Muslim Friendly Hotel Development in Malaysia: Prospect and Challenges

Che Musa Che Omar,[1] Noormuthaah Mohamad Ali Adaha[2]

Abstract: *Muslim Friendly Hotel (MFH) and its Shariah compliant is a new lucrative tourism product that grew tremendously in Malaysia over the past years as part of halal industry. There are about 5,520 hotels in Malaysia and about ten percent (10%) are complying with Shariah requirements. The prospect for Muslim Friendly Hotels will be observed through the adoption of Shariah rules and regulations in the hotel development in Malaysia due to the increased in Muslim tourist arrivals, particularly from Middle Eastern countries. There are few standards been developed pertaining to Shariah compliant in hotel development or Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) in this country. This paper will highlight some of the criteria on Shariah compliance in the provision of hotel room facilities through Face to Face (F2F) interviews with hotel management and guests, and inventory of room facilities. The study was conducted on eight (8) MFHS hotels aimed at assessing the facilities provided in the room in compliance to Shariah requirements. A total of 40 questionnaires were distributed to the hotel guests to identify Muslim guest needs based on Maslow hierarchy of needs. All data were collated and analysed through content analysis and descriptive analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate results. The results were synchronized with Islamic Quality Standard (IQS) and MFHS Standard for hotels to be embedded with the ultimate objectives of Shariah (Maqasid Shariah). The findings show that all 33 aspects of hotel room being surveyed were complying with Shariah requirements. About 15 of the criteria met the Muslim guest needs. The Shariah compliant hotel criteria based on guestroom facilities have accommodate hotel operators to apply the criteria in meeting the potential users in the hotel industry development in Malaysia.*

Keywords: *Shariah, Guest, Hotel, Friendly, Facilities*

I. INTRODUCTION

Muslim friendly hospitality has become a new niche segment in research. According to the Global Islamic Economic Report 2016 stated that about USD1.9 trillion was spent on food and lifestyle and about USD151 billion was spent by the Muslims on outbound travel. The huge spending illustrated the emerging activities in Islamic hospitality and tourism sector. The demand for Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) is an emerging sector in Malaysia tourism industry. The Report also indicates that Malaysia rank top in the global Islamic economy together with United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and Oman (Thomson Reuters, 2016).

MFHS is one of the niche segments in the Islamic hospitality and tourism industry which focussed very much on services that compliant to Shari'ah, which are much sought by travellers on such services. Historically, travelling has been as one of the most important part in the hospitality and tourism sector. Many travelled for leisure, recreation, heritage, pilgrimage, family visit, education attainment and reasons of their choices. Tourism Malaysia (2016) recorded an increase of 3.7% in tourist arrivals with tourist receipts up by 10.7% resulted in RM37.4 billion as incomes to Malaysia. This escalation growth pattern in the tourism industry has established Malaysia to become the major player in the hospitality

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[1] Universiti Kuala Lumpur Business School
chemusa@unikl.edu.my
[2] Noormuthaah Mohamad Ali Adaha, Master Management, Universiti Kuala Lumpur Business School.

and tourism industry in offering the best Muslim friendly hospitality services for both Muslim and non-Muslim guests. Recent survey by Dinar Standard (2016) has named Malaysia as one of the world's favourite tourism destination with 'halal' travel indicator (Thomson Reuters, 2016) because Malaysia has the best developed ecosystem for halal travel. And this has made Malaysia a major Muslim friendly destination for travellers. It is believed that the MFHS has the potential to play an important role in promoting and enhancing the growth of the Islamic tourism industry. Thus, this study intends to find new research direction on MFHS to create more understanding and to foster various research needs in order to support the Islamic hospitality and tourism industry in Malaysia.

II. THE CONCEPT OF MUSLIM FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY

The contemporary hospitality management started with the word hospitality which was derived from the Latin word *hospitare* meaning to "receive as a guest". Hospitality is the act of kindness in welcoming and looking after the basic needs of guests or strangers by providing food, drink and accommodation that justified for the hospitality industry to grow. Since 1930s hospitality is related to a show of 'kindness in welcoming strangers or guests' (Hepple, Kipps, & Thomson, 1990). Some researchers defined hospitality as a mixture of tangible and intangible components such as food, beverages, beds, ambience and environment, and behaviour of staff. According to Jaswir and Ramli (2016), Muslim friendly hospitality services such in airlines, hotels and food services are the new fast-developing tourism products pertaining to halal tourism industry. A real definition on MFHS goes beyond the scope that covers the holistic way of honouring guest and providing the best services that one could offer.

III. MUSLIM PARTICIPATION

According to the United Nation (2019), Muslim population in the world is around two billion scattered across many continents and countries. In 2019, the total number of Muslim tourist arrivals to Malaysia was approximately 5.38 million. Muslim population in Malaysia is about 65% from the total population of 32.37 million (2017). With the big population of Muslim living and residing in Malaysia, it has opened up a massive potential and opportunities for Islamic services in Islamic hospitality to be developed due to a growing interest in Muslim-friendly tourism, family-friendly tourism, halal tourism, or Shariah-compliant tourism in Malaysia. Many Muslim countries, especially Middle Eastern countries as suggested by Javed (2007), tourists from Muslim countries preferred to visit other Muslim countries due to availability of MFHS. The increasing number of Muslim Travellers to non-traditional destination was partly due to the post September 11 incident with re-orientate large number of tourists from traditional destinations to new tourist destination, and Malaysia benefitted from looking for new market segments. It has motivated stakeholders in the tourism sector to introduce Muslim-friendly facilities to directly meet the needs of Muslim tourists (Battour, Ismail & Battor, 2010). Tourism Malaysia (2015) reiterated that Malaysia uniqueness is enriched by its multi-ethnic characteristic. This does not prevent Malaysia to be a country that is leading and advance in the Islamic hospitality. It has developed to become a key player in world travellers to experience the MFHS offered by this country. In serving the growing interest of Muslim tourists to Malaysia, the government in 2009 launched *Islamic Tourism Centre* (ITC) to assist the Ministry of Tourism, Art and Culture (MOCAT) to strategize tourism research and market intelligence in relation to Islamic tourism (ITC, n.d.). In 2012 ITC came out with *Islamic Tourism Blueprint*, outlining its strategic plan for the development of Islamic tourism in Malaysia.

IV. TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY MALAYSIA EXPERIENCED

The government of Malaysia has identified the tourism and hospitality industry as one of the sectors that plays an important role in the economy and social development of Malaysia (Nor' Ain Othman, 20015). The setting up of Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in 2009 would provide training and capacity-building services in relation to foster Islamic tourism in Malaysia (ITC, 2016). The establishment of MFHS, ITC was seen as an Islamic hospitality and tourism expert pertaining to any references among stakeholders and industry players. ITC undertake a strategic research for tourism

policy formulation that will enhance of MFHS by introducing the Muslim friendly hospitality services standard MS2610:2015 in 2015. It is a Standard for Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services Requirements that was initiated and led by International Institute for Halal Research & Training (INHART) based in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Prior to that, Malaysia has published no less than ten Malaysian Standards (MS) as a guideline applicable for national and international usage.

Malaysia has put a very high commitment in activating the whole tourism industry to make it as significant market for travel destination due to its success story pertaining to Muslim friendly hospitality and services. For an instance to compare, in Malaysia, De Palma hotel, a Shari'ah-compliant hotel has embarked on a pioneering concept of providing hotel facilities based on Islamic compliance in 2006. De Palma hotel starts its journey in 1996 after sealing of cooperation between Perbadanan Kemajuan Negeri Selangor (PKNS) and Biztel Sdn. Bhd and the hotel is run under the conventional concept for nearly 12 years. Many achievements have been awarded to De Palma hotel including being chosen as the Best Hotel in the medium size category and the best *surau* (prayer hall) in the hotel category on 2009. In line with the motto *'To enhance the Syariah 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 this 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. The hotel has been increasing 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 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 guest as well. Based on these two hotels as an introductory example, Malaysia Muslim-friendly hotels seems to be ready towards achieving Islamic hospitality.

V. NEW RESEARCH DIRECTION IN MFHS

The general definition of hospitality is the management of any business that supplies food, drink or accommodation for those who are travelling. Halal tourism (tourism that respects the principles of Muslims) has become the focus of attention worldwide (Biancone et al, 2019). In recent years, Halal tourism has been widely seen as one of the strongest export markets for this type of tourism. This new tourist style is meant for hotels and resorts that are keen to not offer any programmes, meals, food, or activities that are contrary to Islamic law. Hospitality services is a multidisciplinary area of study with the purpose of expanding industry that provides food, accommodations, and tourism services to people away from home. It is an extensive assortment of services that provided to fulfil the diverse demand of customers. A wide range of hospitality management components is available in the hospitality industry nowadays such as food and beverage management, hotel accommodation management, resort and recreation management, and restaurant entrepreneurship. The early research on hospitality started in the early 1980s by Tideman (1983), Khan and Olsen (1988) and Edgar and Umbreit (1988) are focusing on a narrower, commercial and economic perspective in defining hospitality.

Tideman (1983), defined hospitality as the way to gather the need of guest in order to make the guest happy at most in supplying good and services in an excellence quality desired by the guest at a value of worth paying the price. This definition has been imbedded in almost any hospitality economic activity. However, Khan and Olsen (1988) and Edgar and Umbreit (1988) have also called for hospitality management research community to raise the outline in the importance of hospitality research because the current definition of hospitality is imprecise. According to Brotherthon (1999),

hospitality is closely related to tourism and leisure most of the time. He also agreed that the restriction line for hospitality is also drawn to other service industry that include financial services, marketing, transportation and storage, communication and government services. However, there is lacking in the theory of hospitality structure and data because the basic nature of hospitality itself is remain unclear. From the few research mentioned, it can be surmised that the structure and definition of hospitality are more general with social scientific approach taken by these researchers to define hospitality that has some merit as it seeks to reflect the holistic nature of the concept.

Over the last decades, many researchers have done research in hospitality management but focusing on the area related to hospitality management. Lugosi (2009) stated that hospitality management has become a vibrant area of research, producing number of studies that aimed at shaping industry practice and academic work. Baloglu and Assante (1999), Bowen and Sparks (1998), Crawford-Welch and McClearly (1992), and Chon, (1989) have conducted research based on the progress and development of hospitality management based on special focus on identifying the main subject areas and research methodologies. Based on the research conducted, they wanted to contribute to the growth of the hospitality field by identifying the research gaps and providing new ideas for future research. However, over the time, many researchers have been done focusing on specific subjects within the hospitality management itself. Additionally, hospitality marketing research has been growing constantly. Line and Runyan (2012), Yoo, Lee, and Bai (2011), Oh, Kim, and Shin (2004) and Bowen and Sparks (1998) have centred their research on hospitality marketing. Line and Runyan (2012) conducted a research on hospitality marketing from the period of 2008 to 2010 with a total of 274 articles on hospitality are chosen for the purposes of identifying significant trends and gaps in the literature. Oh, Kim, and Shin (2004) examined developments in hospitality and tourism marketing research for a two-year period and provided guidelines for future research directions as well whereas Bowen and Sparks (1993) conducted a research on hospitality marketing for approximately an eight-year period on 131 articles published in eight major journals and derived nine categories of research techniques and identified twelve future research areas in hospitality marketing.

Apart from the contemporary definition and structure of hospitality, the trend nowadays is directing into Islamic hospitality or in other word MFHS. Few research that has been done in the MFHS scope that focusing in creating the structure and provide a clear definition that represent Islamic hospitality. Current research done by Azreen Hamiza Abdul Aziz (2016) found out the real definition of Islamic hospitality is from the primary sources of Islam, the al-Qur'an. She found out that from Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:23-27, the definition of hospitality should be welcoming guests with the utmost respect, greet them politely and providing them with the best facilities that we could offer immediately. Abdul aziz Harjin (1999) however is focusing on the research on Islamic hospitality etiquette in the early age of Islam. He found out that in the practice of hospitality of Prophet Ibrahim a.s. there are six stages of etiquette consist in Surah *Adh-Dhariyat* in honouring guests. Apart from this, other researches are focusing on other major elements in hospitality namely, the near neighbour of tourism, accommodations, food and beverages and entertainment.

Nevertheless, there are few definitions related to Islamic hospitality. As stated by Mohd Fadil Mohd Yusof and Mohd Zulkifli Muhammad (2017), Muslim-friendly hotel is defined as the hospitality services that are in line and follow the Shari'ah law in every aspect of services provided. The same definition has been stated by Yusoff Shamim (2009) by defining all services and businesses provided by Islamic hotels are accordance to the Shari'ah law that include the implementation of all aspects of hospitality management on certain elements and features especially to provide Halal food, 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 dress in a specific dress code and strictly no-alcohol serve in the hotel.

Islamic tourism is tourism primarily undertaken by its followers within the Muslim world (Abdul Aziz Hussin. 2015). It is not just motivated by religious feeling--it also includes participants pursuing similar leisure experiences to non-Muslims but within the parameters set by Islam, and destinations are therefore not necessarily locations where Shari'a or full Islamic law is enacted (Ahmad Jamal et al, 2018). Noel Scott and Jafar Jafari (2010) have conducted a research on

Islam and tourism signifies the tourism in the Muslim world and provides some basic information that will help the non-Muslim to understand Islamic tourism more. They mentioned that religion and pilgrimage are part of the important themes of tourism literature that may have the historical journey of tourism. Apart from them, Raj and Morpeth (2007) also has explored the tourism and religion theme focusing on religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management as well as Timothy and Olsen (2006) on tourism, religion and spiritual journeys. Nevertheless, Henderson (2010) believes that the principle of the concept of Islamic hospitality is still underdeveloped. Choufany Rosenberg (2009) is agreeing to this and said that although the concept of Islamic hospitality has long been discussed, there is no exact principle and criteria used in defining it. However, from the Islamic tourism point of view, Henderson and Zamani Farahani (2010), Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) they have the same opinion on the spiritual goals that is to reinforce one's submission to the ways of Allah SWT, encourage and strengthen the Ukhuwwah and the society. Alternatively, Marcus, Karl and David (2010) examine the challenges faced by the hospitality industries in developing an Islamic hospitality identity and indigenous styles of management, particularly in the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) especially Dubai. They review and merge a diverse range of literature concerning Islamic hospitality (and tourism), Arab management and leadership qualities, human capital and nationalization of employment, industry skills and educational directives in hospitality and destination and product strategies. As the result, they found out there is a need to develop human capital through highly skilled employees within the hospitality industries is regarded as a main enabler for sustainable and regional development.

In the accommodation part, Fatemeh Shafaei (2015) research is concentrating on the influence of Muslims' involvement with traveling to Islamic destinations on Malaysia's Islamic. The main objective of her research is focusing on the test in the relationship between Muslim tourists' involvement with travelling to Islamic destinations and the dimensions of Islamic brand equity of Malaysia. Silimarly, Siti Nabiha Abduk Khalid and Stephanie Phang (2013) are directing their research in sustainable tourism on how to synergizing environmental and social practices in the hospitality context. Their study examines on the current environmental practices and also the community programmes implemented by a resort in Phuket. Few other research that have been focusing on tourism and business activities which is more focus on hospitality and accommodation are done by Shaw (2004), Morrison and Teixeira (2004), Seppala-Esser, Airey and Szivas (2009), Mshenga and Owuor (2009) and Thomas, Shaw and Page (2011).

Looking into the food and beverages segment, Ala`a Nimer Mousa Abukhalifeh and Ahmad Puad Mat Som. (2013) aims to review the existing literature on performance management in the F&B department of hotels, its processes, and its effective management system framework. Their study suggests an appropriate application of the system`s theory and food service model that can help personnel and managers to be more productive in the workplace by creating an understanding of the interrelatedness of tasks in the food service operation. In another research done by Ahmad Rasmi Suleiman AlBattat and Ahmad Puad Mat Som, (2013) on job satisfaction and turnover crisis in Malaysia's hospitality industry, they interpreted the valuable factors of enhancing employment in order to reduce the turnover in the hospitality sector by increasing the wages and reinforcing work situation. This could consolidate the relationships between hospitality personnel within their industry followed by a reduction in turnover since hospitality has embraced the service industry model: service intangibility, production and consuming inseparability, and the heterogeneity between customers and service suppliers (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, IIhan and Buyruk, 2010).

VI. CONCLUSION

Demand for Islamic tourism destinations is increasing as the Muslim population expands worldwide, with the market forecast to be worth US$238 billion by 2019 (Ahmad Jamal et al, 2018). The pursuit of MFHS in Malaysia will create the biggest development in improving Malaysia economic stability. The identity of Malaysia as the pioneer in the Halal industry and Islamic finance has made the discovering of MFHS to be vital. To surmised, most of the research selects the hospitality-oriented journals and analyses the topics and trends of hospitality in order to explore how hospitality research has progressed within the past decade in terms of topical areas, industry applications and additionally discovers notable

trends for hospitality research. These researchers intend to find the significant trends and gaps in the literature and niche area in hospitality that are focusing on accommodation, food and beverages segment as well as the tourism industry. In making MFHS a vibrant area in research, the new research direction in Islamic hospitality emphasise on exploring and strengthening the structure and concept of MFHS to maximize the lucrative benefits of the economy. Future research should explore and consolidate the MFHS structure to ensure the stability of the tourism and hospitality sector in Malaysia. The diversity of idea sometimes led into the existence of debates in all over the world on fundamental nature of researchers that attempting to study more on the knowledge hospitality and the industry players seeking information to provide to consumers.

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