



Datuk Wira Dr Noor Zari Hamat



prayer rooms, he stated that it was good to have additional products such as Muslim-friendly healthcare facilities, cosmetics, fashion, and pharmaceutical products.

“Don’t forget, people will only come to your place if they can be comfortable to know that the products offered are halal,” said Mohd Ilyas.

He then laid out some strategies that destinations can do to champion this segment of tourism, which are:

- Promoting the destinations well on social media.
- Offering appealing ambience and social media-worthy food presentations.
- Being creative in creating new products, investing in digital marketing.
- Engaging with potential clients via social media and introducing some technologies in staff training.

Muslim-friendly hospitality services standard (MS 2610)

“The development of Malaysian Standard (MS) 2610 was initiated and started in December 2012,” said Fakheezah, Senior Assistant Director of Standardisation Division at Department of Standards Malaysia.

After a lengthy process, the final draft of MS was approved on Jan 6, 2015.

“The general content of MS 2610 is scope, normative reference, terms and definitions, general requirements, specific requirements, legal requirements and compliance.”

In terms of scope, she explained this Malaysian Standard provides guidelines and requirements for managing tourism facilities, products and services for Muslim travellers in accommodation premises, tour packages and tourist guides. However, this Standard is not applicable for health and beauty facilities such as spa and massage or any balneotherapy facilities, products and services.

“In terms of normative reference, there are two documents. MS 1500, which is on halal food, and the Tourism Industry Act 1992 (Act 482),” said Fakheezah.

She explained the general requirements in the MS covered the elements of quality management, and the specific requirements emphasised the accommodation, tour packages, and tour guide.

Fakheezah also highlighted that under this MS, all products and services should, in other aspects, comply with the legislation, including relevant requirements in force in Malaysia.

She then informed that MS 2610 was under revision and highlighted Malaysia’s participation in the Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries (SMIIC).

Muslim-friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR)

Sharing about Sunway Group’s experience in Muslim-friendly tourism was Ahmad Faizal, the Director of Sales-Wholesale at Sunway City Kuala Lumpur Hotels. He said the already established Muslim-friendly environment at Sunway City helped in pursuing to get recognised as Muslim-friendly. Sunway Hotels’ services and facilities for Muslim guests include prayer rooms, Arabic-speaking guest relation officers, wash room, bidet, qibla direction sign in the guest rooms, and a certified halal kitchen.

“If the guests choose to pray inside their room, they can always request prayer mats,” said Ahmad Faizal, adding that having the Muslim-friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) by ITC is important in this segment of tourism for the hotel industry. Hoteliers can apply for the MFAR programme through ITC’s official website. “Once we obtained the MFAR recognition, we were able to drive more businesses into Sunway Hotels and Resorts.”

At the end of the session, Dato’ Dr Mohamed Razip Hasan, the Director-General of ITC, highlighted the importance of strategic and applied research and capacity building in exploring the Muslim-friendly Tourism concept. 

Understanding Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality

Muslim tourists seek halal standards and certification while travelling

BY FATIHAH MANAF

THE GROWTH of the Muslim travel market has seen many industry players becoming interested in this tourism segment, including the non-Muslim countries.

The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) recently held a webinar titled ‘Understanding Muslim-friendly Tourism’ to provide insights regarding Islamic Tourism and Muslim-friendly destinations.

The webinar aimed to highlight the potential of Islamic tourism within the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) and sought to strengthen IMT-GT’s position as a top destination in Islamic tourism.

Datuk Wira Dr Noor Zari Hamat, the Secretary-General of Ministry of Tourism, Arts & Culture (MOTAC) Malaysia and the Chairman of ITC, issued the keynote address.

He highlighted that tourists would likely make more considered travel choices due to the pandemic by prioritising health and safety in their travel decisions. He urged destinations to understand the new needs of travellers and ramp up their efforts to address those needs.

He said: “It would be beneficial for Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand to work together in strengthening our Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality offerings so that this triangle will be a key destination for Muslim tourists.”

The webinar featured speakers Assoc. Prof. Dr Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah, Datuk Mohd Ilyas Zainol Abidin, Fakheezah Borhan and Ahmad Faizal Iskandar.

Muslim-friendly Tourism from an academic perspective

Mohd Hafiz, Deputy Dean at Faculty of Hotel & Tourism Management of MARA University of Technology (UiTM), discussed Muslim-friendly tourism from the demand and supply perspectives.

He stated that Indonesia, Thailand, Japan and Taiwan have also aggressively pushed this segment of Muslim-friendly tourism. These countries have come out with halal standards and certifications to cater to the needs of Muslim travellers.

Based on his study, Hafiz stated in visiting non-Muslim countries, Muslim travellers’ halal consumption relied heavily on their level of religiosity, how they perceive themselves as Muslims and who could influence their

decision-making.

He also highlighted that Muslims mostly travel for leisure but are urged to comply with their Islamic teachings and religiosity.

“The higher the level of religiosity, the more attitude they display towards consuming halal food,” said Hafiz, adding tourism marketers need to understand this behaviour for them to market themselves among the core Muslim market.

He said Muslims relied heavily on other people’s opinions who had prior experience in visiting these non-Muslim countries.

“The Muslim-friendly tourism strategy in Japan comprises offering Muslim-specific complementary services while maintaining Japanese local wisdom,” explained Hafiz.

While Japan separated this Muslim-friendly tourism as a separate niche market, New Zealand did not find the need to view them as a different market as these Muslim travellers have similar leisure behaviours like other tourists.

The academician also pointed out the importance of smart applications and online presence, which would be helpful for Muslim tourists.

He said: “Young Muslims are one of the key motors for growth in Muslim travel, and they are very attached to new technologies.”

Opportunities and strategies for non-Muslim destinations

Mohd Ilyas, the Executive Chairman of Ample Prospects Sdn Bhd, said while the world embraced the new normal, many countries were preparing to reopen their borders to welcome tourists with various offerings.

He said: “I believe, unless and until you make new offerings, it is quite hard to attract tourists to your destination, particularly if it is a non-Muslim destination.”

Moving forward, he said the growing Muslim travel market would remain optimistic despite the pandemic. He then divided the Muslim travellers market segment into five parts: family travel, leisure travellers, business travellers, millennial Muslim travellers, and female Muslim travellers.

These groups of travellers have different needs and wants that must be catered to by the hospitality providers. He also pointed out that 36 to 40 per cent of these Muslim travellers are millennials.

Looking at the top non-OIC destinations, Mohd Ilyas believed Muslim-friendly tourism products would be here to stay.

Aside from the halal food and comfortable



Assoc. Prof. Dr Mohd Hafiz Hanafiah



Ahmad Faizal Iskandar.



Fakheezah Borhan



Datuk Mohd Ilyas Zainol Abidin