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# Factors of Adoption Shariah Governance in the Halal Hospitality and Tourism Industry

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## ABSTRACT

The halal industry has been globally recognized as an essential niche segment in many established industries in Malaysia, including hospitality and tourism. This is due to the industry's potential to attract both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers to access products and services that meet Shariah requirements. Therefore, robust Shariah governance is needed for the industry players to monitor the activities accordingly. However, to what extent is the commitment of the tourism stakeholders, especially from the authoritative policymakers, to ensure that effective monitoring can be achieved, given the limited research in this area of governance? This paper will investigate the factors that lead to the establishment of Shariah governance in the halal hospitality and tourism industry. A qualitative research methodology is used in this study, employing an in-text document analysis technique to obtain data, supported by content analysis to analyse the data simultaneously. The research has found that the state authorities play a significant role in realising the mission to implement an ideal Shariah governance with strong support from the federal government. It is hoped that this study will contribute to policymakers and hospitality and tourism players committing to governance practices aligned with the Shariah principle when offering and promoting the products and services in the halal hospitality and tourism industry.

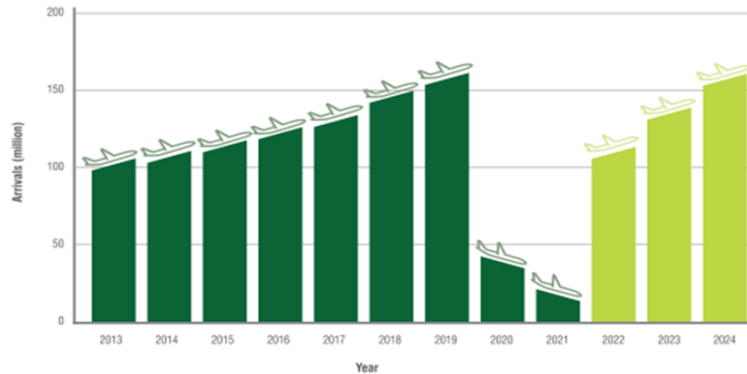
## INTRODUCTION

The Muslim population kept rising over the years for many reasons, affecting the halal industries. As illustrated in Fig.1, Crescent Rating (2023) has reported 110 million Muslim international visitors, accounting for 12% of all international arrivals in 2022. This considerable growth is equivalent to 68% of the pre-pandemic levels seen in 2019. The report predicted that Muslim traveller arrivals will rise to 140 million in 2023 and recover to the pre-pandemic levels of 160 million in 2024. Furthermore, it is anticipated

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that Muslim arrivals will reach 230 million by 2028, with an estimated expenditure of USD225 billion. Based on this increase, it is implicitly understood that the demand for halal products is essential to ensure that a sufficient supply is made available to this group. This substantial progress has created many business opportunities to capture the Muslim segments when travellers visit tourist destinations. Among the leading industries are Islamic banking and finance, takaful, halal investment, halal food, halal pharmaceuticals, and Islamic tourism and hospitality, which mutually grab this excellent opportunity.

Fig. 1 Muslim Travel Market Outlook



Source: Crescent Rating, 2023

This scenario indicates that many future investors have recognised the potential of Islamic-related market industries in their business approach and strategy, especially in branding and promotion. As a result of this scenario, industries have been introduced, and most of them are specifically segmented and tailored to Shariah-compliant businesses or placed under the existing conventional sectors. Fig. 2 shows the leading halal industries in the world (Halal Development Corporation Berhad, 2020).

Fig. 2. Global Halal Market



Source: Halal Development Corporation Berhad (2020)

This strategy was initiated to develop the economy in many tourism destinations, whether Muslim or non-Muslim. In this regard, a study by Bilim (2017) emphasises recognizing the Islamic tourism industry as the essential strategy to assist the economic growth in OIC countries. With the consecutive meetings, several initiatives were executed by members of the OIC countries to realise the mission. Among them was establishing Islamic tourism cities or destinations in dedicated countries to attract more travellers to visit the destination. This, at the same time, could contribute to the enormous halal business opportunities and revenues as well. The concept of the establishment aims to promote economic development in Islamic tourism cities, improve tourism infrastructure, establish competition among member states, and strengthen Islamic solidarity through tourism development.

Other than that, non-Muslim countries are also involved in the game, and many of them have started to promote their tourism products and services in the name of Islam to attract potential Muslim international travellers to visit their destination. Table 1 illustrates that many famous tourist destinations like Korea, Japan, Thailand and Singapore have started to use the Islamic tourism concept as their attraction (Khan & Callanan, 2017). Even Taiwan, for instance, recently promoted its place with the slogan ‘Salam Taiwan’ and appointed the famous Malaysian celebrity and influencer Mira Filzah as a tourism ambassador to promote and attract Malaysian and Bruneian people to visit Taiwan by providing five attractions namely food, unique ecology, lohas, a fusion of traditional and modern culture and shopping (Taiwan Waves of Wonder, 2019). Islamic tourism is well accepted by most destinations worldwide as a niche industry.

Thus, proper governance is crucially needed to monitor the activities of halal hospitality and tourism establishments and their services regardless of whether they are in OIC or non-OIC countries, where adopting good governance should be tailored to Shariah requirements. In this context, the understanding of Shariah governance is significant, as conceptually, Shariah governance is associated with ‘Islamic governance’, which carries a similar meaning, where the terms represent the incorporation of the ideals, values and principles in a system of governance that aligns with Islamic law to protect and promote collective social benefits (*maslahah*) and prevent social detriments (*mafsadah*) (Abdul Aziz, 2015). This means that Shariah governance is essential to ensure that all operations are Shariah-compliant.

Table 1. Tourism Strategy of the top 10 non-OIC destinations for Muslims, as identified by Crescent Rating’s recently published Global Muslim Travel Index

Top halal-friendly non-OIC destinations	National tourism plan/strategy/vision reference	Mention of Muslim or halal tourist within tourism plan/strategy	Mention of Muslim or halal tourism within the national tourism website	Mobile app
Singapore	Navigating the next phase of tourism growth (2013)	None	No results for Halal’ and “Muslim” searches	None
Thailand	Strategic tourism planning: national tourism development plan (2012-2016) Thailand	None	Website covers Muslim-friendly information	Free Mobile app on “Thailand Muslim friendly destination”
UK	Delivering a golden legacy: a growth strategy for inbound tourism to Britain from 2012-2020	None	No results for Halal’ and “Muslim” searches	None
South Africa	South Africa “national tourism sector strategy”	None	No results for Halal’ and “Muslim” searches	None
Hong Kong	Tourism vision and strategy	None	No results for “Halal” and “Muslim” searches	None
France	A tourism development strategy, June 2015	None	No results for “Halal” and “Muslim” searches	None
Taiwan	Taiwan’s 2015-2018 Tourism action Plan	None	No results for “Halal” and “Muslim” searches	None
Japan	Tourism nation promotion basic plan, 2012	None	Yes – search for “Halal” and “Muslim” produced links to food, tours, prayer facilities and other information	None
Sri Lanka	Tourism development strategy, 2011-2016	Identifies the Middle East as a potential tourist target market	Yes – search produced one link about the local Muslim community	None
USA	National travel and tourism strategy 2012	None	No results for “Halal” and “Muslim” searches	None

Source: Khan & Callanan (2017)

However, despite the positive impact of the increase in the Muslim population with the establishment of many available products and services in halal hospitality and tourism, there is still limited discussion on the need to establish Shariah governance to oversee the end-to-end activities of these tourism industries. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the extent of the commitment of the tourism stakeholders in preserving the essential elements of Shariah, especially the authoritative decision-makers, to ensure that the monitoring of their products and services can be done accordingly, as research in this area has been limited.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research method. The in-text documents technique was used to obtain the data from online databases provided by Universiti Teknologi MARA, Google Scholar, the government's official website, and other authoritative sources deemed suitable to answer the study's objective. The sources involved in this study include halal hospitality and tourism-related policies, rules and regulations, and articles relevant to the study's focus. Afterwards, the data were analysed using content analysis techniques, which ran simultaneously with the data collection, until the findings could answer the study's objective.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study has found that several themes could be generated to answer the study's inquiry: government direction, demand from travelers and the local community, and establishment of rules and regulations.

### 1. Government Direction

With the positive movement trend of inbound and outbound travellers in many Islamic tourism destinations, the government authority, in particular, has intensely considered this matter, taking into account their available tourism uniqueness and attractions to invite more potential travellers to visit their destination. Therefore, to be recognised and acknowledged as a host of halal tourism providers, the governments are committed to realising Shariah-compliant tourism products and services, and this effort should start with the authority's commitment. In the context of Malaysia, the roles of the authority could be divided into two-tier levels of implementation, namely federal and state. On this occasion, the government authorities have made many efforts to ensure Malaysia always remains at the top as a leading Islamic tourism destination in the region. The establishment of the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in 2009 principally demonstrates the commitment of the government to incorporate Islamic values into the Islamic hospitality and tourism products available in Malaysia (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2009).

With the establishment of the ITC, many responsibilities in developing and managing Islamic tourism were given to this entity. Among them are promoting Muslim-friendly tourism products locally and internationally and providing strategic support in training, research, guidelines, and standards to sustain the Islamic tourism ecosystem (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020). Apart from that, the most essential aspect of industrial practice is certifying the halal hospitality establishment as a Muslim-friendly accreditation (MFAR) establishment. Having this certification under the Malaysian Standard of Muslim-friendly Hospitality Services-Requirements known as MS 2610:2015 indicates that the halal hospitality establishment should comply with at least the minimum Muslim-friendly requirements under the certification, where the accreditation provided by the ITC is Muslim-friendly accommodation recognition (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2015). In this regard, Jais and Azizan Marzuki (2018) clarified that halal hospitality premises or services need to comply with the minimum requirements in the standard to ensure the implementation of Shariah compliance is observed accordingly. Based on the examination, the company must adhere to Shariah compliance requirements, specifically under management's responsibility. This indicates that the incorporation of Shariah governance is highly significant in establishing a good halal hospitality system based on the requirements, where the arrangement of the governance is based on the

precise elements of people with clear key functions, structure and processes needed to ensure the objective of the certification requirements is fulfilled accordingly.

This study has examined that the commitment of the highest authority is the most crucial to ensure the tourism stakeholders can implement the Shariah principles by putting the requirements into the policy. Therefore, government authorities should be given proper guidance to guide the industry players in halal hospitality and tourism. Interestingly, the commitment of the government, especially those who have the authority, influences the decision-making of Muslim-friendly establishments, especially in the firm's operation. The determination of the government authority plays a significant role concerning Muslim-friendly implementation, whereby it is vital to get the attention from the government as they have much power to direct and influence the essential halal tourism stakeholders in developing the halal hospitality and tourism industry based on the Islamic way.

Furthermore, the state and federal collaboration, it could synergize the implementation of Shariah compliance and the reason for adopting proper Shariah governance. The states of Terengganu (Battour et al., 2011), Kelantan (Habsah, 2020), Sarawak (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020) and Sabah (Islamic Tourism Centre of Malaysia, 2022), for instance, are among the states in Malaysia that have seized the opportunity to introduce their tourism products as Muslim-friendly and have gained the attention from the ITC to realise the mission. Based on the Annual Report of Islamic Tourism 2020, assistance from the ITC, the subsidiary unit under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture of Malaysia, could expedite the process of branding and marketing these Islamic tourism destinations and their potential for tourism products (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020). At this point, the incorporation of Shariah governance to manage Muslim-friendly products and services is on the verge, and therefore, it is absolutely in line with Shariah compliance. With this mission, all the state-owned corporations and commercial entities should be tailored to the government mandate. Paya Bunga Hotel in Terengganu, for instance, is a state-owned hotel reported and claimed as a Shariah-compliant hotel (Mustafa, 2018). Based on this claim, the transparency of the governance approach is urgently needed to ensure the firm aligns with the Islamic claim in line with what has been practised at the hotel. Additionally, Kelantan also shows its efforts and commitment by including the Shariah values in their implementation, where the District of Bachok has been recognized as an Islamic Tourism City (*Bandar Pelancongan Islam*) (Habsah, 2020; Majlis Daerah Bachok, n.d.). Through these efforts, the government's involvement in directing the industry players to manage their firms is essential to guide them properly.

In a nutshell, the government with the highest authority should ensure these tremendous efforts in implementing proper Shariah governance in establishing halal hospitality and tourism in products and services in Malaysia are made available and followed in the best manner. Further focus on the urgent need for good governance following Shariah is crucial to ensure the availability of products and services related to the Muslim community is monitored appropriately.

## **2. Demand from travellers and the local community**

Travellers or visitors are important clients among Muslim-friendly stakeholders, and this group significantly affects the government's plans for the country's development. Realistically, the number of travellers and visitors arriving with repeat coming indicates the resilience of the hosting provider as a Muslim-friendly tourism destination provider. Therefore, proper planning and development have been initiated and implemented appropriately to sustain the destination. Undeniably, Malaysia is among the top choices for travellers to visit due to many factors such as the safe geographical location, uniqueness of the tourism products, and high security (Abdullah et al., 2018; Amir Abdullah et al., 2020; Chamhuri et al., 2011). With this uniqueness, it is expected that all the Muslim travellers' needs could be made available and appropriately facilitated to reach their highest level of satisfaction, especially regarding their religious observances, such as prayer time, qibla direction and the accessibility of halal food. Besides that, the pulling and pushing factors are also primary considerations to ensure that the service and facilities provided to Muslim travellers adhere to the Shariah principles. A report from Crescent Rating (2023) has emphasized

that Muslim traveller would be more appreciative and gain meaningful travel experience when their religious needs and expectations are fulfilled. On this notion, the hosting provider is accountable for overseeing the available service and facilities provided in the best manner by incorporating Shariah compliance management to ensure its effectiveness.

Moreover, local community considerations are among the pushing factors for incorporating Shariah governance into establishments. The high religious observance among the local community assists in the rapid Islamisation process in many aspects of hospitality and tourism, especially on the level of Shariah compliance and the halalness of the products and services that are available and offered to them. Interestingly, the first users of the products are among the local community as well, whereby they are among the potential repeat clients to use the product and services. This can be seen in many destinations that seek the acceptance and favour of the local community to ensure the sustainability of the tourism destination. A study by Henderson (2003) asserted that political mileage is commonly influenced by the local community's interests, where the local community's consideration sets the government's agenda. An international concert that tainted the norm of the Malaysian community by showing immoral behaviour, for instance, has triggered anger among the community, and many stakeholders have been concerned about this issue (Siti Aisyah, 2023). The controversial issue denoted that the locals' dissatisfaction with the services provided could affect the host's performance (Ruzulan et al., 2022). Therefore, these issues could be managed wisely by incorporating the Shariah governance.

Therefore, with the increase of awareness and knowledge about halal consumerism, stakeholders, primarily the hosting provider and the government authority, should consider the voices of the clients and the local community, especially their sensitivities, to ensure the products and services offered in halal hospitality and tourism are sustainable and conform to the needs of the dedicated stakeholders.

### **3. Establishment of Rules and Regulations**

The rapid industrialization of the halal hospitality and tourism industry has made it globally recognized as independent. As mentioned, the industry is typically segmented under the existing industry, with halal hospitality and tourism falling under the purview of the conventional hospitality and tourism industry. The inclusion, however, cannot be denied due to the existing policy in which the activities and practices shall follow the specified guidelines and regulations based on the regulatory requirements.

In the context of the hospitality industry in Malaysia, the industry's practice shall be tailored to relevant laws, such as the Tourism Industrial Act 1992, and/or be based on federal and state regulatory requirements. In the current practice, halal hospitality and tourism establishments must observe all the requirements before being eligible for halal certification. Since halal requirements in hospitality are relatively new and dependent on the relevant laws, there is no compulsion for the halal host provider to make the Shariah values mandatory in implementing halal comprehensively in their establishment (Jais & Azizan Marzuki, 2018). This scenario occurs due to the absence of halal requirements enshrined in the regulations or laws concerning the claimant and practices in the Muslim-friendly tourism industry, except for the kitchen and food premises governed by halal regulations under the Trade Description Act 1972. By default, the inclusion of halal is voluntary, whereas, from capitalist manufacturing practice, the emergence of halal hospitality products and services is driven by the business opportunity created by the high demand from the Muslim segment in the industry. This phenomenon leads establishment owners or service providers to include and implement halal requirements to cater to the Muslim segments. This can be seen in the internal halal control system or halal assurance system established by halal certificate holders in Malaysia (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), 2020; Malaysian Halal Management System (MHMS) 2020, 2020; Mohd Safian, 2020). Therefore, the laws enacted and enforced by the competent authority require the host or the owner to incorporate halal elements throughout the process to ensure they can wisely comply with the provisions.

## CONCLUSION

This study has identified three common causes for adopting Shariah governance in the hospitality and tourism industry: government direction, demand from travellers and the local community, and establishment of rules and regulations. Indeed, incorporating Shariah values in managing halal hospitality and tourism products and activities is crucial to ensure that the implementation of halal in the company's management and operation is thoroughly supervised. Therefore, the relevant stakeholders such as the government, host providers, travellers and local community play significant roles in ensuring the effectiveness of Shariah governance. This study recommends that close collaboration and strong engagement among the stakeholders, especially the government, with the owners of the halal hospitality and tourism products and services, are crucial to ensure the excellent practice of Shariah governance can be made available and overseen accordingly in the halal hospitality and tourism industry.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Zulaipa Ruzulan carried out the research, wrote and revised the article. Muhammad Aizat, Rusni Hassan and Khairusy Syakirin Has-Yun anchored the review, revisions and approved the article submission. Hanifah Musa Fathullah Harun assisted in conceptualising the central research idea.

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