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MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM

THE PROMISING TOURISM SEGMENTS FOR MALAYSIA

¹Noralisa Ismail, ¹Jazira Anuar, ¹Fauziah Deraman, ²Dr Zainuddin Zakaria

¹Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management, UiTM Cawangan Terengganu

²Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Cawangan Terengganu

The Muslim population is expected to increase from 1.6 billion people (23% of the world's population as of 2010) to 2.76 billion people in 2050 (Pew Research Centre, 2015). With the huge economic, demographic and destination potential of Islamic tourism and halal travel market, many countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are gearing their efforts to fulfil the requirements of the Muslim travel market.

Malaysia, for instance, ranked as number 1 Muslim friendly travel destination in 2019, sharing the top rank with neighbourhood country Indonesia (GMTI, 2019). The previous year's report also witnessed the country continues to top the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) by Crescent Rating in partnership with Master Card for the sixth consecutive year in a row. The country has consistently been able to maintain its standing amongst the main three themes of family-friendly holiday and safe travel destination, Muslim friendly services and facilities at the destination, and halal awareness and destination marketing (Tourism Review, 2016).

The key and unique strength of Malaysia's success story on Muslim friendly and halal tourism is the commitment of Tourism Ministry as early as 2009 to identify the Muslim market as a priority market. This also led to the creation of the Islamic Tourism Centre in the same year. The key lesson learnt in Malaysia's success

story is that a government led commitment is required to activate the whole industry to make Muslim friendly tourism a priority market for the destination, with all facilities and services aligned to cater to this segment (COMCEC, 2016). Other key strengths include its large Muslim population base, a strong halal certification body, and diverse natural and man-made tourism resources.

In addition, a survey by Dinar Standard, Malaysia is named as one of the world's favourite tourism destination whereas in the Halal travel indicator, Thomson Reuters (2016) declared Malaysia as one of the countries that have best developed ecosystem for Halal travel. Malaysia is the most culturally significant country with different races and ethnics living under one roof with its own unique culture.

Malaysia offers a widespread assortment of products and services for both Muslims and non-Muslims to experience including the facilities, halal food and beverages as well as Muslim friendly accommodation. It can be found that Malaysia has numerous and reachable halal products and

services that perfectly accommodate all travellers to discover and experience the uniqueness of Malaysia. For instances, mosques and mushollas can easily be found in every district, as well as ample prayer rooms at almost every public place. Most food and beverages outlets serve JAKIM-certified halal food and many hoteliers provide qibla direction and prayer mats in their guest rooms (ITC, 2016).

Malaysia continues to lead the Global Islamic Economy Indicator, that were followed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia (GIE, 2017). Malaysia tourism industry is at the peak of its growth and widespread recognition, the acceptance of the Muslim friendly tourism concept used by Malaysia tourism industry received a positive recognition and respond from tourists' in Malaysia.

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