

COMPLETION REPORT

Promoting Japan for Halal Tourism: A Multiple Stakeholders Perspective

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Japan only started to seriously target Muslim tourists in Malaysia and Indonesia after the 2011 Tohoku disaster. Many tour operators are deliberately promoting Japan as a Halal destination to Muslims. However, to what extent do these service providers understand and provide services in the Halal way. This study seeks to examine (1) the Malaysian Muslims' travel needs, (2) the governmental and service providers' understanding of religious needs, and (3) their strategies in capturing the Muslim travel market. This study also uses Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and Constraints Negotiation Theory (CNT) to understand how negotiation of constraints can facilitate travel.

Focus groups interviews were conducted to identify Malaysian Muslims' travel needs. Religion related findings identified availability of Halal food, prayer location and fear of cross contaminated food with traces of prohibited food (i.e. pork) as key concerns for Malaysian Muslims when traveling to non-Muslim countries. Although Malaysian Muslims express great interest to travel abroad, fulfilling these religious aspects without having to compromise on them is equally important. In the absence of Halal food, Malaysian tourists would seek for dining at fully vegetarian or seafood restaurants as an alternative. Recently, JNTO has provided a list and location of Muslim-friendly restaurants. Secondly, to resolve issue of prayer, Malaysian Muslims managed their travel itinerary by reducing the number of activities in a day to allow time for prayer at hotel.

Findings from focus group interviews also revealed that Malaysian Muslims are less keen on visiting places of worship due to their religious upbringing. In contrast, activities such as shopping, learning about Japanese culture (i.e. anime, kimono), or experiencing Japanese four seasons are more interesting to them and therefore should be prioritized in promotional strategies.

Interviews with Malaysian travel agencies were conducted to identify their understanding of Muslims travel needs and their willingness to accommodate and customize their packages. Tours dedicated to cater to Muslim needs are often termed as "Muslim-friendly tours", and usually incorporate provision of prayers and Halal/Muslim-friendly food as salient features of a tour package. The levels of customization travel agencies adopt vary based on their existing capacity and resources. Managements who are serious about targeting Muslims with expectations to retain their clientele undertake greater effort to provide an enriching travel experience by relating (where relevant) Islam related historical knowledge for sites with such history. Some travel agencies would do physical visit to new destination for its location and facilities (i.e. availability of Muslim-friendly restaurants) prior to launching the destination.

Results of quantitative survey revealed a direct relationship between constraints negotiation and intention to travel. This implies that Malaysian Muslims are willing to proactively overcome constraints and undertake effort to allow for performance of religious obligations in non-Muslim countries, thus expressing intention to travel. For instance, Malaysian Muslims learnt and adapted travel skills to find alternative ways in overcoming issue with Halal food by bringing pre-packed instant or canned food from Malaysia.

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