LEVEL OF ISLAMIC ATTRIBUTES PRACTICES BY MUSLIM FRIENDLY HOTEL IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Islamic tourism is an innovative tourism that promotes Islamic way of life. The service not only aims for Muslim travellers but also benefited to non-Muslim. One of the various strategies to promote Islamic tourism is to introduce Muslim-friendly hotels (MFHs), and Malaysia could lead the way in doing so. MFH characteristics are still unclear as many hoteliers were perplexed by this circumstance, which hampered hotels' efforts to implement it. So, this study objective to examine level of Islamic attributes practices by the MFH in Malaysia. A total of 380 respondents were selected using a convenient sampling method and data was analyzed using descriptive statistic. The result shown that "Placement of Qibla stickers /direction (Qibla stickers/direction point towards Mecca city)" in hotel's room most likely favourite variable during guest's stay in MFH. As an important variable was pointed out, it helps hotel management to market their products and services in proper way. Also, support government to boost up market of halal hotel in future as an effort for branding Malaysia as halal hub globally, in the same time, to help Malaysia's authorities to determine Islamic attributes that may satisfy the guests' needs.

Keywords: Muslim Friendly Hotel, Islamic attributes, Islamic Tourism, mean

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INTRODUCTION

The attributes of an accommodation provider play a vital role in attracting business (Torres, Fu, & Lehto, 2014). Customers consider the range of features and amenities a lodging provider offers when selecting a place to stay when travelling (Caber & Albayrak, 2014). Since repeat guests are a hotel's richest source of revenue and profit, the hotel attributes that are most likely to be sources of observable consumer value should be the focus of managers. Other hotel characteristics evaluated in the study included location, food and beverage services, physical assets, and other services that can increase "consumer value." (Sim, Mak, & Jones, 2006). Understanding the critical elements that influence client satisfaction is essential for success in the hotel industry (Poon & Low, 2005). Additionally, since it affects destination selection, product and service consumption, and the decision to return, visitor happiness is crucial for effective destination marketing (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000).

Additionally, Kandampully and Suhartanto, (2000); Ryu, Lee, and Kim, (2012); Worsfold, Fisher, McPhail, Francis, and Thomas (2016) highlighted the significance of a hotel's physical characteristics in relation to overall satisfaction and repeat business. Additionally, Bellingkrodt and Wallenburg (2015) noted that when it comes to the role of customer relations for innovation and customer satisfaction, they find that businesses that offer new or innovative services may draw customers' attention to them and reward them even though the improvements are modest. This demonstrates that hoteliers will be able to compete in the hotel market with the new Muslim Friendly Hotel (MFH) concept.

Moreover, with more than 6000 mosques nationwide, 821 flights every week from West Asian and OIC nations, and 5896 food establishments with certified Halal kitchens, Malaysia has one of the most developed and advanced halal industries. by Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (Henderson, 2016). Nonetheless, study by Md Salleh, Hamid, Hashim, and Omain (2014) found that unclear MFH characteristic (e.g. absence of Islamic standard for hotels) lead to confusion amongst hoteliers and disrupted the process for hotels to adopt it. Even though numerous studies have examined a variety of topics on conventional hotels, there are still lacking in-depth research on the importance of hotel attributes in MFH.

So, this study should give an idea and benchmark for hoteliers to form and innovate better concept and understanding of Islamic attributes in their hotels. To helps government to boost up market of halal hotel in future as an effort for branding Malaysia as halal hub globally, in the same time, to help Malaysia's authorities to determine Islamic attributes that may satisfy the guests' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Malaysia is prosperous with various cultures of multiple races (Laderlah et al., 2011) and Islam is its official religion, but Malaysians may practice any religion. Temples, mosques, and churches are often found in vicinity areas. Therefore, they become attractions for international tourists who seek for diversity in a country. With progressive promotion, one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world is now Malaysia. Currently, the tourist industry is recognised as a significant contributor to the economy, one of the main sources of foreign exchange profits, and a driver of economic growth (Mosbah & Al Khuja, 2014). Hence, tourism industry in Malaysia continues to expand in 2016 with the contribution of 14.8 per cent (RM182.4 billion) to the economy.

Ministry of Finance (2018) reported that number of hotels has increased in five years from 1,376 unit in year 2012 to 3,126 unit in year 2017 as shown in Figure 1. The significant increase was seen in 2017 with an increase of 1,667 units. This shows that the hotel industry in Malaysia is increasingly gaining attention among tourists with total average of stay per night was 5.7 nights.
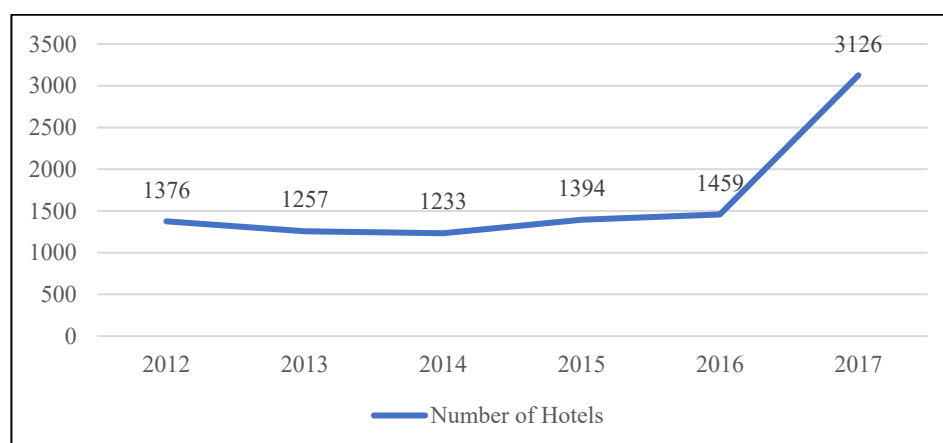

Figure 1: Number of Total Hotels in Malaysia from 2012 until 2017
(Valuation of Property Services Department, Ministry of Finance, 2018)

Aligned with the niche market, Ministry of Tourism established Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in February 2009 and one of the functions is to develop halal tourism in Malaysia (Kamarudin & Nizam, 2013). Malaysia also took initiative to promote products and services based on Islamic lifestyle by organizing events such as Islamic Festival Fashion (IFF), Halal Showcase, Islamic MATTA Fair, and Islamic tourism conferences such as Regional Seminar on Islamic Tourism (ReSIT, 2012) and World Islamic Tourism Mart (WITM, 2012) organized by ITC, Malaysian Association of Tours & Travel Agents (MATTA) and Tourism Ministry. These initiatives received overwhelming

response from international tourists especially from Middle East (ME) countries. Tourists from this region began looking for alternate vacation spots. One of their possibilities is Malaysia because it is an Islamic nation. Their arrivals in Malaysia have demonstrated an upward tendency (Mohd Salleh et al., 2010). Along with a growth in arrivals, visitors from the ME market also tend to spend more money and stay longer in this nation (WTO, 2008).

Islamic Tourism in Malaysia
A significant moment for Malaysia occurred when it became the first nation to have a formal, systematic halal assurance system in 2000. With this head start in the halal development, Malaysia has developed into the leading nation for halal standards and is in a favourable position to access the $2.30 trillion global halal market (MITI, 2015). Therefore, one of the many methods to promote Islamic tourism is by implementing the MFH, and Malaysia should lead the way in doing so. As any tourism destinations strive to find a balance between sustainability and development (see Mohd Rasdi et al., 2022) given that Malaysia is a multicultural nation, the exclusivity of Islamic tourism must be considered based on its emphasis on religion, culture, and spirituality.

Islamic tourism is beyond innovation from mass tourism by adding some Islamic way of life to fulfil Muslim travellers' requirement. Currently, recognized as a progressive Islamic country, Malaysia should aggressively promote Islamic tourism, by introducing the MFH (Mohd Yusof & Muhammad, 2010). Marketers may also use Islamic attributes in promotional programs (Mohamed Battour & Ismail, 2014). Shafaei and Mohamed (2015) agreed that In Malaysia, there are several tangible and intangible Islamic characteristics that can entice Muslim travellers. The presence of mosques and places for prayer, the abundance of halal food for Muslims, the presence of local Muslim communities, the country's stability and safety under Islam, and Malaysia's internet reputation as an Islamic nation are some of these.

For instance, JAKIM issues the halal hotel accreditation. Hotels that follow the halal restaurant concept are well renowned for adhering to all JAKIM guidelines' legal requirements. The findings of the SCH acceptance research are applicable to the majority of Muslim nations, however there are no universal Islamic standards that hotels in Malaysia to adopt (Othman, Tarmudi, & Mohd Taha, 2013).

Muslim Friendly Hotel
By implementing a Muslim-friendly approach, Samori & Abd Rahman (2013) advise hotels to use the appropriate Islamic themes, ambiances, and architecture to make guests feel at ease as they fulfil their religious obligations and to enhance the hotel's value, reputation, and brand. In essence, the management and growth of MFHs are the same as those of conventional hotels. However, when planning,

a few operational peculiarities must be taken into consideration (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). This planning important to make sure improper arrangement especially between spaces in toilet or bathroom that related to cleanliness. Designers should include sufficient ventilation systems in ablution areas and any other facilities that use water to prevent diseases that can develop in the future as a result of poor design (Haraty & Utaberta, 2019).

Islamic Quality Standard (IQS) by Universal Crescent Standard Centre (UCSC) can be a good initiative as a mechanism to standardize the compliance of Islamic principle that can be used for hotel management. To be awarded as an IQS, taken into account the quality of physical facilities, service quality, no alcohol in the premises is allowed and only "halal" food is available. As well as for relevant standards of quality in key areas of cleanliness, customer service, guest rooms, bathrooms and food must follow the rules of Islamic principles. Basic requirements under Islamic principles are the perquisites for a hotel to be considered under IQS (Jais, 2016). This study was adopted IQS as mechanism to choose population.

Islamic Attributes

The MFH concept is becoming more popular throughout the Middle East, particularly in Saudi Arabia where the majority of hotels are run in accordance with Islamic law. It is crucial to keep in mind that for a hotel to qualify as an MFH, Syariah norms and principles must be followed in terms of operation, design, and even the hotel's financial system. Islamic values should guide the management of the hotel's amenities. For instance, separate facilities for men and women should be adopted for the spa, gym, swimming pool, and guest and function rooms (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009).

When promoting a hotel, service quality becomes an important reason for a potential guest. Thus, this study examines which attributes are more needed by respondents when selecting a Syariah-compliant hotel during their stay. The majority of the facilities (such as floors, a spa, a gym, and guest and function rooms) must be gender-separate for a hotel to be entirely Syariah-compliant. This is especially important while creating the hotel's floor plans during the development phase. Toilets and beds shouldn't be positioned facing Mecca. In terms of the building's architecture and décor, no artwork showing people should be on exhibit, nor should any jewellery that does not reflect any indication or symbol of daily life or furniture arrangements that adhere to Shariah principles (Din, 1989; Stephenson, Russell, & Edgar, 2010).

Additionally, Zhou, Ye, Pearce and Wu (2014) finds that factors related to room satisfaction include the size and layout of the room, the facilities in the room and bathroom, the cleanliness of the rooms, and the inviting additions. Rosenberg and Choufany (2009) concluded MFH attributes into three important dimension which are summarized in Figure 2. MFH attributes are divided into

three main dimensions, which are operations, the hotel must run and follow according to Syariah and Islamic laws.
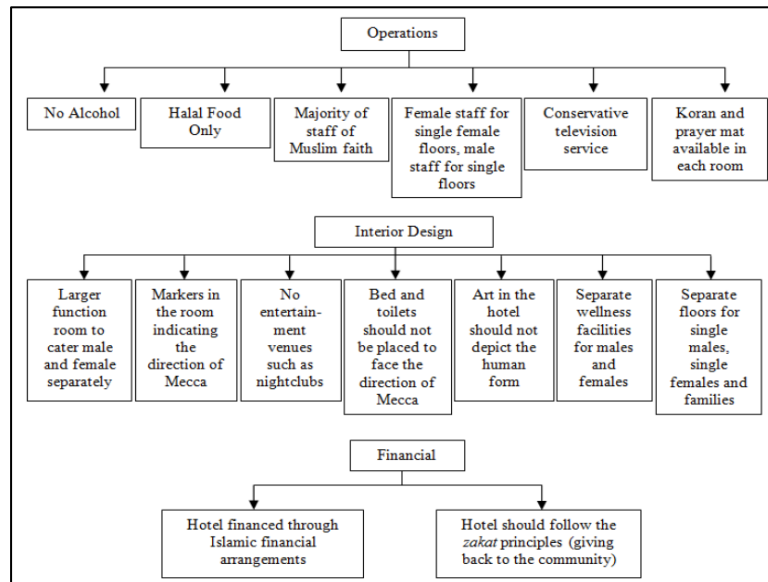

Figure 2: Islamic Attributes of MFH in Malaysia
(Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study employed descriptive statistic method to determine level of Islamic attributes practices. The 5-point interval scale instruments were divided into five parts. Part A contained seven questions regarding respondents' demographic profile, such as gender, age, marital status, religion, place of origin, educational qualification and occupation. Part B consisted of respondent's travel pattern, while Part C comprised a set of questions about Islamic attributes experienced by respondents during their stay. Part D of the questionnaires included statements to measure customer satisfaction, and the last section was designed to measure guest revisit intention to the hotel.

Table 1: List of Hotels Awarded IQS by UCSC

No	Hotel's Name	Location
1	Grand Bluewave Hotel	Shah Alam, Selangor
2	De Palma Hotel	Shah Alam & Ampang, Selangor
3	PNB Perdana Hotel and Suites on the Park	Kuala Lumpur
4	Adya Hotel	Langkawi, Kedah
5	Primula Beach Hotel	Terengganu

| 6 | Tabung Haji Hotel and Convention Center | Terengganu |
| 7 | Klana Beach Resort, Port Dickson | Negeri Sembilan |

Source: Othman, Mohd Taha, & Othman (2015)

The study has utilized multi-tier method, which consists of the judgemental or purposive technique for the population and convenient technique for sampling method. Non-random sampling was chosen because there is no existing list of the entire tourist population that has stayed in MFH in Malaysia. At the first stage, the screening process of population was determined by the hotel list that was awarded IQS. The details of hotels listed are shown in Table 1. Then, by using convenient sampling, total 380 questionnaires being dispensed, 285 were returned. After screening the surveys and normality test, only 251 samples are appropriate to be analyzed.

FINDINGS
Level for each item in the variable for SCH attributes is summarized in Table 2. According to the mean values suggested by Oxford & Burry-stock (1995), low score is between range 1.0-2.4, medium between range 2.5-3.4 and high is between range 3.5-5.0. It indicated that the highest value means for Islamic attributes (4.79) belonged to the statement "Placement of Qibla stickers /direction (Qibla stickers/direction point towards Mecca city)" in hotel's room. It gives meaning that respondents fully support MFH providing direction towards Mecca city in hotel's room, which make easier for them to perform prayers.

Meanwhile, statement "Female non-Muslim staff are encouraged to wear hijab while on duty" gets the lowest score with 3.75 compared to others. However, as a whole, the values of the means for Syariah-compliant attributes items were classified as high (4.34).

Table 2: Level of Islamic Attributes Practices

No.	Items	Mean
1	Placement of Qibla stickers /direction (Qibla stickers/direction point towards Mecca city) in hotel's room	4.79
2	Hotels should only serve halal food	4.69
3	Provision of prayer mat in hotel's room	4.69
4	Banning of alcoholic drinks in hotel's premise	4.63
5	Male staff are allowed to perform Friday prayer while on duty	4.61
6	Banning of nightclub entertainment in hotel's premise	4.58
7	All staff are given break time to perform routine daily prayers while on duty	4.58
8	Provision of a copy of the Holy Qur'an in hotel's room	4.57
9	Availability of prayer schedule in hotel's room	4.57
10	Availability of Musolla (prayer room) for congregation prayer	4.53
11	Hotels should follow the Zakat principles (Giving back to the community)	4.50

12	Hotel policy on display forbidding unmarried Muslim couple to check-in hotel's room	4.50
13	Hotels must be financed in line with the Islamic principles (e.g. Islamic financing)	4.49
14	Hotel's premise (including all guest rooms) to be designated as non-smoking zone	4.47
15	Availability of shower hose//bidets in the hotel's bathroom for ablution	4.44
16	Hotels Art display should be other than human form	4.35
17	Availability of segregated gymnasium for men and women	4.30
18	Availability of Muslim travel packages/counter in hotel's premise	4.29
19	Availability of segregated swimming pools for men and women	4.25
20	Toilets should be arranged in opposite direction of Mecca	4.24
21	Banning of massage centre in hotel's premise	4.20
22	If no segregated facilities, the hotels should provide different timing for men and women to use common facilities, respectively	4.20
23	Presence of loud public pronouncement of Azan (call for prayer) to indicate prayer time	4.12
24	Availability of an exclusive floor of guest rooms for single women only in hotel's premise	4.09
25	Imam (religious officer) on duty to lead the 5 obligatory daily prayers at Musolla (prayer room)	4.09
26	Beds should be arranged in opposite direction of Mecca	4.08
27	Availability of zakat counter in hotel's premise	3.96
28	Hotel's location in proximity to mosque	3.93
29	Hotel policy to recruit Muslim staff only	3.80
30	Female non-Muslim staff are encouraged to wear hijab while on duty	3.75
	Total	**4.34**

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Descriptive analysis used to define the variables of Islamic attributes that influence hotel's guest to revisit. Understanding how consumers view the features of a product or service, as well as their significance and performance in comparison to rivals, is essential for success in the hospitality industry (Baruca & Civre, 2012). It also challenging to introduce Muslim friendly concept to the world, but marketer need to understand and promotes this way of life in positive surrounding. Thus, when promoting a hotel, service quality becomes an important reason for a potential guest. This study examines which attributes are more needed by respondents when selecting a MFH during their stay.

Measuring service quality is different among hotel when it comes to religious needs. In this study, service quality is measured by 30 items which were adopted by previous researcher (Farahdel, 2011; Henderson J.C., 2010a; Razalli et al., 2015; Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). This study adapted 30 attributes from the previous research on MFH to be investigated by guests who have experienced staying in such hotels.

The result shows that item "Placement of Qibla stickers /direction (Qibla stickers/direction point towards Mecca city) in hotel's room" is the most agreed by respondents to be provided in hotel room. During pilot test, this item was dropped due to low of loading value. However, researcher decided to maintain the item because of prayer is compulsory to Muslims, and they need Qibla direction as a guide to perform prayers. Hence, the actual study approved that this item is important to most respondents during their stay. Since MFH is an inclusive concept guided by Islamic principles, this requirement is essential for the hotel guests.

In addition, frequency for the item show that 4 and 5 (strongly agree) is the highest number scale answered by respondents (42.7%). This reflects that hotels in Malaysia are now furnished with the necessities for Muslim visitors, including a prayer mat, a Qibla direction, and the ability to provide halal food or beverages (see Samori & Sabtu, 2014).

In this study, item "Hotel should only serve halal food" was listed as the second most important attribute the hotel needs to provide. Thus, hotel is required to obtain Halal certification from the authorities to provide guests with confidence regarding the halal food status, as Muslims should avoid "Syubhah" when consuming food. Although guests can search halal food elsewhere, some guests traveling with family members consist of parents and young children prefer to eat at hotel.

Result also shows that item "Provision of prayer mat in hotel's room" as equally important with Halal food since the mean values are equal. Prayer mat provides comfort to Muslim when performing a prayer, although not obligatory. This requirement is not taken seriously by some hotels which will cause dissatisfaction among hotel guests. "Banning alcoholic drinks in hotel's premise" also becomes a significant attribute to be classified as MFH. If the hotel still serves alcoholic drinks, the hotel is not worthy to be called SCH, but it is only known as a 'dry hotel'; it still does not meet the features as MFH (Ahmat et al., 2012b).

Until now, there are no specific Syariah-compliant laws and regulations concerning the service industry in Malaysia, especially in the accommodation sector. Since Malaysia is leading towards halal tourism globally, this research findings could help in developing Islamic module or standard based on Syariah principles to be adopted by practitioners. It is easier to adopt, which mean the process to apply and adopt the standard is not troubling existing hotel operation or involving major renovation. Various public, private and hybrid tourism stakeholders can also cooperate with hoteliers to think creatively, innovatively and solve common problems and create better Islamic tourism in future (see Azinuddin et al., 2022a, 2020; Mior Shariffuddin et al., 2020). As claimed by Samori and Abd Rahman (2013), in terms of market size and revenue, the halal business and tourism have enormous potential. Focusing specifically on the hotel

services industry demonstrates that it will not only assist Muslims in general but will also benefit non-Muslims.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Following international publication policy and our ethical obligation as a researcher, we report that we have no conflict of interest.

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