

THE INFLUENCE OF INBOUND MUSLIM TRAVELLERS' ATTITUDE ON TRAVEL SATISFACTION TOWARDS REVISIT INTENTION TO MALAYSIA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Muslim travelers segment is gaining attention among the destination marketers as a target market. Thus, ensuring their repeat visitation is among the top priorities of the marketers. However, the factors that make them return to a particular destination are still unclear as studies on Muslim travellers segment are still limited. Nevertheless, previous studies have shown that the availability of Islamic attributes of destination as well as certain destination attributes exert significant influence on travel satisfaction and destination loyalty. Although few studies have shown that availability of Islamic attributes of destination and destination attributes lead to tourist satisfaction as well as inspire multiple return visits, more studies are needed to strengthen the finding. Therefore, this article proposed a study on the influence of Muslim travellers' attitude towards Islamic attribute of destination and attitude towards destination attributes on their travel satisfaction and repeat visit to Malaysia. The discussion started with the overview of inbound Muslim travellers followed by the importance of revisit to the tourism industry with highlight given to the Islamic attributes of destination, destination attributes and travel satisfaction as the main antecedents of the Muslim travellers' revisit intention. The future finding of the proposed study will provide valuable information for Malaysian tourism marketing and planning organisations. Thus, effective marketing strategies can be developed to encourage repeat visit from Muslim travellers segment.

Keywords: Inbound Muslim Travellers, Revisit intention, Travel Satisfaction, Attitude, Islamic Attributes of Destination, Destination Attributes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Muslim travellers market is fast becoming high market potential in global tourism business. This is due to the emerging economy as shown by the increasing percentage for the expenditure growth rate year by year (Wilson et al., 2013) which is expected to be on average of 4.79% per year for 2012 until 2020 (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2015). The expenditure growth rate is higher than the expected average global growth rate of 3.8% during the same period (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2015). The comparison between the Muslim travellers segment and the global expenditure growth rate shows a very high potential of Muslim travellers segment's contribution to the global tourism industry.

Meanwhile, the total Muslim travellers expenditure is estimated to be USD192 billion representing 13.36% of world tourism expenditure by 2020 (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2015). This great potential segment is targeted by marketers as it is associated with high purchasing power (Abdul Rahman, 2013; Battour et al., 2012; Bhuiyan et al., 2011; Samori & Rahman, 2013). For example, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq are known as high earning gas and oil exporters (high income). Tourists from these countries are looking for luxury tourism as they are rich and young with high expectations in terms of quality and services offered (Gayatri & Chew, 2013; Kovjanic, 2014). Furthermore, with high spending power, there is a tendency that they will stay longer and travel in large family groups (Shumin, Abdullah, & Alam, 2009). As this segment has potential in terms of spending power, this valuable market needs to be captured to increase particular tourism destination revenue. Thus, studies focusing on this segment will significantly assist tourism destination players to develop effective marketing strategies in tailoring suitable tourism product for this segment.

In Malaysia context, the number of Muslim travellers arrival was about 5.2 million and it contributes approximately 20% of the total tourist arrival in 2016 (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2017). Besides, Malaysia has been the leading tourism destination for Muslim travellers since 2011 until 2016 (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2015). However, there is fierce competition among regional destinations in Southeast Asia for attracting Muslim travellers. For example, the challenges begin when Middle East travellers have considered Indonesia as substitute destination for Malaysia (Norlida Hanim, Redzuan, Abu Hassan Shaari, & Mohd Safar, 2010). On the other hand, non-Muslim countries like Japan, Taiwan and China are moving towards establishing Muslim friendly environment. Recently, Japan is developing its halal industry as preparation to anticipate Muslim tourists during upcoming Olympic Games in 2020 (Kim et al., 2014).

Given the importance of Inbound Muslim Travellers (IMT) segment to Malaysian tourism industry and the challenge to retain Malaysia as their destination choice, it is crucial to understand their travel behaviour. Meanwhile, Muslim travellers' revisit will significantly be foreseen as one of the contributors to the potential growth of Malaysian tourism industry (Ahmad Puad, Seyedeh, Azizan, & Jamil, 2011), it is crucial to investigate the antecedents of Muslim travellers' satisfaction and revisit intention. However, there is a lack of consensus about the antecedents of IMTs' satisfaction and repeat visitation in Malaysia (Battour, Battor, & Bhatti, 2013; Bhuiyan, Siwar, Ismail, & Islam, 2011; Rahman, 2014). On the other hand, studies on antecedents contributing to the inbound Muslim travellers' satisfaction and revisit intention are limited. Although Muslim travellers attitude towards Islamic attributes of destination and destination attributes have significant influence on satisfaction and destination loyalty, not many studies can be found (Battour et al., 2011; Battour et al., 2012, Battour et al., 2013; Rahman, 2014). Furthermore, the search for literature on Muslim travellers found limited empirical studies on satisfaction and revisit intention in tourism destination. The literatures leave many unanswered questions pertaining to Muslim travel behaviour and the actual picture of inbound Muslim travellers repeat visitation to Malaysia remains unclear.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Inbound Muslim Travellers (IMT) in Malaysia*

Generally, one of the main purposes of inbound Muslim travellers (IMT) visiting Malaysia is for leisure. They look for knowledge and education, family togetherness, achievement, excitement and escape from their routine (Battour et al., 2012). The estimated number of IMTs arrival is increasing as shown in Table 2.2. Normally, the high demand from this segment is in the months of July to September (Norlida Hanim et al., 2010). Ali and Mohd Safar (2012) stated that the increasing number of IMT arrival is the impact from the promotion of Islamic tourism concept that is being highlighted in the Muslim tour packages specifically in term of halal activities, food and beverage, and hotel services. For example, the introduction of Islamic tourism concept in Malaysia has gained attention from Muslim travellers who are looking for halal food during their trip (Maisarah, Suhaila, & Nurul Azida, 2013).

Furthermore, some activities in eco-tourism, agro-tourism, cultural heritage and health activities are tailored accordingly to fulfil Muslim requirements (Nor'ain, Rozian, & Shaya'a, 2013). Besides the Islamic concept, the destination attributes such as natural scenery, wide space & activities, cleanliness & shopping, modern atmosphere, and different culture also play important role (Battour et al., 2012). The promotions were focused on Muslim travellers who seek pleasure of urban and ecological tourism (Battour et al., 2012). Hence, Malaysia has been highlighted as an ideal destination for leisure and at the same time emphasizes on Islamic customs and traditions.

Malaysia also has been recognised as number one destination for Muslim travellers by the Global Muslim Travel Index 2015 (GMTI) and the second best global shopping destination for Muslim travellers after Dubai and UAE (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2015). This recognition has been given due to the availability of Islamic attributes in hospitality and destination attributes of tourism products. For instance, Malaysia international hotels serve halal food according to the Sharia, provide prayer mats and prayer times and placed markers for direction of Mecca in hotel rooms (Khalek, Hayaati, & Ismail, 2015). Besides, Malaysia also has over 6,000 mosques all over the

country, with 821 numbers of total flights from West Asia and OIC countries and offer 5,896 food premises with halal certified kitchen by Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2015).

The above discussion indicates that Islamic attributes of destination and destination attributes play important roles as main attractions for IMTs to choose Malaysia as their travel destination. Thus, it is vital to understand the influence of both Islamic and destination attributes on IMTs satisfaction and revisit to Malaysia.

2.2 Revisit Intention

Recently, many tourism destinations tend to encourage repeat visitation as it is seen to benefit the countries from the perspective of economic. Oppermann (1998) highlighted the benefits of repeat visitation in the context of four marketing advantages: (a) less marketing costs to attract repeat tourists as compared to the first timers, (b) number of revisit is an indicator of tourist satisfaction, (c) the repeaters' assumption of a particular destination as the most favourable and (d) these groups have the tendency to suggest the destination to others. On the costs effective side, many tourism destination show the inclination to rely on repeaters as they spend less to encourage repeat visitation compared to the first timers (Um, Chon, & Ro, 2006).

Scholars have acknowledged that revisit will ensure continuous growth of tourism industry and should be given focus in tourism literature (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chen, Lee, Chen, & Huang, 2011; Kim, 2010; Leong, 2015; Moliner, Sánchez, Rodríguez, & Callarisa, 2007; Rizan, 2010). For example, few studies have concluded that revisit is an antecedent of destination loyalty (Alegre & Cladera, 2013; Kim, 2010; Mohamad, Abdullah, Ali, & Yacob, 2013; Rahman, 2014). In addition, maintaining loyal customers is an essential contributor to the business success (Gursoy, Chen, & Chi, 2014). Likewise, Malaysia tourism industry also benefits the economy growth as repeat visitors contribute to increase in revenue continuously (Ali & Mohd Safar, 2012).

We can gather from the above discussion the importance of revisit to both global and Malaysia tourism industry. More tourist revisit studies need to be carried out due to the ever-changing lifestyle and tourist behaviour (Flambard-Ruaud, 2005). Tourism players and researchers have to come out with related information in developing strategies to retain their client. Further, not much research has been done to discover the significant antecedent for Muslim travellers revisit to particular tourism destination. Thus, more related studies on revisit that focus on Muslim travellers will benefit the tourism destination as well as the literature of this field.

Previously, scholars have been focusing their theoretical and empirical studies on revisit intention concept as the main factor highly associated with actual revisit behaviour. The number of studies on tourists' revisit intention shows the growing attention from many researchers to predict and clarify tourists' revisit behavior (Campo-Martinez, Garau-vadell, & Martí, 2010; Chang, 2013; Chen & Chen, 2010; Chen & Gursoy, 2012; Darnell & Johnson, 2001; Hong et al., 2009; Huang, 2006; Huang, 2009; Jang & Feng, 2007; Kim, 2010; Kozak, 2001; Lee, 2009; Mohammad, 2014; Um et al., 2006; Yuksel, 2015). An overview of these studies demonstrates that the tourist revisit intention is considered a valuable concept in predicting future revisit behaviour. Thus, the finding of the proposed study would provide better understanding of IMTs' revisit intention. Perhaps, this study area should be one of the main concerns for tourism marketers as to predict IMTs' behaviour of revisit to Malaysia in future.

2.3 Attitude towards Islamic Attributes of Destination (AIA)

The AIA is the first variable that will be examined to reveal IMTs' revisit intention to Malaysia. The Islamic attributes of destination demonstrate the application of Islamic values in tourism destination as they are based on Sharia. These attributes are found to have significant influence on Muslim travel behaviour (Battour et al., 2010). The attributes represent the values of Sharia compliance that are related to tourism activities and practice at the destination (Battour et al., 2013) and influence Muslim travellers when choosing tourism destination (Battour et al., 2011). Given the importance of Islamic values among Muslim travellers, the Islamic attributes of destination have been empirically examined in a few studies (Battour et al., 2013, 2011; Farahdel, 2011; Rahman, 2014).

Farahdel (2011) has investigated the Islamic attributes of destination as a moderator between motivational factors (push and pull) and tourist satisfaction in Iran. The result shows that Islamic attributes have a positive relationship but weak impact as a moderator. On the other hand, Rahman (2014) found that Islamic attributes have significant

relationship with Islamic tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty as compared to other destination attributes. Even though both researchers have contributed to different area of studies, more studies are needed to discover the importance of Islamic attributes on Muslim travel behaviour (Battour et al., 2013, Battour et al., 2011; Farahdel, 2011; Rahman, 2014). Meanwhile, Battour et al. (2010) have investigated the standard of Islamic-oriented values in tourism. Their discussion highlighted the Islamic values associated with tourism which are alcohol and gambling-free zones; the availability of halal food; gender segregation; dress code; worship facilities; entertainment; and prohibition of women travelling alone.

Accordingly, Battour et al. (2011) through a qualitative study revealed that Islamic attributes are essential for Muslim travellers' preference in choosing a particular tourism destination. The preferred Islamic attributes are worship facilities, halal food, Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress code and general Islamic morality. The Islamic attributes then are termed as Islamic attributes of destination. As an effort to support the significance of Islamic attributes of destination with Muslim travellers, the Islamic attributes of destination measurement scale was developed and empirically tested (Battour et al., 2013). The main aim of their study was to examine the influence of Islamic attributes of destination on overall tourist satisfaction. The results revealed that the measurement is reliable and valid (Battour et al., 2013, Battour et al., 2011). Furthermore, the results also have shown that there are positive relationships between Islamic attributes of destination (worship facilities, halalness, alcohol and gambling free zone and general Islamic morality) and overall tourist satisfaction.

However studies regarding revisit among Muslim Travellers are still limited. There are only few studies related to Muslim travellers revisit intention as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Related Studies of Muslim Travellers Revisit Intention

Author	Revisit study area	Description
Rahman (2014)	Motivating factors of Islamic Tourist's Destination Loyalty: An Empirical Investigation in Malaysia.	i) Identified the motivational factors that influence Islamic tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention. ii) Recommended and formulated strategies to develop the Islamic tourism industry in Malaysia.
Eid (2013)	Integrating Muslim Customer Perceived Value, Satisfaction, Loyalty and Retention in the Tourism Industry: An empirical study	i) The effect of the Muslim Customer Perceive Value (MCPV) on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. ii) The effect of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty on customer retention.
Khan, Haque, & Rahman (2013)	What Makes Tourists Satisfied? An Empirical Study on Malaysian Islamic Tourist Destination	Identify influential factors that lead to tourist satisfaction (TS) in destination that is Islamic tourist destinations in Malaysia.
Battour, Battor, & Bhatti (2013)	Islamic Attributes of Destination: Construct Development and Measurement Validation, and Their Impact on Tourist Satisfaction	Developed a measurement scale for Islamic attributes of destination (IAD) and investigated the influence of Islamic attributes on overall tourist satisfaction (OTS). The IAD: 1) Worship facilities 2) Halalness 3) Alcohol and gambling free 4) Islamic morality
Battour et al. (2012)	The Mediating Role of Tourist Satisfaction: A Study of Muslim travellers in Malaysia.	Empirically tested the mediating effect of overall tourist satisfaction (OTS) between travel motivations (push and pull) and destination loyalty (intention to revisit and intention to recommend to others)

Battour, Ismail, & Battor (2011)	The Impact of Destination Attributes on Muslim Travellers' Choice.	Identified the main Islamic attributes of destinations that could be used as a base for tailoring Halal tourist packages as follows: 1) Worship facilities 2) Halalness 3) Alcohol and gambling free 4) Islamic morality
Kim, Im, & King (2014)	The destination preferences (Korea, China and Japan) and brand perceptions (brand image, awareness, association and loyalty) of Muslim travellers from Malaysian.	Conducted a study on Malaysian Muslim travellers' destination preferences with Islamic image as brand perception.

The above summaries show that tourist satisfaction and Islamic attributes of destination (IAD) are the two main variables being focused by the authors for Muslim travellers behavioral studies. Emphasising the importance of IAD, Battour, Ismail and Battor (2011) found that the worship facilities, halalness, alcohol and gambling free, and Islamic morality are the main IAD that could be used for tailoring Halal tourist packages. Meanwhile, Battour et al. (2013), Battour et al. (2012), Eid (2013) and Rahman (2014) attempted empirical testing on the relationship between IAD and Muslim travellers satisfaction. For example, Battour et al. (2013) and Eid (2013) have found that there is a positive relationship between Islamic attributes of destination and tourist satisfaction.

In addition, a study by Khan et al. (2013) has found that destination image, religious motivation and service quality have positive relationships with tourist satisfaction on Islamic tourist destination in Malaysia. Meanwhile, Kim et al. (2014) associated the Malaysian Muslim travellers destination preferences with brand perception namely Islamic image such as halalness. However, studies related to Muslim travellers are still limited and aimed only to a few attributes in IAD. As to gain better understanding on the relationship between Muslim travellers and Islamic attributes of destination, a study on IMTs' attitude towards Islamic attributes on their satisfaction and revisit intention is sufficient for further research. Thus, the following proposition needs to be substantiated:

Proposition 1: There is a significant influence between attitude towards Islamic attributes of destination and revisit intention.

2.4 Attitude towards Destination Attributes

The Attitude towards destination attributes (ADA) is the second variable that will be examined to reveal IMTs' revisit intention to Malaysia. Destination attributes are vital to the formation of positive image that may influence tourist to revisit a particular destination (Rahman, 2014) and the positive destination image contributes to the destination's competitive advantages over competitors (Li, Cai, Lehto, & Huang, 2010). Destination attributes have been proven to affect tourist decision to revisit certain destination (Bouzari, 2012; Kim & Lee, 2015; Wong, King, & Wan, 2015). Meanwhile, destination attributes also have gained attention from several researchers to study their relationship with revisit in Malaysian context (Ahmad Puad et al., 2011; Battour et al., 2012; Fatemeh, Shirazi, Puad, Som, & Marzuki, 2012; Karim & Chua, 2009; Ling, Muhd Shahrin, & Mohhidin, 2010; Mahadzirah, Ahmad Rusdi, Abdul Manan, & Nur Izzati, 2012; Munir, Khatijah, & Azizul Yadi, 2013; Puad, Som, Marzuki, Yousefi, & Abukhalifeh, 2012; Sara, Shamsul, Ling, & Hooi, 2012).

For example, Battour et al. (2012) have succeeded in revealing the significance of destination attributes (natural scenery, wide space & activities, cleanliness & shopping, modern atmosphere, and different culture) with Muslim travellers repeat visitation. Although this study indicates that there is a significant relationship between destination attributes and revisit, the evidence is not enough to relate the specific destination attributes with IMTs' repeat visit. More studies are needed to investigate the destination attributes that may lead IMT to repeat visitation particularly in Malaysia as there are many attractive destination attributes. Thus, this study will investigate the

influence of IMTs' attitude towards destination attributes on revisit intention in Malaysia. Based on discussion, this study proposed the following hypothesis:

Proposition 2: There is a significant influence between attitude towards destination attributes and revisit intention.

2.5 Tourist Satisfaction

Satisfaction is an important concept in tourist behaviour literature. Tourist satisfaction is a post consumption process (Yuksel, 2000) and sometimes possessed during or known as on-site experience (Bosque & Martin, 2008). The assessment takes place after the individual has completed or gained certain part of their holiday experiences (Bosque & Martin, 2008; Yuksel, 2000). The related information of tourist satisfaction is vital for destination managers to improve their service (Neal, Sirgy, & Uysal, 1999) and an effective way to compare one destination performance with others (Kozak, 2001). As such, satisfaction or dissatisfaction is a useful tool to measure destination performance (Arasl & Baradarani, 2014) and as a main source of competitive advantage (Alegre & Cladera, 2013).

For instance, the satisfied tourists tend to revisit and recommend a particular destination to others, or express positive comments about the destination. In contrast, dissatisfied tourists may not return and make recommendation to other tourists. Besides, negative comment from dissatisfied tourists may also ruin particular tourism destination (Chen & Chen, 2010). In Muslim travellers context, Battour et al. (2013), Eid (2013), Khan et al. (2013) and Kim et al. (2014) have found that there is a positive relationship between Islamic attributes of destination and tourist satisfaction. Given the relative importance of satisfaction with Muslim travellers' repeat visit, tourist satisfaction will be tested as an antecedent as well as mediating variable to predict revisits intention among IMT in Malaysia. Thus, the following hypotheses were developed:

Proposition 3: There is a significant influence between satisfaction and revisit intention.

Proposition 4: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between attitude towards Islamic attributes of destination and revisit intention.

Proposition 5: Satisfaction mediates the relationship between attitude towards destination attributes and revisit intention.

2.6 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on previous literatures in which variables of attitude towards Islamic attributes of destination and attitude towards destination attributes, satisfaction and revisit intention are assumed to be interrelated, these variables should be examined holistically. Thus, the conceptual framework of this study is an integrative summary on the antecedents of inbound Muslim travellers' intention to revisit Malaysia. At the same time, tourist satisfaction is formulated as the mediator. This study intends to find out whether those mentioned antecedents are able to predict IMTs' revisit intention as well as tourist satisfaction roles as mediator on the relationship between the antecedents (AIA and ADA) and revisit intention. Thus, Figure 3.1 presents the conceptual framework for further research.

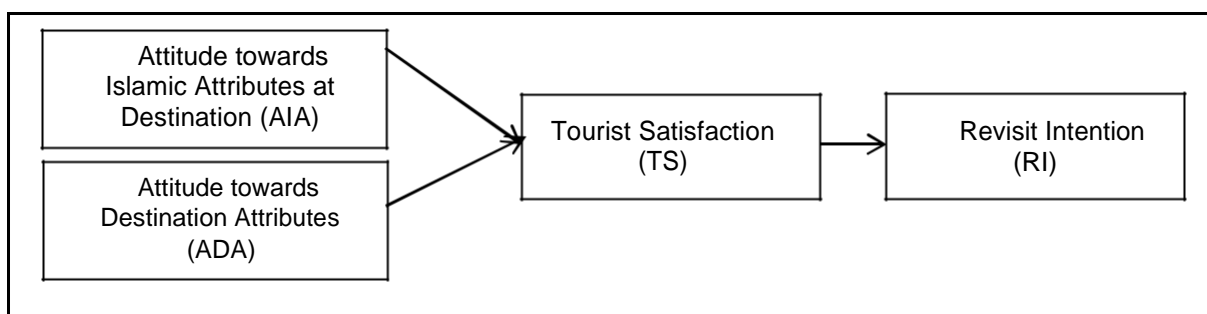


Figure 3.1: The proposed Conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study will apply quantitative approach and will be conducted by self-administered survey. The respondent will be selected equally from six groups of South East Asia, East Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Europe and others as determined by Islamic Tourism Centre, Malaysia. The main reason to use equal sample size for each group is to have better understanding of their behaviour. Respondents will be selected among inbound Muslim travellers at departure hall of international airport at Kuala Lumpur, Langkawi and Penang. These destinations are among the famous attractions for Muslim travellers in Malaysia (Noor Hazarina, Jamie, & Nazlida, 2007). This study will apply probability sampling technique as the selected samples representing the whole population of IMT. Prior to proceeding with delivering the questionnaire, tourists will be asked few screening questions. Only international Muslim tourists who come to Malaysia with leisure purpose will be engaged to complete the questionnaires. The data will be analysed using Structural Equation Model (SEM). The data will analyse using SEM and Structural Equation Modeling- Partial Least Square (SEM-PLS).

4. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it is noted that there are scarce empirical studies to examine the travel behaviour for Muslim travellers especially in their revisit intention to any tourism destination. Moreover, it is important to recognise that very few researchers investigated the antecedents of Muslim travellers revisit intention from different nationalities. The purpose of this study is to fill the gap in Islamic attributes of destination and destination attributes as well as satisfaction in revisit destination literature. Therefore, this paper proposed to study the IMTs' attitude towards Islamic attributes of destination, attitude towards destination attributes available in Malaysia and satisfaction as the main antecedents to be tested on revisit intention. The focus of Muslim travellers in this proposed study is those who travel for leisure. The finding of this study hopefully will give better understanding on IMTs' revisit behaviour. Further, the result may assist destination tourism managers to improve their marketing efforts and to maximise their use of resources in ensuring tourists retention.

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