

HALAL TOURISM IN MALAYSIA: A MARKETING ANALYSIS

Rosilah Bt Man¹

¹ Politeknik Tawau Sabah
(email - rosilah@politawau.edu.my)

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Abstract: *The tourism sector in Malaysia is the country's largest income contributor tourism.gov.my. The halal tourism sector is one of the popular trends nowadays and Malaysia is one of the preferred Muslim travel destinations for Muslim travellers around the world. Nowadays, many Muslim travellers nowadays have the ability either financially or physically to travel. Therefore, this study is conducted to analyze to which extent the marketing strategies made by tour operators were able to attract Muslim travellers to subscribe the package. The survey was distributed via online and a total of 52 samples were obtained. Descriptive analysis was used using SPSS. The result found that Muslim-friendly travellers need a number of criterias that should be reviewed in a tour package especially in terms of halal awareness and information, sensitivity, respect for culture as well as safety and comfort. Some of the items proposed to the agency's travel are such as providing halal-certified food and accommodation that complies with halal standards. The importance of this study is to provide information especially to travel agencies, travel company operators, policy makers and related parties to ensure that the marketing strategies displayed in the advertisements are in line with the needs of Muslim travellers .*

Keywords: *Muslim-friendly tourism, halal, tour packages*

Introduction

The rapid growth of the global tourism industry (Faeni et al., 2023) has intensified destination competition, prompting the exploration of innovative marketing strategies to attract diverse segments of travelers (Noor et al., 2022). Among these segments, halal tourism has emerged as an important niche, meeting the preferences and needs of Muslim travellers who are looking for destinations in line with their religious and cultural values. As the demand for halal tourism experiences continues to increase, the effectiveness of marketing strategies aimed at attracting Muslim tourists to halal-friendly or shariah-compliant destinations is becoming important (Hasan, 2023). This is because Islamic tourism is importance for Muslims who want to visit important religious places, such as holy cities such as Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. In addition, Islamic tourism allows travellers to explore and experience the rich cultural heritage of the Muslim-majority region. These include historical sites, mosques, palaces, markets and museums that showcase Islamic art, architecture and traditions.

In this context, the promotion of halal travel destinations has become essential to cater to importance as a way to meet the needs and preferences of Muslim travellers (Absah et al., 2024). However, there are significant gaps in understanding the effectiveness of marketing strategies in attracting Muslim tourists to halal tourist destinations. The gap lies in the limited understanding and research on the effectiveness of marketing strategies specifically designed to attract Muslim tourists to halal or shariah-compliant destinations. While demand for halal tourism is growing, there is insufficient empirical evidence or analysis of which marketing approaches work best in appealing to this segment. Therefore, this research aims to address this gap by examining the strategies that need to be used in the marketing of halal tourist destinations. Hence, this study will contribute valuable insights into the field of halal tourism marketing, enabling destinations to adapt their approach to better align with the priorities and expectations of Muslim travellers.

Research Objectives

Identify marketing strategies that need to be prioritised to attract Muslim travellers to the shariah-compliant travel program

Literature Review

Islamic tourism, also known as halal tourism, refers to a specific form of travel and tourism that meets the needs and preferences of Muslim travellers. According to Oktadiana et al. (2016) halal tourism is a term widely used as a synonym for Muslim travel, referring to products, leisure, recreation and social purposes that adhere to the teachings of Islam. It also includes destinations, accommodation and activities that are consistent with Islamic principles, values and practices (Syara and Fauzan, 2023). Islamic tourism aims to provide Muslim travellers with experiences that match their religious beliefs, including access to halal food, prayer facilities, and opportunities to enrich culturally and spiritually (Jamal & El-Bassiouny, 2019) and emphasizes decency (Malchrowicz-Mosko, 2021) as well as to respect for local customs and traditions. Islamic tourist destinations often feature historical and cultural sites that are important to Islam, as well as opportunities for spiritual experiences (Kamal and Kashif, 2022). Islam is a complete system in all aspects of human life (Mohd Bokori et al., 2022) As a result, the concept of Islamic tourism has gained attention in recent years as the global Muslim population grows and more Muslims seek travel experiences that are in line with their beliefs and lifestyles.

Tourism is generally divided into several categories (such as ecotourism, agrotourism, health tourism, conference tourism, cultural tourism, educational tourism, and Islamic tourism) (Rahmani, 2023). In Islamic tourism, there are several things throughout the travel period that must be taken care of so as not to violate Islamic Sharia, among those are leaving prayer, being responsible for the care of the environment in the area visited, ensuring halal food consumption, wearing clothes that cover the aurat, using halal sources for all travel expenses and doing activities that do not conflict with the teachings of Islam throughout the trip (Meerangani, 2020). Meanwhile, the concept of Islamic tourism, from a cultural point of view, focuses more on organizations that provide Islamic tourism programs for tourists to visit Islamic historical heritage sites, which both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists can visit. The concept of Islamic tourism from a religious point of view brings the concept of adjusting the tourist industry according to the basic teachings brought by Islam, (including gender segregation, alcohol areas, organizing activities with Islamic elements as well as financial practices based on Islam) (Hamim, 2023).

Research Methodology

The study was carried out using quantitative methods. Random sampling techniques are used to obtain data. The respondents include students, lecturer, and members of public, regardless of their participation in halal tour packages. The study instrument uses a self-developed structured questionnaire and through expert verification. The reliability analysis of the items carried out shows the Cronbach Alpha value is 0.972 which indicates the item is very reliable. The questionnaire consist of closed-ended questions designed to measure the respondents' preferences on travel agency's marketing strategies. The 5-likert scale item is used to evaluate answer options from respondents. Demographic items include gender, religion, frequency of travel and frequency of travel using halal tour packages. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to summarize the demographic characteristics of participants and their responses to questionnaire items. The determination of the level is based on the mean score as shown in Table 1. These determinations are cited in the Ngadiman et al. (2019) studies starting from 1.00–1.99 (Weak), 2.00–2.99 (Low), 3.00–3.99 (Simple) and 4.00–5.00 (High).

Results and Discussion

i. Background of the respondent

The respondents were made up of three categories, namely the public, students and lecturers of the Politeknik Tawau Sabah. The details of the respondent's information are as shown in Table

Table 1: Background of Respondents

Items		n	%
Gender	Men	9	16.1
	Female	47	83.9
Category	Public/tourist	26	46.4
	Students	20	35.7
	Lecturer	10	17.9
Frequency of travel	Rarely	23	41.1
	Sometimes	16	28.6
	Very often	4	7.1

Have followed a shariah-compliant tour package	Always	12	21.4
	Never	1	1.8
	Rarely	9	16.1
	Sometimes	9	16.1
	Very often	1	1.8
	Always	2	3.6
	Never	35	62.5

ii. Analysis of Study Items

The findings in Table 2 are divided into 4, namely Awareness and Information, Sensitivity and Respect Culture, Security and Comfort and Information and Communication. Based on the mean score value, all items scored a mean above 4.00 i.e. at a high agreement with the marketing strategies. Therefore, all suggestions of promotional strategies for Muslim travellers should be given attention by all tour operators who apply the shariah-compliant element in their promotion.

Table 2: Proposed Islamic Tourism Promotion Strategy

Items	Standard Deviation	Mean score
Part 1: Awareness and Information		
Provide halal-certified food options	0.611	4.661
Offer prayer facilities and set prayer times	0.636	4.679
Ensure accommodation complies with halal standards	0.759	4.571
Availability of halal leisure and entertainment options	0.826	4.411
Organizing cultural events and activities that meet Islamic priorities	0.920	4.339
Part 2: Sensitivity and Cultural Respect		
Ensuring a respectful and culturally sensitive environment	0.733	4.589
Displays information about local customs and traditions	0.738	4.482
Incorporating Islamic art and architecture in the design of tourist locations	0.862	4.357
Promoting destinations that respect Islamic values and practices	0.807	4.446
Train staff to understand and meet the needs of Muslim travellers	0.757	4.589
Part 3: Safety and Comfort		
Ensuring a safe and secure environment	0.721	4.661
Offer gender-segregated facilities and services	0.871	4.429
Provide reliable and efficient transportation options	0.737	4.554
Promoting destinations with attractive climatic conditions	0.763	4.518
Offers accessible and convenient facilities for families travelling with children	0.728	4.625
Section 4: Information and Communication		

Provide comprehensive and accurate information on halal services	0.761	4.446
Create a user-friendly digital platform to showcase halal facilities	0.846	4.393
Collaborate with travel agencies that specialize in Muslim-friendly packages	0.822	4.375
Using social media to share a positive Muslim traveller's experience in a destination	0.785	4.464
Engage tour operators with Muslim influencers and bloggers to promote destinations among their followers	0.820	4.268

Conclusion

From the findings of the study, all mean scores exceeded 4.00, this indicates that all marketing proposals made are suitable for reference for tour operators to develop Muslim-friendly tour packages. In the category of Muslim-friendly tourists there are several things that need to be fulfilled during the holiday among them are the obligatory things to be done according to religious instructions such as prayer, fasting and halal food. These three most basic things need to be fulfilled to ensure the comfort of Muslim travellers.

From the findings, the respondents have high agreement on marketing concepts that need to be implemented at the travel agency level. Among the items need to prepare halal food and provide the highest mean score of prayer, this shows that Muslim travellers attach great importance to providing halal food and comfortable places of worship throughout the journey. Additionally, Muslim travellers prioritize destinations that are family-friendly the holidays, such as theme parks that provide appropriate family activities. Future research could further explore the skill of tour operators in develops the Muslim-friendly and promote easy access to suitable activities.

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