

Attraction of Three-Star Hotel Through Alternative Entertainments

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ABSTRACT

Hotel ratings are used to classify hotels according to their quality. The objective of hotel ratings is to focus on the hotel experience as a whole. Three star hotels and above attract their guests by providing various types of services and facilities. Hotels are independently assessed in traditional systems and rely heavily on the facilities provided. This standard discriminates people with a smaller budget to experience certain services. In fact, three-star hotels can provide certain facilities and services in such a way to attract more people. This study critically discusses on the implementation of entertainment services existing in three-star hotels. Observation has been used to analyse the implementation of entertainments in the three-star hotels. The study demonstrates that most three-star hotels provide very little entertainment due to some limitations. In conclusion, three-star hotels can provide more entertainment that is shariah compliant to attract guests despite the space limitation and financial constraint.

Keywords: Halal Entertainment, Hospitality Services, Light Entertainment, Shariah Compliant, Three-Star Hotel

1. Introduction

The Malaysian Tourism Office for the year 2014 reported a total of 4,072 classified hotels which account for a considerable amount of 262,021 rooms. Malaysia’s hotel supply grew by a Compound Annual Growth

Rate (CAGR) of 14.5% in terms of hotels and 11.7% in terms of rooms during the period of 2010-14. The states of Sabah (533 hotels), Johor (509 hotels), and Pahang (424 hotels) have the highest number of hotels in the country with an average inventory of 60 keys. Of the existing hotel supply (by the number of hotels) in Malaysia, 22.7% are branded and affiliated with international companies while the rests are independently run operations. The branded hotels are mostly located in Kuala Lumpur, other famous tourist attractions in coastal areas such as Langkawi, Penang and the major cities of East Malaysia such as Kota Kinabalu and Kuching (Huijun, Vadehra & Mann, 2015).

Generally, hotels are classified based on their ratings. The classification system is a coded form based on an objective assessment of facilities and services provided. In the European Union (EU), this assessment is done by state bodies or by professional organizations. If the state assumes responsibility for classification, grading is generally obligatory. Grading systems set up by the hotel sector (professional associations) are generally voluntary to their members. Some classification systems are regionally organised, while most are national. Finally, in some EU countries there is no official rating system (European Consumer Centres Network, 2010).

Countries around the world often adopt star rating system where the higher the number of stars, the more luxurious is the standard of the hotel and therefore, more facilities and services will be provided to the guests. Of course, the price will usually be higher though some luxurious hotels could offer a more reasonable and affordable price (Martinez, Orfila & Crespi, 2005).

Eventhough the rating could indicate the facilities provided, tourists still need to check how the ratings are attributed to hotels in the country they want to travel to. The rating of a hotel often do not indicate the hotel's location; style and decoration; its suitability to senior citizens or handicapped person and young families with children. The rating also could not tell the quality of furniture and other facilities.

Taking serious attention to hotels' hospitality and facility is essential as some people choose to break away from their daily routine by travelling and being in a different environment to do fun activities as a way to reduce stress, and hotel is often their choice of accomodation. In fact, some tourists are willing to spend a substantial amount of their time and money to make their holiday more memorable. Furthermore, through the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia has allocated large amount of funds towards tourism development to accommodate these tourists. In this

regard, having comfortable cozy accommodation with pleasing ambience are necessary (Tourism Malaysia, 2014).

Apart from hospitality and facility, hotel operators need to also give premier attention to entertainments provided in the premise. People are getting busier and their lives are getting more stressful hence, it becomes more difficult for them to have a healthy and peaceful mind. Thus, as a form of get-away, it is necessary to keep them entertained to improve their quality of life through entertainment. Entertainment provides a break away from one's everyday monotonous activity. Entertainment may bring happiness to a person. Happiness has the ability to reduce stress and tension (Al-Qaradhawi, 2005). With so many sources of entertainment available at present, people have many options to choose in order to kill their precious leisure time.

Muslim scholars view entertainment as lawful and permissible as a form of mind relaxation through permissible sports, games or other similar activities provided that they do not obstruct or hinder one's religious obligation and responsibility. Activities like racing, wrestling, archery, spear-play, horse-riding and hunting are the kinds of sport which the Prophet and his companions used to participate (Hannan, 1995).

Lack of concern on this matter may have its consequences. Unseparated swimming pools between males and females for example may give an impression that covering one's aurah only requires the covering of certain body parts and disregarding the separation of activities between genders. Whereas, Islam has made it clear that there are restrictions on males and females activities. They cannot freely intermingling with one another. They must lower their gaze against any contemplation. Worse is when the lacking of shariah guidelines in hotel services could enable pre-marital affairs and this could potentially lead to a bad perception on hotels at large (Tavakoli & Mura, 2015). Therefore, hotels must provide clear rules and guidelines on entertainment and they must be imparted to the guests for them to adhere. And of course, being in an Islamic country, hotels in Malaysia should provide shariah guidelines to attract more Middle-eastern tourists to come. Futhermore, improving the entertainment facilities could be one of the way to attract them.

While spending more on high-end luxurious hotels is not a big deal to the well-off, others with lesser budget may have to look for accommodation that suit their pockets. Hence, lesser-rated hotels like three-star and below, would be their choice. Even so, travellers with a limited budget also longs for entertainment. In a nutshell, this research is

focused on investigating the entertainment elements in three-star hotels. The study also suggests some alternatives for Muslim friendly entertainments to be provided by hotel operators. The study also discussed on how three-star hotels, as an affordable accommodation option to lower-budget travellers, could attract more customers through entertainment.

2. Muslim Friendly Entertainment

Entertainment is something that makes someone feel happy, relaxed, and relieved (Kamdar, 2011). The heart of entertainment is the concept of leisure where people do things willingly for fun (Sayre, 2008). In other words, entertainment is any enjoyable things that people do without being pressured or pushed. Some people feel that fishing is stressful and boring but others feel relaxed and enjoyed in doing the activity eventhough they have to wait for hours to get the catch. Watching movies might be enjoying to some people but others would prefer to go bowling and have fun in competing with friends. So, entertainment is different depending on each person's preferences.

General guidelines on entertainment has been outlined in various sources of Islamic teaching. In the Quran Allah said: "In the bounty of Allah and in His mercy - in that let them rejoice; it is better than what they accumulate" (Quran, 10:58). The verse clearly stated Allah's permission to have entertainment. In another verse however, Allah warned that, "And of the people is he who buys the amusement of speech to mislead [others] from the way of Allah without knowledge and who takes it in ridicule. Those will have a humiliating punishment" (Quran, 31:6). The verse implied that Allah will give severe punishment to those who are overly obsessed with entertainment until they forgot their Creator.

Muslims have the right of freedom to live a happy life. Apart from performing the act of worship (ibadah) consistently, Islam propagates the Muslims to have fun with their families and relatives. This is shown by our Prophet himself who had given a very good example of entertaining his family by having fun racing with his wife, Aisha (Peace Vision, 2012). This sunnah of the prophet proved that Islam gives freedom to human beings to entertain themselves as entertainment is part of fitrah (natural disposition) (Hannan, 1995).

The main issue at present is when people are taking entertainment too far and they make entertainment as their primary aim of life. This is

called hedonism. Hedonism is the thought and cultural life which focuses and emphasizes on fun and enjoyment. Hedonists would seek pleasure (without pain) through fun programs and activities to the extent of sacrificing religious, ethical and cultural boundaries. The phenomena of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender) is an example. Some even go beyond it by indulging into intra-sexual and queer.

Islam is a *deen* (way of life) that promotes modesty in all aspects of life. Islam does not forbid the Muslims from seeking pleasure and enjoyment from entertainment as it may bring positive effects. Nevertheless, Islam does not grant absolute freedom towards those involved in entertainment as it can cause negative effects if it is not under proper supervision and guidelines. There are a lot of aspects that needs to be considered in the execution of entertainment so that the objective to receive pleasure through entertainment is achieved and not being tainted by things that are not compliant with *syariah*. Amongst the things that need to be considered are the location, the entertainment concept itself, the persons involved notably the organizers, the staffs and crews and also the audiences. The outfits and attires of the performers should also comply with the *shariah* guidelines (JAKIM, 2012).

Besides, there are a number of studies on the basic guidelines of entertainment in hotel. Muslim scholars, researchers, academicians as well as industry practitioners had outlined some basic characteristics and attributes of *shariah*-compliant hotels. In other words, they have given a set of guidelines that the hotel must comply. No inappropriate entertainment, predominantly Muslim staffs with a proper Islamic code of dressing, separate salon, recreational facilities and separate swimming pool for men and women, tourists dressing code and no gambling and alcoholic beverages in the hotel lobby or restaurant are among the attributes of *shariah* compliant hotels (Henderson, 2010; Zailani, Omar, Kapong, 2011).

Muslims are very enthusiastic travellers when it comes to the attraction that maintains family themes. Travelling is deeply rooted in Islamic tradition. Islamic tradition advocates travelling in groups on trips to faraway places. Most muslim in the world prefer to travel in groups of family members, friends and relatives. Grouping entertainment is depend on the numbers of people playing or enjoying each game or entertainment whether it is alone or interacting with other such as war games, swimming and beach games. This is one of the concept of entertainment. Another concept of entertainment is individual entertainment which

involves no interaction with people such as watching television and video games (Islam, Karkkainen, 2013).

Human activities in the context of entertainment experiences can be related to two major classes: Passive Experiences (reading novels, watching movies, listening music) that sometimes called lean back entertainment and Active Experiences (doing sports, creating art, jogging) which sometimes called lean forward entertainment. Passive and active experiences are the two poles of the activity dimension. Active experience is mainly correlated with physical presence, and passive experience mainly with mental presence (Nakatsu, Rauterberg, Vorderer, 2005).

Hotel operators in Malaysia particularly should enhance the value of offering *halal* foods, good service quality and hotel basic facilities in line with the Islamic teachings to attract more Muslim tourists particularly from the Middle East and West Asia. Hence, the hotel operators should ensure that the qualities of their hotels are maintained to suit customers' needs. If a customer's satisfaction is not met, his or her perception of service quality and hotel image will be affected. There is a need to develop more halal tourism products and services together with the shariah-compliant hotel as it is a potential market in future (Zailani et al., 2011).

3. Methodology

This study adopts the method of observation to achieve the objective of investigating the entertainments provided by three-star hotels. For the first stage, relevant literatures were searched to dig out the current entertainment guidelines and identify the suitable types of entertainment for three-star hotels. In searching the literatures, all the informations from Quranic translations, traditions of the Prophet and his companions, books, journal articles and some relevant websites related to entertainment and three-star hotel were explored.

Field work in the form of observation was then conducted on several three-star hotels in the area of Kuala Lumpur. The samples were randomly selected among the three-star hotels operating in the targeted area under study. The observations allowed for the gathering of data relating to the available entertainment services provided by the samples. In addition, observation enabled the excavation of the limitations and also opportunities that could be provided as alternative entertainment.

4. Result and Discussion

Facilities available in hotels are vary depending on the star of the hotels. Some hotels have only few entertainment services while some others have many. The common entertainment elements in three-star hotels are gymnasium, bicycle and swimming pool. These entertainments are just a few examples of the concept of entertainment.

Some hotels divide their services into categories depending on the purpose. They classified the services into three; i) entertainment that could give enjoyment like radio and television, ii) facility to facilitate the guest like gymnasium and recreational, and iii) outdoor activities like cycling and swimming.

Some other hotels divided their entertainment based on the places and the concept of entertainment. First is in-room entertainment which is provided in room such as radio and television. Second is in-house entertainment that can be used by public such as gymnasium and spa. Third is event entertainment that organized by outsiders like wedding ceremony.

All these division actually seem likely to one another. They can be combined and divided into easier concept. They can be divided into two classes which are passive entertainment and active entertainment. Passive entertainment is activity that does not require movement like watching television, reading and listening. While active entertainment is activity that require movement such as playing sports, cooking, riding horses and much more.

Some people perceived that entertainment is just thing or activity that could give excitement and pleasure whereas, it is more than that. Calmness and relaxation are actually part of it (Sulaiman, 2004; Al-Qaradhawi, 2005). Indeed the real meaning of entertainment is wider. There are other activities of entertainment such as writing, dancing, reading, painting and much more. Therefore, alternative entertainments in a wider concept could be provided in three-star hotel to attract more guest.

Besides, the entertainments must be in line with guidelines provided by authorities. Table 1 below listed several suggested entertainments that are suitable to be implemented in three-star hotels. These entertainments are chosen based on certain constraints such as limitation of space, budget limit and conformity in the three-star hotel.

Table 1. Suggested Entertainment

Entertainment	Note
Swimming pool	Should have gender-based schedule as building separate pool is costly
Water sport	If swimming pool is present
Spa	A bit costly in providing the services
Gymnasium	A bit costly in providing the equipment
Dart	Should have gender-based schedule
Table tennis	Should have gender-based schedule
Snooker	Should have gender-based schedule
Cycling	If able to provide bicycles
Basket ball	Limited area
Archery	Should have gender-based schedule

Most three-star hotel provide facilities like swimming pool, spa and gymnasium and they face difficulty in maintaining the services due to budget constraints. Besides, these entertainment are only an added feature to star-rating hotel and not the minimum requirement. Perhaps, three-star hotel can implement other entertainments that can attract guests at a lower costs such as providing mini libraries for kids, indoor play grounds, scenery landscaping for calmness ambience and as such.

5. Conclusion

Entertainment provided in three-star hotels are limited and not vary. The common available entertainment provided is television. Only some hotels provide swimming pools as they are quiet costly for the hotels to maintain. Many hotels have only limited space for the guests to conduct outdoor activities, and some are having no scenic landscaping and no entertainments equipments. So, this paper discussed briefly about the alternative entertainments that can be provided there. The limited area and cost are being considered as they are three-star hotels. The suggested entertainments are manageable as they can arrange schedule based on gender. In order to attract more guests to a hotel, the management must put attractive entertainments which are shariah compliant. Activities provided should meet the shariah guidelines to give more trust for the guests to come.

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