Halal tourism: Concepts, practises, challenges and future

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Abstract

Tourism recognizes the growing interest in Halal tourism from both the perspectives of industry and research. Halal tourism can be summarized by any object or action which is permissible to use or engage in tourism industry, according to Islamic teachings. Therefore, the success of developing and marketing Halal tourism destination must be guided by the adoption of Islamic teachings and principles in all aspects of tourism activities. This paper explores the concept of Halal tourism along with the components which constitute the industry. It provides worldwide examples of some of the current best practises. The opportunities and challenges in developing and marketing Halal tourism are also discussed.

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1. Introduction

Tourism industry recognizes the growing interest in Halal tourism from both the perspectives of practitioners and researchers. Those involved stress the fact that any strategy to develop or market Halal tourism products services must be guided by Islamic law (Shariah). This growing interest in Halal tourism could due partly to the growth of Muslim population worldwide. The paper explores the concept of Halal tourism along with the components which constitute the industry. The paper also discusses the opportunities and challenges in developing and marketing Halal tourism. Marketers and policy makers who are concerned with halal issues will understand the Islamic requirements related to tourism. This will help them choose suitable halal alternatives. The knowledge of Halal tourism concept and components are pertinent to industry players alike in developing Halal tourism infrastructure and facilities, halal travel packages, and halal travel activities.

It will also help them design specific messages for marketing communication in order to attract Muslim tourists.

2. Halal tourism concept

It is recently noted that there is a challenge to identify the right terminologies as well as the proper clarification Halal tourism concept. At the moment the most commonly-used terms are ‘Halal tourism’ and ‘Islamic tourism’. Due to the multidisciplinary scope of the subject matter, there exist confusions regarding the two terms. As a result the terms are often used interchangeably by researchers in both conceptual and empirical papers as if the two concepts are similar (see, e.g., Battour, Battor, & Bhatti, 2013; Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011; Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awaies, 2014; Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010; Henderson, 2009; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Stephenson, 2014; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). However, using ‘Halal tourism’ and ‘Islamic tourism’ as the same terms could be questionable.

According to one very authoritative book entitled ‘The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam’, which was written by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a globally-respected Islamic scholar and chairman of the...
International Union of Muslim Scholars, the term Halal is defined as “That which is permitted, with respect to which no restriction exists, and the doing of which the law-giver, Allah, is allowed” (Al-Qaradawi, 2013; p. XXV). Therefore, Halal term means ‘permissible’ according to Islamic teaching (Sharia law). Halal is also one of five actions (al-ahkam al-khamasah) that categorizes the morality of human action in Islam, others being Fard (compulsory), Mustahabb (recommended), Makruh (disliked), and Haram (forbidden) (Faruki, 1966). From Islamic perspective, Halal as defined above refers to any practise or activity in tourism which is ‘permissible’ according to Islamic teaching.

The term ‘Islamic’ is precisely applied only to that which relates directly to the faith and its doctrines (such as Islamic law/Shariah, Islamic values, principles and beliefs, Islamic worship) (Doughlass & Shaikh, 2004). It is therefore closer to the Arabic term ‘Mu’minoon’ (Ibn Kathir, 2000). This is because Islam indicates the faith as an ideal based on the core Islamic sources which are the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Arjan, 2014; Battour et al., 2010). It therefore follows that Muslim men, women, country may not necessarily be Islamic and that ‘Islamic men’ and ‘Islamic men’ have different meanings (Arjan, 2014; Khalifa, 2001). Moreover, another element needs to be present to make an activity ‘Islamic’ which is niyyah or intention. An action or activity is accepted by God becomes Islamic when the intention of the person who performed it is seeking the pleasure of God (Arjan, 2014; Olatoye, 2013). This is based on the very famous hadith by the Prophet Muhammad:

“Verily actions are by intentions, and for every person is what he intended. So the one whose hijrah (migration) was to Allah and His Messenger, then his hijrah was to Allah and His Messenger. And the one whose hijrah was for the world to gain from it, or a woman to marry her, then his hijrah was for what he made hijrah for” (Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

The background to the above hadith was that the companions of the Prophet were discussing the actions of their fellow Muslims performing Hijrah (moving from the Holy city of Makkah to Madinah). The Prophet SAW divided the actions into two categories — those that are accepted by God and those that were not. The former is when the intention was to seek the pleasure of God, whilst the latter is when the intention or motives were for other than pleasing God (Arjan, 2014; Olatoye, 2013). Therefore, an activity that is accepted by God and deserving of reward from him is categorized as ‘Islamic’. Based on the above argument, using the terms ‘Islamic’ and ‘Halal’ as if they have similar meaning is inappropriate. It would be better to use ‘Halal’ as brand name rather ‘Islamic’ for any related product and service in tourism industry.

It could be better to define tourism first to define Halal tourism properly. According to UNWTO definition, “Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes” (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). Cook et al. (2014; p.3) defined Tourism as “the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations, and the facilities created to cater to their needs”. It is noted from the previous definition that the tourism include the movement of people (tourists) which represents the demand side and activities/facilities to cater to tourists’ needs (destination) which represent supply side.

Some researchers have tried to define Islamic tourism and Halal tourism in tourism and destination marketing literatures (Battour et al., 2014; Carboni, Perelli, & Sistu, 2014; Din, 1989; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Timothy & Iverson, 2006; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). However most have not taken into consideration the Islamic law (Shari‘ah), the target customers (i.e. Muslims or non-Muslims), the location of activity (i.e. Muslim vs non-Muslim country), the product and service offered (i.e. food, facilities), and the purpose of travel. Most of these definitions are loosely defined and used interchangeably. In other words, Halal tourism and Islamic tourism are treated as similar concepts. For example, Jafari and Scott (2014) defined Islamic tourism as “The encouragement of tourists likely to meet the requirements of Sharia law”. The definition focuses on Islamic law and its requirements to meet the tourist needs but ignored the religion of tourists (Muslims) and other dimensions. In our opinion, Jafari and Scott’s definition is more appropriate for ‘Halal tourism’ rather than ‘Islamic tourism’.

Carboni et al. (2014) defined Islamic tourism “as tourism in accordance with Islam, involving people of the Muslim faith who are interested in keeping with their personal religious habits whilst travelling”. This definition takes into the consideration the Islamic law, the target customers (Muslim), and the location of activity, but the product and service offered (i.e. food, facilities) is ignored. However, Carboni et al. (2014) recommended that Islamic tourism is not restricted only for religious purposes and is not exclusively to or within Muslim countries.

Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) considered that Islamic tourism and Halal tourism are same concepts and defined Islamic tourism as simply tourism mainly by Muslims who prefer to stay within their culture. This definition highlights the fact that Islamic tourism is for Muslims and the location of the activities is in Muslim country. However, the definition neglects the Islamic law requirements in tourism activities. Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) in the same study reported that Islamic tourism could be extended to target non-Muslims which is against their definition of Islamic tourism. However, in line with Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) highlighted the benefits of Islamic tourism for non-Muslim tourists visiting the Muslim world.

WTM (2007) explains Halal tourism as a type of religious tourism that is in conformity with Islamic teachings regarding behaviours, dress, conduct and diet. On the other hand, it is claimed that Islamic tourism attracts many travellers entirely interested in what is termed ‘Islamic culture’ (Henderson, 2009; Javed, 2007). Shakiry (2006) also claims that ‘the concept of Islamic tourism is not limited to religious tourism, but it extends to all forms of tourism except those that go against Islamic values’. Therefore, the two concepts are vague and definitional ambiguities in terms of the Islamic law, the target customers (i.e. Muslims or non-Muslims), the location of activity (i.e. destination attributes), the product and service offered (i.e. food, facilities), and the purpose of travel.

To sum up, Halal tourism is “any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in tourism industry”. The definition consider the Islamic law (shari‘ah) as the basis to deliver tourism products and service to the target customers who are mainly Muslims, such as Halal hotels (shari‘ah compliant hotels), Halal Resorts, Halal restaurants, and Halal trips. The definition claims that the location of activity is not limited to the Muslim world. Therefore it includes services and products that are designed for Muslim travellers in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Furthermore, the definition considers the purpose of travel is not necessarily religious. It may be any of the general motivations of tourism.

3. Current practise in Halal tourism

It is noted recently that Muslim customers become sensitive to consume products and services that Shari‘ah compliant (Battour, Battor, & Ismail, 2012; Battour et al., 2010; Jafari & Scott, 2014). Moreover, the awareness among Muslim increased to select Halal options for their needs from the common of options currently offered (Battour & Ismail, 2014; Muhammad, 1989, p. 24). Therefore, some non-Muslim destinations such as Japan, Philippines, and Brazil offered Muslim friendly solutions/options to scenario seen as problematic by Muslim travellers. For example, Chambers of Commerce in Japan and the Philippine Travel Agencies Association (The National, 2014; TTG Asia, 2014) organized seminars to train the tourism industry to satisfy Muslim tourist needs. Moreover, prayer rooms are allocated at major airports and restaurants offer Halal Food in Japan. Muslim friendly
guide is also published to provide information on Halal Food and prayer places (The National, 2014).

Recently, some practises related to Halal tourism have been observed. These practises which are applied in some destinations could be used as a benchmark for other destinations to target Muslim tourists and/or to market the destination as ‘Muslim friendly destination’. For example, the numbers of Shariah compliant hotels are growing in some Muslim and non-Muslim destinations. These destinations promote these hotels that claim to be ‘Shariah compliant’ as ‘Muslim-friendly hotels’ (Carboni et al., 2014). Muslim friendly hotels deliver Muslim guests with all services that are compliant with Islamic teachings such as Qibla Direction, Halal food, alcohol-free beverages, and prayer room with call for prayers (Battour et al., 2010; Henderson, 2010; Javed, 2007; Stephenson, 2014).

Aerostar Hotel in Moscow is Muslim friendly as one of the hotel’s kitchens is certified Halal (Sboros, 2014). The hotel provides a copy of the Quran, a prayer mat and the Qibla direction in 20 of their rooms. The shampoo and soap provided in the rooms are certified Halal. Two prayer rooms are available; one for men and one for women. Fairmont Makati and Raffles Makati hotels in Philippines becomes Muslim friendly by providing Quran copies, prayer room, and Arabic-language TV channels (TG Asia, 2014). From the previous practises, it is noted that availability of Muslim friendly hotel is considered one of the most important attributes that attract Muslim travellers and encourage them to visit the destination.

The availability of Halal food and beverages is vital for destinations that target Muslim travellers. It is now common for Muslim tourists to request Halal food and beverages when they visit non-Muslim destinations (Euromonitor International, 2015, p. 17). According to Islamic law, it is not allowed for Muslim followers to eat pork or pork by products, animals that were dead prior to slaughtering, animals not slaughtered properly or not slaughtered with pronouncing the name of Allah, blood and blood by products, alcohol, carnivorous animals, birds of prey (Battour et al., 2014; Battour et al., 2010; Stephenson, 2014).

According to Euromonitor International report (2015, p. 16), the sales of Halal food is increased in Europe, particularly in consumer foodservice outlets because of inbound Muslim tourists visiting Europe. Therefore, it is expected that the investments in Halal food market will grow in non-Muslim destinations due to the growth of Halal tourism. For example, global Muslim expenditure on Food and Beverages (F&B) has increased 10.8% to reach $1,292 billion in 2013. This expenditure is expected to increase to a $2,537 billion market by 2019 and will account for 21.2% of the global expenditure. Furthermore, middle eastern full-service and fast food restaurants which serve Halal food for Muslim tourists are very prevalent in France, Germany and the UK and some of their customers may be frequently non-Muslim.

Some of chain restaurant cater for Muslim tourist needs by serving dishes prepared in kitchens certified as Halal and using Halal chicken. For example in UK, about 100 KFC outlets and a fifth of Nando’s restaurants serve Halal-certified chicken. Chicken Cottage, Dixy Fried Chicken, Pizza Express and Perfect Fried Chicken are using Halal chicken. Subway with sales of €488 million (EUR605 million) in 2014, is used Halal meat in its sandwiches sold (Euromonitor International, 2015, p. 7; Stephenson, 2014). In addition, Manhattan Fish Market which is a leading chain restaurant in Malaysia opened in 2015 its first outlet in Tokyo. The outlet is serving 100% Halal-components for its menus (Shugo, 2015). Ryokans, the traditional Japanese hostels, are also serving halal meals. The availability of Halal food in the destination allows Muslim tourists to experience famous cuisine in accordance with their beliefs and will motivate them to visit the destination.

One of the recent practises in Halal tourism industry is providing smartphone application that make the holiday enjoyable and Muslim friendly. Thailand is one of non-Muslim country that takes initiatives to launch Muslim friendly application to help further enhancement tourism industry in Thailand (Lefèvre, 2015). It helps visitors to find hotels and shopping centres with prayer rooms and restaurants that provide Halal food availability. The Tourism Authority of Thailand reported that the new application is available on Google Inc’s Android and Apple Inc’s iOS systems and available in English and Thai but will be expanded to include Arabic and Bahasa Indonesia. Stephenson (2014) also reported that some Muslim friendly interface applications for smart phone is available such as ‘HalalTrip’ and ‘Muslim Pro’. Stephenson (2014) claims that applications help Muslim tourists to find Halal-friendly hospitality products and services, such as hotels, destination guides, holiday packages, airport guides and Halal restaurants. It is expected that non-Muslim countries that target Muslim travellers will develop its own applications to make the country Muslim friendly.

Muslim friendly airport is recently one of the best practises to satisfy Muslim travellers. It was reported that the numbers of visitors from the Southeast Asian Muslim countries of Malaysia and Indonesia in recent year increased in Osaka (KDX, M. F. A., 2015). Therefore, Kansai International Airport (KDX) has taken initiative to satisfy Muslim. The airport allocates three prayer rooms for use of travellers and visitors. One room is located on the third floor on terminal one and another two rooms are located at the international departure gate. The prayer rooms are segregated by gender. A washing space is provided to perform ablution for praying. The prayer rooms are opened for 24 hours a day for Muslim travellers with rental prayer tools and display Qibla direction. Fifteen restaurants prepare Halal food promoted as ‘pork-free & alcohol-free menus’ and three restaurants are ‘Halal certified’. Moreover, Narita Airport and Haneda International Airport in Tokyo opened a prayer room in 2014 (The National, 2014).

A new travel package in the tourism industry which provided full holiday services in accordance with Islamic beliefs and practises is called ‘Halal Holiday’ (halalBooking, 2015; Khalil, 2010; themeguardian, 2010). These include Halal resorts and hotels which serve only halal foods and non-alcoholic drinks. Other services offered may include separate pools, spa and leisure facilities for men and women, an open beach which separates males from females, private women female only beach, family oriented facilities such as mixed beach areas for families with Islamic swimming dress code, and Muslim prayer facilities. Some may even offer Islamic Heritage tours for tourists to explore and discover the history and culture of the Islamic civilisation. Some of the tour providers may stress that their activities are geared towards maintaining the values and modesty of Muslims who desire to follow the Quranic encouragement to travel throughout the Earth to see God’s signs and patterns all over the world.

Crescent Tours and Islamic Travels, and halal booking started selling the concept in Turkey, the seat of the Islamic Ottoman Empire, which for six centuries was the centre of interactions between the East and West (www.crescentrating.com/). It is considered one the preferable destination that attracts Muslim tourists from around the world. In our opinion, availability of Halal friendly holiday can increase the recognition of destination to be Muslim friendly destination will attract Muslim tourists. We are of the opinion that the term ‘Muslim-friendly’ holiday is more appropriate to be used instead of ‘Halal holidays’.

Availability of Muslim swimming suit for women in destination may satisfy Muslim tourists. It is sometimes called Burqini or burkini swimsuit (Euromonitor International, 2015, p. 24). It is a type of swimsuit for women intended to comply with the Quranic admonition for Muslim women to dress modestly. The suit covers the whole body except the face, the hands and the feet, whilst being light enough to enable swimming. It looks rather like a full-length wetsuit with built-in hood, but somewhat looser and made of swimsuit material instead of neoprene (Al Arabiya News, 2014).

Burqini are expected to gain importance in beach leisure as more Muslim and non-Muslim women recognize its multiple benefits, including sun protection, flexibility and modesty. In the case of Muslim women, particularly, the Burqini has enabled Muslim women to be more involved in beach-related family activities and lifted limitations of those who felt confined in the domestic sphere (Euromonitor International, 2015, p. 28). However, some resorts in Moroccan ban in...
their pools and this could be negative efforts by destinations to become more Muslim-friendly, as several resorts in destinations such as Turkey, Egypt and the UAE are actually trying to become more Muslim friendly by creating women-only pools and welcoming the Muslim full bathing suit (Al Arabiya News, 2014).

One of the recent trends in global halal market is Muslims friendly cruise. It is the first Halal cruise which is launched by the Antalya-based Fusion Tour Company in Turkey. It sails to Greece without alcohol, pork-related products and gambling on board. It also includes segregated sports centres, single-sex spa facilities, separate Turkish baths and prayer rooms (Salama, 2015). Moreover, Star Cruise is a Malaysian cruise company offering family-friendly/Halal cruises for Muslims. Halal cruise concept may be imitated from other religious communities such as Kosherica cruise for the Jewish community (http://www.kosherica.com/).

4. Challenges and future of Halal tourism

Muslim customers are one of the fastest developing market segments and its needs cannot be ignored by destination marketers and tourism operators (Battour & Ismail, 2014; Battour et al., 2014). According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy report (Reuters, 2015), produced by Thomson Reuters in collaboration with DinarStandard, the global Muslim travel market was worth $140bn in 2013, which represents 11.5% of global expenditure. The same report predicts that the segment is expected to be worth $238bn in 2019 and represent 13% of global expenditure. The tourism industry is increasingly competitive. Therefore, innovation is one of the success factors in this huge market. In developing new ideas and innovations, technology plays an important role in Halal tourism. In this regard, one of the best practices to make destination Muslim friendly is Muslim friendly application. One of the areas that needs more innovations and is neglected to make the destination Muslim friendly is ‘Muslim-friendly airlines’.

It is expected that Halal tourism industry could be competitive in the coming next years. Destinations, hotels and resorts, airlines, and travel agencies are recommended to position itself in Halal tourism market. The initiatives that are taken to make the destination Muslim friendly by some non-Muslim countries may motivate other destinations to be Muslim friendly. It is expected that worldwide global brands in hospitality industry may address this opportunity. Furthermore, many countries and businesses in Asia Pacific region are expected to increase attention to Halal tourism and may start to take initiatives to be Muslim friendly. In Muslim minority countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and South Korea, Halal tourism is considered a good business opportunity.

Travel agencies could target Muslim travellers by customizing Halal tours to Muslim tourists; availability of halal food, an itinerary built around prayer timings, visits to mosques and Muslim tour guides. It could design programmes in Muslim minority countries to visit Islam-related historical religious and cultural sites whereby Muslims can learn about other communities and share their faith. In general, travel agencies have many Halal tourism opportunities in areas such as Halal business travel, family-friendly packages, Muslim-friendly services, luxury Muslim market segment and Muslim heritage souvenirs.

The numbers of Shariah compliant hotels and Halal resorts are still limited in non-Muslim destinations. Therefore, this is a business opportunity for further investment in tourism industry globally, especially in countries that have high inbound Muslim tourists. Education syllabus and training programmes are needed in hospitality industry to understand Halal issues and this could be an opportunity to universities and training centres to offer such programmes. Furthermore, Halal medical tourism could be a potential area that needs more attention for non-Muslim destination targeting Muslim tourists.

Undoubtedly, there are challenges in developing and marketing Muslim-friendly or Halal tourism. Potential challenge is related to terms used in Halal tourism as discussed earlier in this paper. There are many terms used such as ‘Halal travel’, ‘Halal tourism’, ‘Muslimfriendly’, and ‘Islamic travel’. Therefore, standardization system is needed in Halal tourism to certify Halal friendliness in hotels, resorts, cruise, restaurant, airport and parks.

The marketing of Halal tourism is not an easy task because of the variance between the demands of non-Muslim tourists and Muslim tourists. The non-Muslim tourist may decide not to travel to a particular destination in the absence of certain attributes (Battour et al., 2011; Battour et al., 2014). Therefore, the challenge for Muslim destinations is how to cater for the non-Muslim tourist and satisfy their needs without opening their hotel with Islamic teaching. For example, some hotels declare on their website that they are Shariah-compliant hotel and this may not be attractive to non-Muslim guests. Therefore, Halal tourism practices could be seen as constraints to tourism destination development. These constraints are critical and big challenge to tourism planning and destination marketers. However, this could be an opportunity for businesses to use their creativity and flexibility in catering to the different needs of Muslim and non-Muslim.

Halal tourism practices and activities are affected by the political environment in Middle East. The Arab Spring affects the outbound tourists from Middle East. Although the Arab Spring proved beneficial for tourism industry in UAE, Turkey, and Malaysia where there was recorded an increase in demand for hotel rooms from Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. However, the numbers of Muslim tourist could be affected in terms of inbound tourists to non-Muslim countries. Another challenge is the fall in oil prices. It could be a short run challenge but it is one of the obstacles that affect Muslim-friendly or Halal tourism market. Moreover, using social networks and proper geographical marketing programmes is one of the challenges in this market. The fast process of information dissemination of Muslim friendly destinations through social networks or geographical proximity is still very weak. The geographical marketing programmes should be designed and disseminated to places where the majority of Muslims are located, both in non-Muslim and Muslim countries. These programmes should be designed not only for strict adherents as well as general Muslim tourists as well.

5. Conclusion

One of effective means of accessing the market is to make Halal food widely available in the destination initially which is considered the high priority for Muslim tourists. Furthermore, Muslim friendly hotels should be available in the destination or at least separated sections in hotels where no alcohol beverages, no pork, Halal food are provided. Finally, Muslim friendly airport is considered a starting point that could be used in promotion tools to market the destination as Muslim friendly.

For the purpose of future research, developing construct of Muslim friendly destination is needed. Perhaps qualitative followed by quantitative research to develop Muslim friendly destination criteria is recommended. Halal tourism is a new area of research and more research of how to make non-Muslim destinations friendly for Muslim tourists are needed. The perceptions of non-Muslim towards Halal tourism could be a potential study to be conducted in Muslim and non-Muslim destinations.

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