

A Review of the Challenges and Prospects for Islamic Tourism Policies in Malaysia

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Abstract

Statistics attested that Malaysia is ranked the 1st as the hub for Islamic tourism among the organization of Islamic cooperation members' state. Despite these achievements, literature indicated some conspicuous challenges affecting Islamic tourism policies in the country. This study uses secondary data to examine the barriers militating against Islamic tourism and put forward some prospects; policy recommendations respectively. Findings from our review reveals that the country had executed 10 different master plan, but poor policy guidelines, paucity of researches and market difficulty were some of the challenges affecting the sector, while other predicaments to Islamic tourism in the areas of Shariah compliant hotels, promotion of halal products, were underutilized. Two propositions were established to accelerate in identification of the challenges and prospects for Islamic tourism in the study area. We have suggested for policy guidelines, the revitalization of the image of Islamic tourism, provision of modern infrastructure, and utilization of the natural, historic and other Islamic center to attract visitors from all parts of the world. Islamic tourism required diversity in the market, especially through specific needs, beliefs, tastes, expectation and global competitiveness.

Keywords: Policies; Islamic tourism; Halal products; Malaysia.



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1. Introduction

The development of conventional tourism after the Second World War witnessed three potential prospects and challenges in most developing countries. Literature categorized these phases of development into economic benefits in the aspect of employment, revenue, foreign exchange and foreign direct investment. It is also an opportunities and challenges of international tourism on the developing countries cum the tangible contribution which focuses on dependency, sociocultural shocks, environmental pollutions and other leakages (Kusluvan and Karamustafa, 2001). The importance of tourism specifically on job creation, foreign exchange and overall influences on the economic and cultural development of both developed and developing of countries such as United states, Sweden, New Zealand, France, Malaysia (Cárdenas-García et al., 2015). Tourism industry generated revenue and serve as a potential avenue for investment in many developing countries such as Jordan, Romania, South Africa and Brazil (Cárdenas-García et al., 2015; Pulido-Fernández et al., 2014). However, the current National policy on Islamic tourism management in Malaysia, aimed at attracting international tourists, with emphasis on commercial objectives in order to maximize revenue and provide leisure and amusement for the tourists. The Islamic tourism division is bedeviled with series of challenges such as inadequate policy guidelines and political challenges, insufficient research, low Islamic tourism images, market difficulties, poor coordination and organization of the sub-sector. Based on these developments (Henderson, 2003) noted that observers of Islamic tourism world over and Malaysia in particular categorically dismissed other unethical, offensive and contradictory issues prominent among include prostitution, gambling, shabby dress, alcohol consumption and other offensive behaviours which are forbidden in Islam (Henderson, 2003). In line with the foregoing, this study examines the challenges of Islamic tourism and proffer substantive recommendations for the improvement of Malaysia Islamic tourism for sanity and wholesome revenue for the government putting into cognizance Islamic implications.

2. Overview of National Tourism Policies in Malaysia

Tourism has been recognized in Malaysia since the colonial era, but the direct government involvement officially started in 1953. The cultural department was officially opened in 1964, since that time tourism sector is experiencing considerable growth over the years and became next to manufacturing sector. The establishment of Tourism Development Corporation Malaysia (TDCM); and Ministry of Arts, Culture indicated the governments` determination to promote tourism as other befitting sources of revenue. To actualize this objective, the ministry of tourism was reorganized and took the responsibility of coordinating and development of tourism activities while

related agencies like Promotional tourism initiatives - Malaysian Visitation Year (MVY); were equally set up at the state levels in 1990s, 2000 and 2007 respectively, with full participation and involvement of private business groups.

Tourism master plan in Malaysia took different phases of developments. For instance 1966-1970 represents phase one with inadequate policy recommendations for tourism development. The second phase covers 1971-1974; and recorded significant impact, specifically, the Pacific Asian Travel Association (PATA); conference in 1972. The third Malaysian plan was between 1976-1980 which yielded positive results in engaging 14,800 people in the hotels respectively. In order to regulate Malaysians foreign trips, a plan was made in the first phase of the National Development Plan (NDP) to develop and promote domestic tourism to discourage the citizens' foreign trips in 1990. This was captured in the sixth Malaysian Plan, 1991-1995. This policy was sustained in the seventh Malaysian plan, 1996-2000 to strategize the national development, specifically to eliminate poverty and reorganization of the country's economy vis-a-vis national integration and minimization of wide inequalities in the aspect of economy among the different states, urban and rural areas respectively.

In addition, the eighth Malaysian plan, 2001-2005; categorically, underscore strategies for tourism policy development for sustainable growth, increased income generation across national, state and community levels. Concerted efforts were established to ensure balance of resource allocation amid economy, environment and socio-cultural challenges in tourism accomplishments. Primarily, sustainable tourism development, events, carnival were established to promote the country as a tourism destination and human resource development (Pulido-Fernández *et al.*, 2014).

Similarly, international alliances and cooperation; hospitality and safety were captured in the plan (Pulido-Fernández *et al.*, 2014). Consequently, the ninth Malaysia plan, 2006-2010 emphasized the tourism development and sustainability, especially on product development, domestic tourism development, human resources advancement, market and promotional schemes while the tourism committee coordinates the activities of both public and private sector. Other areas identified include eco-tourism via agriculture and local products in rural communities (Marzuki, 2010).

The 10th Malaysian plan acknowledged tourism sector as driving force for economic development and redistribution of wealth; the plan puts the country among the top 10th tourist nations. Areas of focus include comparative advantage, qualitative and sustainable tourism a sum of RM115 billion was generated in the year 2015. These strategies identified market sub-sector, while utilizing areas such as Kinabalu Park and Penang as UNESCO Heritage spot (Le-Klähn *et al.*, 2014).

It is pertinent to point out at this juncture that in spite of comparative advantage of eco-tourism in Malaysia peninsular, putting into cognizance its opportunities, natural endowment, as well as numerous objectives to accomplish the plans, the potentiality of Islamic tourism in the areas of Shariah compliant hotels, promotion of halal products, was underutilized (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2011). Again (Razalli *et al.*, 2012), noted that the Shariah compliant hotel is relatively paradigm shift among tourists, hotel operators, managers. In spite of the fact that most tourists, especially from the Middle East, western Asia and other Islamic states are conscious about resorts and tourist centres with halal packages (Razalli *et al.*, 2012) yet, its institutional guidelines are vague.

In Malaysia, features of Islamic tourism were categorically contained in the National Cultural Policy conference anchored by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports since 1971. The policy has three basic principles:

- I. The National culture of the country must be based on the cultural background of the people in the region.
- II. Elements that corroborated Malaysian culture considered suitable and acceptable might be integrated into national culture and
- III. Islam will be an essential element in the Malaysian culture (Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015).

The National tourism policy study (NPTS) of 1992; precisely, recommended for wide policies for the planning, advancement and marketing of tourism. The policy covers accelerate foreign policy, employment generation, persuade equal socioeconomic development, general involvement and participation in tourism activities by all ethnic groups, improved international image for all Malaysians, build National unity, accelerate urban-rural integration, promote rural enterprises. Other tourism areas include ecotourism; riverine tourism; agrotourism; cultural and heritage based tourism respectively (Mosbah and Saleh, 2014).

A survey was conducted on the halal certification policy between Malaysia and China, the results indicated that the central government in Malaysia was organized according to the prescribed production guidelines, preparation, processing procedure and storage while due recognitions are given to manufacturing practice standard. On the contrary the China's recent national halal certification policy is quiet decentralized and inadequately coherently organized. The system is basically on customer centered and lacks centralization or the agency to unify the approval of certification process throughout the country, rather certificate are freely issue at regional levels (Dubé *et al.*, 2016). Despite the identified challenges by this study, the Malaysian halal certification guidelines will influence tourists' desire to patronize the organized halal products.

3. Islamic Tourism in Malaysia

Islamic tourism is conceptually acknowledged as a system of the journey, which involve Islamic affairs or Muslim visitors and travelers. These entail that Muslims travel to destinations that Islam is the recognized as an official or dominant faith, mostly for religious purposes. ICT Malaysia (2009), define Islamic tourism as any form of pursuit, event, experience or pleasure undertaken in a condition of travel that is guided by Islamic teachings. The journey may include people of Islamic faith that are interested in sustaining their religious obligations while travelling without restraint exclusively religious journey or Muslim countries (Kessler, 2016). Islamic tourism also means a form of journey, carried out by Muslims in which the main intent might not be absolutely religious⁶.

The accommodation and halal packages are among the prominent section of the tourism business which grows over a period in Malaysia. The literature abounds that hotel innovativeness, low transport fare and proliferation of articulated policies were the factors responsible for the growth of Islamic tourism in the country.

Islamic Tourism Blueprint; Malaysia in the recent years discovered the need to invest in the Islamic tourism, halal packages, therefore, some laudable strategies were adopted and captured clearly in the 10th master plan 2011-2015; in order to realize these specific objectives called strategic plan for Islamic, tourism development which outlined an extensive and implementable strategic plan for a robust future for the development of the sub-sector via Islamic tourism, halal packages, standards, qualitative control and management. The objectives include:

- I. Detailed study of the background of Islamic tourism;
- II. Conduct SWOT analysis of the Malaysian Islamic tourism versus other countries;
- III. To propose for a strategic focal point with detailed course of action to develop and upgrade Islamic tourism package in Malay.

In realizing these objectives and the need to promote Islamic tourism, a Regional Seminar on Islamic tourism ReSIT; was held to share, discuss, organize, coordinate, manage, plan and develop a conducive and suitable Islamic tourism, tour packages that display Malaysia's potentials in Islamic tourism products to the citizens and other international visitors respectively (Shafaei and Mohamed, 2015). Aside, discussing about the best ways to ensure that Malaysia becomes a premier for Islamic tourism destination (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2013). The seminar also identified the needs, expectations and alliances between public and private sectors. The forum attracted key players and stakeholders in the tourism industry such as government officials, airlines, hoteliers, travel tour operators and other businessmen.

Malaysia had a lot of rigorous efforts in promoting and developing of Islamic tourism, especially through the establishment of the Islamic Tourist Centre in 2009, under the supervision of Tourism Malaysia. Another giant effort was the launching of Islamic tourism blueprint in 2012. In spite of the exertion of the Malaysian government and other stakeholders in the development of Islamic tourism and Halal packages.

Propositions

Marketing oriented policies will accelerate the growth and development of Islamic tourism in Malaysia.

Islamic tourism will contribute positively to the development of the Malaysian economy.

Challenges

Literature identified some challenges bedeviling Islamic tourism in the peninsular Malaysia, those recognized by this study include -: Inadequate Policy guideline, inadequate research, low Islamic tourism images, Market difficulty, scarce coordination and organization. Inadequate policy guidelines.

The policy guidelines for Islamic tourism, especially halal foods, Shariah compliant hotels are scanty hence it was captured in 1992. Razalli *et al.* (2012) noted that the Shariah compliant hotel is relatively a new paradigm shift among tourist, hotel operators, managers and the institutional guidelines are unclear.

Insufficient researches on halal, food, Islamic oriented hotels were some of the factors responsible for the underdevelopment of Islamic tourism like the conventional tourism in the Malaysia. Literature reveals that Islamic tourism research in the Muslim countries are limited and inadequate to address some barriers to the development of the sector (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010).

Low images for Islamic tourism: unlike the conventional tourism, the Islamic and halal tourism was not expanded in the country as it does not attract huge visitors, therefore, its image needs articulated and sound advertisement.

Marketing difficulty: - most tourism countries developed suitable marketing strategies, but Islamic tourism in Malaysia is short of modern marketing initiatives such as seasonal, relational, diversity, public relation, online marketing, event, newsletter, content direct and cross media marketing resourcefulness.

Poor coordination and organization:- The potentials of tourism in Malaysia needs cooperation with other Muslim states such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan among others for the proper utilization of the Islamic tourist destination in this peninsular (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2011). Other barriers to the development of Islamic tourism as identified by Henderson (2003) postulated that observers of Islamic tourism world over and Malaysia in particular categorically dismissed other unethical, offensive and contradictory unresolved issues prominent among include prostitution, gambling, shabby dress, alcohol consumption and other offensive behaviors which are forbidden in Islam. Basically, the halal prodigy among the consumers and companies were observed to have rampant exhibition of Quranic verses; pervasive halal logos by various firms; frail definition of halal concept on the facet of slaughtering animals' inadequate enforcement by JAKIM; JabatanKemajuan Islam Malaysia (Abdul *et al.*, 2009). These constituted some of the predicaments to Islamic tourism in the country.

4. Prospects and Policy Recommendations

Despite the challenges identified by this study, statistics attested that Malaysia is ranked first as the hub for Islamic tourism among the organization of Islamic cooperation members' state. The country had established services and financial strategies to make the sector innovative and revenue oriented. Based on the identified challenges our study set up a panorama in order to strengthen Islamic tourism, halal packages for the economic, religious and social expansion.

The Policy approach, the slogan satu Malaysia and Malaysia, truly Asia should be emphasized among the local in order to accommodate all and reestablished harmony among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. These will go a long way to ensure the country became the hub of tourist.

Improvement of the modern infrastructure, adequate communication gadgets to attract visitors from all parts of the world. Islamic resorts, halal packages such as food, drinks, hotels and mosques. Government sponsorship of Islamic tourism related researches in all the relevant tertiary institutions to discover noble ways to adopt Islamic tourism policy, research and development.

Revitalization of the image of Islamic tourism, previous studies discovered that destination loyalty, tourist satisfaction and destination image were responsible for the tourist happiness, enjoyment. To concur with these, Malaysia has a lot of natural waterfalls, mountains, coastlines, exotic birds, wildlife, beautiful islands, lakes and mangrove forest among others. This study recommended for the improvement of these resources and metamorphosed it into Islamic oriented tourism center in order to attract tourists.

Marketing strategies: Modern trends in the development and expansion of Islamic tourism required diversity in the market, especially through specific needs, beliefs, tastes, expectation and global competitiveness. The Malaysian Islamic tourism sector should be seasonally focused, event oriented while due recognition should be given to online, newsletter, direct marketing and cross media initiatives respectively.

Proper coordination and organization: Proper coordination between the ten OIC countries of Turkey, Malaysia, Jordan, Bahrain, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia among others might influence more tourists through conferences, exhibition of the beautiful nature of the country. Again the organization of halal products, package programs shall ensure wider economic prosperity.

Policy regulations by the Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia: these can be achieved through the imposition of higher tax to illicit acts that contradict Islamic halal packages on gambling, prostitution or commercial sex work, nasty dresses, alcohol consumption and misapplication of halal slogans by the manufacturing firms.

Islamic tourism sub-sector is one of the fastest growing segments of tourism especially in Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, Brunei, United Arab Emirate and Malaysia alike. Therefore, the need to intensify efforts to study and explore the area will help in the economic development, sustainability and social security for the country.

We, therefore, suggested in concrete terms that the Historic heritages located in different parts of the country should be upgraded to standard for tourism purposes, prominent among Royal Museum, Cottage industries, Kota Bharu Handicraft Village and Craft Meseum, Istana Balai Besar of Kelantan, Colonial architecture of Kuala Lipis, Sungai Lembing Museum. We opined for expansion and judicious utilization of Assorted buildings in the Royal town of Pekan, Sultan Abu Bakar Museum, Desa Craft Handicraft Center, Istana Maziah, Traditional boat building and Traditional houses are all potential center suitable to The Islamic heritage and virtuous places such as the Islamic Museum and the State Mosque in Kelantan, Kota lama Duyong, Masjid Tengku Tengah Zaharah, State Mosque of Pahang and Masjid Abidin and Masjid Kampung Tuan of Terengganu will attract visitors and this shall serve as sites for Islamic tourism and were interested visitors could patronize.

5. Conclusion

We can conclude that Malaysia is the hub for Islamic tourism and the possibility of the country to transform the sector into market oriented, which in the long run shall contribute to socioeconomic development is glaring. The study has reviewed the national master plan and the prosperity of Islamic tourism Policies. The concerted efforts executed to promote the sector, challenges discovered such as low policy guidelines, paucity of researches on Islamic tourism, poor marketing among others was discovered. Our prospects and recommendations corroborated for market oriented Islamic tourism policy, improvement of infrastructural facilities, revitalization of the image and prudent management of the natural resources, traditional centers while focusing other Islamic endowments. However, this study is conceptual, thus, future research should apply qualitative approach to examine the acceptability of Islamic tourism products among the non-Muslims.

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