Muslim Friendly Hotels As Islamic Tourism Products: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Muslim Friendly Hotels are a type of Islamic tourism that can be established and aggressively marketed in Malaysia. Apart from the seriousness with which Islamic values are upheld in the hospitality sector, this Muslim-friendly hotel is successful in attracting travellers to Malaysia, particularly those from Muslim and Arab nations. Muslim-friendly hotel services include halal food and drink, Al-Quran books in the room, Qibla direction in the room, musolla, prayer rugs, separate rooms for single men and women, separate bathing areas for the sexes, and financial transactions that follow sharia law. Even while it appears that this Muslim-friendly hotel can draw in foreign visitors, there are still not enough hotels that adopt this Muslim-friendly concept. The goal of this study is to identify and assess the problems and obstacles facing hotels that cater to Muslims as Islamic tourism goods. This study is a qualitative one that collects and analyses data from secondary sources utilising library research as the method of data gathering. According to the study's findings, there are five primary problems and obstacles that must be overcome before Muslim-friendly hotels can be implemented. The first concern and challenge is with the terminology used in Islamic tourism. The second concern is with understanding and importance. The third concern is with operating guidelines and policies. The fourth concern is with running facilities and the last, the fifth concern is marketing the Islamic tourism industry. There will be many hotels with a Muslim friendly concept and be able to draw as many domestic and foreign tourists as feasible if these five concerns and challenges can be improved and addressed by the responsible parties.
Keyword: Hotel, Accommodating Muslims, Islamic Travel, Standards

Introduction

An Islamic development tool that has its own affects and implications is tourism. It is implemented with a variety of aims, goals, and purposes, including education, da'wah, business, and kinship. Based on aims and goals that do not contravene syar'a, every aspect is decided (Ibrahim et al., 2019). Additionally, it is a way of life that human societies need, and tourism also includes activities that need people to physically go from one location to another

(Jamudin, 2012). In actuality, the definition of Islamic tourism encompasses all forms of tourism as long as they do not contradict with Islamic values and is not limited to specific and stationary in the form of purely religious motive (Shakiri, 2006).

Following that, the tourist sector is one of the key industries contributing to Malaysia's economic growth, and its revenue has grown since 2001 (Laderlah, 2015). Based on data from the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report (SGIE) 2020/21, which stated that there was an increase in Muslim spending on the tourism sector from $189 billion in the year 2018, increased by 2.7% to $194 billion in 2019, Islamic tourism is no exception in contributing to the nation's tourism sector and has great potential. However, the COVID-19 situation has had some effects on the tourist industry, which is anticipated to recover by 2023 and see a return of growth in Muslim traveller spending at a 5-year CAGR of 1.4% from 2019 to 2024. (2020 Standard Dinar). The director general of ITC, Dato' Dr. Mohmed Razip Haji Hasan, stated at a seminar on entrepreneurship and leadership in the Islamic tourism sector that Islamic tourism is expected to grow in the upcoming years and that this market segment is not only focused on one region, such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), but also across various corners of the world, from Central Asia to Southeast Asia where the population of the people who practise Islam is high.

Due to its strong potential, developing a Muslim-friendly hotel has attracted a lot of interest and encouragement from various parties. After the events of September 11, 2001, it became a phenomena and a series of events where Middle Eastern tourists started to shift their travels that were previously centred on western countries and flowed to other Muslim countries, mainly Asia (Kamarudin & Nizam, 2013). Because of this, Malaysia experienced the effects of the problem as a preferred travel destination for visitors from the Middle East and other local and international travellers (Hanim et al., 2010).

Islamic tourism must thus be promoted in this nation since it has the potential to significantly and favourably impact the country in terms of boosting the national economy. An estimated 320,000 Middle Eastern tourists travelled to Malaysia in total in 2010, spending an average of RM7,400 each traveller. By contrast, in 2014, their expenditures in Malaysia totaled RM2.2 million. This unmistakably accelerates socioeconomic development and even energises downstream industries like agriculture, which is founded on halal goods and services (Abdul Rahman, 2018).

However, as Islamic tourist products, Muslim-friendly hotels still face issues and challenges. In order to satisfy the wants and requirements of customers who are tourists not only from inside the nation but also from abroad, some standards linked to Islamic tourism of this Muslim-friendly hotel need to be refined and improved. In light of that, the implementation of Muslim-friendly hotels and the improvement of Islamic tourist goods depend greatly on the coordination and collaboration of the government, hoteliers, operators, and other stakeholders.

Research Methodology

This study's methodology employs a qualitative approach, and its design is based on content analysis. The method of content analysis is the gathering of data through research to the Tun Abdul Razak Library (PTAR), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), which is by gathering and analysing data from secondary sources on Islamic tourism as well as numerous related articles published, to obtain information and significant information pertaining to the problems and challenges of Muslim-friendly hotels as Islamic tourism products.

Literature Review
Islamic tourism

It is defined and supplied with a broad meaning and diverse terminology from an Islamic perspective. Among those based on Islamic tourism, such as musafir, rehlah, ziarah, siyahah, umrah, and hajj, each of which satisfies the requirements and objectives of tourism, including learning, doing business, appreciating the magnificence of the gods of flora and fauna, preaching, receiving guidance and lessons, staying healthy, making friends, looking for and acquiring information, altering attitudes to win God's favour, and (Hasan et al., 2010). While the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC) (2009) defined Islamic tourism as any activity, event, experience, or relaxation that is carried out while travelling in accordance with Islamic beliefs. Additionally, it attempts to investigate the history, culture, art, and heritage of Islam as well as feel and experience the Islamic way of life. According to the words of God Almighty, all of the aforementioned expressions and ideas are suggestions, prompts, and encouragements to His followers in the Al-Quran, are regarded as acts of worship, and are even rewarded if performed with the appropriate intention:

<div dir="rtl">قُلْ سِيرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ ٱنظُرُوا۟ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَـٰقِبَةُ ٱلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ١١</div>

Meaning: Say; "Walk on earth then, see how the end of those who lie."

Based on the verse above, Allah commands to travel, walk to see this world to see the signs of His power and majesty so that we always remember and be grateful for the blessings given by Allah S.W.T.

An important aspect in discussing the concept of Islamic tourism is that Islamic tourism is an activity that demands goals and objectives to be achieved in terms of physical, social and spiritual (internal) aspects. The concept of Islamic tourism is very different and significant compared to the Western perspective which makes hedonism the purpose and goal of their tourism through the 4's (sun, sea, sand and sex). On the other hand, Islam sees tourism as a form of appreciation and thought in seeking the pleasure of Allah S.W.T. For example, the use of alcohol, prostitution, promiscuity between men and women, gambling and the like are prohibited in Islam. It is clear here that, the meaning of Islamic tourism is not simply an order and relaxation given by Allah SWT to walk and have fun, but it is an activity that must have a direction and goal in carrying it out, in accordance with Islamic values and principles. and at the same time, perform it with the intention of worship to get rewards and only hope for the pleasure of Allah SWT (Din, 1989).

According to Abdul Rahman (2018), Muslim tourists want services that allow them to walk without abandoning the commands and instructions of Allah SWT. Therefore, Malaysia with all the available resources has great potential and should develop Islamic-based tourism holistically despite the existence of some constraints. This is because, Malaysia offers various attractions for Muslim tourists to visit this country, among them, it is easy for tourists to get halal food products. Malaysia has also succeeded in meeting the needs of Muslim tourists by providing halal restaurants through meat slaughtered according to Islamic requirements, the availability of facilities for places of worship, prayer places at airports, shopping centers and hotels, health-based tourism, cultural diversity and heritage, safe and rich in resources natural flora & fauna, beautiful islands and shopping malls. The main factor that boosts Malaysia's name as a destination of choice for Muslim tourists is the convenience in terms of obtaining certified halal food sources from the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM). This is very important for Muslim tourists because, getting halal food is one of the mandatory things that a Muslim needs to do no matter where they are (Haliza et.al., 2019). As a multi-racial Muslim country, Malaysia shares many similarities such as food and various cultures,

therefore Muslim tourists have the experience of tasting halal dishes and menus of various races without having to worry and feel comfortable here.

For this reason, Malaysia is the focus of Islamic tourism because of its policy of openness and ease in the practice of religion and worship in general for Muslims. The factors of Islamic countries and Muslim-friendly holidays are driving the arrival of foreign tourists to this country, which is expected to exceed the initial target of 4.5 million people before. In addition, the aspect of movement and the frequency of direct flights also contributed to the increase in their entry. Previous Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Datuk Seri Nancy Shukri said, Malaysia becomes the focus and choice when tourists can easily get halal food, hotel facilities and other Muslim-friendly services (Ismail, 2022). The effect of the nature and policy of this openness, drives tourists from abroad into the country, and clearly has a good effect on the country's tourism sector.

Muslim Friendly Hotel

The standard was born through research by the International Institute for Halal Research and Training (INHART) from the International Islamic University of Malaysia (UIAM) with the cooperation and involvement of the Malaysian Standards Department (Khairusy Syakirin Has-Yun, 2021). Besides that, the success factor and success of this standard must involve various parties who are committed to achieving the goal of meeting the needs of Islamic tourism. Based on Islamic Tourism Council (2016), this standard is also the first Malaysian standard in this hospitality specialization sector. Among other tourism agencies that are also involved in building this standard, such as Islamic Tourism Center (ITC) under MOTAC, Malaysia Association of Hotels (MAH), Malaysia Association of Hotel Owners (MAHO), Malaysia Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA), Malaysia Tourist Guides Council (MTGC) and Bumiputera Travel and Tour Agents Association of Malaysia (Bumitra).

MS 2610: 2015 does not only apply to accommodation, but also includes tour packages and tour guides. Accommodation standards include five main components: rooms, food and beverages, public mosques, public toilets and recreational and health infrastructure. These components can be seen in the following table (Department of Malaysian Standards, 2015):

Based on the meaning of the Malaysian Standard MS2610:2015, Sirim (2015), Muslim-friendly hospitality services are Shariah-guided requirements for tourism industry players in establishing a guarantee system to preserve the integrity of products and services provided to Muslim travelers. In general, Malaysian Standard MS2610:2015 was built with the aim of guaranteeing hotel products and services provided to Muslim customers are in accordance with Islamic requirements and Shariah orders and the objectives of this standard are;

  i)   To increase the ability of an organization/individual to produce and/or manage Shariah-compliant Muslim-friendly tourism products and services;

  ii)   To preserve and protect the integrity of Muslim-friendly tourism products and services through the use of effective standards; and

  iii)   To increase customer satisfaction by meeting customer needs

While according to the understanding by ITC (2021), Muslim friendly hotels are quite famous because Malaysia is recognized as the world's number one Muslim-friendly destination due to its excellent facilities and good service. Walking into most hotels, tourists are confident that their basic needs as Muslims are being taken care of. Rooms are marked with qibla signs, bathrooms are equipped with bidets and water hoses. Obtaining prayer needs such as prayer mats and women's prayer clothes only need to go to the customer service counter and it is customary for the hotel kitchen to produce and prepare Halal food for its Muslim guests.

Therefore, it is clear that the construction and application of Muslim-friendly hotels to the Islamic tourism sector provides many benefits to Muslim users, but there are still some shortcomings that need to be refined and improved to ensure a better future.

Findings

The findings of the study show that there are 4 issues and challenges for Muslim Friendly Hotels as Islamic Tourism Products. Every industry has its own challenges, obstacles and no exception is the tourism industry in Malaysia, especially Islamic tourism products. In general, Malaysia has great potential to be used as a destination of choice for Islamic tourism at the international level. Among the things that the researchers focus on here are such as terminology in Islamic tourism, understanding and importance, operating guidelines and policies, facility operation and finally, the marketing of the Islamic tourism sector.
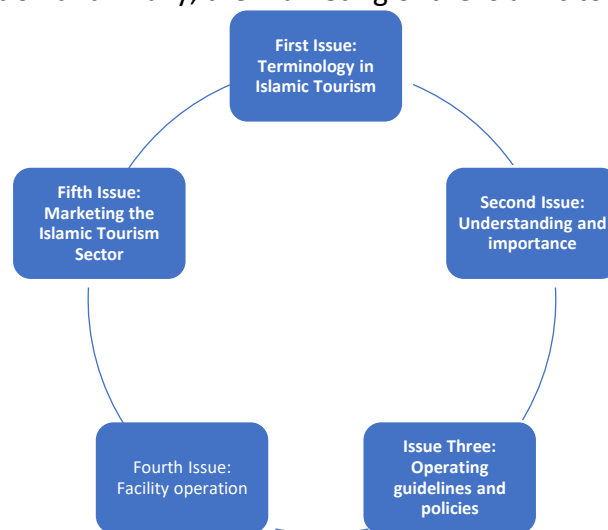

Illustration Based on Researcher's Study

First Issue: Terminology In Islamic Tourism

Tourism is traditionally closely related to religion which has acted as a strong purpose or motive for tourism. Buildings related to religion, ceremonies, festivals and religious events are tourist attractions, with their preference of tourists by their respective beliefs (Henderson, 2003). In addition, tourism based on the Islamic religion is known for its various aspects and purposes. Some researchers have emphasized how Islam supports various tourism activities to improve religious and social functions. In Islam, its ummah is encouraged to travel in order to find the beauty of the creation of the One Creator and travel solely for the pleasure of Allah S.W.T. Every year more than a million Muslims visit Saudi Arabia during the Hajj season (Bhuiyan et al., 2011).

Hoteliers around the world are aware of the potential of Halal tourism, which is recognized as complying with Islamic Sharia law as described in the Al-Quran as well as promising and meeting the needs of the traveling Muslim community (Mohsin et al., 2016). Therefore, halal tourism has become a "mainstream" in the tourism sector, especially in the provision of hotel hospitality. According to Bhuiyan et al (2011), the concept of tourism based on the characteristics and values that exist in the Islamic religion such as Muslim tourism or Halal tourism is a new field of research and requires more research.

Nowadays, it is observed that there are challenges in identifying the correct terms or terminology and explanations in the concept of Halal tourism. Nowadays, the terms often and

commonly used are "Halal tourism" and "Islamic tourism". Due to the scope and multi-discipline of the research subject, there is confusion regarding the two terms. As a result, the term is often used interchangeably by researchers in both conceptual and empirical papers for the same two concepts. Therefore, the use of the terms "Halal tourism" and "Islamic tourism" as the same term can be questioned (Battour and Ismail, 2016).

In addition, the tourism industry faces a big challenge to identify the appropriate terminology and meaning to describe the concepts of "Muslim Tourism", "Halal Tourism" and "Islamic Tourism" where, there are various confusions and doubts about these terms. The use of these terms can be questioned because they are seen as if they are the same (Battour and Ismail, 2016). Confusion about the terms Muslim tourism, Islamic tourism and Halal tourism causes travel providers or operators to be unable to provide packages that can meet certain market segments because there are too many different terms. This is because, if the service providers themselves do not clearly understand the concept of tourism terms, then it becomes a challenge for them to build a package that can meet the needs of the market segment.

In addition, the concept of tourism also has various definitions, terms and meanings presented by scholars and various stakeholders (Abdullah and Mukhtar, 2014). However, most do not take into account Islamic law (Shariah), target customers (i.e. Muslim or non-Muslim), location of activity (i.e. Muslim vs. non-Muslim countries), products and services offered (i.e. food, facilities), and purpose trip. Most of these definitions are loosely defined and used interchangeably. In other words, halal tourism and Islamic tourism are considered the same concept (Battour & Ismail, 2016). According to some scholarly opinions in terminology, the meaning of Halal tourism according to Jafari and Scott (2014), defines Islamic tourism as "Encouraging tourists who may meet the requirements of Shariah law". The definition focuses on Islamic law and its need to meet the needs of tourists but ignores the religion of tourists (Muslims) and other dimensions. According to Battour and Ismail (2016), argue that Jafari and Scott's definition is more suitable for 'Halal tourism' than 'Islamic tourism'. While Islamic tourism according to Carboni et al (2014) on the other hand, defines Islamic tourism "as tourism according to Islam, involving Muslim people who are interested in maintaining their personal religious habits while traveling". This definition takes into account Islamic law, the target customers (Muslims), and the location of the activity, but the products and services offered (i.e. food, amenities) are ignored. However, Carboni et al.(2014) recommended that Islamic tourism is not limited only to religious purposes and not exclusively for or within Muslim countries alone.

Therefore, this shows that there are many opinions in the determination of terms, terms and also terminology in the title of Islamic, Halal, Muslim tourism and recently there are some scholars classifying tourism in the term Sharia Compliant. As a result of this, the government and stakeholders are expected to work together to define a general and concrete terminology in Islamic tourism, especially for the hotel hospitality sector. This is to avoid confusion between operators and users.

Second Issue: Understanding and importance

Lack of understanding and awareness of Sharia compliance or the importance of Muslim-friendly hotels to the community and hospitality industry players. This causes a lack of understanding in the minds of the community and hospitality industry players of the importance of complying with sharia in every aspect of life. According to a study conducted by Baharudin et al (2015), the findings of the study show that consumer response to halal hotel management in Malaysia is not very comprehensive and knowledge about it is also

unsatisfactory. The study also shows a moderate level of agreement and understanding among users regarding how to understand the Islamic management system operating in the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, based on a study by Hashim & Fauzi (2022), through a focus group discussion, the absence of a strong support system to support the implementation of the Muslim friendly hotel (MFH) concept was also an important concern raised by the panel members. According to panel 6 from a Higher Education Institute in Selangor, this causes many hotels to claim to be MFH without understanding the operating terms and conditions of running hotel operations through the MFH concept. Furthermore, most hotels in Malaysia, they use the concept of MFH as their marketing strategy in gaining profit but as a mere business impression and tagline. This led to the next panel from the government Department related to tourism, suggesting that MFH operations should be established based on a Muslim-friendly point of view, not just as a mere business tag line. Nevertheless, a panel from a 4-star Selangor hotel expressed the opinion that "the operation of MFH in our hotel is based on MS1500:2009 Malaysian Standards for the Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage of Halal Food (Halal Certification by JAKIM)" while a panel from a 5-star Selangor hotel explained that "the MFH concept is just a relevant restaurant."

Basically, this reveals that the concept of MFH is used in various ways in Malaysian hotel operations. From the point of view of this study, the instability of the development of the Muslim friendly hotel concept and its implementation in the hospitality industry in Malaysia is feared to have an impact on the satisfaction of the targeted customers. Therefore, the government should design and form the MFH industry that is easy for operators to apply, this will encourage more hotels to adopt and follow the MFH management implementation standards properly. In addition, since MS1500:2009 (Malaysian Halal Food Production, Preparation, Handling and Storage Standard) was mentioned by the majority of the panel members in the focus group discussion as a method to implement MFH, it is believed that the MFH implementation model in Malaysia should focus on the demands of Muslims towards Halal food services by incorporating MS1500:2009 into the MFH implementation model as a comprehensive system.

It is clear here that user awareness is still at a moderate level based on research by Hamzaimi and his team. In addition, on the part of the industry or operators in the tourism and hotel sectors, the level is still unsatisfactory because some people only use the Muslim-friendly tagline solely for profit, and there are also some who do not fully understand the implementation of Muslim-friendly hotels towards A conventional hotel is to comply with all aspects of hotel operations, not limited to food and beverages only. So here, it can be seen the importance of the authorities, academics in providing real exposure and knowledge to users and also to entrepreneurs in the tourism sector in achieving the purpose of Islamic tourism.

Third Issue: Operating guidelines and policies

The absence of concrete specific standards such as the halal logo standard by Jakim. The issue of the absence of concrete specific standards has long been studied and expressed by several researchers. This is important to ensure that the maqasid sharia is applied in hotel management that wants to offer a Muslim-friendly hotel concept. Based on a study by Zakiah and Noorsalwati (2012), the problem found is the lack of guidelines so far provided by the Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) in determining the guidelines for Sharia Compliant Hotels. JAKIM should gazette guidelines, standards or regulated standards to hotel

operators to enable them to fully comply with the requirements of a Shariah Compliant Hotel as a whole that covers the entire premises when applying for halal certification. Most hotels only focus on one guideline only, which is the halal certificate of food and beverages, but do not cover the entire premises and management.

Sharia, in a practical sense, is a guideline for making laws. Any criteria construction has to be founded and must be based on sharia. Therefore, a Syariah Compliant Hotel is not only limited to halal food and beverage services but must cover the entire business operation or management. Although there are no formal and concrete concepts and criteria for this purpose, some researchers such as Henderson (2010), suggest a set of characteristics of a Shariah Compliant Hotel such as no alcohol, only halal food is served, al-Quran and prayer mats are provided in each room, toilets do not face the Qibla, prayers in the room, suitable entertainment, most of the staff are Muslim, staff clothing that complies with Sharia, separating all facilities between men and women, providing a special floor for women, customer dress codes, and financing according to Islam. And additional criteria according to Zakiah (2012), the kitchen must be ensured to be halal as a whole i.e. it is not mixed with non-halal food and cooking equipment, there is a prayer section in the room and around the hotel premises, the separation of the bathroom/floor for unmarried couples between women and men, tourists who are dressed to cover their private parts, no gambling and alcoholic beverages in the lobby of hotels or restaurants.

While according to JAKIM's Guidelines for Hospitality and Tourism Services Based on Maqasid Syariah (2021), sharia-based services refer to the management and administration systems of various fields that comply with the principles of preserving the principles of Maqasid Syariah, which are the care of religion, life, intellect, offspring and property. In this context, service refers to the organization's ability to meet the needs and wants of customers. It is an activity or profit offered for sale that is intangible and does not result in material ownership. Services cover areas such as education, transportation, hospitals, health, hospitality and so on.

In order to address a number of these problems, many agencies have developed and suggested ratings and recommendations, including Rosenberg & Choufany (2009), Henderson (2010), Crescent Rating, Salam Standard, and Muslim Friendly Rating Hotel System (MFRHS). the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), Muslim Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) by (INHART), and the Malaysian Standard MS2610:2015 by Sirim Malaysia are the most latest (Aziz & Zaini, 2021). To ensure the credibility of the halal certification, which is accepted and recognised globally, the criteria and rating system above still need to be improved. As an example, consider a complete Halal certification system including manuals, enforcement, audits, penalties, and so on.

Fourth Issue: Facility Operation

In following the progress and improvement in the Muslim-friendly hotel hospitality industry, one of the most important aspects is the infrastructure or the hotel building itself. According to Saffinee (2017), by providing various tourism themes including eco-tourism, agro-tourism, cultural tourism and others for the commercial hospitality industry, one of the most important current discussions in the tourism industry is hotels. As Malaysia receives millions of visitors from many Muslim countries, it is important for them to form and maintain tourist accommodation premises (TAP) according to Shariah.

Next, this has the effect of increasing the cost of services, the cost of renovating the current hotel to a Muslim-friendly hotel. In moving towards a change and renewal, we will not run away from sacrifices such as the implications of manpower, labor, costs and so on.

According to Karia & Fauzi (2019), the application of something new requires costs and it involves absorbing labor costs to the hotel while also creating problems in terms of maximizing the company's profits. So it is nothing but, definitely giving implications to the service charge which is clearly borne by the customer. It is clearly not in line with religious teachings, because Islam emphasizes consumer welfare, especially for tourists who intend to travel, their affairs must be simplified.

Next, according to a study by Azizol Aziz & Saifudin Mohamad through their questionnaire on random tourists, it shows that there are a few respondents who do not agree if the price of sharia-compliant hotel services is higher than conventional hotels. It can be concluded here that sharia-compliant hotel operators need to control the price of their services, so as not to impose high charges that burden tourists. In other words, tourists, especially Muslim tourists, should not be burdened with high charges to obtain the services of a Sharia-compliant hotel that operates based on Islamic characteristics. High charges can cause tourists to refuse to stay in sharia-compliant hotels and turn away and can affect the Islamic tourism industry as a whole.

Not only that, in the change towards a Muslim-friendly hotel, it also takes into account the renovation and additional provision according to the terms of the Muslim-friendly hotel which definitely involves costs. This matter is important because various facilities are important for the use and meeting the needs of visitors and tourists and can even improve the image of an area as an Islamic tourist destination. Infrastructure development is an important factor in determining the flow of tourists and the subsequent development of the industry. In addition, the attraction of Islamic architecture alone is not enough to attract tourists because the attraction must be equipped with other tourism facilities as well as good infrastructure. Infrastructure facilities that are complete and sufficient, efficient and effective will facilitate the movement of tourism or reaching the destination in question. The difficulty of travel will restrict tourists' desire to enjoy the characteristics of tourism attractions, including accommodation and eating facilities close to the resort (Mathieson and Wall, 1991).

While according to Junaidi (2020), halal tourism has a huge potential to be developed in line with the increase and awareness of Muslim consumers to maintain sharia values even in tourism activities. It happened because the teachings of Islam stipulate not only worshiping God, but also instructing in human relations, which is muamalah. The concept of halal tourism, then, becomes a concept of tourism that contains certain requirements. Through the findings of interviews and previous studies revealed that, to meet the needs and demands of tourism requires a certain amount of additional costs to become Sharia-compliant tourism or just for Muslim-friendly tourism. Additional costs are often a constraint for tourism business operators who intend to change their business process from the existing conventional to a halal concept or who really intend to run a halal tourism business from the very beginning.

In fact, not only that, the challenge and also the risk of increased costs also affect the satisfaction of tourists in evaluating one tourism service which is clearly paid by them because, the preparation and implementation of transport, accommodation, food which is also the scope of hospitality in the tourism industry. In addition, to get maximum results and provide satisfaction to tourists, good service and hospitality from the implementers and the surrounding community is very relevant (Makiya et al., 2014). While according to Rasit (2016), not only satisfaction is something that is emphasized in the tourism industry, when tourists feel a moment of satisfaction then, repetition or the opportunity to return to tourism will happen in the future. It can be said that tourist satisfaction is important for second and future visits.

This demonstrates that no change or development will be made without risks and consequences, as is seen in the tourist industry, particularly in the high expenses associated with Muslim-friendly hospitality services that influence the entire Islamic tourism industry. Additionally, it is not enough for the service provider to be responsible only at the destination; they must also consider the entire journey and the facilities at the destination to ensure that there are no delays, issues, or disruptions when tourists arrive at their destination and that all of their needs are fully met. Therefore, Muslim-friendly hotel operators and the cooperation of the government need to think of the best mechanism in winning this situation on both sides between policy makers, operators, providers and also customers.

Fifth Issue: Marketing the Islamic Tourism Sector
In the era of advanced globalization, facing industrial revolution 4.0, the hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia is also no exception in facing challenges in adapting to the latest technology. Therefore, the country has taken proactive steps in following the current of technological change, in line with the idea by YAB Prime Minister to improve the national economic sector, in the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) in the context of the tourism sector, in accordance with the focus on restoring economic sector of the country. MOTAC will ensure the government's desire to build resilience and competitiveness as well as take advantage of the adoption of advanced technology, digitization and special capabilities involving players in the tourism industry, becoming one of the catalyst industries for national economic growth (Motac, 2021).

The tourism industry has been severely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic and is still in the process of recovering to pre-pandemic levels despite no travel restrictions being enforced. Through Budget 2022, MOTAC has received a higher allocation of RM1.6 billion to intensify the recovery of this industry. Of that amount, a total of RM600 million is allocated for the PENJANA Tourism Sector Financing Scheme under Bank Pembangunan Malaysia Berhad. The scheme supports micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to maintain workforce capacity and help make appropriate investments to remain viable post-Covid-19. As of 6 July 2022, RM88.1 million has been approved to 421 applicants. In addition, a total of RM85 million has been allocated as special assistance to more than 20,000 tourism operators while RM10 million to the children of Sabah and Sarawak for programs and activities related to culture and heritage. Meanwhile, more than 26,000 employers and 330,000 workers in the tourism industry benefited from the RM600 million allocated for the Wage Subsidy Program. The industry also received several tax incentive extensions including income tax exemptions for the organization of art and cultural activities as well as international sports and recreational competitions until the year of assessment 2025 (Bajet Malaysia, 2023).

Not only that, the government itself, under the supervision of MOTAC, has also put a number of key focuses in the country's tourism, among them through the nine main focuses highlighted in the 12th Malaysia Plan. Among the focuses involving tourism, the first focus is involving a number of strategic and high-impact industries of which the tourism sector is one of them, which is in a mission related to efforts to restore growth momentum to all economic sectors and create new sources of growth.

The first focus is to stimulate economic growth contained under RMK-12 is also in line with the National Tourism Policy (DPN) 2020-2030, which focuses on efforts towards increasing national income, encouraging public-private cooperation, empowering local communities, strengthening competitiveness, development of the tourism sector in a sustainable and inclusive manner, effective recovery of the tourism industry based on new norms as well as

readiness to face any uncertain situation in the future. In order to achieve the first Focus as well, MOTAC will act more creatively and continue working closely with all state governments where the state government can propose new tourism products to be highlighted. MOTAC will welcome the proposal by improving the product and further promoting it to the international stage. This kind of cooperation can be mobilized together in achieving optimal economic potential.

As a step in improving the promotion of the tourism sector, MOTAC has delved into the most basic principles of life, which is to empower the skills and knowledge of tourism and cultural industry activists and explore opportunities for residents in rural areas that have the potential to be used as eco-tourism sites by local tour guides. As a result of this, there are 6 main focuses or focuses to be given priority as a strategy to revitalize the tourism industry, which are:

    i)   Restoring the confidence of tourists
    ii) Improve the quality of products and services
    iii) Improve the sustainability of tourism products
    iv) Strengthen the Malaysian brand and marketing strategy
    v) Institutionalizing governance reforms
    vi) Promote domestic tourism

At the same time, commitment to sustainable tourism will further strengthen the role of tourism as a catalyst for environmental protection, preservation and conservation of local culture and heritage. The wealth of various natural resources can be expanded to reach remote communities that are able to offer unique experiences to tourists. These features make Malaysia the world's preferred eco-tourism destination. This effort is also in line with the country's commitment to the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the United Nations (Motac, 2021).

This coincides with a study by Abdul Rahman (2018) that, Islamic tourism needs to be prioritized in this country because it can make a significant contribution to the country from the aspect of generating the national economy (In 2010, a total of 320,000 tourists from the Middle East made Malaysia their holiday destination with an average expenditure of RM7,400 per person while in 2014 a total of RM2.2 million was recorded as a result of their expenditure in this country), boosting socioeconomic development and even stimulating downstream economic activities such as agriculture, an economy based on halal products and services.

Therefore, various drastic and proactive steps have been taken by the government in an effort to promote Malaysian tourism, especially Islamic tourism. Based on the initiative and idea by the Prime Minister in RMK-12 in the context of the tourism sector, MOTAC through all its agencies will ensure that more aggressive efforts can be carried out to promote Malaysia as a destination of choice for tourism. Not only that, MOTAC also takes a new approach where art and culture are also given priority in the element of tourism products which our country is rich with. This is in an effort to promote Malaysia on the international stage with the aim of Malaysia returning and becoming a tourist destination of choice for consumers.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Muslim-friendly hotel (MFH) is an Islamic tourism product that attracts foreign tourists. Not just an attraction, but it is also a choice for tourists, especially Muslims. The importance of this MFH product is to provide comfort and confidence to Muslim tourists to stay at a hotel. Malaysia as a country where the majority is Muslim and the natural conditions are very beautiful must have a strong and established Muslim-friendly hotel implementation system

to encourage more players in the tourism industry and hoteliers to adopt and apply this Muslim-friendly hotel concept in order to attract tourists. The application of Muslim-friendly hotels also has many advantages and will have positive implications for industry players due to the increasing demand for halal products and Islamic tourism in the world today.

However, in the phase of strengthening this Muslim-friendly hotel product, there are definitely issues and challenges. This is where the importance of this study lies. It will be a reference and guide to responsible bodies or agencies, whether from the government or the private sector. The five issues and challenges stated, namely terminology in Islamic tourism, understanding and importance, operational guidelines and policies, operation of facilities and marketing of the Islamic tourism sector are the main and most important issues to be resolved in order to ensure that this Muslim-friendly hotel product develops, is strong and can attract more tourists and be able to provide comfort to them.

This study is also very significant as an addition to studies in Islamic tourism, especially in relation to Muslim-friendly hotel hospitality, which is seen to be still under-studied. While the study related to the scope of Islamic tourism is quite large, broad and important to study. Therefore, this study is able to make a great contribution to the responsible bodies or agencies, whether from the government or the private sector, and the players in the tourism industry in strengthening and commercializing their hotels.

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