



**THE READINESS OF SELECTED HOTELS IN
MALAYSIA TO PROVIDE MUSLIM FRIENDLY
SERVICES**

BY

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Art (Halal Industry Management)**

**International Institute of Halal Research and Training
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FEBRUARY 2018

ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring the readiness of selected hotels in Malaysia towards adopting the standard of Muslim friendly services. It is conducted due to obscure terms used among hoteliers, different understanding as well as non-standardized implementation among them on the standard services. In addition, there are certain hoteliers even claimed their hotels as Muslim friendly or Islamic hotel, yet appropriate guidelines are not in place. In line with the establishment of the Malaysian Standard, MS2610:2015-Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services-Requirements, a need to explore the readiness of those hotels towards adopting and implementing Muslim friendly service is of paramount importance. In the study, the researcher identified three variables that determined those readiness, i.e.; the awareness and understanding of Muslim friendly concept among hoteliers, the management commitment and capability to fulfill the general as well as specific requirements of Muslim friendly services. Qualitative method comprised of interview with nine hotel staff, two representatives from policy maker and hotel owner association as well as observations were conducted to obtain an insight on the prescribed variables. The study found that the level of awareness among the hoteliers on the requirements of Muslim friendly services was at low level. On the other hand management commitment and capability to observe the requirement remain inadequate. For the specific requirements, these selected hotels are fully conformant, yet further support by the general requirements is still required. The study proposed, the importance of boosting further the awareness and understanding of the standard of Muslim friendly services among hoteliers, strengthening commitment of hotel management to the standard, and enhancing their capability towards implementation of Muslim friendly hotel services to comply with MS2610:2015.

خلاصة البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على مدى استعداد الفنادق المختارة في ماليزيا لهضم وتبني موصفات ومعايير خدمات الضيافة المسلمة. تنطلق فكرة الدراسة من إشكالية تعدد المصطلحات غير الواضحة التي تبناها أصحاب الفنادق ، واختلاف الأفهام فيما بينهم عن فكرة الضيافة المسلمة والتطبيقات المختلفة غير الموحدة فيما يتعلق بالخدمات. وزاد الطين بلة ، أن أصحاب الفنادق أعلنوا فنادقهم فنادق مسلمة على الرغم غياب الإرشادات المناسبة التي تستهدفها بها. فبناء على إنشاء وإصدار المواصفات والمعايير المالزية MS2610:2015 فيما يتعلق بمتطلبات الضيافة المسلمة، ترى الباحثة أهمية استكشاف مدى استعداد الفنادق لتمثل وإنجاز خدمات الضيافة المسلمة. فمن خلال الدراسة تعرفت الباحثة على ثلاث متغيرات تحدد تلك الاستعدادات، وهي: وعي وفهم فكرة الضيافة المسلمة بين أصحاب الفنادق، والتزام إدارات الفنادق وقدرتها على تحقيق المتطلبات العامة والخاصة للضيافة المسلمة. تنتهج الدراسة المنهج الكيفي في الحصول على المعلومات والبيانات، والذي تمت عبر المقابلات الشخصية مع تسعة من موظفي الفنادق، وممثلين من صانعي القرار السياسي، وأعضاء هيئة الفنادق، كما تم بالتأمل الشخصي لإنجازات وتطبيقات الفنادق المختارة لسائر الإرشادات. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن مستوى الوعي والفهم لمتطلبات الضيافة المسلمة، والتزام أصحابها وقدرتهم على متابعة متطلبات الضيافة المسلمة ما زالتا ضعيفتين . وأما فيما يتعلق بالمتطلبات خاصة، توصلت الدراسة أن الفنادق ظلت تلتزم بها ، غير أنها تحتاج وما زالت إلى تأييد ودعم من المتطلبات العامة لتقويتها. اقترحت الدراسة بأهمية تكثيف الوعي بين أوساط أصحاب الفنادق عن مواصفات ومعايير خدمات الضيافة المسلمة، وتوثيق التزام مديري الفنادق بها ، وتطوير قدراتهم على تحقيق خدمات الضيافة المسلمة حتى تتواءم مع مواصفات ومقاييس الضيافة المسلمة الماليزية MS2610:2015.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Art (Halal Industry Management).

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah S.W.T, the most Merciful and Compassionate. First and foremost, all praises to Allah S.W.T for giving me the opportunity to pursue my study until this far. I would have stumble if it was not for His Rahmah and Grace that kept me going.

My utmost gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Afridah Abas who kept pushing me out of the box and guided me from start to finish with her expertise and vast experience. I will be forever indebted to her. Her effort in this beautiful journey is much appreciated and will not be forgotten. Not to forget, the beloved Dr. Noriah Ramli and the rest of INHART lecturers. Their kindness touched my heart and will forever be remembered.

To the top of my family, my mother Wan Sepiah and father Mohd Daud, I cannot thank you enough for all of your deeds and this dissertation is not enough to return the favor that both of you did to me from nothing to who I am today. My siblings, Kak Lah, Abang Mali, Kak Ain, Kak Idah, Kak Huda, Abang Pyan, Adik Wa, and Adik Pah, sisters in law, Kak Farah and Kak Syahida. Your supports and endless love are what kept me going until now and may Allah S.W.T. bless us all from time to time.

To my best friends forever, Khadijah, Aina and Faz, thank you for the utmost supports and good laugh all of you gave throughout this journey. Never was I in a dull moment whenever we are together. I hope this beautiful friendship that we have right now will never end.

There are too many challenges I have been through to be in this place right now and I believe all of the hardships yield the best and memorable journey to be brought up in life later on. And last but not least, to all people who directly or indirectly involved in making this dissertation I humbly thank you from the bottom of my heart and may Allah S.W.T bless us all with love and prosper.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss on background of study regarding the readiness and implementation of Muslim friendly hotel services. The background of study will cover the problem statement, research objective, research question, scope of research, operational definition, research and theoretical framework and significance of research.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The contribution of tourism industry as the second largest foreign exchange earner and national key economic areas (NKEAS) assisted from the sector that supported and complemented its needs such as hospitality services. Apart and the most significant factor that leads tourism industry to succeed are the tangible and intangible elements of hospitality.

Hotel is a part of hospitality services which combined the tangible and intangible elements played significant role in tourism supply for the domestic and international tourists or travellers. Hotel is classified by price, function, location, particular market segment and distinctiveness of styles or offerings (Barrows, Powers, Reynolds, 2012). The changes of social life, economic and guest needs, the competition amongst the hotels with the development of technological innovations has highly influence the services of hotel to be improved in order to gain customer. These changes

will urge many hoteliers to accelerate their costs, improve quality and reputation, adapt flexibility and also promote innovations (Emilian & Dragos, 1990).

In Malaysia, the average of hotel occupancy rate has shown a significant correlation with the tourist arrivals and domestic tourist. This following table indicates a gradual change of domestic tourists, tourist arrivals and average occupancy rate of hotel from 2014-2016.

Table 1.1 Key tourism indicators. Source: (Tourism Malaysia and Malaysian Immigration Department, 2017) (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2015)

	2014	2015	2016	% Change 2014/2015	% Change 2015/2016
Domestic Tourists	169.3m	176.9m	189.3m	4.5%	7.0%
Tourist Arrivals	27.44m	25.72m	26.76m	-6.3%	4.0%
Average Occupancy Rate of Hotel	63.60%	61.9%	67.1%	-1.7*	8.4%

The data of the tourism indicator for domestic tourist and international tourist are important in order to see its correlations to occupancy rate of hotel. In 2014-2016 there are differences trends were identified between domestic and international tourists, whereby numbers of domestic tourists recorded an increasing of 4.5% to 7.0%. In contrast, for international tourist was notably decrease from -6.3% to 4.0%. Meanwhile average occupancy rate of hotel was recorded frequent change from -1.7% and step up to 8.4% at 2015-2016.

Being a part of the tourist arrivals, Muslims play significant roles that contribute to the progression of tourism and hospitality services in Malaysia. The growing numbers of Muslim tourist and their preferences of visiting Malaysia, has captured the attention of many, be it from the government as well as the industry players to accommodating and welcoming them by acknowledge their needs. In this context, it reflects the most important needs of hospitality services for Muslim guest in a state of

travelling, such as a place to perform prayer, Halal food availability, needs during fasting month of Ramadan. These needs are magnified mostly in the accommodation services such as hotel services.

In Malaysia, the initiative to cater Muslim tourists' needs has been well supported with the emergence of Halal industry, by introducing Halal certification and logo for the food and beverages. It was later found that the Halal certification has been obtained in most of hotels, by introducing Halal menu. Then, the hotel providers has stepped forward to enlarge their service innovation towards adapting the needs of Muslim guest in the hotel, by introducing Shariah compliant hotel services, Halal hotel, Islamic friendly hotel and others. Islamic hospitality or Muslim friendly services has been renowned in most of hotels worldwide, which specifically cater for the Muslim needs.

Thus, the scope of this research is focusing on the readiness amongst hotel players in selected hotels to provide Muslim friendly services. Recently in Malaysia, there are awareness of Islamic concept hotel and its practices exist from the perspective of policy makers, academicians and also the industry players. The problem regarding on the proliferation of Islamic concept hotel are due to the non-existence of guidelines for its practices before a recent standard, MS2610:2015 Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services was introduced. Even though, this standard has been established, however, the government still do not have current information on how far the industry are ready to implement and fulfil the minimum requirements because the adoption of standard are made upon voluntarily basis, without any monitoring and certification.

Thus, the researcher is interested to explore the hotel operator's readiness in terms of their understanding, commitment and capability of management and their practices to fulfil the underlined requirements. Other than that, this research also aimed

to identify the gap exists between other Islamic hotel concepts with Muslim friendly hotel services.

This research is significant for the stakeholders include industry players and consumers. The benefits obtained from the industry are to guide the implementation with a proper standardization to ensure their practices in fulfilling the minimum requirements and capable to run the operation systematically without competing with different concepts. The existence of different concepts would affect consumers' perception and understanding of the services provided for Muslim. It is also concerned that, the existing concept applied does not fulfilled even the minimum requirements and displayed bad image that could tarnish the Islamic values of hospitality services. Thus, by applying standardization of requirement, the consumer rights will be preserved of what they have paid for the Muslim friendly hospitality experience. In effect, it has created a various understanding and practices that bring into the issues of the readiness of hotel operators towards implementing this concept. Furthermore, from the management perspectives, it required the commitment and capability within the organization in order to realize the implementation.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In general, the problem underlined in this research is pertaining on the readiness among hotel players to provide Muslim friendly services. Although it was acknowledged that there are numbers of hotel in Malaysia have been renowned with Muslim friendly services provision, but still there are inconsistencies from the understanding on its concept and also from the implementation, amongst Shariah scholars as well as hotel operators (Hidayah et al., 2012). The status of these Islamic concept hotel are still

unknown or found uncertainty in terms of their status neither for the religious experience nor value for money (Reuters, 2011).

There are differences of understanding on Muslim friendly hotel concept, but mostly viewed on the requirements, features and attributes which dealt with tangible or visible aspects such as specific facilities in the hotel (Rosenberge and Choufany 2009). Scholars and hotel operators also have a different views pertaining on the Muslim friendly hotel service requirements (Javed, 2007).

The confusion of term also exists due to lack of understanding on concept and requirements whereas many hotels claimed they are adapting the concept of *Islamization* to their hotels but they are more into the Dry Hotel concept (Rosenberg, P., & Choufany, H. M., 2009). Other terms such as Halal hotel, Shariah compliant that referred to Muslim friendly services has lead into the saturation of industry (Ahmat, Ridzuan, & Zahari, 2012). Taking an example from Staff Writer, 2009 mentioned about misconception of provision for Muslim guest, which are simply relates with the restriction of serving alcohol in the hotel and also by providing the amenities for Muslims (Seth, R. (2006). In effect, the problem regarding on the ill definition and precise concept among hotel operators could create a business turbulence (Ahmat et al., 2012).

The unstructured implementation of Muslim friendly services at the hotel is one of the central issues witnessing most of the hotel operators have implemented according to their own interpretation (Hidayah et al., 2012) and initiated by themselves. (Junainah & Norazla, 2015) has addressed on the hotel which adapting Muslim friendly services is determined by the service provider's initiative by integrating the existing hospitality concept with the Shariah rules. Even though the standard on Muslim friendly hospitality services, MS2610:2015, has been established, but there is no benchmark to

measure the awareness among hotel operators. Specifically, Ahmed, Z. (n.d), mentioned that the standardization is lacking in addressing Shariah issues. This is directly related to the awareness and understanding among hotel players on this standard were highly influenced the readiness amongst hotel players.

Despite of the establishment of Malaysian Standard, MS2610:2015 Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services as a sole standard that covers hotel services, there are several issues on its feasibility of implementation. It is undoubted that this standard has strategized the terms and minimum requirements. Nevertheless, in term of awareness, understanding, acceptance and willingness of hotel providers to adapt with this new concept is being questioned. This is due to its infancy stages in terms of its introduction among industry players and also limited research undertaken by the academician (Junainah & Norazla, 2015). Furthermore, the fulfilment and adaptation of this new concept is made upon voluntarily basis. Therefore, the implementation of Muslim friendly concept will be time consuming.

The management requirement for Muslim friendly hotel services is another issues which given less exposure in the academic field (Che Musa; Mohammad Serazul, Noormuthaah, 2013). The research on the management is crucial whereas all the adoption of services and its practices are resulted from the agreed decision from the management level. Thus the readiness from the management level need to be explored to know their level of understanding towards the concepts and services introduced in that particular hotel.

Although the idea and implementation of Muslim friendly services in the hotel is not entirely a new concept being discussed in academic or amongst industry players, nonetheless there are gap exists between the understanding of this concept, commitment from management and also the implementation being practiced in the

hotel. Therefore this research will assess the readiness of these selected hotels to provide Muslim friendly services by analyzing these three factors in reference to the Malaysia Malaysia Standard, MS2610:2015:

- i. The understanding of hotel providers on the concept of Muslim friendly hotel services;
- ii. The commitment of hotel management towards Muslim friendly hotel services
- iii. The implementation of Muslim friendly services at the hotel.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to explore the readiness of selected hotels to provide Muslim friendly services. The readiness will be measured based on three factors, which are their awareness and understanding on the Muslim friendly concept, the commitment from management, and also the capability of implementation in that particular hotel.

Objectives 1: To identify the hotelier's awareness on the Muslim friendly hotel services concept;

Objectives 2: To analyze the commitment and capability of management to implement Muslim friendly services in their hotel;

The commitment of management towards fulfilling the general requirements will be assessed in accordance with MS2610:2015. This is referring to the management responsibility, personnel and responsibility, management system, training, documentation and storage, and communication.

Objectives 3: To assess the implementation towards Muslim friendly services at their hotel;

Practices are defined as actions of doing something regularly or repeatedly (Cambridge University Press, 2016). These practices are assessed based on the specific requirements in reference with MS2610:2015 for Muslim friendly services at the hotel. The specific requirements in this standard highlighted on the aspects of rooms, food and beverages, public *musalla*, public washroom, recreational and wellness facilities.

Objectives 4: To analyze the readiness of selected hotel towards providing Muslim friendly services.

The readiness for the selected hotels towards providing Muslim friendly services will be determined based on the hotel operators understanding, how the commitment of hoteliers and also the implementation which practiced at their hotels.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The following questions will be addressed in this research:

1. To address awareness and understanding of hotel providers on the Muslim friendly services concept.
2. The commitment and capability of management towards implementing Muslim friendly services in their hotel.
3. The aspects which the hotel fulfil the requirements for Muslim friendly services.
4. The readiness of these hotel to become Muslim friendly hotel services.

1.5 SCOPE AND LIMITATION OF RESEARCH

The scope of this research is confined to the discussion on the understanding and readiness of the selected hotels towards implementing Muslim friendly services.

The selection of population is limited to 9 hotels from 2 star rating and above, located at four states namely, Kuala Lumpur, Selangor, Kuala Terengganu and Kelantan. The selection of hotels is made due of two aspects;

- i. Muslim friendly services at the hotel
- ii. Islamic attributes featured (in room, facilities, food and beverages, operation and other additional values)

Due to the lack of exact data in regards of Muslim friendly hotel services from the relevant agencies and government, the researcher has sought information from various medium such as articles, journals, newspapers, and websites to identify the hotels that reflect Islamic services in their hotel operation. Meanwhile, the selection of respondent for this research is also limited to those who are directly manage the hotel and also involved in the operational of their hotels.

In addition, there are few numbers of hotels that could not be covered for this research due to the location and also the policy of some hotels does not permit a researcher to conduct a research at their hotels. This issue constitutes limitation to the study.

1.6 CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Conceptual definition intends to provide an understanding and further explanation on the terminology and concept, related to the scope of research. In reference to the research topic, this research will examine the readiness of selected hotels to provide Muslim friendly services. Hence, there are four components that need to be further elaborated in terms of their concepts and terminologies which can be divided as follows; i) readiness, ii) hotel, iii) hotel services, iv) selected hotels, v) Muslim friendly hotel services.

1.6.1 Definition of Readiness

Readiness is rooted from the words 'ready' that implies the preparedness to do something (Merriam-Webster, 2015). From a business perspective, readiness is defined as a state of preparedness of people, systems, or organizations in order to meet a situation or to carry out an action planned. Specifically, it refers to a state of psychologically and behaviorally prepared to take action (Weiner, 2009). These changes would affect an individual or collective decision cognitively or emotionally that could change towards agree, disagree or embrace and adopt certain idea that can alter the status quo (Holt, 2002). In this context, readiness is assessed in organizational setting which is in hotel services towards implementing Muslim friendly services which involved the organizational member's decision, belief, and action.

1.6.2 Definition of Hotel

According to the Encyclopedia of Tourism by Jafar (2000), hotel is defined as a business that involves renting room or providing accommodation to the public for a minimum duration of one night. Other than providing accommodation, hotel also covers the ancillary services such as food and drink. It is characterized under the lodging sector due to its role to accommodate the guest (Jones & Lockwood, 1989). There are some classifications that differentiate between hotel with one and another, which classified according to number of room available, level of service provision, target markets, tariff charged and types of ownership and operation (Jafar, 2000).

From the perspectives of Malaysia, there are some consensus and also additional classifications proposed by (Lim Tau et al., 2009):

1. Star rating system (1 to 5 stars)
2. Number of rooms

3. Location (rural or city)
4. Clientele (business or leisure)
5. Facilities and services (full service, economy)
6. Price (luxury, upscale, midprice, economy, budget)

Therefore, in relation to the scope of this research will be focusing on the Muslim friendly hotel services. It can be summarized that this type of services is classified under the facilities and services which facilitate the needs of Muslim guest with some modification made on its operation governed by Shariah guidelines.

1.6.3 Definition of Hotel Services

Hotel services are highly interrelated with its function and major activities or operations. Basically (Clayton W., Tom, & Dennis, 2006) addressed that most of hotel properties have same functions, but it is extended in accordance with the property size and their ways to accomplish their business goals. In more details (Bardi, 2007) has listed a full range of accommodations and services which can be guidelines to conceptualize from the real business perspective of hotel. These services include reservations, suites, public dining and banquet facilities, lounge and entertainment areas, room service, meeting rooms, specialty shops, laundry, swimming pool and other recreational activities, ground transportation and concierge services (Bardi, 2007). However the level of services is identified to be different in terms of what they are offering. It can be shown in Table 1.2.