AENSI Journals
Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences
ISSN:1991-8178
Journal home page: www.ajbasweb.com

Special Needs of Muslim Family Tourists Across The Family Life Cycle: Stakeholders' Perspectives

[1]FatinNorain Osman, [2]SitiRahayu Hussin, [3]Raja Nerina Raja Yusof, [2]Haslinda Hashim, [2]Yuhanis Abd.Aziz, [2]Hossein Nezakati

[1]*Post Graduate Candidate, School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*
[2]*Faculty of Economics and Management, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*
[3]*Putra Business School, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia*

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 25 November 2014
Received in revised form
26 December 2014
Accepted 1 January 2015
Available online 10 January 2015

Keywords:
Family decision making, Muslim tourists, Tourist's behaviour, Tourism typology

ABSTRACT

The growing popularity of Islamic tourism has captured the interest of academics and practitioners all over the world.The extant literature have examined tourists' motivations and destination choice from the tourists perspectives, however, little have been examined from the perspectives of those involved in providing services to the tourists. These service providers include government agencies in-charge of tourism sector, the destination operators such as theme parks, the lodging provider such as hotels and homestays, and the travel agents who deal closely with the tourists. This research offers the model of Family Life Cycle, as a theoretical framework to examine the travelling decisions made by family tourists at different stages in the family life cycle. The novelty of this paper is in defining the Muslim tourists. Here, Muslim tourists refer to tourists whose religion is Islam. i.e. tourists who are Muslims and came to Malaysia and local tourists who are Muslims who travel in Malaysia. This is in contrast to the Muslim tourists who is defined in existing literature as Muslims who go for pilgrimage and consumeIslamic-related tourism products and services. The study takes a different approach by examining the perspectives of stakeholders instead of the tourists. The research aimed to ascertain the stakeholder's perceptions about the travel decisions made by family tourists and the commonalities with these group of tourists (i.e., tourists' decisions on destination choice, facilities/services required, and shared behavior). Using qualitative method, this study investigated the specific requirements of Muslim family needs while travelling. A series of focus groups with stakeholders and service providers in the tourism sector in Malaysia was conducted in 2014. Six groups of informants were interviewed based on their participation in the Islamic tourism in Malaysia. The findings indicated three major themes which are specific to Muslim tourists i.e. cultural-influence (religion), customer characteristic (stage in family life cycle) and destination services (family-friendly facilities). Factors such as family togetherness activities, family travel packages, family-friendly environment, wellness facilities for Muslim women; Muslim-friendly environment, etc. were among the factors repeatedly highlighted by the six different groups of informants with regards to the special needs of Muslim family tourists. The study concluded that there is a need to revisitfamily tourists'behaviour as the Muslims tourists seemed to have specific requirements on their own. Specifically, the study recommended that a new tourist typology is to be developed for Muslim family tourists.

© 2015 AENSI Publisher All rights reserved.

To Cite This Article: FatinNorain Osman, SitiRahayu Hussin, Raja Nerina Raja Yusof, Haslinda Hashim, Yuhanis Abd.Aziz, Hossein Nezakati., Forecasting Network Flow in IDS. ***Aust. J. Basic & Appl. Sci.,*** *9(3): 108-112, 2015*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourists travelling abroad together as a family, with family members ranging from 3 to 7 in numbers, and 3 to 50 years of age. Past research on family vacation has focused on the decision making process and the destination choice of the family. However, just like other types of marketers, tourism marketers are confronted with the dilemma of whether the standardization or the tailoring of services, products and marketing programs for specific markets is more effective and efficient(You, Joseph, & Morrison, 2008). Tourism itself is a world-wide socio-economic phenomenon and evolved from developing sectors of world's economy in the past period to emerging sectors in the 21st century. According to World Tourism Barometer, international tourist arrivals grew by 5% in 2013 and reaching a record of 1,087 million arrivals. For 2014, 4% to 4.5% growth is forecasted above the long term projections while demand for international tourism for destinations in Asia and the Pacific are strongest in regional prospect by 5% to 6% growth where the number of international tourists

Corresponding Author: FatinNorain Osman, Post Graduate Candidate, School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Serdang, Selangor, Malaysia.

grew by 14 million to reach 248 million (UNTWO, 2014).Meanwhile, tourism industry in Malaysia is expected to contribute 12.5% to the GDP in 2014, a 12% increase from 2011 (Malaysia Travel News, 2014). There is expected arrival of family-oriented tourist to Iskandar Malaysia in the southern state of Peninsular Malaysia, as it is targeted for all age groups. The introduction of new tourism products in this state, such as Johor Premium Outlet, LEGOLAND Theme Park, Puteri Harbour Theme Park, Sanrio Hello Kitty Town and Lat's Place have resulted in an increase in tourists arrival(NSTP, 2014). At the same time, Muslim touristsare also expected to continue coming to Malaysia, with an estimated 4.3 million Muslim tourists from January to September 2013 (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014b).

The objective of this study was to examine the needs of Muslim family tourists travelling in Malaysia. Preliminary observations of the behaviour of tourists coming from Islamic countries such as the Arabs from Middle East has indicated the need for special and/or additional services and facilities to cater to specific needs of this type of tourists when travelling abroad. It is paramount for industry players to understand the needs of this market segment. In particular, the study aimed to investigate the specific needs of different types of family members while travelling and how these needs influence the behaviour of family in travelling together as tourists.

Literature Review:

Muslim Tourism Sectors:

Currently, Malaysia is a pioneer in the development of halal standards and a systematic halal assurance system which are implemented nationwide and have been used as a guideline globally (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014a). Moreover, out of the 25.03 million tourist arrivals in 2013, about 22% or more than five million were from Muslim majority countries (The Star, 2014). The result of the study by Ibrahim (2009) shows that the majority of Arab tourists visiting Malaysia are from the Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Syria, of which 56.9%f them travelled with their spouse and children compared to travelled with business associates, friends or alone. This is also based on Islamic teaching that encourages individuals especially women and children to travel with their *muhrim* which means that someone who has blood relation with them to provide them with security.

The tourism industry of a nation can be a benchmark or a vehicle whereby host countries can locate and present themselves as they would like to be seen by others (Henderson, 2010). Hence, the growingIslamic tourism sector which has yet to be fully addressed poses new challenges in the tourism industryif it is to be successful and sustainable. The report from CrescentRating.com found that Muslim tourists contributed 12.3 per cent of global travel expenditure in 2011, up from just 3.5 per cent in 1995. This means that the Muslim tourists market is the second fastest growing tourism market in the world behind Chinese tourists market(Al-Jazeera, 2012).Generally, Islam is the foundation of public and private life in Muslim nations as the followers of Islam is one of the largest and making it as one of the major religions globally. The religious obligations particularly will affect recreation and travel either directly or indirectly such as in the determining demand for travel among Muslims, the operations of the industry, tourism policy making and destination development. In addition, the impacts of Islam on tourism will affect in the ways in which it shapes individual host and guest experiences (Zamani-farahani & Henderson, 2010). As asserted by Zamani-Farahani and Musa (2012), religiosity can be measured by Muslim belief, piety and practice. In order to fulfil Muslim tourist needs, this paper argues for an emphasis in the implementation of Muslim-friendly hospitality services in tourism industry, which comprises of accessibility of information (travel directory, travel packages, tour guides), facilities and accommodation (wellness facilities for women, prayer facilities, Muslim-friendly environment), and halal foods (Halal certificates, no alcoholic beverages serves in restaurant, hotel, resorts, airlines) (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014). By understanding the Muslim family market needs specifically, tourism practitioners can support Islamic tourism industry by aligning their products, services and codes of conductwith Islamic practices.

Characteristics of Family Tourists:

A family travelling with its members can be different from a person travelling alone. In this study, family tourists refer to a family who travels and make travel decisions to accommodate the different family size, age of family members, and behaviour at different family life cycle stage. The changes of life event and circumstances that happen on individuals and families throughout the family life cycle such as marriage, childbirth, death of spouse, retirement etc. may affect their behaviour and travel motives based on their altered family structure. Thus, it is posited that the characteristics of the family may influence the destination choice, types of accommodations, service facilities required and travel activities chosen by the family tourists.Past researchers have categorized tourists by identifying their common characteristics in responding to a certain situation to gain useful knowledge to assure the objectives and goals while trying to satisfy tourists needs (Jafari 1989, 26-27; Wickens, 2002; Marwijk & Taczanowska, 2006). Conceptually, Cohen (1972, 1979) was the first researcher who subdivides tourists into a group of different categories. As asserted by Cohen's conceptual descriptions, tourists can be divided based on their degree of institutionalization and how to differentiate between the drifter,

the explorer, the individual mass tourist and the organized mass tourist whereas how tourist react during their travels is therefore determined by the orientation of spiritual or cultural attributes which can be located within or outside their normal region (Arnegger, Woltering, & Job, 2010).

In the effort to understand the family tourists characteristics and behaviour better, this paper emphasized on Family Life Cycles (FLC) stages by Lawson (1991) and Hong *et al*., (2005). It is will shed light by understandingeight dummy stages of FLC which are bachelor, young couples, full nest I, full nest II, full nest III, empty nest, elderly and solitary survivors. 1) Bachelor: young adults, young singles. 2) Young couples: newly married, no children. 3) Full nest I: young couples with children. 4) Full nest II: growing families with dependent children. 5) Full nest III: older married couple with dependent children. 6) Empty nest: older married couple with no children at home. 7) Elderly: senior citizen, company of other older people. 8) Solitary survivors: widows, widowers. The choice of trip activities for each group may vary because of the characteristics of family itself.Bachelor and young couples group may choose to join adventurous activities as they are young and eager to discover something new as well as they has less commitment compared to family with children. Growing family such as full nest II may be chose leisure activities compared to others as they are travel with their children. Their choice of activities may be based on their children decision and to suit their preferences, parents may consider visiting destination such as theme park and wildlife zoo. As empty nest and elderly group may choose to travel for heritage and nature tourism rather than leisure tourism compared to full nest. According to Jang and Wu (2006) one of senior travellers travel motives was to seek for knowledge and intellectual enrichment by visiting natural and historical sight. Whereas, travel expenditure for families with children mostly fall in leisure activities (Hong *et al*., 2005).

Family-friendly services play an important role in making family travel more fun as well as influence their decisions of travel arrangement. Family-friendly services could consists of kids clubs, crèches (day care centre, babysitting services), travelling nannies (swimming instructor, sport coaches), family travel packages (bundle or combined family services), all inclusive hotels/resorts (packages of food, dining, accommodation and activities), and five or more family hotels/ resorts (flexibility of adjoining rooms) (Bohrer, 2011).

Methodology:

This study is at its early stage in exploringMuslim tourists' special requirements and behaviour. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted to gain insights from the perceptions of various organizations involved in the tourism sector. Informants were selected from three groups of participants i.e. (i) destination providers (ii) travel agents (iii) government agency.The interviewees were selected based on their experiences (more than three years in the industry) and interactions with Muslim family tourists (inbound and local tourists in Malaysia, i.e. Malaysian tourists who are Muslims and Muslim tourists from other countries visiting Malaysia) and their participations in the Islamic tourism in Malaysia. The informantswere from these organizations:1) Accommodation A, 2) Accommodation B, 3) Accommodation C, 4) Travel A, 5) Government A, and 6) Travel B.The interviews were conducted in the months of May and June 2014.

Semi-structured questions were prepared in such a way that the interviewees were able to provide information on several important aspects of family decision such as (i) motivation to travel, (ii) choice of activities, (iii) search behaviour, (iv) food/meals requirement, (v) types of accommodation, (vi) cultural influence, etc. Each interview took between 45 minutes to an hour to be completed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results reported that the answers provided by informants were based on their actual experience regarding questions asked by the interviewer. Several themes were uncovered regarding the behavior of Muslim tourists in malaysia.

First of all, the informants perceived that family togetherness variable is one of the most important factor influencing their travel decision such as the choice destination and activities of the family while travelling in Malaysia. As mentioned byAccommodation A, "One group of family that consist of different age normally choose and join activities that suitable for all family members because they just want to be bonding with their families".

Accommodation B: "We have a wide range of different activities so that people who come here they can actually choose and make a choice. So that a lot of things for them on what they want to do. But more or less they are being together".

Accommodation C: "they choose our homestay because they want to stay together with their family like at home which hotel could not offered to them".

Secondly, it is also noted that from the perceptions of the informants that there seemed to be cultural differences in tourists'travel motivation and behaviour between tourists from different country of origins. Accommodation A: "Asian and European tourists do love and enjoy cultural activities such as traditional games

while Arabs also do activities but they prefer to do it among themselves without presence of others than their family, for them quiet surroundings and privacy is very important".

Travel A: "Arabians seem to be free independent travel. We as a travel agent only took them from the airport and they will do activities among themselves".

There is also the need to translate information into English and Arabic. As mentioned by Accommodation B: "What we have done for tourists who do not speak English or Malay, we prepare a tourist kit where we put in pictures so we deal with them through pictures when we explained to them. It is easier for them to understand through that way".

Thirdly, it is observed by the stakeholders that in general, there is a growing interest among service providers such as hotels and travel agents to provide facilities and amenities to cater specifically to Muslims who are concerned about their religious obligations. These religious obligations include the need to consume only Halal food, and to be able to perform the five daily prayers. As quoted by Government A, "Here in Malaysia, the closest one to that standard quite a few hotel that are small hotel not 4 or 5 star chain hotels such as De Palma Hotel, PNB Darby Park, Blue Wave, The Zone and Tabung Haji Hotel. PNB Darby Park management followed Islamic shariah Compliance under Sirim (QMS). The Zone is a favourite hotel among Middle East tourist because they do not serve alcohol. They are the closet hotel to Shariah compliance in term of halal, non-alcohol, and some of the hotel have swimming pool for ladies. The most "Islamic" one is PNB Darby Park Hotel because their managerial systems use Islamic banking; kitchen is halal, non-alcohol are not served, *adzan* 5 times per day, availability of Imam in their *Musolla*for conduct *jumuah* prayer. They also have a Muslim floor and if customers want to change it to families or ladies floor they can make it as an additional concept of the hotel". The other interviewee Travel B mentioned that "the Muslim families choose hotel that accommodate them with religiousness services because as a Muslim they should aim to obtain the Blessings of God".

Another informants, Travel A stated that "we prepared pamphlet consists of flight itinerary, schedule, hotel information and prayer timetable for tourists". Travel B which conduct Mosque Toursin Malaysia also mentioned that not only are the tourists interested in the architecture of the building but they also love to take part in religious activities such as practice *adzan, iftar* in Ramadhan, and read the *tafsir*while joining mosque tour.

Fourthly, the tourist's stage in family life cycles plays major role in findings tourists' specific needs while traveling. For example, specific requirements among families with teenage children include outdoor activities and access to the internet and channel TV. As mentioned by one of the informants, Accommodation B: "Most of facilities at our theme park cater for both; adult and children. If they have young kids, we have the area for them (12 years and below).We also have a baby room in the waterpark, so mother with very small babies they can actually nurse the baby there. They can take a break that the kids can relax and sleep because we have baby cots in there. We have a small little play area and of course we have area for the mother to relax and space for them to change the diapers. We also have wheelchair facilities where they can borrow if they need too upon availability. Sometimes when there is a group of disable persons, we will assign staff to help them when they move around. The park is equipped with the pathways for wheelchair too". Most of informants try to cater family-friendly services to their customers. They believe it is an important need and element in serving family tourists.

Conclusion:

This paper has highlighted some interesting aspect of family tourists as a large segment in the tourism industry. Along the growth of Islamic tourism, it is apparent from this study that stages in the family life cycle are reflected in the family's motivation to travel; type of accomodation; food/meal preferences; and Muslim-friendly services. The informants also seemed to believe that decisions on vacation activities may be influenced with the age of family members of the group, family size and culture or country of origin. Constraints imposed by children were also repeatedly discussed by all informants as they perceived the decisions on different travel activities by the Muslim family were made to accomodate different family members of different ages.

Muslim family tourists could become the next target segment which can be lucrative to tourist destinations all over the world. However there is a need to pay special attention to the needs of this group of tourists as initial observations of their travel behaviour indicates that there are several specific needs unmet by current offers in the tourism market. The paper began by reviewing Islamic tourism as one of the emerging tourism sector. Islamic tourism has attracted both Muslims and non-Muslims travellers all over the world, to countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and to South East Asia such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei. Islamic tourism products include halal-friendly holiday offering halal food, religion-friendly facilities, women-friendly services, etc.

Travelling in a family means that the travelling decisions may be influenced by the various family members, thus leading to specific travelling or purchase behaviour that may be different from individual tourists. For example, the head of the family may make decision for the whole group, thus increasing the quantity of products purchased, customizing types of product to suit different needs of different group members, especially the ones regarding toddlers, teenagers and older people. The paper used the Family Life Cycle Stage to predict tourist behaviour as being influenced by the special needs of tourists at different stages.

The themes uncovered from the interviews can be categorized into four: (1) the need for travel activities that enhance family togetherness; (2) preference for services that accommodate specific culture and religious obligations; (3) the choice of travel destination and activities for different family members at different family life cycle stages; and (4) specific service facilities for different family size and family life cycle stages.

It is believed that family tourists who are Muslims require more wholesome tourism packages that are appropriate for the stages in family life cycle. The literature review on the motivation of tourists from different cultures may challenge current tourism research, which has not focused on individualism and rationalism. These values of individualism and rationalism result in underestimation of the influence of groups, norms, culture, and emotion or impulse on tourist behavior. There have been few studies which attempted to directly identity and measure cultural characteristics of touristsacross cultures, and to explain how these cultural characteristics play a role in creating distinctive differences in tourist motivation. Thus, this study proposed future research to further explore: (1) cultural differences underlying individualism-collectivism between Muslims and Non muslim tourists; and (2) examine the relationship of family life cycle to tourist motivation.

REFERENCES

Al-Jazeera, 2012. Malaysia hotels cater to Muslim tourists. Retrieved from http://www.aljazeera.com/

Amin, H., 2002. Religious Tourism in Islamic Heritage. *Islamic Tourism*, (02).

Arnegger, J., M. Woltering, H. Job, 2010. Toward a product-based typology for nature-based tourism: a conceptual framework. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *18*(7): 915-928. doi:10.1080/09669582.2010.485680

Blichfeldt, B.S., B.M. Pedersen, A. Johansen, L. Hansen, 2011. Tweens on Holidays. In-Situ Decision-making from Children's Perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, *11*(2): 135-149. doi:10.1080/15022250.2011.588444

Bohrer, I., 2011. 7 Family-Friendly Services That Make Family Travel Easier (and More Fun!). BootsnAll. Retrieved from http://www.bootsnall.com/

Coccossis, Contantoglou, 2006. The Use of Typologies In Tourism Planning, (September).

Henderson, J.C., 2010. Islam and Tourism. *Bridging Tourism Theory and Practice*. Elsevier. doi:10.1108/S2042-1443(2010)0000002009

Hirschman, E.C., 1986. Humanistic Inquiry in Marketing Research : Philosophy , Method , and Criteria. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *XXIII*(August), 237–250.

Hong, G., J.X. Fan, L. Palmer, 2005. Leisure Travel Expenditure Patterns by Family Life Cycle Stages. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, (February 2014), 37-41. doi:10.1300/J073v18n02

Ibrahim, Z., 2009. Travelling Pattern and Preferences of the Arab Tourists in Malaysian Hotels. *International Journal of Business and Management*, *4*(No.7): 3-9.

Illum, S.F., 2013. Family tourism: multidisciplinary perspectives. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, *11*(1-2): 126-127. doi:10.1080/14766825.2012.750027

Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014a. Islamic Tourism Standards. Retrieved from http://itc.gov.my/

Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014b. Malaysia keen on remaining top Muslim-friendly holiday spot. Retrieved from http://itc.gov.my/

Jang, S., Shawn, C.M.E. Wu, 2006. Seniors' travel motivation and the influential factors: An examination of Taiwanese seniors. *Tourism Management*, *27*(2): 306-316. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2004.11.006

Lawson, R., 1991. Patterns Of Tourist Expenditure And Types Of Vacation Across The Family Life Cycle. *Journal of Travel Research*, *29*(4): 12-18. doi:10.1177/004728759102900403

Malaysia Travel News, 2014. Malaysia has identified four mega-trends to attract tourists. Bernama. Retrieved from http://blis.bernama.com/

Marwijk, R., Van, K. Taczanowska, 2006. Types of Typologies - From Recreationists & Tourists to Artificial Agents, (September), 499–501.

NSTP, 2014. Malaysia can achieve 26.8 million tourist arrival target. New Straits Times. Retrieved from http://www.nst.com.my/

Obrador, P., 2012. The place of the family in tourism research: Domesticity and thick sociality by the pool. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *39*: 401-420. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2011.07.006

The Star, 2014. Malaysia to be hub for Islamic tourism. Retrieved from http://www.thestar.com.my/

UNTWO, 2014. International tourism exceeds expectations with arrivals up by 52 million in World Tourism Organization UNWTO. Retrieved from http://www2.unwto.org/

Wickens, E., 2002. The Sacred and The Profane: A Tourist Typology. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *29*(3): 834–851. doi:10.1016/S0160-7383(01)00088-3

You, X., O. Joseph, A. Morrison, 2008. International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Travel Push and Pull Factors, (July 2014), 1–26. doi:10.1300/J149v01n02

Zamani-farahani, H., J.C. Henderson, 2010. Islamic Tourism and Managing Tourism, *89*(July 2009), 79–89.

Zamani-Farahani, H., G. Musa, 2012. The relationship between Islamic religiosity and residents' perceptions of socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Iran: Case studies of Sare'in and Masooleh. *Tourism Management*, *33*, 802–814. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2011.09.003