

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR:

ISLAMIC TOURISM IN THE OIC COUNTRIES



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New Directions in the Tourism Sector:

Islamic Tourism in the OIC Countries

Introduction

Over the last two decades, Islamic life style market has been growing as sharia'h compliant products and services (e.g. halal food, Islamic tourism and Islamic finance) have become an important component of the global economy. With an increasing awareness and expanding numbers of Muslim tourists, many tourism industry players have started to offer special products and services, developed and designed in accordance with the Islamic principles, to cater the needs and demands of these tourists. Nevertheless, despite attracting significant interest across the globe, Islamic tourism is relatively a new concept in both tourism theory and practice. Not surprisingly, Islamic tourism activity remained highly concentrated in Muslim majority countries of the OIC, which are currently both the major source markets for the Islamic tourism expenditures and popular destinations. Islamic tourism is a natural-fit for these countries as the majority of them already have basic infrastructure and environment in place to cater for the specific needs of Muslim tourists, and thus, have a comparative advantage over the others. Therefore, it is true to believe that, if planned and managed properly, Islamic tourism could play a vital role in revitalising the economic development and growth and hence, spread the prosperity across the OIC countries.

Against this backdrop, this section aims to provide a candid theoretical discussion on the definitions and dimensions of Islamic tourism by sifting through the tourism literature and reviews the emergence and status of Islamic tourism industry in the world in general and in the OIC countries in particular by analysing the latest available information and statistics. A sub-section also provides a brief discussion on major challenges and opportunities for the development of Islamic tourism in OIC countries. At the end, some specific policy recommendations have been listed for the consideration of the OIC countries both at national and OIC cooperation level and the major stakeholders of tourism industry.

1.1 Islamic Tourism and its Components

Islam and Tourism

Travelling and journey are highly recommended by the Qur'an. Allah asked us to travel through the earth to take the lessons from His creation that He offers to us in His mercy (*Al-Quran 29:20*). It is a well-established fact that religion has influence on the day-to-day activities of Muslims, whether at home or travelling, and thus it shapes the choice of a destination for discretionary purposes and what is done at the destination (Jafari and Scott, 2014). Islam recognizes people's right to move from one place to other and encourages travelling for beneficial purposes including Hajj and Umrah (literally the higher and lesser pilgrimages, respectively), health and medication, education, business, trade, entertainment, and fun. However, words like "fun" and "entertainment" should be interpreted with caution as Muslims are allowed to seek fun and entertainment only in a way that does not go beyond the rules and obligations of Islamic Sharia'h (Saad et al, 2010). Therefore, in this context, tourism policy, development objectives and the management and operation of the industry will be greatly influenced by the Islamic principles (Scott and Jafari, 2010).

Islamic Tourism: Definitions and Dimensions

As it is evident from the name, Islamic tourism is mainly targeting people with Islamic beliefs in particular, though it could also have a universal appeal even for the non-Muslims due to a multitude of reasons like fair pricing, peace and security, family-friendly environment and hygiene etc. Islamic tourism as a concept has been used with different names and connotations in the tourism theory and practice. Halal tourism, Sharia'h Tourism and Muslim-friendly tourism are the most common terms, which are used alternatively. However, none of these terminologies has a universally understood definition (Crescent Rating, 2015). Moreover, there are some related terms such as 'Halal hospitality', 'Sharia'h compliant hotels', and 'Halal friendly travel' concerning the services in this sector.

Box 1: Major Components of Islamic Tourism

Halal Hotels: Some of the main indicators of an Islamic hotel include: No alcohol, gambling etc.; Halal food only; Quran, prayer mats and arrows indicating the direction of Mecca in every room; Beds and toilets positioned so as not to face the direction of Mecca; Prayer rooms; Conservative staff dress; Islamic funding; Separate recreational facilities for men and women.

Halal Transport (Airlines): Major indicators for halal transport include: cleanliness; non-alcoholic drinks; and publications which are coherent with Islam.

Halal Food Premises: Foods that served in a restaurant have to be halal. All animals must be slaughtered according to Islamic principles. No alcoholic drinks should be served in the premise.

Halal Tour Packages: The content of the tour packages must be based on an Islamic themed. The Islamic tour packages include visits to the mosques, Islamic monuments and promote an event during the Ramadan.

Halal Finance: The financial resources of the hotel, restaurant, travel agency and the airlines have to be fit with Islamic principles. In general, Islamic finance requires participation in sharing the profit and loss among of all parties who involved in this finance enterprise. Islamic finance also prohibits interest.

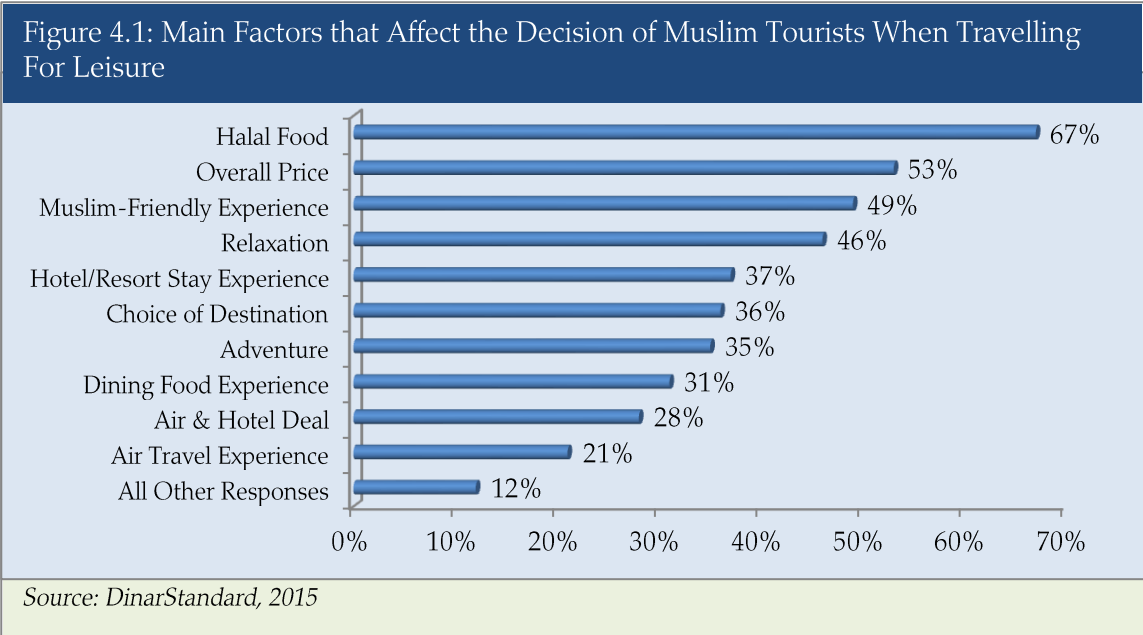
Source: Adapted from Akyol and Kilinc, 2014.

The major components of Islamic tourism are similar to those of conventional tourism like hotels, restaurants, logistics, finance, and travel packages. Evaluation of the value of tourism products in case of Islamic tourism, however, entails a completely different process due to the requirements of the Islam. These requirements are called Sharia'h-principles and at the simplest level, these principles "prohibit adultery, gambling, consumption of pork and other Haram (forbidden) foods, selling or drinking liquor and dressing inappropriately." In addition, a typical Muslim is expected to do regular prayers in clean environments and fast in Ramadan. In Islamic teachings, Muslims are also expected to abstain from unnecessary consumption and indulgence. In principles, Islamic tourism is about satisfying tourists looking for a destination that can fulfil their needs without being offensive in any way. It covers all tourism related goods and services that are designed, produced and presented to the market according to the Islamic rules (Hamza et al., 2012). Muslim tourists usually travel with family members and therefore, this concept is tailored around the travel needs of Muslim tourists who predominately seek a family friendly environment (Dinar Standard, 2015). All destinations that provide services and facilities that cater to at least some of the faith-based needs of Muslim visitors are categorised as 'Muslim Friendly Destinations' (Crescent Rating, 2015). At these destinations, tourists can count on feeling safe and secure, and can enjoy family-centred halal activities and have good time without worry. It may sound too good to be true, but there are many such places at both Muslim and non-Muslim locations.

The motivation for the Muslims to participate in tourism activity can be general (e.g., conducting business, visiting friends or relatives), pursuing other personal goals and activities (e.g., education, shopping) and pleasure, and/or specific Islamic motivations (e.g., spreading the message of Islam, Islamic values and culture, worshipping Allah (through Hajj and Umrah), strengthening the bond of silat al-rahim (fraternity) etc. Most of the general motivations are common for Muslims and non-Muslims. However, certain motivations for tourism which provoke pure hedonism and lavishness are not acceptable according to Islamic doctrine and these motivations can be considered non-Islamic or haram (Duman, 2011).

There is also a wide diversity in awareness and adoption of various Islamic practices by Muslim travellers. A significant number of Muslim tourists travel to global non-Muslim destinations such as Europe and adjust to any limitations by seeking alternatives to Halal Food, as well as other religious considerations such as prayer spaces, etc. Meanwhile, a big segment travelling globally is also seeking options that address their religious considerations (Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard, 2015). In a global survey jointly conducted by Dinar Standard and Crescent Rating, halal food, overall price and Muslim-friendly experience were ranked among the top-3 Muslim tourist market needs (Figure 4.1). While a large segment of Muslim tourists looking for these services, very few hotels, airlines and tourism destinations in fact tried to meet their demands.

Of course, while developing a strategy to address the Islamic tourism market, all major stakeholders like destinations, hotels and resorts, airlines and travel agencies need to consider the size of the flow of Muslim visitors to their destination. They also need to consider which faith related needs they will cater to. Basic needs such as Halal food, absence of alcohol, prayer spaces and Ramadan accommodation are a must for Muslim majority countries. Additional options include providing “women only” facilities, and incorporating Islamic heritage tours, among other options (Dinar Standard, 2015).



1.2 State of Islamic Tourism in the OIC Countries

Islamic tourism is a recent phenomenon in the theory and practice of global tourism industry. Traditionally Islamic tourism was often associated with Hajj and Umrah only. However, recently there has been an influx of products and services designed specifically to cater the business and leisure related segments of Muslim tourists across the globe. The Muslim tourism market has witnessed rapid growth over the years and emerged as one of the fastest growing segments of the global tourism market. According to the latest estimates, Muslim tourism market (excluding the Hajj and Umrah expenditures of \$20 to \$25 billion) has increased from around \$80 billion in 2006 to \$145 billion in 2014, corresponding to an impressive increase of 81 per cent (Crescent Rating, 2015). Despite recording impressive growth over the years, Islamic tourism remained as an emerging niche market with 108 million Muslim travellers, accounting for 10 to 12 per cent of the global tourism sector. Currently, with an annual growth rate of 4.8 per cent, Muslim tourism market is growing faster than the global tourism market, which recorded a growth rate of 3.8 per cent in 2013. Provided the estimated exponential growth in Muslim population and positive economic prospects for many Muslim majority countries, Islamic tourism market is forecasted to grow to \$200 billion with 150

Box 2: Broad Concepts of Islamic Tourism

Economic concept: The economic concept for the Islamic tourism focuses on inclusion of new tourist markets and tourist destinations. This concept is the most widely discussed and understood in both Islamic and non-Islamic countries. Major tourism players, consider Muslim countries as one of the emerging tourist markets with huge economic, demographic and destination potentials. There are many regional and international forums like Islamic Conference for Ministers of Tourism (ICMT) and the Arab Counsel of Ministers of Tourism (ACMT) to discuss and elaborate on economic dimensions of the Islamic tourism market. The third meeting of ICMT presented a new vision in this regard by adopting the “Riyadh Declaration”, which aims to ease the visa, enhance the intra-OIC tourism investment, organize joint marketing events and facilitate the revival of Islamic cultural heritage.

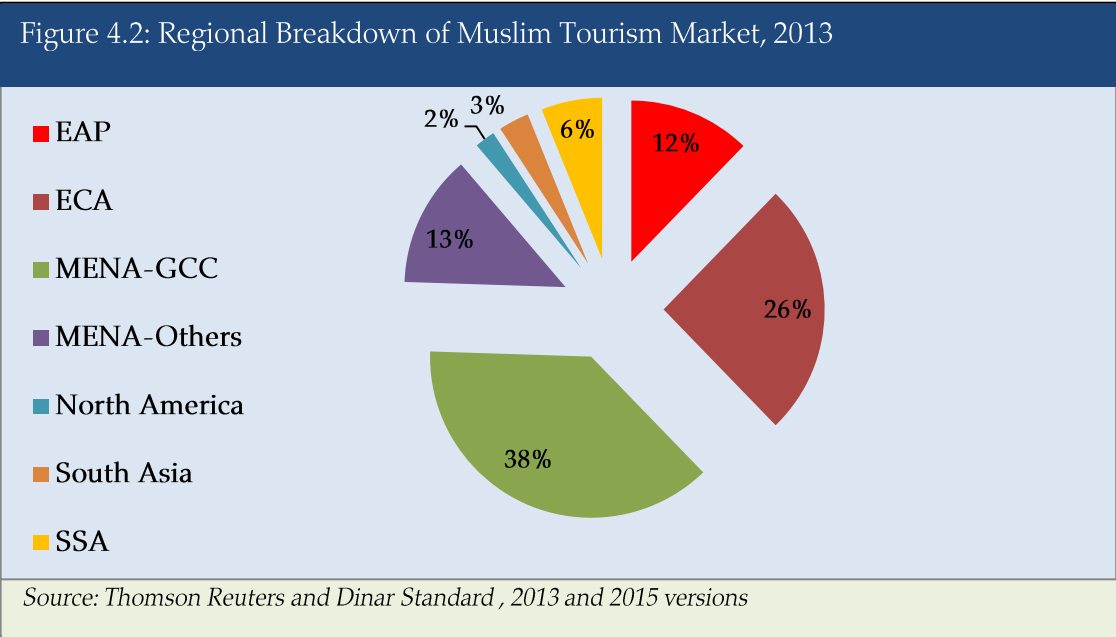
Cultural concept: The cultural concept for Islamic tourism includes visions and ideas that outline the inclusion of Islamic religious cultural sites in tourism programs with “pedagogical” and self-confidence building elements. It tries to encourage a reorientation inside the tourist destinations towards less consumption and “western culture” loaded sites towards more Islamic historical, religious and cultural sites.

Religious conservative Concept: The religious conservative concept for Islamic tourism is based on the conservative interpretation and understanding of Islam. Merging elements of the extremely conservative Islamic lifestyle with the modern tourism industry could indeed present new tourism options, spaces, and spheres. For a growing conservative intra Arab and intra Muslim tourism market, the implementation of a religious conservative concept in tourism planning as an extra option and as an insertion into the existing mainstream tourism could indeed have a positive economic and social effect.

million tourists by the end of 2020 (Crescent Rating , 2015).

The regional breakdown of the global Islamic tourism market reveals that it is highly concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region (Figure 4.2). In 2013, MENA region accounted for half of the total out bound tourism expenditures made by the Muslim tourists. Among other regions,

Europe and Central Asia (ECA) accounted for the second largest share of 25 per cent followed by East Asia and Pacific (EAP, 12 per cent) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA, 6 per cent).



Major Source Markets for Islamic Tourism

The 57 Member Countries of the OIC are the major source market for the global Islamic tourism industry. According to the latest estimates, more than three quarters (78 per cent) of the total 1.62 billion Muslims reside in the OIC countries. With estimated tourism expenditures of over \$100 billion, these countries account for around 82 per cent of the total Muslim travel expenditures in 2013-2014. Nevertheless, Muslim tourists and tourism expenditures remained distributed unevenly across the OIC countries. Unsurprisingly, the resource rich OIC countries in the Middle East remained the major source markets for the Islamic tourism. Among these countries, members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) emerged as the star performers with a convincing 37 per cent share of global Muslim travel expenditures. It is worth noting that GCC countries represent only 3 per cent of the global Muslim population (Dinar Standard and Crescent Rating 2012).

Currently, the top-20 global Muslim tourism source markets spread across the four continents, accounting for over three quarters (76 per cent) of the global Islamic tourism market in 2013-2014. The primary top source markets, in fact, are concentrated in the Muslim majority OIC countries. As shown in Table 4.1, 14 out of 20 top markets are the OIC countries whereas six of them are Muslim minority countries from the Europe and America.

Saudi Arabia was ranked first with Muslim tourism expenditures of \$17.8 billion followed by Iran (\$14.3 billion), United Arab Emirates (\$11.2 billion), Qatar (\$7.8 billion), Kuwait (\$7.7 billion), Indonesia (\$7.5 billion) and Malaysia (\$5.7 billion). These top seven source markets accounted for more than half of the total Muslim tourism expenditures. On the other hand, among the six Muslim minority source markets, Russia accounted for the largest share with \$5.4 billion Muslim tourism expenditures followed by Germany (\$3.6 billion), United Kingdom (\$2.4 billion), Singapore (\$2.3 billion), France (\$2.3 billion) and United States (\$2.0 billion). As a group, these countries accounted for around 12 per cent of the total Muslim tourism expenditures during 2013-2014.

Table 4.1: Top-20 Source Markets for Islamic Tourism, 2013-2014

Rank	Country	Size (US \$ Billion)	Rank	Country	Size (US \$ Billion)
1	Saudi Arabia	17.8	11	Germany	3.6
2	Iran	14.3	12	Egypt	2.8
3	United Arab Emirates	11.2	13	Azerbaijan	2.4
4	Qatar	7.8	14	United Kingdom	2.4
5	Kuwait	7.7	15	Singapore	2.3
6	Indonesia	7.5	16	France	2.3
7	Malaysia	5.7	17	Iraq	2.2
8	Russia	5.4	18	United States	2
9	Turkey	4.5	19	Morocco	2
10	Nigeria	4.4	20	Lebanon	1.9

Source: Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard

Major Islamic Tourism Destinations

In the global tourism market, Europe is the most popular region in terms of number of arrivals. At the country level, France tops the list of the most popular destinations, followed by USA, Spain and China. Among the OIC countries, Turkey and Malaysia are ranked among the top global tourist destination. At the OIC level, Turkey is the most popular tourism market followed by Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Morocco and United Arab Emirates.

The above mentioned rankings of the top tourist destinations are largely based on the conventional tourism criteria without giving due consideration to the fundamental requirements of the Islamic tourism. Over the years, several institutions have embarked on initiatives to develop special criteria to evaluate the performance of tourism destinations with respect to the compliance with the requirements of the Islamic tourism and rank them accordingly. One of the most famous and premier initiatives is the *Master Card-Crescent Rating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI)*.

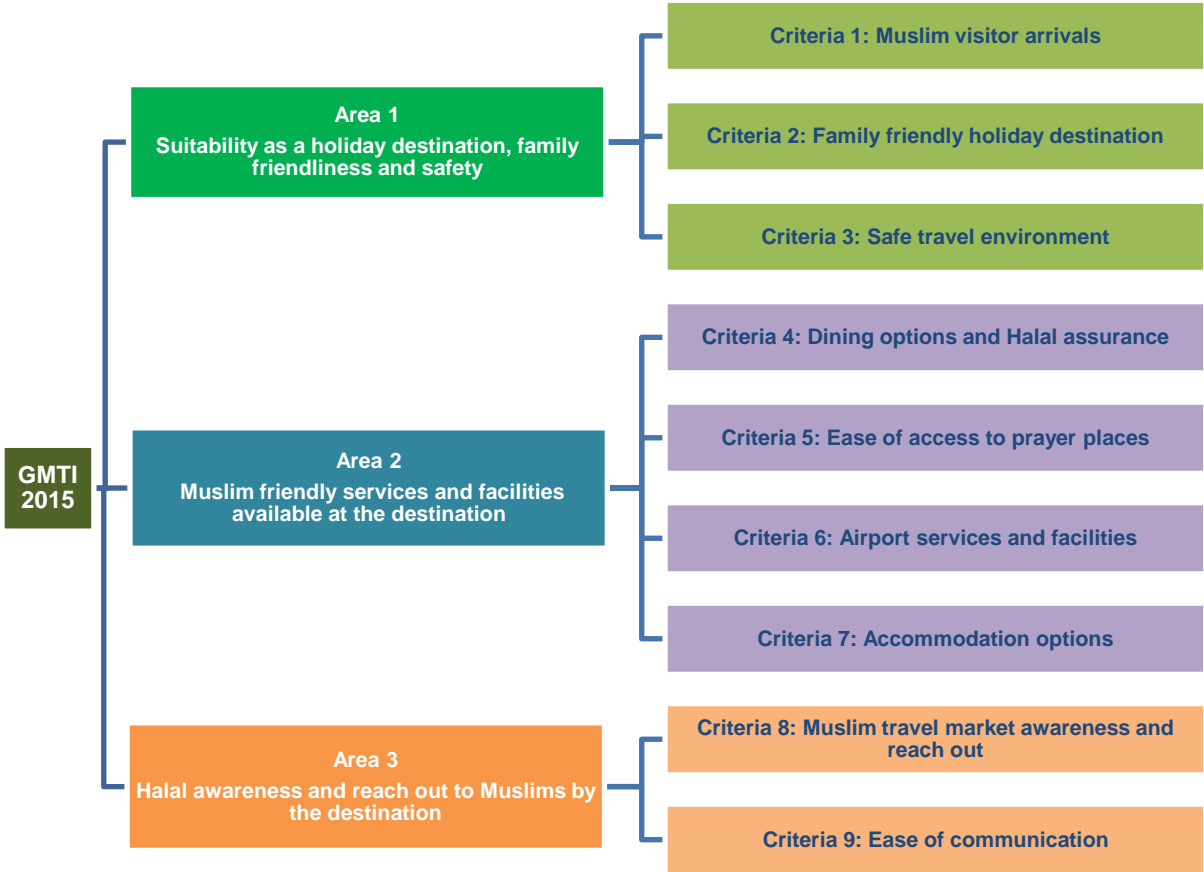
GMTI is made of several factors that constitute the Muslim tourists experience at a destination. As shown in Figure 4.3, this index looks at nine criteria in three areas for a destination. Each area is given specific weight according to its relevant importance. In GMTI 2015, each of the Area 1 and Area 2 was assigned 40 per cent weight whereas Area 3 accounted for 20 per cent of the index score for a destination. Overall, 110 countries were studied and ranked for the GMTI 2015. The top-100 countries, which include 29 OIC countries, accounted for over 95 per cent of the total Islamic tourism market in 2014.

According to the results of the GMTI 2015, Malaysia topped the index ranking with a cumulative score of 83.3. It was followed by Turkey with a score of 73.8 and UAE with a score of 72.1 (Table 4.2, left). In fact, nine out of the global top-10 Islamic tourist destinations are OIC members. Given the fact that the OIC countries have a comparative advantage mainly due to by-default existing Muslim friendly facilities and services, it is not surprising. Nevertheless, there is a strong need for proactive policies

and measures in the OIC countries to capitalise on existing pro-Islamic tourism environment and converting their comparative advantage into competitive advantage. In fact, most of the OIC countries are lacking basic requirements and coherent strategies to fully maximise their attractiveness to Muslim tourists (Master Card and Crescent Rating, 2015).

In contrast, many Muslim minority countries have made significant progress in catering for the needs and demands of Muslim tourists. Among these countries Singapore, Thailand, UK, South Africa, and France are top-5 non-OIC Islamic tourism destinations (Table 4.2, right). With a cumulative score of 65.1, Singapore is ranked even higher than the popular OIC destinations like Morocco and Brunei. In fact, majority of these non-OIC top Islamic tourism destinations are characterised by excellent tourism infrastructure and products and hence, sometimes they need very minimal changes in their strategies to cater for the needs of the Muslim tourists (Master Card and Crescent Rating, 2015).

Figure 4.3: Composition of the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI)



Source: MasterCard and Crescent Rating, 2015

Table 4.2: Top 10 OIC and Non-OIC Islamic Tourism Destinations

GMTI 2015 Rank	OIC Destination	Score	GMTI 2015 Rank	Non-OIC Destination	Score
1	Malaysia	83.8	9	Singapore	65.1
2	Turkey	73.8	20	Thailand	59.2
3	United Arab Emirates	72.1	25	United Kingdom	55
4	Saudi Arabia	71.3	30	South Africa	51.1
5	Qatar	68.2	31	France	48.2
6	Indonesia	67.5	32	Belgium	47.5
7	Oman	66.7	33	Hong Kong	47.5
8	Jordan	66.4	34	USA	47.3
10	Morocco	64.4	35	Spain	46.5
11	Brunei	64.3	36	Taiwan	46.2

Source: MasterCard and Crescent Rating, 2015

1.3 Challenges and Opportunities for Islamic Tourism

Islamic tourism is a very recent phenomenon. Despite all the positive developments, the Islamic tourism market is still fragmented by the diversity of the meaning of halal, income level, awareness level, location and religion and ethnicity. These are some of the main stumbling blocks to enhancing Islamic tourism activity in the OIC countries. Some of the specific challenges that limit the development of Islamic tourism in the OIC countries and available opportunities ahead of the OIC countries for the development of Islamic tourism market are listed below.

Challenges

Lack of unified and global standards and certification: There are no unified international halal standards and certification arrangement for the tourism industry. In fact, in the majority of the OIC countries, there is no official body available at the national level to certify hotels and destinations according to the Islamic requirements. Meanwhile, a Singapore based private company named Crescentrating pioneered the halal friendly travel certification by rating hotels/resorts against a five-level Crescentrating Standards.

Financial Constraints: As a new emerging segment of global tourism industry, Islamic tourism has not received enough financial resources, perhaps, with growing number of success stories investors will give due attention to this niche segment by considering its potential and growing market size.

Gender: In many Muslim majority countries, female employment in the tourism sector is a problem due to various social and cultural reasons. Furthermore, women are also not allowed to travel alone in certain Muslim countries. Thus, a significant proportion of the global Muslim population is by-default eliminated from the Islamic tourism market.

Differences in the influence of Islamic values and beliefs: There is significant variation across the OIC countries regarding the understanding and influence of the Islamic values and beliefs. These existing differences are also reflected in their tourism development policies. While, some OIC countries are more relaxed and welcoming towards the tourists, some others are more conservative and less interested.

Opportunities

Islamic tourism potential for economic growth: Provided the fact that many OIC countries already have basic infrastructure and environment for catering to the requirements of the Muslim tourists, they can benefit more from the Islamic tourism market. Therefore, development of Islamic tourism could play a vital role in the economic growth and prosperity in these countries.

Innovative tourism products: There are opportunities for the OIC countries to bundle traditional pilgrimage and religious travel experiences with the activities related to culture and heritage to make unique and innovative tourism packages. For the destinations with Islamic and heritage sites, there is a growing opportunity to develop and market their potential by designing Muslim-friendly cultural tour packages.

Social Media: Internet and social media provide a significant communication platform for introducing, positioning and marketing of the Islamic tourism brands, products and services to a wider audience.

1.4 Concluding Remarks and Policy Recommendations

There is a convergence of common interest-religious, political, economic, social, and cultural-that is now clustering around the concept of Islamic/Halal tourism, and all that it implies. There is an increasing level of awareness about the social, economic and cultural potentials of the Islamic tourism at the top policy makers' level. In fact, tourism is an important constituent of the OIC development agenda and over the years, several conferences and forums including eight Ministers level conferences have been organized to highlight the major issues and challenges facing the development of tourism in OIC countries and formulate policy actions to address these challenges. Development of Islamic tourism has also gained greater importance on the agenda of the OIC and the First OIC International Forum on Islamic Tourism was organized in Jakarta, Indonesia on 2-3 June 2014.

In this context and in the light of the discussion in this section, some policy recommendations could be made for the consideration of the OIC countries at both national and OIC cooperation level, and the major stakeholders of tourism industry.

At the National and the OIC Cooperation Level

Harmonization of policies and guidelines: There is a need for working out modalities and findings ways and means to harmonize the Islamic Tourism policies and guidelines in order to promote development of Islamic tourism and better cooperation among the OIC countries.

Sharing of expertise and experiences for the development of Islamic tourism: Among the OIC countries, there are some examples of successful Islamic destinations like Malaysia, Turkey and United Arab Emirates. Efforts should be made to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and exchange of expertise among the emerging Islamic tourism markets and the top performing countries.

Cooperation for making a positive image: Peace and security are the most important elements for tourism development. Due to political instability and civil conflicts in some OIC countries, there is an overall negative global media positioning of these countries. Furthermore, the phenomenon of Islamophobia is also on the rise across the globe. There is a need for joint action and cooperation at the OIC level to counter the negative media publicity and address the growing Islamophobia by highlighting the cultural and religious values and contributions of the Muslims to the history, culture,

architecture and art. This will help not only in positive image building and but also pave way for the development of Islamic tourism.

Organizing Islamic tourism events: There is a need for special conferences, workshops and forums at both OIC and national levels to introduce and advertise the Islamic tourism related products and services. Furthermore, events should also be organized to gather the major stakeholders in Islamic tourism market to share their experiences and best practices and brainstorm the joint future policies and strategies.

Utilizing the media: Media can play an important role to foster and propagate Islamic tourism activities. To this end, the OIC countries should consider establishing dedicated satellite TV channel(s); publish special editions of popular magazines on Islamic tourism and launch large-scale social media campaigns.

Designing long-term strategies and master plans for the development of Islamic tourism market: Being the major source markets and beneficiaries of Islamic tourism, the OIC countries should develop a comprehensive; evidence based and long-term strategies for the development of a sustainable Islamic tourism sector at both national and OIC level.

At the Industry Level

Ensuring Halal: Take necessary measures to ensure that all products and services provided for a halal conscious tourist are in accordance with the Islamic principles;

Training the staff: Train, educate and inform the staff and guides about the Islamic values, teachings and principals;

Facilitating the access: Prepare printed maps or develop applications that indicate the locations of mosques or prayer facilities, halal food restaurants and other related services;

Paying attention to diversity: Destination marketers need to identify and address the Islamic culture of different nationalities in order to be able to design packages that cater for their specific needs;

Proper accommodation management: Arrange the accommodation according to the Muslim needs like equipping every room with a pointer to direction of Qibla, providing praying mats and facilitating congregational prayers;

Information about halal food: Be well informed about the Halal food premises as one of the most important concerns for the majority of Muslim travellers. Get appropriate certification for halal food;

Offering gender specific facilities: Arrange separate entertainment facilities like swimming pools and Spas for women and men;

Appropriate dress code for the staff: Develop an appropriate dress code for the staffs serving in hotels and other tourist services centres;

Suitable marketing strategies: Develop and apply suitable marketing strategy in compliance with the Islamic teachings and morals for the advertisement and promotion of the Islamic tourism products and services.

Box 3: Highlights of the Key Islamic Tourism Markets

Malaysia

Malaysia leads the GMTI ranking by a big margin from the rest of countries. Large inbound Muslim traveller base relative to its size, strong Halal-friendly ecosystem and high level of awareness and promotion of Islamic tourism drives the top ranking of Malaysia. Islamic tourism is a major segment of Malaysian economy and the Ministry of Tourism has established the department of Islamic Development of Malaysia to promote Islamic tourism. Most of the tourists in Malaysia come from China and other Asia Pacific countries. However, the Government is aggressively expanding its reach by easing the visa restrictions for many OIC countries and targeting MENA market based on its credentials as an exotic yet 'Muslim-friendly' destination, with credible Halal food supply as well as family friendly entertainment and environment. Some of the major Islamic tourism players in Malaysia include:

LSG Sky Chefs -Brahim's Sdn Bhd is a co-owned subsidiary of Brahim Holding Bhd, a global halal food catering company, and Malaysia Airlines, which certifies in-flight kitchen facilities. They also plan to provide technical support to foreign in-flight caterers in China and the Middle East to certify their in-flight kitchens as halal.

Star Cruise refurbishes and operates cruise ships to house halal restaurant to attract more Muslim tourists from Malaysia, Indonesia and the Middle East. The restaurant is halal-certified by JAKIM, Malaysia's official Halal Certification Body. In 2013, JAKIM announced a 39 per cent increase in applications for halal certificates for hotels and food premises.

Malaysia as a top destination for Muslim travellers has worked hard to become a medical tourism hub. Currently, most of the medical tourists come from Indonesia, and the Middle East and North Africa. At the hospitals, female doctors usually treat female patients and there are facilities for prayer.

Turkey

Turkey is quite rich in tourism potential. Its geographic location, climate, the multicultural nature of its demographics and diverse history make it one of the most attractive destinations in the world. Currently, it is ranked as the second most popular destinations for the Muslim tourists. Family-friendly Islamic tourism market is growing fast in Turkey with strong domestic and inbound travel demand.

Turkish Airlines is growing rapidly in a bid to become a transport hub serving Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In terms of halal food, the airline states on its website that all meals served on their flights are in accordance with Islamic religious beliefs. The hub airport for Turkish Airlines, Ataturk International Airport in Istanbul is one of the fastest growing airports in the world. In general, basic Muslim needs are largely catered at the airport.

Many hotels in Turkey offer conservative holidays targeting the affluent and pious Muslim population. Among these hotels and Bera Hotel are the most famous one. Sultan Beach Hotel offers quite a number of Muslim-friendly services like halal food, separate pool for women, prayer facilities and ban on alcohol. Bera Hotel in Alanya has an open-air, ladies-only pool on the top floor to which access is strictly guarded; the elevators leading up to the pool are female only and no camera phones nor are boys aged over six are allowed. On the beach, women are required to dress modestly and only burkinis (the full Muslim swimsuit) are welcomed. The resort includes many family-friendly services like children's pools etc. All rooms include a Quran, a prayer rug and prayer beads and a Qibla pointer. Digital displays in the lifts and lobby indicate accurate prayer times and there is a mosque in the hotel.

United Arab Emirates

UAE is one of the fastest growing Islamic tourism travel destinations and. Building on its Islamic heritage and strategic location, UAE scores high on its Muslim friendly ecosystem and awareness and promotion of tourism for the Muslim travellers.

Abu Dhabi's Tourism and Culture Authority is working with travel companies to promote Islamic heritage tourism packages. Sharjah has been chosen as the Capital of Arab Tourism for 2015 and is expected to organise an Islamic Travel Summit by the end of 2015. Through this Summit, it also aims to promote co-operation within OIC member states in the travel sector. Dubai is continuing its promotion to attract travellers by promoting its Halal credentials as well as a family-friendly shopping destination.

Emirates Airline received the "World's Best Airline" award from Skytrax in 2013. Emirates Airlines has announced plans to increase its fleet of 200 aircraft by 25 percent over four years. In terms of Muslim friendliness, all meals on Emirates flights are halal. The hub airport for Emirates Airline, Dubai International Airport, is the second fastest growing airport in the world. At the airport, separate prayer rooms are available for men and women with built-in wudhu facilities, and there are arrangements for offering the Friday prayers in the airport premises.

Al Jawhara Group of Hotels and Apartments is a Muslim-friendly enterprise in UAE. All hotels are alcohol free and have a separate swimming pool for women along with a separate gym. All female staff is required to wear hijab. Hotels offer a wakeup call service for the Fajr prayers and provide a printed prayer schedule. The television channels are also family friendly.

UAE aims to start the halal certifications for the travel and tourism industry and the work on regulations to certify halal products, including food, travel, clothes, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, media, and art is close to finish.

Source: Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard, 2013, 2015, 2015a; Duman, 2011.

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