Visitor's experiential attributes and revisit intention to Islamic tourism attractions in Malaysia

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Abstract

The popularity of Malaysia as one of the prominent Islamic tourism and Muslim-friendly destinations in the world is non-arguable. The country has been recognised as one of the top destinations for Muslim travellers, owing to many factors such as world-class tourism infrastructures, nature wonders, multicultural identity, and unique culture and heritage based on the Islamic principles. The city's most iconic Islamic attractions, the National Mosque and Islamic Arts Museum were named as must-see attractions in the city, promoted heavily by the government and have ever since experiencing a tremendous increase in visitors' arrival. To keep up with the demand, these places need to continuously provide excellent facilities and services as expected by the tourists, and at the same time maintain the exclusivity of what an Islamic tourism attraction should be. It is essential to acknowledge that the success of any tourism attractions depends significantly on many factors, and these include its worthiness for repeat visitation. This study intends to discover the visitors' experience of these places and assess their likelihood to make repeat visitation to the same place. Results revealed that escapism, entertainment, and aesthetic are the experiences that affect visitors' revisit intention. Education, on the other hand, is found to have a weak relationship, prompting for further examination. Overall, the study provides an avenue for more researches to be conducted in multiple elements of these prominent Islamic tourism attractions in the country.

Keywords:

Islamic tourism; visitors experience; Islamic attractions; revisit intention; Muslim friendly

1   Introduction

Tourism is a major industry in various Islamic countries such as Morocco, Turkey, and Egypt, including Malaysia (Rahman, 2014). As one of the most important sources of revenue for Malaysia's economic development, the revenue from the tourism industry has been increasing since the year 2001 (Laderlah, 2015). There are various types of tourism, such as cultural and heritage tourism, sports tourism, adventure tourism and religious-based tourism. Religion and tourism have a close relationship in which religion becomes one of the motives of travels, hence contributes to the existence of religious tourism (Terzidou, Scarles, & Saunders, 2017; Ummara, Sundas, & Farhat, 2016). Millions of pilgrims travel to a variety of sacred places for different reasons such as to explore the culture of other countries, religions or sacred destinations. As one of the most lucrative and rapidly growing market segments in the travel industry, the Muslim travel market holds great potential to thrive as Islamic tourism destinations. The interest in Islamic tourism, or also known as halal tourism, has been recognized by the tourism industry (Battour, Ismail, Battor, & Awais, 2017). Recently, several Islamic and non-Muslim majority countries begin to offer halal tourism services, by the Islamic norms, to attract more Muslim tourists (Gabdrakhmanov, Biktimirov, Rozhko, & Mardanshina, 2016).

The Muslim market has its special requirements and culture that cannot be ignored (Battour, Battor, & Ismail, 2012; Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011), thus satisfying these needs is crucial to ensure continuous success of such destinations in the market. In recent years, Malaysia has been making efforts to brand itself as an Islamic and halal hub. Laderlah (2015) cited a Bernama report stating that Malaysia has been promoting Islamic tourism to attract the Chinese Muslim market as the statistics showed that the number of Chinese Muslim tourists to Malaysia went up to 94,000 in 2008 from 50,000 in 2005. Mastercard and CrescentRating (2017) rated Malaysia as the top Islamic destination chosen by Muslim travellers for seven years in a row since 2011. Looking at the growth of the number of tourists, particularly for Islamic tourism products, it is crucial that tourism business owners and service providers understand the impact of tourists' experiences on their businesses, and to continuously take measures to improve and satisfy their customers. This is because the nature of the industry itself is service-oriented, thus is greatly affected by the quality of tourists' experiences and their assessments on the services and facilities. This knowledge can facilitate better coordination and management of the attractions and assure returning of the tourists to the attractions and also the country.

There are various means to investigate visitors' experiences and assess their perceptions of the attractions. Pine and Gilmore (1998) termed them as the four realms of experiences or the 4Es. The 4Es consist of adding educational, Aesthetical, escapist, and entertaining experiences to the business. The four experiences vary based on the customer's active or passive participation and absorption or immersion in the experience. This present research used the framework suggested by Pine and Gilmore to understand visitors' experiences when visiting two famous Islamic attractions in Kuala

Lumpur, Malaysia. These attractions symbolise Islam as the national religion and are included as must-see attractions in Kuala Lumpur. This research intends to assess the visitors' experiential attributes and how they correlate with their revisit intention to these attractions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Tourism and visitor's experience

Malaysia is considered as one of the most dynamic countries in developing and finding opportunities for Islamic tourism. It took the initiative to organise the first Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Global Islamic Tourism Conference and Exhibition. The emergence of Islamic tourism globally has triggered Malaysia to develop better strategies and plans to provide adequate Islamic tourism products and facilities to the promising Muslim market (Kamarudin & Nizam, 2013). Islam, being the official religion of Malaysia, creates large opportunities for Malaysia to develop this country as an Islamic tourism destination.

Tourism relies heavily on tourists' visits and patronage to prosper. Tourist's experience and consumption are important to the success of tourism products and eventually to the destination. Managing these aspects of a tourist is not entirely an easy task. This is because the quality of experience often determines satisfaction and post-consumption behavioural intention. Consumption or tourist's experience is the sum of all experiences a customer had with a provider of goods and services, throughout his or her relationship with that provider (Kwek & Ross, 2016). According to Pine and Gilmore (1998), experiences are "events that engage the individual in a personal way" (p.11). It is, therefore, understandable that experience may influence the consumer emotionally, physically, and intellectually, as suggested by Mossberg (2007). Tourists experience the attractions in multiple ways; through education, aesthetic, escapism, and entertainment as indicated by Pine and Gilmore (1998).

Ghazali, Najmin, Thirumoorthi, and Taha (2017) mentioned that visitors who visited a spot for the first time searched for prior information regarding the destination's history, location, culture, and religion. Information boards and explanations from local people and the tour guide also helped to broaden the visitors' knowledge on the sacred site. Education factor can also be considered when the visitors visited artwork galleries and wineries, went shopping, had resort or spa experience, and visited spiritual, metaphysical vortexes (Jurowski, 2009). Although visitors gained a lot through educational experience, some visitors may not experience the same. Aesthetic experience, on the other hand, refers to the evaluation of the physical environment or the overall atmosphere or mood (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). According to Crozier (2012), aesthetical elements in a heritage context stemmed from the heritage infrastructure and location as well as intangible elements that engaged the imagination of visitors using a sensory trigger. Aesthetic involves the visitors in observing the physical aesthetical element of the attractions and then relating them to their experiences.

Besides, escapism experience is also one of the ways for tourists to experience attractions and is understood as anything one does to distract, forget, or take a breather from real life. Escapism is a strong motivation for tourists to visit the site. Some tourists visit the place to get away from certain situations. For example, a survey from Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) and Chauhan and Manhas (2014) both concluded that an individual visited a museum to acquire time aside from work and family and to experience a different time or space. Tourists participating in escapism experience embarked on a voyage to a specific place and participated in activities worthy of their time (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). Entertainment experience typically occurs when people passively observed others' activities or performances (Aikaterini, Seonjeong, Liang, & Lanlung, 2014). A research was done by Thyne (2001) and Scott (2007) in a museum setting, found that museums are often perceived to be interesting, joyful and fun, thus creating memorable experiences for the visitors.

A memorable tourism experience is believed to lead to overall perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and post-consumption behavioural intentions (Cooper & Hall, 2008). Many scholars suggested that perceived service quality and customer satisfaction are distinctive constructs of experiences (Sotiriadis, 2017). Perceived service quality is evaluated by the actual performance of the service in terms of a particular service attribute in a specific context, whereas customer satisfaction is assessed by the customers' overall experience of the service, of which service quality is only one aspect (Oliver, 2010; Saha & Theingi, 2009; Sotiriadis, 2017). It is generally accepted and understood that the feeling of satisfaction towards a thing or a place would have great effect on post-purchase behaviour. Satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend a business or a destination and may make repeated visits or purchases.

2.2 Revisit Intention

Revisit intention implies the expectation of a certain type of an individual's behaviour in a given setting and the possibility that he or she will act based on that expectation (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Besides, behavioural intentions can also be regarded as a form of loyalty. Oliver (2010) defined loyalty as a deeply held commitment to re-purchase or re-patronize selected products or services consistently in the future. However, Bigné, Sánchez, and Andreu (2009) argued that in a competitive market, even a satisfied customer may switch to a rival business because of the opportunity to achieve better service. Customers switch to other service providers for many reasons. This includes pricing, inconvenience, core service failures, failed service encounters, response to failed service encounters, competition, and ethical problems.

The interest of previous visitors in revisiting a region can be explained partly by tourism service provision (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2007; Neuvonen, Pouta, & Sievänen, 2010), and also by their overall attachment to the place (Hailu, Boxall, & McFarlane, 2005). Furthermore, attachment to a place was found to be connected to a visitor's perception of service quality (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005). Therefore, a conclusion can be made that intention to revisit can be explained by two important factors: those that are associated with the individual characteristics of the visitor, including place

attachment; and those that correlate with the services provided and their perceived quality (Neuvonen et al., 2010).

This study aims to assess visitors' experience and measure their satisfaction towards these prominent Islamic attractions in Malaysia. Also, the study also wishes to explain the relationship between visitors' experience and satisfaction with revisit intention. This investigation is deemed necessary as these places are popular attractions in Kuala Lumpur, and their popularity is increasing day by day. Malaysia ought to make these places stand out and able to attract not only first-time Muslim tourists but also repeating visitors to keep coming back and experience everything again. This investigation is important as it may shed some early insights into recognizing and mitigating any problems ahead.

3   Methodology

Surveys were conducted within the vicinity of two prominent Islamic attractions in Kuala Lumpur; the National Mosque and Islamic Arts Museum for five days. A self-administered questionnaire addressing the 4Es was developed, and respondents were selected based on the number of visitors according to population distribution per year at both attractions. Respondents consisted of both local and international visitors. The survey instrument was mainly aimed at identifying the underlying dimensions of visitors' revisit intention. From a total of 180 questionnaires distributed, only 150 of them were found to be usable for the analysis, obtaining 83% of response rate. The attribution items in all sections of the questionnaire used the 5-point Likert scale from "5=strongly agree" to "1=strongly disagree".

The survey items were solicited and adapted from previous researches by Oh, Fiore, and Jeoung (2007) and Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996). Some modifications were made, and the final questionnaire was tested in a pilot study involving students and lecturers at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Malaysia. After satisfying the required value of reliability analysis ($\alpha=\geq0.7$), the questionnaire was deemed as fit to be distributed to the respondents in Kuala Lumpur. Data were analysed using the SPSS program, and statistical analyses were performed by study objectives. While descriptive statistics were used to compute the mean scores for each of the visitors' experiences items, Pearson correlation coefficient was performed to test the relationship between the two variables.

4   Findings

4.1 Background of respondents

Respondents of the survey consisted of males (40%) and females (60%). A majority of them are between the age of 25-39 years old (52.7%), followed by 19-24 years old (29.3%), and 40-59 years old (14%). Only a small percentage represents 13-18 years old (2.7%), and 60 years and above (1.3%). Many of them are locals (37.3%), followed by Europeans (31.3%), and some are from other Asian countries (18%). A small number of

them comes from different parts of the world; America (8%), Oceania (4.6%) and Africa (0.7%). There was a good balance between local and international respondents for this survey. Most of them are students by profession (35.3%) and personnel at private companies (32.7%), while the rest are personnel at government agencies (11.3%), unemployed (6%) and others (14%).

4.2 Visitors experiential attributes of Islamic tourism attractions in Kuala Lumpur

Respondents were presented with four realms of visitor experiences and were asked to rate their agreement on the items to measure each of the realm. Table 1 below presented the mean scores for each item.

Table 1: Visitors experiential attributes based on 4Es

Realms	Item	Mean	SD
Education	Made me know more about Islam	3.91	.851
	Stimulated my curiosity to learn	4.05	.784
	Content of the board is informative	4.00	.751
	Provides professional guide service	3.72	.913
	Highly educational for me	3.92	.966
Aesthetic	A real sense of harmony	4.31	.795
	Being here brings pleasant	4.32	.717
	Setting is clean	4.65	.555
	Setting shown attention to detail in the design	4.39	.694
	Setting provides pleasure to my senses	3.84	.970
Escapism	Feel like living in different time/place	3.35	.969
	Completely escaped from reality	3.17	.999
	Forget about routines	3.27	1.09
	Could get away from the stressful social environment	3.76	.946
	Could recuperate my physical strength and mind	3.53	1.10
Entertainment	Enjoy interacting with others	3.65	.905
	Had fun at this place	3.77	.820
	Feel relaxed	3.90	.865
	Had an unusual experience	3.50	1.10
	Feel emotionally stimulated	3.77	.942

N=150

The descriptive analysis used was able to show which items in each realm were related to the respondents' experience at the attractions. Most of the items scored

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"neutral" to "agree" (3.00-4.00) on the scale. The respondents agreed that these places provide aesthetical value to their experiences. The physical elements designed at both places helped them to enjoy their visits. In particular, the cleanliness and design of these places were rated higher compared to other elements asked. This is appropriate given that these places hold a significant image to Islamic values. In addition, the visits brought pleasant and pleasure, as well as promoted harmony to them. The education realm was seen to have an impact on the respondents' experiences as well. They agreed that the visits helped to stimulate their learning about Islam and the information provided facilitated this process. Respondents were also asked on their intention to revisit the place in the future. Below are the mean scores for each item to measure their intention.

Table 2: Visitors intention to revisit

Realms	Item	Mean	SD
Intention to revisit	Willing to visit in the future	3.73	.976
	Will recommend the place	4.15	.763
	Willing to repurchase the paid services	3.35	.977
	Although some services are pricey, I am eager to repurchase	3.15	1.054
	Compared to other attractions, I will revisit this place more	3.45	.901
	Compared to other attractions, I will spend more time here	3.41	.964
	Compared to other attractions, I am more than willing to visit this place	3.56	.923

N=150

The findings revealed that majority of the respondents would most likely revisit the place based on their experiences at these attractions. This indicates that favourable experience will influence future behavioural intention to revisit. Based on the findings, there is also a high probability that these visitors will not only come back but will also recommend the place to other tourists. This affirms previous findings in similar researches which found that terms of destination or attraction loyalty, repeating visitors not only intended to revisit but will also recommend the specific place to their relatives and friends. Recommendation by other people is one of the most sought-after types of information for people who wish to travel. Also, word of mouth is found to be very significant in marketing because it is considered to be the most reliable source of information (Nordin, Shuib, Abdullah, & Kunasekaran, 2018; Som, Marzuki, Yousefi, & AbuKhalifeh, 2012; Wu, Li, & Li, 2018). A Pearson correlation coefficient test was performed to analyse the relationship between the variables. A rule of thumb, as indicated by Moore, Notz, and Flinger (2013), was used as a guideline to interpreting the strength of these relationships, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficient rule of thumb

Pearson correlation (r)	Strength of relationship
r < 0.3	None or very weak
0.3 < r < 0.5	Weak
0.5 < r <0.7	Moderate
R > 0.7	Strong

The results indicated that escapism, entertainment and aesthetic have a moderate positive relationship with intention to revisit. Education, on the other hand, was found to have a weak positive relationship (r = .487) with visitors' intention to revisit these attractions.

Table 4: Relationship between variables and revisit intention

Correlations	Education	Aesthetic	Escapism	Entertainment	Revisit
Education	1				
Aesthetic	.454**	1			
Escapism	.383**	.607**	1		
Entertainment	.528**	.619**	.712**	1	
Revisit	.487**	.511**	.597**	.561**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Based on the results, it is acknowledged that all realms of experience have some effect on the overall intention to revisit by the visitors. It is interesting to note that education was one of the experiences that have neither the moderate nor the strong relationship with revisit intention. Contrary to the findings by Jurowski (2009), education experience in an exhibition usually provides meaningful experiences through active participation and absorption. Visitors normally engage in interactive participation, maybe from the tour guide at the place or audio guide and acquire enough information from boards or signage or labels which helps to engage both mind and body to increase their knowledge on the place. However, some lacks in the service provided could contribute to less education experience acquired. For example, lack of information provided for the visitors, weak presentation of such information or lack of activities that involve participation from the visitors (Ho, Tsai, & Wu, 2010; Pine & Gilmore, 1998). While this study did not attempt to address the satisfaction of visitors on the education element at both attractions, it pointed out some information worthy of being investigated by the management. Probably, some improvements or issues require immediate attention to ensure that this element meets the expectation of the visitors.

The results further concluded that the other three experiences have some degree of moderate relationship with intention to revisit. Escapism experience, which is a result of active participation and immersion, means that visitors actively participated and

found themselves 'lost' or escaped from reality when visiting these places. This entails that the ambience and surroundings of the National Mosque and the Islamic Arts Museum helped visitors to truly focus on the activities and distracted them away from daily routines. Aesthetical elements of these places could contract sensory contents and physical surroundings, which created the illusion of being somewhere else. Environment plays an important role in visitors' experience and most of the time, the physical setting will affect the aesthetic experiences (Ghazali et al., 2017). The facades of these attractions which fused the traditional Islamic arts in its architectural design and decoration have certainly created a notable impression to the visitors.

The last experience which is entertainment, requires absorption and passive participation. Museums, most of the time, are always portrayed as a place that perceived to be interesting and offer chances for entertainment and fun (Bahrin, Mahdzar, Hamid, & Ghani, 2017; Ioannis & Stella, 2016; Irina & Boogaarts, 2002). This finding coincides with this statement at which these attractions did provide some extent of entertainment experience, which occupied visitors' attention. This shows that visitors of these attractions who are religiously influenced were still very keen of entertainment element, just as much as visiting other attractions. The entertainment experience gained at the National Mosque and Islamic Arts Museum did not only focus on the fun they had while at the attractions, but also on how they were emotionally stimulated by the experience gained and feeling enjoyed and entertained.

5   Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the experiential attributes of visitors to National Mosque and Islamic Arts Museum in Kuala Lumpur and their revisit intention to these attractions. Both places are prominent Islamic tourism attractions in Malaysia and are featured in media, websites and tourism packages in the city. This study provided some interesting findings on the matter studied. Visitors were found to be very keen to revisit these places due to their escapism, Aesthetic and entertainment experiences gained. This presages that the management was successful in creating a sense of escapism through services and facilities provided. Also, the outstanding architectural design, together with pristine condition, created a memorable Aesthetic experience to the visitors. Visitors were also adequately happy with the entertainment aspects of the attraction as this was also a reason for their intention to revisit.

Nonetheless, this conclusion offers some views for improvement and enhancement. It is suggested that the management enhance the interactive elements in museum exhibits, and enhance the ambience to create a more realistic, one-of-a-kind experience to the visitors. This will keep them immersed into the surroundings, feeling as if they were somewhere else, and hopefully strengthen the relationship of these experiences with the intention to revisit. On the other hand, a weak relationship between education and intention to revisit among visitors highlighted some concerns on the extent of educational elements provided to the visitors. Further studies examining this element may be conducted to acquire more evidence to help enhance this aspect of visitors'

experiences at both attractions. However, it was noticeable during data collection that some things are lacking such as the availability of guides, insufficient information on boards and minimal usage of technology to assist visitors to acquire enough information and knowledge. This entails that the management would need to take appropriate measures to ensure that these attractions remain as popular Islamic attractions in Malaysia.

6   About the author

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7   Acknowledgement

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