non-government bodies in Malaysia.

Table-2. List of Parties involved in Islamic Tourism Malaysia

Tourism Products	Government Bodies	Non Government Organizations
Immigration, visa	Ministry of Home Affairs (KDN) Immigration Department of Malaysia Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) National Registration Department (JPN) Royal Malaysian Customs Department	Association of Banks in Malaysia
Transportation	Ministry of Transport Road Transport Department (JPJ)	International Air Transport Association Malaysia Airlines Pilots' Association
Hotel and lodge	Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) State Department of Islam (JAIN/MAIN), Ministry of Tourism Malaysia Inland Revenue Board of Malaysia (LHDN) Local Authorities	Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) Association of Banks in Malaysia Malaysia Budget Hotel Association (MBSA)
Tour Guides	Ministry of Tourism Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumerism Malaysia (KPDNKK)	Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) International Association of Business Communicators - IABC Malaysia
Places of interest and attraction	Ministry of Tourism Islamic Tourism Centre Ministry of Education Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumerism Malaysia (KPDNKK) Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture National Department for Culture and Art Malaysia Ministry of International Trade and Industry Malaysia Ministry of Agriculture & Agro-Based Industry Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education Local Authorities (PBT)	Malaysian Handicraft Development Cooperation Muslim Consumer Association (PPIM) Entrepreneurs Club Malaysia (KUAT) Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Malaysia Association of Environmental Consultants & Contractors in Malaysia
Eating places	Council of District or Majlis Daerah Ministry of Health Local Authorities (PBT)	Kuala Lumpur Vegetable Wholesalers' Association Kumpulan Usahawan Muslim Malaysian Franchise Association (MFA)
Safety, security	Royal Malaysia Police (PDRM) Rela Corps (RELA) Ministry of Defense Malaysia	Federation of Malaysian Unit Trust Managers Securities Commission Malaysia Malaysian National Institute of Translation Life Insurance Association of Malaysia (LIAM) National Insurance Association of Malaysia (NIAM)
Other Facilities	National Bank Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water Ministry of Women, Family and Community development.	Malaysian Indian Muslim Associations (PERMIM) Malaysian Chinese Muslim Association (MACMA) Malaysia Retailers Association – MRA National Association of Women Entrepreneurs of Malaysia Suara Persatuan Ulama Malaysia

Source: Government Policies including National Economic Advisory Council (NEAC) and Malaysia Central Online

From the table above, it is clear that the development of Islamic Tourism in Malaysia will become amazing if all Malaysians work together with government bodies and non-government organizations in supporting a new

approach in tourism. Nonetheless, the most important agencies to play an imperative role in Islamic tourism development are Ministry of Tourism, Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia, Malaysia Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM), National Department for Culture and Art Malaysia, Malaysian Association Hotels (MAH) and Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture. The Ministry of Tourism and Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia have to highlight the idea of Islamic tourism clearly. This should include the Islamic teachings and be advertised and promoted by the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture. All parties should support one another in order to make the industry success and to contribute to development of the local economy.

5. RELIGIOUS

Islam encourages human to go for travel and the Qur'an declares this in thirteen verses. All of these verses show that, the activity of travel and tour is beneficial activity. For instance, in Surah al-Angkabut (29:20) Allah SWT says;

"Say: "Travel In the land and see How (Allâh) originated creation and Then Allâh will bring forth (resurrect) the creation of the Hereafter (i.e. Resurrection after death). Verily, Allâh is Able to do all things."

Islam is not the only religion emphasizes on traveling. Other religions also look tour and travel as a good activity and gives values to the society. Therefore, religion is a part of Islamic tourism concept.

6. CULTURAL

The unique of Malaysia, which is difficult to look at other countries, is multicultural country. Malaysia is rich with a variety of types of foods. Man has to take food because food is a basic need of life. In this regard, Islam highlights in the Holy Qur'an the types of food that can be consumed, i.e., Halal food. In Surah al-Ma'idah (5:88) Allah SWT says;

"And eat of the things which Allâh has provided for you, lawful and good, and fear Allâh In whom You believe".

Similarly, in Surah Yunus (10:59) Allah SWT says;

"Say (O Muhammad to These polytheists): "Tell Me, what provision Allâh has sent down to You! and You have made of it lawful and unlawful." Say (O Muhammad): "Has Allâh permitted You (to do so), or do You invent a lie against Allâh?"

In Surah al-Nahl (16:115) Allah SWT says;

"He has forbidden You Only Al-Maytatah (meat of a dead animal), blood, the flesh of swine, and any animal which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allâh (or has been slaughtered for idols etc. or on which Allâh's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering). but if one is forced by necessity, without wilful disobedience, and not transgressing, then, Allâh is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful".

Islamic tourism is dependent on the intention or objectives of the activity. It is a must for Muslims to have an intention of traveling for Allah SWT and to follow His rules and obligations. On the other hand, non-Muslims are not obligated to follow, but they may follow voluntarily the regulations.

As mentioned at the above, travel in Islam closely connected to three important elements, i.e., spiritual, physical and social. There are five objectives of *Shariah (Maqasid al-Shariah* - the purpose of Islamic law), i.e., look after self, mind, property, religion and hereditary. Actually, all of these objectives are included in the spiritual, physical and social aspects. For instance, the traveler who goes for travel may reflect on her or his spirit because of the motivation or self-reflection (*muhasabah*). This spiritual reflection is influenced by looking at the historical places or the experience which touch the feeling or spirit as human beings. Thus, the faith as a caliph and Muslim in this world will be enhanced indirectly.

Islam (60.4%). The term of 'Malay' refers to a person who practices Islam and Malay traditions, speak the Malay language and whose ancestor are Malays.

Islam is an official religion of Malaysia because Muslims is the majority followers in the population. However, Malaysia is not like other Middle East countries where the population are mostly Muslims. Although the Muslim population in Malaysia is not so much as Middle East countries, the environment and the practices of Islam is free in Malaysia. In other words, Malaysia is a harmonious and safe country with multiracial and multi-religious society. In the Holy Qur'an, Allah says;

"O mankind! we have created You from a male and a female, and made You into nations and tribes, that You may know one another. Verily, the Most honourable of You with Allâh is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e. one of the Muttaqûn. Verily, Allâh is All-Knowing, All-Aware".

(al-Hujurat; (49:13)

Because of the uniqueness of Malaysia and prominent in the ASEAN and OIC, the government is serious in promoting Malaysia as one of the Islamic tourism centers and it is not exaggerated to claim now Malaysia has become as one of the best destinations in the world. For attestation, Malaysia has been chosen as one of top ten countries for 2010 in the world by Lonely Planet, a popular travel guidebook (The Star, 2009). Malaysia was awarded as the 'Best in Travel 2010' and the 'Best-value Destinations for 2010'. Malaysia also has been declared as second best destination in Asia by 'Go Asia' marketing.

The present Minister of Tourism Malaysia announced in the New Year Greetings, in 2010 Malaysia has been recorded as a significant increase in tourism arrivals, the increasing number of tourists from 5.5 million in 2008 to 23.65 million in 2009. Malaysia 'homestay' program has been recognized as one of the preferred tourism products by tourists from Korea and Japan.

There are several awards for Malaysian resort operators in the World Travel Awards 2010, such as Asia's Leading Green Hotel for Sukau Rainforest Lodge in Sabah, Asia's Leading Spa Resort for the Andaman Langkawi and Asia's Leading Family Resort for Resorts World Genting. Malaysia has also achieved the highest rate of return on investment per ringgit spent on promotion and the lowest cost of promotion per tourist at RM14, while commonly tourist spent RM2 260 per trip.

8. PROMOTING ISLAMIC TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

To ensure that Islamic tourism prospers the Malaysia government has established the Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia in 2008. This means that the Centre needs to increase and improve the quality and performance of the Islamic tourism. Consequently, the development of Islamic tourism aims to expand tourism within the Muslim world, develop new tourists' destinations and strengthen cooperation between governments and institution in Muslim countries.⁵

This Centre was established after the government realize the opportunity that Islamic tourism could be developed due to the fact that Muslims are now getting travelling all over the world. Among the tasks of the Centre was to study the strategy to promote Islamic tourism products both at local and international levels. Currently, Turkey has been chosen as the most preferred destination by tourist while Malaysia is the next (New Straits Times, 2008).

According to the Ministry of Tourism, promoting Malaysia as a Halal hub, peaceful environment and multiracial are the factors that Malaysia is preferable country to be the best Muslims destination in the South East Asia. Malaysia has good Muslim friendly facilities such as comfortable prayer room, halal food, variety of cultures, heritage and beautiful environment. In addition, most hotels in Malaysia do provide Muslim-friendly facilities such as prayer direction (*qiblah*) and bathrooms designed with ablution (*Wuduk*) facility. The Ministry of Tourism

⁵ (Asia Economic Institute Article Online, at http://www.asiaecon.org/special_articles/read_sp/12690)

Malaysia and the Malaysia Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) are ready to convert Malaysia as the most popular destination in the world for Muslim tourist. At this point, tourists from the Middle East acknowledge Malaysia as one of the most secure, harmonious and Muslim-friendly country.

9. CONCLUSION

The uniqueness of Islamic tourism has opened up a new dimension of tourism in the industry. It offers not only to the physical but also social and spiritual benefits. Although the theory of Islamic tourism is already stated in the Holy Qur'an, it is only recently that the scholars start to research on the principles of Islamic tourism and to understand and develop a model of sustainable tourism.

This paper provides a model of Islamic tourism; its concept and benefits not only to the Muslims but also to all tourists. The practice that has been embraced in Malaysia is gearing towards Islamic tourism, and this is true through the establishment of the Islamic Tourism Center. It is hoped that this study will benefit those who involve in the industry as Islamic tourism has a huge potential to explore in tourism industry because the distribution of Muslim population will increase 35% in 2030 from 2010, rising from 1.6 billion to 2.2 billion (Pew Research, Undated).

Funding: This research is funded by the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia under the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS).

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributors/Acknowledgement: This paper is written based on a research project entitled 'Developing the Concept of Islamic Tourism'

REFERENCES

- Al-Hamarneh, A. and C. Steiner, 2004. Islamic tourism: Rethinking the strategies of tourism development in the Arab world after September 11, 2001. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 24(1): 173-186. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- Bulletin Darul Qur'an, Undated. The Meaning of Meaning. No. 7. Year 7. JAKIM. Misas Advertising Sdn Bhd.
- Goeldner, C.R. and J.R.B. Ritchie, 2009. *Tourism: Principles, practices, philosophies*. 11th Edn., Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.
- Haq, F. and J. Jackson, 2009. Spiritual journey to Hajj: Australian and Pakistani experience and expectations. *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 6(2): 141-156. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- Hazarina, H.N., J. Murphy and M. Nazlida, 2006. Tourism and islam: Understanding and embracing the opportunity. *Lausanne Hotel School (Ehlite) Magazine*, 14(September): 11-13.
- Henderson, J.C., 2010. Islam and tourism: Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. *Tourism in the muslim world*. Book series: Bridging tourism theory and practice, 2: 75-89. [View at Google Scholar](#)
- ITC News Online, 2011. Islamic tourism an untapped potential to explore, says Ng. Retrieved from <http://www.itc.gov.my/news/view.cfm?id=2640C9CD-188B-76AA-002515CB53D519CA> [Accessed 2nd January 2012].
- Kadir, H.D., 1989. Islam and tourism: Patterns, issues and options. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 16(4): 542-563. [View at Google Scholar](#)
- Kurtzman, J. and J. Zauhar, 2005. The emerging profession – sports tourism management. *Journal of Sport Tourism*, 10(1): 3-14. [View at Google Scholar](#) | [View at Publisher](#)
- New Straits Times, 2008. Out to make Malaysia top muslim tourist destination. National Newspaper. [Accessed 20th June 2010].
- Pew Research, Undated. Pew research center's forum on religion & public life. Retrieved from <http://features.pewforum.org/FutureGlobalMuslimPopulation-WebPDF.pdf> [Accessed 20th February 2011].

- Rowe, A., J.D. Smith and F. Borein, 2002. Career award travel and tourism standard level. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Suhana, S. and M.R. Marsitah, 2009. Manage the governance of a Malaysian islamic city: Case study in Kota Baharu, Kelantan. *Malaysian Journal of Society and Space*, 5(3): 8-25.
- The Star, 2009. Lonely planet chooses Malaysia among the world's top ten countries for 2010. National Newspaper. [Accessed 3rd December 2010].

Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the author(s), International Journal of Asian Social Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.