

AN ASSESSMENT OF NON-MUSLIM TOURIST  
EXPERIENCE AT TOURISM MOSQUES IN KLANG  
VALLEY

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Malaysia is an Islamic country that possess beautiful Islamic Architectural charms scattered in every region, and mosque is one of the main attractions. Mosques in Malaysia is not merely a house of worship and an Islamic institution to the Muslim community, yet it is a place to visit among non-Muslim tourists locally and internationally. This is in line with the rapid development and increasing demand for Islamic and Religious Tourism. Most importantly, mosque is an edifice that exhibit and depict the whole picture of Islam, its practice and the diverse cultures of the country. Thus, it is crucial to ensure that Tourism Mosques in Malaysia serve the best facilitation and quality service to tourists, more specifically the non-Muslims. In relation to this, the research aimed at assessing Tourism Mosques' performance in the perspective and experience of non-Muslim tourists. In conducting the research, a sequential mix-methodology approach was applied. At the first stage, it begun with quantitative approach which sought to evaluate tourists' satisfaction towards destination determinant attributes through questionnaire survey that were answered by 900 non-Muslim tourists at 6 Tourism Mosques. This is followed by the second stage of qualitative approach that employed hermeneutical phenomenology interview to explore and analyse non-Muslim tourists' experiences. Statistical data gained from the questionnaire survey were analysed using SPSS Software for descriptive and inferential analyses. Meanwhile, data from semi-structured interview for phenomenology were analysed using thematic coding technique in determining new additional destination determinant attributes. Essentially, combination of data from both the research approaches attempted to develop model of determinant attributes that influence tourist experience at Tourism Mosques. The result obtained from the study had informed that the 6 Tourism Mosques is satisfying to tourists and the satisfaction model and checklist developed through the both stages of assessment is reliable and practical. As an impact, the research is expected beneficial for Tourism Mosque organisers in Malaysia to evaluate and continuously monitor their program performances through the recommended tourist satisfaction checklist. Furthermore, the result, data and recommendation could also be a reference for Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) Malaysia, Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MoTaC) and other tourism players to monitor and plan the better destination development strategies that are relevant to elevate Tourism Mosque's potential.

## خلاصة البحث

ماليزيا دولة مسلمة تمتلك سحرًا معماريًا إسلاميًا منتشرًا فيها، والمساجد من عوامل الجذب، الرئيسة للسياحة؛ إذ ليست مجرد بيوت للعبادة أو مؤسسات إسلامية للمجتمع المسلم فقط، وإنما يزورها السياح غير المسلمين من ماليزيا وجميع أنحاء العالم، وهذا يتمشى مع التطور السريع للسياحة الإسلامية والدينية، والطلب المتنامي عليها، والأهم من ذلك أن المسجد صرحٌ يعرض الصورة الكاملة للإسلام وممارسة الثقافات المتنوعة في البلاد، وفي هذا تأكيد أهمية أن تقدّم المساجد في ماليزيا أفضل خدمات الضيافة للسياح، ولا سيما غير المسلمين، وعليه يهدف هذا البحث إلى تطوير قائمة مرجعية لرضا السياح عن السياحة في المساجد الماليزية، وتقييم تجربة السياح غير المسلمين في ستة مساجد في كوالالمبور وبوتراجايا وسلانجور، وقد اعتمد البحث نهجًا مختلطًا يجمع بين المنهجين الكمي والكيفي، ففي المرحلة الأولى سعى البحث إلى تقييم رضا السياح تجاه سبع سمات مقصودة في المساجد المختارة، وذلك من خلال استبانة أجاب عليه ٩٠٠ سائح غير مسلم محلي ودولي، والمرحلة الثانية كانت من خلال المقابلة شبه المنظمة، وذلك لاستكشاف التجربة السياحية في المساجد المختارة، وتحليلها، ثم كان تحليل البيانات الإحصائية أما البيانات المجموعة من SPSS باستخدام برنامج الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية المقابلات فكان تحليلها وفق أسلوب الترميز الموضوعي، ومن ثم كان تحديد سمات إضافية جديدة للوجهة التي تؤثر على التجربة السياحية في المساجد المختارة، ومن المتوقع أن يكون البحث مفيدًا لمنظمي السياحة الدينية في المساجد الماليزية، وذلك لتقييم أداء برامجهم ومراقبته من خلال قائمة مرجعية رضا السياح الموصى بها، ويمكن للبيانات والنتائج والتوصيات أن تكون MoTaC في ماليزيا، ووزارة السياحة والثقافة الماليزية ITC مرجعًا لمركز السياحة الإسلامية والجهات النشطة في مجال السياحة، وذلك لمراقبة إستراتيجيات تطوير الوجهة الأفضل ذات الصلة.. وتخطيطها؛ ارتقاءً بإمكانيات المساجد التي تمثل صورة للجمال العالمي

## **APPROVAL PAGE**

The thesis of Maimunah Binti Abdul Aziz has been approved by the following:

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Maimunah Binti Abdul Aziz

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DMO</b>	Destination Management Organization (Related parties or Organizations that are responsible to the development and promotion of a tourism destination)
<b>JAKIM</b>	<i>Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia</i> (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia)
<b>MoTaC</b>	Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia
<b>IRC</b>	Islamic Religious Council
<b>IRD</b>	Islamic Religious Department
<b>ITC</b>	Islamic Tourism Centre
<b>IOAC</b>	Islamic Outreach ABIM Centre (MTGP Organiser)
<b>MTGP</b>	Masjid Tour Guide Program (Organised by IOAC)
<b>MTP</b>	Masjid Tour Program (Organised by Federal Mosque)
<b>MTG</b>	Mosque Tour Guide
<b>SAS Jamek Mosque</b>	Sultan Abdul Samad Jamek Mosque, Kuala Lumpur
<b>TMZA Mosque</b>	Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque
<b>SSAAS Mosque</b>	Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque, Shah Alam, Selangor.
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedures
<b>UNWTO</b>	United Nations World Tourism Organization

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the study and offers description of the overall research processes. Briefly, the research discusses the phenomenon, issues and solution in the milieu of tourism, mosque as a destination, and tourist (non-Muslim) experience.

O mankind, we created you from a single pair of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes (races), so that you may know each other (Al Quran, 49:13)

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good instruction, and argue with them in a way that is best (Al Quran, 16:126)

The mosques of Allah are only to be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day (Al Quran, 9:18)

It is mostly encouraged in Islam for the Muslim to maintain and '*imaarah*' (enliven) the mosque more than a place of worship. Mosque in this research context is regarded as a tourist destination. Thus, the study intended to assess and explore non-Muslim tourists' experience at six (6) Tourism Mosques in Malaysia; in which both the dimensions, mainly from non-Muslim tourists, also from scholars were taken into account for the better development through suggestion of tourist satisfaction checklist and model. This particular chapter also highlighted issues, problem and motivation to conduct the research, followed by research aim, objectives and scopes.

### 1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Travelling and wandering are integral part of human life, so do the religion (Tarek Hussain, 2015; Suhair Anwer, 2018). Since the dawn of humanity, religious and tourism has strong linkage as human travels for the different purposes in the realms of spiritual and religious motives (Egresi, 2012; Ali Heidari, Hamid Reza and Fatemeh Saghafi, 2018). Nowadays, visiting religious and sacred places are on the up (Duff, 2009), as

tourists regardless believer and non-believer travel to churches, temples, mosques and other houses of worship. Yet, their intention and the value of experience remain as big questions. In Islam, initially, mosque is a house of worship, it is not a destination for tourists. Nevertheless, the roles of the edifice have gradually evolved over the times in line with travelling trends and tourism segment fragmentation.

Malaysia is an Islamic country, also a member of Organization of Islamic Country (OIC), promoted as a well-established destination for Islamic and Halal Tourism (Moghavvemi et al, 2019). One of the products being rigorously promoted and developed is Tourism Mosque. Mosques in Malaysia are vital for the Muslim community to congregate, serves as a multi-functional building for various purposes and functions. Some mosques are also places of interest among non-Muslim tourists, locally and internationally (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016). Commonly, many tourists especially non-Muslims are attracted to visit mosques because of its stunning architecture that serves breath-taking sights for viewing and photography (Ahmed, 2016) besides the unique cultural diversity (Mansor et.al, 2015; Hossam Mahdy, 2019).

On the other hand, tourism is a global phenomenon. Nowadays, many countries perceive Tourism as one of pivotal sources of economic (Mansor et.al, 2015) that is empowered by its great potential in terms of social, economic and environmental benefits. Hence, tourism system and the industry keep emerging and developing, supported by the emergence of sub-segments of tourism activities. Knowing its great benefit and potential, an international congress related to tourism and pilgrimage was held in 2017 by United Nation World Tourism Organization purposely to promote potential religious tourism all over the world (UNWTO, 2017).

In Malaysia, mosques are built in every district and state (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016) and ranging from the different styles of architecture, history and inhabitant community. Ministry of Tourism Malaysia (MoTAC) has deployed its dedicated research institute namely Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) to empower and strategize the influence of Islamic Tourism worldwide. Tourism Mosque is known as an Islamic Tourism product locally, and Religious and Sacred Tourism spot internationally. Mosques is the focal of Islamic and Religious Tourism, an attraction visited by Muslim and non-Muslim alike (Wiltshier, 2019). Besides mosque, there are

few other tourism spots being developed such as museum, 'madrasah' or '*sekolah pondok*', creative art and community-based tourism that embrace the character of Islamic Tourism.

Tourism Mosque is not a new phenomenon among tourists in Malaysia as well as in the other Islamic countries like, Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, Paris, Japan and Indonesia (Syed Ali Raizuddin, personal communication September 30, 2019). In Malaysia, it has already begun as early 2002 in Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Pulau Pinang. The predecessors are The National Mosque, Kapitan Kling Mosque and Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque (Normah Sulaiman, personal communication December 12, 2019; Kamaruddin Abdullah, 2019, personal communication December 12, 2019). Both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists are allowed to enter the mosques with few rules and regulations. Yet, the phenomenon is uncertain and informal (Normah Sulaiman, personal communication December 12, 2019).

Through years, the phenomenon got an attention from JAKIM, Mosque Management Authorities (at mosque), State Religious Councils, and NGO like Islamic Outreach ABIM, Islamic Propagation Society International (IPSI) in Penang, Ukhwah Amara in Sabah as they realized the value of Tourism Mosques in the industry as well as to the religion and country. Consequently, many mosques in Malaysia began to be offered to local and international tourists as a place for visit. More activities and facilities are offered make it more friendly and efficient to tourist. Policies and guideline were also delineated to manage the program more efficiently. As time passes, the local authority and community had started to accept and celebrate the attendance of tourists at mosques.

Tourism Mosques in Malaysia promotes the history of the place, architecture, religion and the life of community inhabitants. Until today, there are 184 mosques in Malaysia are promoted as Tourism Mosques (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016). Tourism mosque is now a popular destination among tourists locally and internationally. Among the popular mosques in Kuala Lumpur and in adjacent to it are The National Mosque, Sultan Abdul Samad (SAS) Jamek Mosque, Federal Mosque, Putra Mosque, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin (TMZA) Mosque and Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah (SSAAS) Mosque in Shah Alam. These are among the principle mosques in Malaysia

that are actively conducting mosque tour programs with tourists (Muslim and non-Muslim) and equipped with Tourism Mosque facilitations, since early 2008.

As mentioned earlier, the main subject matter of the research is within the milieu of tourism, mosque and tourist experience. After more than 20 years Tourism Mosque being operated at mosques in Malaysia, tourists experience is an unrevealed story in any research. Statistics provided by Tourism Mosques' Coordinators shows the increasing number of tourist receipts at mosques, yet the program had never been assessed. Scholars have mentioned, the success of a tourism destination relies on few influencing factors like the infrastructure, facilities and amenities, attitude, environmental settings and some other relevant dimensions and determinant attributes.

### **1.3 RESEARCH ISSUES AND PROBLEM**

Tourism Mosques in Malaysia have many activities to offer from sightseeing, photography, reading, learning, discussion with tourist and mosque touring with trained Mosque Tour Guide (Hafez Ibrahim, personal communication September 16, 2019). In the tourism context, mosques indirectly act as the 'ambassador' to tell the world, especially to the non-Muslim about Islam, Muslim, the architecture, culture, politic, places and history (Raja Aman Shah, personal communication, March 16, 2019). Thus, tourism at mosque depicts the whole story about Malaysia, Islam and the people indirectly through the tour or visit.

Nowadays, the role of mosque in disseminating true information and positive picture of Islam is crucial. Becoming a tourist destination, non-Muslim tourist experience at mosque has not yet been explored. Research related to Religious and Sacred Tourism are innumerable as well as research about tourist experience and satisfaction. Albayrak et. al (2017) asserted, despite the various researches being conducted related to tourist experience, study about tourist experience at Religious Sites is still sparse. There are few studies were conducted in the Field of Tourism to investigate the motivation of tourist to visit mosque in the other countries, yet none of the research had discovered about the motivation of visiting mosque particularly in Malaysia and the processes carried out at the Tourism Mosques. Huang and Pearce