

Predictors of International Tourists' Behavioural Intention to Visit Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper

Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)
2024, Vol. 16 (1) pp 378-388
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UITM Press
Submit date: 30th October 2023
Accept date: 21st December 2023
Publish date: 30th April 2024

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Proposed citation:

Abdul Muhaemin, I. A., & Gani, A. A. (2024). Predictors of International Tourists' Behavioural Intention to Visit Malaysia: A Conceptual Paper. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts*, 16(1), 378-388.

Abstract

International tourists' intention to visit Malaysia as an Islamic tourism destination is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Through an extensive literature review, the study identifies TPB as a pivotal framework for comprehending the intentions and behaviors of visitors. The methodology employed is rooted in a quantitative approach, seeking to provide profound insights into the realms of international tourist experiences. By integrating the TPB, the research aims to deepen the understanding of the determinants of travel decisions and to craft effective strategies for enticing both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists to Malaysia. The review findings underscore the significance of aligning promotional strategies with visitor perceptions to bolster Malaysia's standing as a premier halal Muslim-friendly tourism destination globally. Methodologically, the study champions a rigorous quantitative approach coupled with appropriate data analysis techniques to extract meaningful insights. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) emerges as a key tool for unraveling the intricate relationships between diverse factors influencing tourist behavior, underscoring the study's commitment to thorough analysis and robust findings. This study employs an extended TPB (ETPB) model, including the constructs of tourist destination image, to predict the travel intentions of international tourists regarding their intention to travel to Malaysia, contributing to developing targeted strategies for promoting halal tourism and attracting more Muslim and non-Muslim tourists to Malaysia.

Keywords:

Islamic tourism, Theory of Planned Behavior, Destination Image, Malaysia, International tourists, Muslim tourists, non-Muslim tourists

1 Introduction

Islamic tourism is a tour based on Syariah and Islamic values, attracting both Muslims and non-Muslims (Abdullah et al., 2020). It offers a unique cultural experience and diverse history, attracting tourists from around the world. Malaysia's Islamic economy has grown, with Islamic enterprises in various sectors such as banking, fashion, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, entertainment, and tourism (Abdullah et al., 2020). Islamic tourism provides a new way to expand Malaysia's tourism business while upholding Islam's principles, culture, and values. Malaysia has been recognized as the top Muslim-friendly destination in the world since the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) in 2015. The country's government has made efforts to promote Islamic tourism, and the country's population of 61.3% is Muslim (Kamarudin & Ismail, 2014). To maintain its position as a top halal Muslim-friendly destination, Malaysia must continually improve its services and maintain its leadership position in the halal tourism business (Sakib, 2019). Research shows that Islamic products in Malaysia are popular among international tourists, and the country's government is working to promote Islamic tourism.

According to Jeaheng et al. (2019), Islamic tourism represents a significant potential for Muslims in the region to expand further to tap the business and showcase the region with a Muslim majority to the rest of the globe. Massive efforts have been undertaken in Malaysia to promote and grow religious and conventional tourism. According to Tourism Malaysia (2023), Islamic tourism is encouraged by providing halal products and services, such as halal cuisine, prayer facilities, and hotels that correspond to Islamic norms. Furthermore, advantageous conditions, government-backed regulations, and efforts have strengthened Malaysia's position as the global halal industry's center. It has achieved significant success by rising to the top of the Islamic tourism business.

According to Fajriyati et al. (2020), non-Muslim tourists may require specific adjustments in Muslim-majority destinations to cater to their special needs, which may be challenging for unfamiliar destinations with Islamic values and teachings. According to Ulfy et al. (2021), the influence of affecting attributes on tourists' behavioral intention to visit Malaysia as a halal tourism destination. The study found that religiosity, cosmopolitanism, and perceived destination image positively influence tourists' satisfaction and loyalty. Islamic tourism, in particular, offers a new means of developing Malaysia's tourism industry whilst maintaining Islam's ethics, culture, and values. Islamic tourism is not defined as a visit to the mosque alone, but the visit is closely related to nature, culture, or creativity that integrates with Islamic values (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Islamic tourism has rapidly become a prominent worldwide phenomenon. Many previous studies looked at Muslim tourists' intention to visit Malaysia (Ulfy et al., 2021; Khalid et al., 2023; Saad et al., 2022), Muslim tourists' perception of Malaysia (Shafaei & Mohamed, 2015; Rahman et al., 2020; Mahdzar, 2019) and satisfaction of Muslim tourists on Malaysia (Rahman et al., 2019; Nawawi et al., 2019; Mohamed et al., 2021).

There is a notable lack of studies investigating international tourists' views and perceptions of their intention to visit Islamic destinations (Cham et al., 2021; Hashemi et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021). Even though Malaysia is a well-known preferred Islamic destination worldwide, attempts to investigate its image as an Islamic destination to international tourist markets are still limited. By studying international tourists' perceptions, this research can gain insights into their preferences, motivations, and expectations regarding Islamic destinations.

The concept of destination image holds paramount importance as it wields the capacity to shape and transform future tourists' perceptions significantly, exerting a profound influence on their intentions to visit (Chaulagain et al., 2019). Previous studies primarily focused on the concept and characteristics of tourism (Salleh et al., 2019), with only a few studies investigating tourists' perceived services in terms of Islamic Destination Image (IDI), tourist travel costs, the impact of tourism's religious value, and cultural diversity, all of which may influence tourists' satisfaction for future travel to Islamic tourism destinations.

This study intends to fill the gap in general knowledge about inter justified the study's findings on Islamic destinations since previous studies mainly measure Malaysia's other image, such as medical and sustainable tourism destinations. The findings of this study will successfully prove that tourism destination image positively impacts travel decision-making. The positive image of a destination can increase the number of tourist arrivals and certainly influence tourists' perceptions. By addressing the gaps in the existing literature, researchers can provide valuable insights into the growth potential of the Islamic tourism industry and help Islamic destinations improve their offerings and attract more visitors.

The objectives for this study lies in three essential research questions. Firstly, this study aims to examine whether attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms significantly impact international tourists' intention to choose Malaysia as their Islamic tourism destination. Secondly, it seeks to determine the influence of the tourism destination image on the relationship between attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and the intention to visit Malaysia for Islamic tourism. Lastly, it aims to understand the role of the tourism destination image as a mediator in the relationship between tourists' attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and their intention to visit Malaysia as an Islamic tourism destination. These questions arise from the necessity of comprehending the factors and interactions that influence tourists' choices and their perceptions of Malaysia as an Islamic tourism destination. Addressing these questions will contribute to the formulation of effective strategies to enhance Malaysia's appeal to international tourists seeking unique Islamic tourism experiences.

In conclusion, the evolution of Islamic tourism in Malaysia reflects a dynamic fusion of tradition and modernity, offering visitors a multifaceted experience that celebrates the country's Islamic heritage. With a diverse array of attractions, halal offerings, and cultural experiences, Malaysia continues to attract a growing number of

international tourists interested in exploring the intersection of Islamic values and tourism. As Malaysia's Islamic tourism sector continues to evolve, it holds the promise of further enriching the country's tourism landscape and strengthening its position as a premier destination for travelers seeking a meaningful and culturally immersive journey.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Islamic Tourism

Islamic tourism is widely regarded as one of the most significant economic growth drivers, with Halal and Islamic tourism emerging as new tourism business concepts globally (Prayag, 2020). Islamic tourism is conceptually distinct from Halal tourism. Islam is the most essential belief or religion in terms of significance. It is the hub of Muslim commercial activities and conduct. As a religion, Islam governs the actions and inactions of its adherents. In other terms, Islamic tourism refers to religiously motivated travel by Muslims (Addina et al., 2020). Some terms used to define Islamic tourism include Halal tourism, Halal-friendly travel destinations, Halal travel, Islamic travel destinations, and Halal lifestyle. Under the Sharia concept, Islamic tourism is defined as any visitor activity, facility, action, or purpose permitted by the Sharia principle. Islamic tourism incorporates all forms of leisure and entertainment in the hotel industry and economic, cultural, and religious concepts. According to Stephenson (2014), there are specific halal hospitality sectors in which non-Muslims can be viewed as viable market segments and exploited to promote Islam as halal brands (Wilson & Liu, 2010). Consequently, the number of Shari'ah-compliant hotels in the halal tourism sector is growing, and they can be found in both Muslim and non-Muslim locations (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

Halal tourism is a developing business that has drawn Muslim and non-Muslim nations' interest. At the same time, Islamic tourism is focused on OIC Muslim-majority nations. Many non-Muslim nations have jumped on the halal tourist bandwagon, including Japan, Thailand, and South Korea, by producing and delivering Muslim-friendly travel products and services (Said et al., 2022; Han et al., 2019; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2020). A recent study found that 130 countries became halal tourist destinations in 2017, with just 46 having a Muslim majority (Feizollah et al., 2021). The Halal Tourism business has a bright future because of demographic trends and the spending rate of Muslims and non-Muslims. It is impossible to say how many nations have concentrated on encouraging Halal tourism. However, it is apparent that the market for Halal tourism is expanding and has drawn Muslim and non-Muslims' attention. Many non-Muslim countries realize the value of Halal tourism and give various incentives to attract Muslim visitors (Han et al., 2021). As a result, Muslim visitors require venues that offer halal food and beverages (Battour, 2018).

Islamic tourism is still in its early stages in Malaysia, a world pioneer in this industry. It does, however, have immense promise for the country's tourist sector and the Islamic community, and it will aid in preserving and appreciating Islamic culture in Malaysia. Islamic tourism must conform to religious principles and any style of life that is not incompatible with Islam (Abdullah et al., 2020). Malaysia boasts a wealth of attractions for Islamic tourism. Iconic mosques like the National Mosque of Malaysia and the Putra Mosque, cultural treasures such as The National Museum, the Taman Tamadun Islam in Terengganu, the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, and the Malay and Islamic World Museum. The Islamic Arts Garden Complex, dedicated to Islamic calligraphy, Quran manuscripts, architectural marvels, and more, symbolizes Malaysia's commitment to preserving Islamic art. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) plays a pivotal role in advancing Islamic tourism, collaborating with industry stakeholders to cater to Muslim tourists' needs.

Proactive initiatives and best practices have elevated Malaysia's reputation in Islamic tourism, solidifying its position as a premier destination in this field. Malaysia has a huge potential for attracting Muslim tourists from around the world. The country has potential Islamic tourist environment can be measured by the current development of its infrastructure, economic development, safety and security, natural resources, religious, and cultural activities, and historical, and hospitality enterprises.

2.2 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is a framework for predicting individuals' behavioral intentions, consisting of three main components: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Yuzhanin et al., 2016). These components collectively influence an individual's decision to engage in specific actions, such as choosing a vacation destination. While TPB has been successfully applied in the hotel and tourism sectors, there is a call to expand the theory to encompass additional influencing factors (Kim et al., 2013). By comparing changes in behavior and purpose to the original TPB model, the theory could be enhanced.

Travel intentions, which reflect the likelihood of engaging in tourism-related activities, are influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control for international visitors intending to visit Malaysia. These behavioral intentions are shaped by evaluative beliefs, normative beliefs, and environmental circumstances, with attitude playing a pivotal role (Moutinho, 1987; Cheng et al., 2006). TPB has proven reliable for predicting the desire to visit halal tourism destinations, despite doubts regarding the translation of intention into actual behavior. Subjective norms, influenced by the actions of others, affect individual behavior by reflecting significant others' approval or disapproval (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Research indicates a correlation between subjective norms and intention, demonstrating that influential individuals' opinions influence decision-making, consistent with earlier studies (Utami, 2017; Ham et al., 2015). Perceived behavioral control, a core TPB concept, is shaped by individuals' perceptions of available resources and opportunities affecting their behavior, encompassing assessments of

difficulty, resource availability, cost, effort, and time (Ajzen, 2002). Attitude, reflecting a person's judgment towards people, things, and ideas, significantly influences behavioral intention (Jalilvand et al., 2012). Attitudes can be affective, conative (behavioral), and cognitive, encompassing emotional reactions, motivation, and views of a product (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh, 2010).

Destination image as a mediator

Destination image, as defined by Gartner (1994), plays a pivotal role in tourism decisions, particularly when travellers have not visited the destination (Baloglu, 2001). In the context of Islamic tourism, Malaysia's destination image can attract Muslim and non-Muslim visitors through its infrastructure, economic development, safety, natural resources, cultural activities, and historical sites. A destination image is formed when travelers have ideas, emotions, and beliefs about a region (Chen & Phou, 2013). It may also be defined as the knowledge and impression gained by evaluating information from numerous sources to determine the destination's benefits (Zhang et al., 2014). Mohsin and Alsawafi (2011) found that perceived destination attributes can influence visitor intentions to visit a location. A favorable Islamic destination image can be a magnet for visitors from diverse backgrounds (Gartner, 1994; Baloglu, 2001). Furthermore, the perception of a destination, known as a destination image, is shaped by a tourist's overall mind and emotions related to that destination. Individuals who have not personally visited a destination tend to possess limited knowledge about it (Gnoth, 2000). The acquisition of knowledge is influenced by people's existing understanding, meaning that expectations often stem from memories of past experiences. Jenkins (1999) contended that there are numerous avenues through which individuals can construct their perception of a destination.

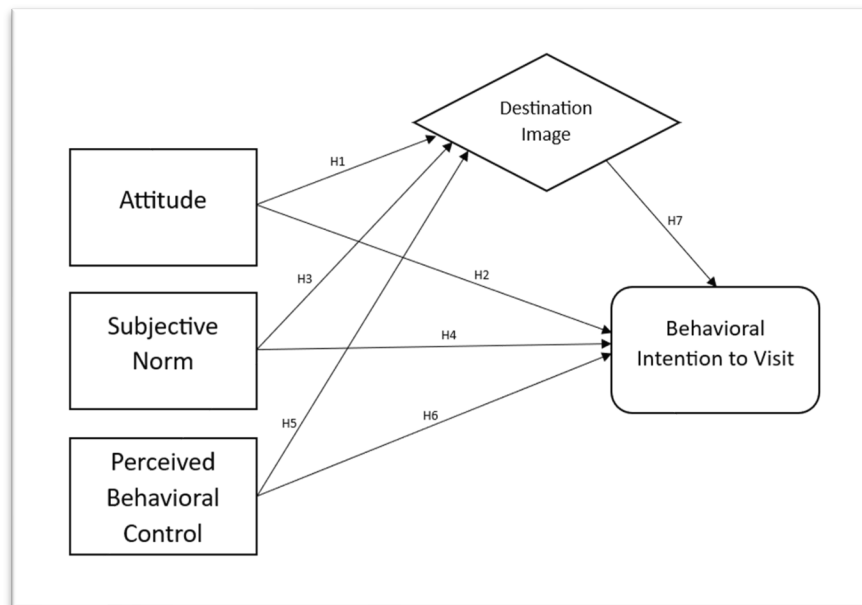


Figure 1: A proposed conceptual framework.

3 Methodology

The methodology presented in the research paper on Islamic tourism in Malaysia demonstrates a systematic and rigorous approach to investigating the factors influencing international tourists' intentions to visit Malaysia as an Islamic tourism destination. The study adopts a quantitative research design, emphasizing the collection and interpretation of quantitative data to address specific research questions related to attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and destination image. By employing a correlational research method, the study aims to explore the relationships between these variables without manipulation, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of tourist behavior.

The use of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as the theoretical framework underpinning the study is a strategic choice, given its relevance in understanding individuals' behavioral intentions in various contexts, including tourism. By incorporating constructs such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, the study seeks to elucidate the factors that influence tourists' intentions to visit Malaysia as an Islamic tourism destination. The proposed extension of the TPB model to include destination image as a mediating variable further enriches the analytical framework, offering a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making process among international tourists.

For data analysis, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS will be employed. The methodological section also addresses key aspects such as sample size determination, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques, ensuring the robustness and reliability of the study findings. The emphasis on cross-sectional data collection provides a snapshot of tourists' perceptions and intentions at a specific point in time, enabling researchers to capture a broad spectrum of responses from the target population. By adhering to best practices in quantitative research, the methodology employed in this study enhances the validity and generalizability of the findings, contributing valuable insights to the field of Islamic tourism research and informing strategic decision-making in the tourism industry.

4 Theoretical and Practical Contributions

This study's importance lies in its contribution to the development of effective strategies to enhance Malaysia's appeal as an Islamic tourism destination for international tourists. The findings will provide valuable insights into the preferences, motivations, and expectations of international tourists regarding Islamic destinations, helping Malaysia and other Islamic destinations to tailor their offerings to attract more visitors. By filling the gap in the existing literature and assessing the mediating role of destination image, this research can guide stakeholders within the Islamic tourism industry to make informed decisions and maximize the growth potential of this sector. Moreover, the study has practical implications for governments such as Tourism Malaysia, and hospitality businesses in Muslim-majority countries and beyond, as it illuminates the factors driving tourist decision-making, offering a unique perspective

on how to create a welcoming and enticing environment for tourists seeking Islamic tourism experiences. Ultimately, the research contributes to enhancing the reputation of Islamic destinations, strengthening the economic prospects of these regions, and fostering cross-cultural understanding and cooperation.

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The field of tourist behavior towards Islamic tourism is continually evolving. More research is needed to unlock the full potential and complexities of this dynamic and growing market. This ongoing research is essential in guiding the development of strategies, policies, and services within the Islamic tourism industry and fostering a deeper understanding of the preferences and needs of diverse tourists, whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. Through a comprehensive literature review and the integration of behavioral theories, the study underscores the significance of cultural authenticity, personalized experiences, and strategic marketing in positioning Malaysia as a premier halal Muslim-friendly tourism destination. The study's emphasis on knowledge generation, and positive social change underscores its potential to inform marketing initiatives that resonate with diverse traveler preferences and cultural sensitivities, fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for tourists in Malaysia.

6 About the author

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7 Acknowledgment

This research is funded through the research grant obtained from GPK (Geran Penyelidikan Khas) (Grant No: 600-RMC/GPK 5/3 (056/2020)).

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