

# The Future of Islamic Tourism: A Perspective Study of Muslim Non-Arabic Countries and Non-Muslim Countries Halal Growth

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## Abstract

Despite of the popularity of the Islamic tourism or halal tourism in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, there have been little systematic effort to explore the topic. The paper aims to explore the concept and eliminate the controversies and ambiguities surrounding their definition, connotation and context which has the potential to adversely affect communication of tour packages to the target customers. The study also takes a look at the future of the industry and provides some useful recommendations. The research is based on a purely qualitative approach and attempts to undertake a critical analysis of the existing literature. In addition, qualitative semi-structured interviews are also carried out with 10 participants' from tourism industry. The study establishes a rising demand for Islamic tourism, both in the traditional Islamic countries and the non-traditional non-Muslim countries. The study reveals an opportunity to develop unique Islamic tourism packages such as Islamic cruises and Islamic villages that showcase the Islamic cultural heritage. However, there are expected in terms of various security concerns in the Middle East region and intensified competition. The study recommends stakeholders to creatively and innovatively design Islamic tour packages in order to achieve competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Islamic, Tourism, Halal, Non-Muslim, Shariah, Innovation, Creativity, Islamic tour packages

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## 1. Introduction

Islamic Tourism as a concept seems to be new and expanding. However, according to the Islamic Center 2012, Islamic tourists as individuals are interested in exploring Islamic knowledge of Islamic shariah, culture, heritage, arts, Islamic history, and spiritual aspects (Islamic Tourism Center, 2012). To this effect, Laerlah et al. (2011) argued that in Islam, the act of traveling is seen as Ibadah (worship) if the intention of travel itself is for Allah seek, or pleasure. Thus, tourism from an Islamic perspective can mean many things depending on the intention of the tourist.

Henderson (2010) defined Islamic tourism as "all product development and marketing efforts designed for and directed at Muslims". However, tourists could be pursuing similar leisure experiences as non-Muslims, albeit within parameters set by Islam, and destinations are not necessarily locations where the shari'ah or full Islamic law is enacted. Duman (2011) defined Islamic tourism as activities by Muslims that originate from Islamic motivations and are realised according to shari'ah-principles. These activities can be within the scope of the hajj, the c umrah, silat al-rahim, fi sabil-Allah (acting in the cause of God) and others referenced by the Qur'an and by the teachings of Prophet Muhammad.

A review of existing studies highlights the presence of a challenging in identifying the right terminologies to describe the concept of Islamic tourism. In some cases, the term halal tourism has also been used interchangeably with Islamic tourism (Zamani-Farahni and Anderson, 2010; Battaour et al., 2013). Battour et al. (2017) considered Halal tourism as tourism action that can be deemed to be permissible based on Islamic teachings. The global halal industry is estimated to be worth around USD2.3 trillion (Excluding Islamic finance). Growing at an estimated annual rate of 20%, the industry is valued at about USD560 billion a year thus, making it one of the fastest growing consumer segments in the world. The global halal market of 1.8 billion Muslims has now expanded beyond the food sector to include pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, health products, toiletries and medical devices as well as service sector components such as logistics, marketing, print and electronic media, packaging, branding, and financing (Azmi et al., 2013). The Islamic product is non-exclusive to Muslims and has gained increasing acceptance among non-Muslim consumers who associate with ethical consumerism. Many Western countries have recognized the emerging global trend in consumerism towards toward products and services, and are now racing to gain a footing in the Islamic industry

The paper offers a perspective of Islamic tourism industry in non-Muslim countries in order to provide clearer information regarding the opportunities and challenges that the industry faces currently. It also reviews the controversies surrounding the concept of Islamic tourism that adversely affect communication of tour packages to the target customers.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Concept of Islamic Tourism

According to Duman (2011), Islamic tourism can be defined as "the activities of Muslims traveling to and staying

in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for participation of those activities that originate from Islamic motivations which are not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited". Faith-based needs and services as a niche market "halal-friendly" tourism include; halal hotels, halal transport (halal airlines), halal food restaurants, halal tour packages and halal finance. Therefore, halal tourism consists of different sectors which are related to each other. Sureerat et al. (2015) define Halal tourism as offering tour packages and destinations that are mainly designed to cater to Muslim considerations and address Muslim needs.

Hassan (2004) viewed Islamic tourism as a new ethical dimension in tourism. It stands for values generally accepted as high standards of morality and decency. It also stands for the respect of local beliefs and traditions, as well as care for the environment. It represents a new outlook on life and society. It brings back values to the center stage in an age where consumerism is rife, and everything is available for use and abuse in the most selfish way. It also encourages understanding and dialogue between different nations and civilisations and attempts to find out about the background of different societies and heritage. Hassan (2007) asserted that in a narrow sense, it might mean religious tourism (visiting shrines all over the Islamic world). But in its wide sense, it is the type of tourism that adheres to the values of Islam.

Most of these values are shared with other religious and non-religious beliefs, for example the ethical code promoted by World Tourism Organization. It calls for respect for local communities and the local environment, benefiting the locals, acting with decency and learning about other cultures. Thus, tourism from an Islamic perspective means much more than traveling to see the new world or discover the world but also have the moral obligation into it, at the same time respecting the local norms and cultures and also their environment, to some extent travel as a form of worship.

## **2.2 The Trends and Growth of the Muslim Tourism**

The tourism industry is expected to be significantly influenced by the demand for Muslim-friendly products. Global Muslim tourism market in 2011 was estimated to be around USD 126.1 billion, and by 2020 the total Muslim tourist expenditure is estimated to be worth about USD 192 billion (Crescentrating, 2012).

The study by Abdul Aziz et al. (2018) evaluated the concept of social-cultural demographics and their influence on the Islamic industry tourism and noted that although the core cultural values remained unchanged, changes in the secondary cultural variables such as the empowerment of women in tourism decision-making has increased. This is a trend that has increased and is expected to expand the market base and consumer portfolio in future. Similarly, Khan and Callanan (2017) noted that the Halalification process for tourism destinations is on the rise. The review noted global tourism destinations are realizing the need to ensure that they are religion-conscious in order to expand their market bases. However, the review noted that there is no single term used for this. As such, reviews with the mention of Muslim friendly, Halal tourism, and Islamic tourism have the same orientation and are adopted in the study literature review.

Apart from the Arab countries, Malaysia is seen as the first Muslim country where tourism industry contributed 15.8% to Malaysia's GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2014). In this context, Muslim tourists registered the highest growth rate of international tourist arrivals. According to Shaari (2013), in 2012 alone, international Muslim tourist arrivals were estimated to be around 5.4 million. Other than Malaysia, Samori et al. (2016) noted that Indonesia is developing sharia or halal tourism as an alternative for the travel industry. In addition, Turkey also shows positive growth of tourism industry (Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2011) and its three major cities Antalya, Istanbul, and Mugla accommodate around 50% of international visitors to the country (Duman and Kozak, 2010).

## **2.3 Growth of Halal Hotels and Halal services for Muslims in non-Muslim countries**

Along with the growth of Islamic tourism, Islamic hotels also have shown considerable growth in accordance with the Shariah principles. According to statistics reported by the World Tourism Organization (2010), Shariah Compliant Hotels (SCHs) represent almost 10% of the global tourism market and is driven by the increasing numbers of Muslim traveler around the world (Samori and Abd Rahman, 2013). These hotels that do not serve alcohol, provide Islamic services such as Halal food, prayer rooms, Quran and prayer rugs in each room, and separate facilities for men and women, and governs their operations (from its design, interiors to the hotel's accounts) based on Shariah principle (Zulkharnain & Jamal, 2012).

Non-Muslim countries encourage business to offer halal products. Therefore, some non-Muslim destinations such as Japan, Philippines, and Brazil offer Muslim-friendly solutions. 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 significant airports, and restaurants offer Halal Food in Japan (Battour et al., 2010, 55). In the UK Most of the business have service for examples banks, hotels, and restaurants, for example, more than hundreds KFC Outlets and Nando's restaurant serve halal food. According to Euromonitor International report (2015), the sale of Halal food has

increased in Europe, particularly in consumer food-service outlets because of the inbound Muslim tourists visiting Europe. Therefore, it is expected that the investments in the Halal food market will grow in non-Muslim destinations due to the growth of Halal tourism.

Fairmont Makati and Raffles Makati hotels in the Philippines are providing Quran copies, prayer room, and Arabic-language TV channels (TTG Asia, 2014). The availability of Halal food and beverages is vital for destinations that target Muslim travelers. It is now common for Muslim tourists to request Halal food and beverages when they visit non-Muslim destinations (Euromonitor International, 2015). Japan Narita Airport and Haneda International Airport in Tokyo opened a prayer room in 2014 (The National, 2014). The 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).

## **2.4 Opportunities and challenges in the Islamic tourism sector**

A review of literature suggests several opportunities for tourism stakeholders that seek to specialise in Islamic tourism sector. One such opportunity pertains to the development of Islamic village tourism. Stephenson (2014) described such villages as places where no alcohol is served to visitors and entertainment is based on strict adherence to Islamic values. As an example, Beirut has a traditional village of al-Saha which is located in the southern region of the country. In this village, Islamic aspects such architecture, music, poetry and various forms of art are exhibited to visitors. According to Hazbun (2008), such Islamic villages can be replicated in other parts of the world that can offer meaningful experiences to the tourists and also serve the development of the local community.

Islamic cruises have also been identified as a potential opportunity in Islamic tourism. Although not a distinctively developed concept, it seeks to offer cruise ship holidays that are modelled around the Islamic faith. Such cruises as Stephenson (2014) further elaborates should mainly target Muslim passengers and offer Muslim centric activities. The concept has been implemented in other religions such as Jewish and Christian communities (Seyer & Müller, 2011).

From another perspective, recent surveys have found that there is significant demand for Muslim friendly experiences among Muslims that could be achieved through Islamic tourism. A survey by Dinar Standard (2012) for example found that in over 50% of Muslim tourists Muslim-friendly services were considered to be the central factor influencing travel decisions. Since Muslim countries constitute only 12% of the total tourist arrivals, which are disproportionately distributed to Turkey, Malaysia and Egypt there is still a significant growth potential in other markets.

However, there are a number of challenges towards exploiting these opportunities associated with Islamic tourism. Competition in Islamic tourism will become intense and is expected to arise from travel agencies around the world who are customising their tours to be Muslim-friendly through aspects such as halal foods and itineraries that are built around prayer timings (Battour et al., 2017). Security concerns in the Middle East have also been highlighted as a potential impediment to growth (Carboni et al., 2014).

From the above analysis, it is evident that there is existing literature on the topic. However, the review noted that the existing literature was all stand-alone reviews on their respective markets that lack in proper evaluation of their interconnectedness and variances to identify the trends. The present research paper addresses this literature gap and attempts to undertake a systematic and holistic understanding of the concept of Islamic Tourism and Halal service growth in non-Muslim and non-Arabic countries around the world.

## **3. Methodology**

The analysis in this study is based on qualitative research methodology. It incorporates two of the main sources of data that are recognised in qualitative research. These include a review/consultation of secondary data sources and the use of interviews. The use of these two sources of data was also crucial in achieving data source triangulation which is associated with enhanced validation of data (Fielding, 2012).

As mentioned on its scope section, the study explored the future of Islamic tourism in Muslim non-Arabic countries as well as non-Muslim countries. The use of secondary data allowed the reviewer to collect and access such data from the diverse markets with ease. The alternative which would include the use of primary data would have required the reviewer to visit or engage research assistants in all these countries. The cost and time implications of this would be prohibitive to the study success (Cronin, 2014). Secondly, the use of secondary data allowed the review to conduct a cross-sectional study. By exploring the existing sources of secondary materials, it was possible to analyze the trends and patterns on the Muslim tourism across the nations. It is only through an evaluation of the changes over the last few years that a demonstration of the future and potential changes would be established.

However during the data collection and review, the research faced credibility and accuracy challenge. In order to mitigate this challenge, the review used only the credible sources. The study considered only the peer-reviewed articles that helped inclusion of those information that are reviewed and approved by a panel. The review also used

government publications and industry-approved publications and credible media house reports to maintain reliability and credibility of the research. In addition, the journals and articles that were more than a decade old were not considered in this study.

Finally, the study adopted a thematic qualitative analysis approach for interpreting the research findings. This approach enabled the researcher to investigate and critically analyse the available literature findings by identifying and developing themes under its conceptual framework. It is the thematic analysis approach that guided the formulation of the ultimate study findings and final recommendations.

In addition to secondary data analysis, primary data collection was carried out by conducting semi-structured interviews. The questions in the interview guide were designed based on a literature review. They revolved around key issues related to Islamic tourism such as definitional ambiguities, its main attributes, current trends and future of Islamic tourism. In total, 10 interviewees were purposively selected to take part in the interviews. They included professional in the tourism industry with high levels of experience in relation to Islamic tourism. The list of tourism professional to include in the study was drawn up using the assistance of local stakeholders in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia as two of the locations where Islamic tourism is relatively well-established and characterised by high growth levels. On average the interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour.

At the start of the interview, the purpose of the study was clearly communicated. As a warm up to the interview, the respondents were first asked general questions on aspects such as their experience and interests in Islamic tourism or the general hospitality sector. Specific questions related to the study were then posed to each of the respondents. Since majority of the respondents objected recording their responses, notes were taken during the interviews. After completion, the respondents were allowed to review and verify the accuracy of the notes.

After all interviews had been completed, the author used thematic content analysis to single out the main thematic ideas from the responses. While using the grounded theory approach, coding was used to identify similarities and differences in the responses as well as explore connections (Gibbs, 2008). Anonymity of the interviewees was maintained by used terms such as "Respondent 1" while describing responses from specific respondents.

## 4. Findings and Analysis

### 4.1 Definitional ambiguities of the concept of Islamic tourism and its attributes

At present, there exist ambiguities with regard to the precise meaning of the Islamic tourism concept. Accordingly, the study participants were asked to offer their views on what exactly constitutes Islamic tourism. All respondents acknowledged the presence of confusion regarding the concept and attempted to offer relevant definitions. For example, respondent 8 argued that: *"There is still some confusion of what constitutes Islamic tourism. Not much attention is given on the concept in tourism and thus, confusion emerges between promoting Islamic heritage and culture with the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism"*. These respondents were therefore, concerned that tourism service providers may view the concept of Islamic tourism as revolving around Islamic heritage and culture while others perceive it as offering Muslim-friendly tourism that is consistent with the expectations of the Islam faith. Similarly, respondent 2 further noted the presence of a superficial focus on Islamic tourism among service providers. The respondent argued that: *"Even non-Muslim countries attract tourists and offer Islamic tourism but without the real halal elements incorporating into it. It just acts as a new window to generate more income."*

This can be corroborated with the analysis of Henderson (2010) who stated Motivations are not always or entirely religious and non-Muslims can also engage in similar leisure activities within the boundaries of Islamic law.

In light of the existing ambiguities regarding Islamic tourism several respondents highlighted key elements that should constitute this type of tourism. An overarching view was that Islamic tourism should offer Halal products as an integral aspect of Islamic tourism. Additionally, the respondents agreed that Islamic tourism needs to be centered on heritage and culture while at the same time incorporating other aspects of the conventional tourism. This view was well summed up by respondent 9 who articulated that: *"Primarily these (i.e. Islamic heritage and culture) are the essence of Islamic tourism: Islamic heritage and culture plus the concept of Halal (note: these two should be inseparable). But Islamic tourism should not be limited to these two essential things since tourism in general commonly consists of sightseeing, food, relaxation, physical activities (i.e. hiking, swimming, trekking, etc.), culture and history, and others"*.

This view is similar to the opinion of Battour and Ismail (2016) who stated that Islamic tourism is not entirely limited to religious tourism and thus does not solely target the Muslim people. Non-Muslim individuals may therefore, participate in Islamic tourism with the aim of learning more about the Islamic culture.

The Muslim world is fairly heterogeneous. This aspect could mean that demands for Islamic tourism could vary greatly depending on the tourist's origin. One of the respondents noted that previously, tourism operators in some countries used to limit Islamic tourism to their national culture. However, in the recent times an increasing number of Islamic tourist destinations are gradually adapting to general tourism by offering services that are friendly to a wide range of tourists. In agreement, respondent 9 argued that while still maintaining an Islamic

tourism concept it is important for destinations to offer the basic and common tourist packages. Respondent 2 further argued that: *"I believe that to make an Islamic tourism successful we need to link everything with the concept of halal and also incorporate more historical features of Islamic heritage to get the good feel of it"*.

Based on the above responses, Islamic tourism should thus ensure that halal concept is incorporated while at the same time ensuring that general aspects of tourism products are included in the tourism package in order to cater for the heterogeneity (Battour and Ismail, 2016). Some respondents further identified specific attributes that a visitor of an Islamic tourism destination would expect to experience. Among the main ones include a quiet environment, tour guides, and availability of halal food, water usage friendly toilets, Ramadan services and facilities, the absence of halal activities such as alcohol and casinos and recreational facilities that offer privacy. As noted in the discussion under 2.1 and 2.2, such services are growing all over the world in non-Muslim and non-Arabic countries. Overall, these responses thus suggest the need for Islamic tourism to cater for conservative religious Muslim tourists while also ensuring that the more cosmopolitan, liberal and recreation-oriented Muslim tourists are also catered for.

#### 4.2 Differentiating Islamic tourism offers

The tremendous growth of Islamic tourism has been characterized by subsequent increase in competition among destinations offering this type of tourism. In light of such competition, it is generally considered necessary to differentiate offers in order to attract large visitor numbers. The study respondents suggested various ways in which distinctiveness can be achieved. Technology emerged as a key platform for achieving differentiation. One respondent for instance highlighted the need for Apps that can guide and give updated information. Respondent 8 similarly indicated that: *"for Islamic tourism to intensify it is necessary to continue adapting it to general tourism trend that includes use of innovation and technology to improve tourism industry"*. Respondent 9 further added that:

*"Innovations and technology are now part of any tour packages. The most important thing to consider in order to differentiate the offer from competitors is to focus on the value for money that tourists can obtain from what they pay as well as the comfort and services."*

Based on the above responses, the study respondents therefore acknowledge that incorporation of innovation and technology in Islamic tourism can be instrumental in achieving competitiveness. Another suggestion provided by the respondents include anchoring Islamic tourism on social responsibility, animal welfare and ethical investment. According to the participants this could be a key driver of the Islamic tourism industry.

#### 4.3 Segmentation and flexibility need in Islamic tourism

While Islamic tourist destinations mainly target Muslim tourists there may be significant market opportunities for non-Muslim tourists. Destinations can therefore, seek to attract a wide variety of market segments in order to remain competitive and profitable. A common view among all respondents in this regard was that it is indeed possible to flexibly manage Islamic tourism destinations to attract Muslims and non-Muslims. One respondent for example argued that an increasing number of Muslims have become more liberal and may therefore, not mind the dress code of others during a tourism journey.

In agreement, other respondents further noted that the competitiveness of Islamic tourists is in part dependent on the ability to diversify. Such diversification is for instance demonstrated by ensuring that facilities and offers in the destination attract both Muslims and non-Muslims. The underlying view is that the majority of tourists have common needs such as enjoyment and relaxation. In explaining this view, respondent 9 argued that:

*"In general, tourists (whether Muslims or Non-muslims) purposely go on tours for relaxation and to attract them is to provide satisfaction to this need. While the main idea for Islamic tourism is to view and bring out appreciation to Islamic culture, satisfaction of the need for relaxation should not be ignored."*

The tourism and travel market is too diverse to reach effectively. This may prompt destination marketers to make use of segmentation as a strategic tool to target specific tourist groups. In the context of Islamic tourism, the study participants were interviewed with respect to whether segmentation bases such as demographics, professions and nationality may be necessary. On one hand, some of the respondents considered it necessary to make use of segmentation. One of the respondents for example argued that: *"Muslims from the West especially would expect the standards of service they receive in the West"*. Thus, according to this respondent, nationality should be a key factor in segmenting Islamic tourism products. However, one of the respondents argued that achieving effective levels of segmentation in Islamic tourism may be a significant challenge for marketers. Respondent 9 in particular explained that:

*"I think it is quite difficult to segment the market when it comes to Islamic tourism as the needs of tourists vary insignificantly and usually they come in groups or as a family. However, there should be an option to customize the tour especially for individual tourists or private tours."*

From the above quote, the respondent highlights some interesting aspects that may be useful for destination marketers. First, the conventional Muslim tourist prefers to travel in groups. Accordingly, group-related activities

during the destinations may be preferred and help increase satisfaction. Second, it also means that the traditional family holiday is popular among such tourists. There is also a suggestion that the majority of Muslim tourists are likely to prefer things that are close to their culture particularly halal as a key aspect of the Islamic faith.

#### 4.4 Security concerns in relation to Islamic tourism

Across the general tourism industry, travelers often express fundamental safety and security concerns that may shape their choice of travel destination as well as tourism expectations. Given that the Middle East region has in the recent years being characterized by political and security volatility, the study participants were interviewed with respect to the implications on Islamic tourism. All respondents were in agreement that security remains a valid concern for tourists in the region.

Within the above concern, several measures to change perceptions on safety of Middle East as an Islamic tourism destination were suggested. Respondent 1 and 9 suggested that there needs to be a campaign to show the world that the ME, especially Saudi Arabia is safe and stable. This can be though a well-organized initiative through all media outlets. While still focusing on Saudi Arabia another respondent noted that the country has been comparatively stable and hence this aspect should be emphasized during marketing of Islamic tourism. Precisely, the respondent expressed the view that:

*“Definitely there is high level of volatility in the Middle East. As a country, we are more stable in the region. Our stability can be a marketing point in the turmoil-ridden Middle East. We have to sell our Islamic heritage, prosperity, peace and Halal way of life along with the stability to the tourists who are interested in Islamic tourism.”*

From the above quote some implications are evident for tourism destinations. Most importantly, destination marketers for Islamic tourism need to increase awareness of the security situation in the country. This should be the case since security threats have wider implications on a country’s destination image. As a result, a country may struggle to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists if it is deemed unsafe.

#### 4.5 The future of Islamic tourism

While previously not identified as an independent segment of the tourism market, Islamic tourism has gained high levels of popularity. In light of this development, a question regarding the future of Islamic tourism was posed to the respondents. All respondents were highly optimistic that Islamic tourism will continue to experience high growth levels. For example, respondent 1 articulated that: *“As long as there are Muslims there will be Hajj and Umrah”*. A similar view was expressed by respondent 2 who held the view that: *“Future is very bright if it is done properly as today about 25% of the world population are Muslims, and a vast number of non-Muslims are comfortable with the Islamic way of life”*.

From yet another perspective, respondent 6 was of the opinion that values promoted by halal will continue to be a key driver of Islamic tourism. Examples of such drivers as cited by this respondent include social responsibility, stewardship of the earth, economic and social justice, animal welfare and ethical investment. Respondent 9, however, warned that while the future of Islamic tourism is bright, players in the industry should not solely depend on this form of religious tourism only. Precisely, the respondent argued that:

*“The future of Islamic tourism is bright as the Muslim population is continuously growing. However, the focus of tour should not only centered on the religion but also on culture appreciation and relaxation to make it more competitive and attractive”*.

Further analysis of the respondents indicates that in future some non-Muslim countries will have well-established Islamic Tourism destinations. Put differently, a significant number of Muslim tourists could turn to non-Muslim countries for their Islamic tourism experience. This, can in part, be tied to the large numbers of Muslims in the diaspora as well as concerns about safety. As highlighted by the respondents, such non-Islamic tourism is likely to grow in countries like Singapore, Switzerland, Germany and the UK. Overall, this means that while Islamic tourism is poised to experience significant growth, competition will also intensify from non-Muslim countries.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Islamic tourism constitutes a growing tourism sector with a largely positive outlook. While the concept tends to be associated with religious tourism and halal the study indicates that Islamic tourism goes a step further to include aspects such as Islamic culture. This makes Islamic culture relevant to both Muslims and non-Muslims. Nonetheless, the study clarifies that despite its broader focus all Islamic tourism activities need to be within the confines of Islamic teachings and values.

Another key issue emerging from the study pertains to achieving flexibility while offering Islamic tour packages. As noted in the study findings, destinations could benefit from offering Islamic tourism to Muslims and non-Muslims. However, the two groups have significantly different demands. The study concludes that such differences in demands can be resolved by providing separate facilities for Muslim travellers in aspects such as washrooms and prayer rooms.

From the findings it is also expected that Islamic tourism will become intensely competitive in the coming years. This can be attributed to the development of Islamic tourism related packages in non-Muslim countries which recognize it as a new growth opportunity. As such, creativity and innovation will be required in order to remain competitive. The issue of security also remains a significant impediment to the growth of Islamic tourism in the Middle East region. Based on the study findings, stakeholders need to create market awareness regarding the safety and security measures in markets such as Saudi Arabia which has remained relatively stable. Customization of services in Islamic tourism sector through technological advances such as mobile apps could also be a key contributor to the growth of the sector.

In pursuance of the established study findings, the review developed *five strategic recommendations* that could be adopted both in developing the existing literature and in improving the Islamic tourism industry. These are listed below.

- **Focus on non-Islamic customers** - The industry should focus on the non-Muslim customers. Traditionally, the industry perceived the only customers as Muslims. However, the review established a rising number of non-Muslims preferring the Islamic tourism destinations. The industry should focus on creating an enabling environment for this emerging consumer segment.
- **Understanding market best practices** - This is in line with the already existing preferred Islamic tourism destinations. The emerging destinations should derive and learn from the best practices from the established Islamic tourism sector to increase their preference index among the customers.
- **Offering variety of Islamic products and services** - The study analysis has demonstrated a rising number of interest customers both Muslims and non-Muslims. Unfortunately, the variety of Halal services and products offered are still limited to the traditional market context. As such, this review notes that in order to competitively expand the market, the services offered by the traditional established market should be reviewed. The industry should encourage innovation and creativity within the confines of the Halal products. Such innovation and expansion of services will make the industry more attractive to both Muslim and Non-Muslim tourists.
- **Reviews on products and services** – The formulation of reviews of the Halal product and services is necessary, exploring the attractiveness of each of the products. Currently, the review only noted the products currently on offer. However, it did not evaluate how each of the products is preferred and valued in the market. Such additional studies would help the industries prioritize their investment and provision of the services and products based on their attractiveness'. The proper allocation of resources is key to any industry and market success.
- **Research on emerging markets:** Future studies should be focused on the emerging markets (like UK, Japan, Philippines, Malaysia, and Turkey) where Islamic tourism have evolved. The study established that there are a significant number of non-Muslim countries that have embraced Islamic tourism. Since these were not traditionally considered ideal Islamic tourism destinations, there is minimal literature on them. This creates the need to conduct additional reviews.

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