

ISLAMIC HOSPITALITY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia has become one of the most world's favourite destinations among Muslim travellers. The rapid evolution in the Malaysian Islamic tourism industry has created a greater prospective for Malaysia to become a major player in the Islamic hospitality and tourism industry to offer the best Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS). The increasing need for Shari'ah-compliance services become essential in order to cater the demand and needs of largely untapped but lucrative niche market of Islamic hospitality services. Based on the need of Islamic hospitality in providing services that is in accordance to Shari'ah, this paper aims to firstly undertake the exploration on the Islamic hospitality based on al-Qur'an and hadith, and secondly to investigate the state of the realisation of Islamic hospitality in Malaysia. This paper uses a library research method approach in order to accomplish the objectives and provide the deliverables. The outcomes indicate that Islamic hospitality is indeed embedded in the Islamic way of life itself, and Malaysia to some extent has endeavoured a significant effort in realizing the Islamic hospitality, especially through its Muslim-friendly hotel services.

Keywords: Islamic hospitality, Hospitality management, Islamic Hospitality Management, Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services, Halal Hotels, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION:

It has come to be regarded as axiomatic that hospitality and service accompany each other either in the hospitality industry or in the tourism industry. According to (James, 1995), service is the world's oldest profession and considered as one of the main segments in a country's economy. It comprises a few major industries that are able to attract a huge attention worldwide. Most economies in the world are depending on the service industry. In Asia, service sector has contributed significantly to become as one of the major industrial sectors (Lovelock, 1991) & (Lovelock, Patterson, & Walker, 1998); (Nankervis, Pearson, & Chatterjee, 2007). Hospitality turn out to be the dominant sector in the service industry as it plays an important role in optimising the services provided especially in the rapid growth of tourism industry. Besides tourism, hospitality is also essential in the service industry as most of the profit gain from the service industry is mainly contributed by hospitality and tourism sectors. According to (Lugosi, Lynch, & Morrison, 2009), hospitality becomes as one of the appealing area of research as it produces studies and researches that affect the industry practice and academic works.

In general, hospitality refers to the friendly reception or honouring guest with the best services one can provide. The hospitality industry is always related to the tourism industry as they might be as well in the same business background in providing services to people who travel for the purpose of leisure or business. Meanwhile, in opposite, Islamic hospitality generally means to treat guests or visitors with the utmost honoured hospitable services.

This article intent to understand the thinking of Islamic hospitality according to al-Qur'an and Hadith as well as to investigate the endeavours that have been undertaken in Malaysia. With the aim to divulge the *en route* to Islamic hospitality, this article provides two main sections. Firstly, a section which discusses about Islamic hospitality; and secondly, a section which deals with contemporary efforts of Islamic hospitality in Malaysia.

ISLAMIC HOSPITALITY:

In the view of (Henderson, 2010), hospitality is a business that is inclusive of international tourism that might as well include non-Muslims. He stated that hospitality "constitutes a valuable market worthy of cultivation, even in predominantly Muslim cultures". However, (Henderson, 2010) added that further research in hospitality is necessary in order to improve the understanding of travellers and decision making in organisation's personnel.

On the other hand, (Sobh, Belk, & Wilson, 2013) said that hospitality is about adaptation involving welcoming and confronting with someone who is a total stranger. They defined contemporary hospitality as celebrating, and reinforcing relationships between people that involves crossing thresholds, sharing, gift giving, and generosity. (Gottman, 1997) also defined hospitality as an act to honour the guests and keep them at a distance at the same time. (Brotherton, 1999) and (Lashley, 2000) stated that hospitality is a social scientific view at the heart which concern with host-guests relationship and human interaction. They mentioned that hospitality is more than its industrial context. (Barrow, Powers, & Reynolds, 2012) defined hospitality as the reception and entertainment of guests, visitors or strangers with kindness and good will. In actual essence, these definitions of contemporary hospitality are in fact similar to each other.

However, in the experience of hospitality in Arab Gulf countries, (Sobh, Belk, & Wilson, 2013) said that hospitality is expressive of culture and also an important part of the presentation of national identity. The concept of hospitality remains largely unspecified and unexamined. They found out that there is also a general consensus among Muslim scholars that hospitality and generosity toward guests are an essential part in Islam. In understanding Islamic hospitality, (Tarek Elsherif, 2007) stated that hospitality in Islam already existed in the Arab world with stories of generosity and hospitality. It has become part of every culture in this world to host and welcome travellers but only in Islam, the concept of Islamic hospitality has to be based on the Shari'ah principles. (Tarek Elsherif, 2007) believed that by increasing the awareness of Halal – one of the prerequisites of Islamic hospitality - and the perception among the society regardless of the faith could help in developing the hospitality sector in the future. Meanwhile, (Stephenson, Russell, & Edgar, 2010) mentioned that Islamic hospitality is the best important alternative that should be developed since the Islamic elements could help to refresh and renew the whole picture of hospitality.

Indeed Allah *Subhanawata'ala* (SWT) has mentioned in many verses in al-Qur'an as well as in a significant number of Hadith on hospitality or how to treat guests equally. In al-Qur'an, the content in Surah al-Dharyyat verse 23 to 27 shows a direct message on Islamic hospitality. In the Surah, Prophet Ibrahim *alaihissalam* (a.s) has been honouring his guests even though he did not know who they were. It is a direct example of hospitality that carries out the genuine meaning of hospitality along with the principle of Islamic hospitality. As stated in al-Qur'an in Surah al-Dharyyat, Allah SWT says:

“Then, by the Lord of the heaven and the earth, it is the truth (i.e. what has been promised to you), just as it is the truth that you can speak. Has the story reached you, of the honoured guests [three angels; Jibrael along with another two] of Ibrahim? When they come into him, and said, ‘Salam, (peace be upon you)!’ He answered; ‘Salam, (peace be upon you),’ and said: “You are a people unknown to me,” Then he turned to his household, so brought out a roasted calf [as the property of Ibrahim was mainly cows]. And placed it before them, (saying), ‘Will you not eat?’ then he conceived a fear of them (when they ate not). They said: ‘Fear not,’ And they gave him glad tidings of an intelligent son, having knowledge (about Allah and His religion of true monotheism)” (al-Dharyat, 51:23-27).

The above verse is an example from al-Qur’an on the hospitality of Prophet Ibrahim a.s in gesturing and entertaining guests. Prophet Ibrahim a.s accepted the greeting of his guests despite his guests were strangers to him. In the interpretation of *tafsir Mubin* (Salahuddin & Omar Khalid, 2009), Ibn ‘Abbas explained that the meaning of the guests in the verses 23 until 27 of Surah al-Dharyat refer to the Angel Jibril and Israfil. Uniquely in these verses, Allah SWT has sent a reminder to Prophet Muhammad *sallallah wa ‘alaihi wassalam* (PBUH) on the story of Prophet Ibrahim a.s and his honourable guests. This verse enlightens that Prophet Ibrahim a.s. welcome his unknown guests with the most utmost greeting. He welcome them as he believed that his guests were the most honourable that should be respected. This teaches a lesson from this occurrence that Prophet Ibrahim a.s. treated his honourable guests with the most utmost respect with warm greetings during the welcoming stage, and serves the best hospitality to his guests in order to make the guests feel the most comfortable during their journey even though the guests were strangers to him. This story of Prophet Ibrahim a.s provides a direct definition of hospitality.

Furthermore, Hadith also provides evidence of hospitality from the sayings of Prophet Muhammad PBUH. Prophet Muhammad PBUH is reported to have said from Abu Salih, from Abu Hurairah r.a:

‘Prophet Muhammad PBUH said: He who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him show hospitality to his guest; and he who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him maintain good relation with kins; and he who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent!’ (al-Bukhari, Hadith no. 6018).

From the *syarah* of *Fathul Baari* by (Ibnu Hajar Al-Asqalani, 2009), Imam Bukhari mentioned that whoever believes with absolute faith in Allah SWT specifically focusing on devoted oneself to Allah SWT and the hereafter, Allah SWT will grant him with reward for his good deeds.

All in all, Islamic hospitality concept is indeed a concept that is based on the concept of Islam as a way of life. It shows the perfection of Islam in all aspects of life (Salleh, Hamid, Hashim, & Omain, 2014). This is intimately related to strong encouragement by Islam to travel and experience as well as benefit from the creations of Allah SWT. As stated in al-Qur’an in Surah al-Rum, verse 22 and Surah al-Haj verse 46:

“and one of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your tongues and colours; most surely there are signs in this for the learned” (al-Rum 30:22).

“Have they not travelled in the land so that they should have hearts with which to understand, or ears with which to hear? For surely it is not the eyes that are blind, but blind are the hearts which are in the breasts” (al-Hajj 22:46).

The two verses of al-Qur’an pointed out that Allah SWT has guided His servants to see His greatness through *musafir* or travelling on this earth. There is a diverse of things that can be exploited through the journey including opening one’s mind and at the same time enjoying the creations of Allah SWT. Indirectly, as Muslims, it is recommended that travelling is part of the obedience to the will of Islamic law. In the process of travelling, one is exposed to the Islamic hospitality.

ISLAMIC HOSPITALITY IN MALAYSIA:

In Malaysia, the (Department of Statistic Malaysia, 2016) estimated that approximately 25.7 million tourists have come to Malaysia in 2015 with RM69.1 billion receipts. This enormous tourist’s arrival has boost Malaysia to be rated by Crescent Rating as the global top rank for top Muslim friendly destination for five years

in a row from 2011 until 2015. Malaysia has become a Muslim friendly destination and has offered Islamic hospitality for travellers around the world. The Malaysia Islamic hospitable service is growing at a very fast pace with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the year 2015 for the services sector boost up to 53.8 percent. Malaysia also has been named by Dinar Standard, a leading US-based survey institute for the Muslim travel market as one of the world’s favourite destinations among Muslim travellers, along with Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The rapid development of Islamic tourism after the success of Islamic economics and Islamic finance has emerged globally to give a great opportunity for Islamic hospitality to develop. In the case of Malaysia, a one step in advance in Islamic tourism was undertaken by introducing an Islamic Tourism blueprint named ‘Strategic Plan for Islamic Tourism Development’ published by Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in 2012. Being the most visited country in Southeast Asia, Malaysia has a huge potential and much to offer to travellers in term of hospitality services especially in providing services towards Islamic hospitality, with the aim to provide the best Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS). The term Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) was introduced by the Islamic Tourism Centre – a centre specially established by and located under the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia – to denote a more approachable and comradely gestures.

After the Islamic tourism blueprint, Malaysia has established a first standard dedicated for the Islamic tourism sector. Concentrating as the guideline of Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services, “MS2610:2015 - Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services –Requirements”, officially published in January 2015. The standard provides Shari’ah guided requirement for tourism industry players in fostering and promoting Islamic hospitality services as well as setting up an assurance system in ensuring the integrity of the services provided for Muslim travellers specifically. The standard was initiated and led by International Institute for Halal Research & Training (INHART) of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The drafting committee of the standard includes the main tourism industry players including Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), (Tourism Malaysia, 2016), Malaysia Association of Hotel Owners (MAHO), Malaysia Association of Hotel (MAH), Malaysia Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA), Bumiputera Travel and Tour Agents Association of Malaysia (Bumitra), and Malaysian Tourist Guides Council (MTGC).

As a result of these endeavours entailing from the rapid growing of tourism industry (which has become the third largest industry in the world today), and the enlargement in the world population and Islamic-based travelling, hotel operators in Malaysia, and in fact in the world in general, take further steps to offer services that are more in line with the requirements of tourists. In consequence, one is witnessing a shift in the industry to introduce the concept of Shari’ah-compliant hotels not only in Malaysia, but also throughout the world (Nor Zafir Md Salleh, 2014). Based on statistic fact reported by the World Tourism Organization, (World Tourism Organization, 2015), Islamic hospitality or Shari’ah-compliant hotels represent approximately 10% of the global tourism market, proving that hospitality sector is among the most important sector in the tourism industry (Mansor & Rasit, 2015).

In Malaysia itself, as shown in Table 1, in 2015 there were a total of 283 Muslim-Friendly hotels throughout the 14 states in the country that were Halal-certified by Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), Prime Ministers’ Office of Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur ranks at the first place with 44 hotels certified as Muslim-friendly hotel followed by Johor, Selangor, Penang and Sabah. Despite the differences in the location among the states, it is noted that almost all of the 14 states in Malaysia do offer Muslim-friendly accommodations for travellers¹.

Table 1: Number of Muslim-Friendly Hotel in Malaysia

No.	Malaysia States	Number of Muslim-Friendly Hotel
1.	Kuala Lumpur	44
2.	Johor	33
3.	Melaka	22
4.	Negeri Sembilan	23
5.	Pahang	14
6.	Selangor	32
7.	Perak	15
8.	Penang	30
9.	Kedah	11

¹ The numbers of hotels in Malaysia are growing year by year. In 2014, there are 2,826 registrations of tourist accommodation premises reported by Malaysia Ministry of Tourism and Culture. To compare, there are only 2,544 registered tourist accommodation premises reported in 2013. From this figure, it shows that the development of the accommodation industry in Malaysia is growing stronger by the years.

No.	Malaysia States	Number of Muslim-Friendly Hotel
10.	Perlis	-
11.	Terengganu	13
12.	Kelantan	3
13.	Sabah	28
14.	Sarawak	15
	Total	283

Source: Muslim-Friendly Hotels, Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia (2015)

***Note:** All premises were stated as Halal-certified as of the time of update . For a complete list of Malaysia Halal directory, please visit the website of the Halal Hub, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) <http://www.halal.gov.my/v3/index.php/ms/direktori-halal-malaysia>.

One of the outstanding Muslim-friendly hotels is the De Palma hotel, a Shari’ah-compliant hotel which has embarked on a pioneering concept of providing hotel facilities based on Islamic compliance since 2006 (Shahida, Rahman, Awang, & Man, 2011). De Palma hotel starts its journey in 1996 after sealing of cooperation between Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor (PKNS) and Biztel Sdn. Bhd. The hotel was run initially under the conventional concept for nearly 12 years. After pioneering into the Shari’ah-compliant hotel in 2006, De Palma has been awarded with many accomplishments, including being chosen as the Best Hotel in the medium size category and the best *surau* (prayer hall) in the hotel category in 2009. In line with the motto ‘*To enhance the Shariah Islamic Compliance*’, De Palma hotel is making plan to upgrade their service level to honour the Islamic value of Islamic hospitality.

Besides De Palma Hotel group namely in Ampang, Shah Alam, Kuala Selangor and Sepang, PNB Perdana Hotel and Suites on The Park Kuala Lumpur or as known as PNB Darby Park Executive Suites previously also re-branding its name effective on 23 July 2015. This re-branding has taken PNB Perdana Hotel and Suites on The Park Kuala Lumpur to be a new refreshed brand that made to further strengthen and expand their identity in Muslim-friendly accommodation not only in Malaysia but also across the globe. In 2014, PNB Darby Park Executive Suites was awarded a Muslim-friendly rating of 7 by Crescent Rating, its highest rating for Hotels which signifies that the hotel specialises in catering to Muslim-friendly requirements (Crescent Rating, 2016). The hotel has been increasingly focussing on adding services and facilities to cater to Muslim guests. Equipped with Halal-certification, the two main restaurants at the hotel, 10Binjai and The 39 Restaurant offer guests with plenty of local and international Halal dining options. Both the restaurants have been Halal-certified by JAKIM since 2007. The hotel’s recreational facilities such as the swimming pool and sauna take into consideration the needs of Muslim guests as well. Based on these two hotels as introductory examples, Malaysia Muslim-friendly hotels seem to be ready towards achieving the Islamic hospitality.

Nevertheless, Malaysia is not the only country that is trying to enhance Islamic hospitality. (Dinar Standard, 2016) mentioned in their State of Global Islamic Economy Report 2015 that United Arab Emirates (UAE) too has been ranked at first place in the Halal Tourism Indicator followed by Malaysia in the second place and Singapore in the third. Its chief executive of Muslim Travel Warehouse in UAE, Faizal Bahardeen said that all products and services provided are rated based on the level of Muslim-friendly services. Based on these examples, it has proven that the Islamic hospitality industry is growing at its fast pace not only in Malaysia but also in throughout the world.

CONCLUSION:

The growing demand for services that comply with Islamic law is noticeable and significant nowadays. Most of Muslim travellers prefer to travel within the Muslim-friendly destination since they have become more mobile, frequently travelling for both work and leisure. In the hotel industry, there is a growing demand for Islamic hospitality, or accommodations that apply a no-alcohol policy and tailor their rooms, facilities and services to suit Muslim travellers’ requirements. Being the most visited country in Southeast Asia, Malaysia has a huge potential and much to offer to Muslim travellers in term of hospitality services especially in providing accommodation towards Islamic hospitality.

The rapid influx of Islamic tourism is a great opportunity to offer the Muslim Friendly hospitality concept. Basically, Shari’ah-compliant or Muslim friendly hotel is defined as the hospitality services that comply with Islamic law in every aspect (Mohd Fadil & Mohd Zulkifli, 2013). (Yusof Shamim, 2009) also defined Islamic hotels as hotels that offered services and transactions based on Islamic law. Based on this definition, it covers only by looking at the implementation of all aspects of hospitality management before it can be categorised as

Muslim Friendly hotel. It must have certain elements and features especially to provide halal foods, special place for praying, prayer mat and dress, a copy of al-Qur'an, Shari'ah-compliant entertainment, Shari'ah-compliant facilities with all staff are required to be properly dressed in a specific dress code and strictly no-alcohol serve in the hotel.

Although (Henderson, 2010) believed that the principles of the concept of Islamic hospitality is still underdeveloped while (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009) thought that no exact principles and criteria are used in defining it, but Malaysia has proven to have gone beyond the theoretical domain to embark on practical endeavours and realisation. In fact, the phenomena could have awakened the attention of managers and players of the tourism sector and services industry to the development of the Islamic hospitality. It also provided extra knowledge shift, so that travellers and managers have more information on Islamic hospitality. In sharing the Malaysia's experience in providing Islamic hospitality and as the pioneer in the Islamic tourism and Halal Industry, it is very likely that the statistic of tourist arrivals demanding Muslim-friendly hotels in Malaysia will increase greatly in the near future.

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