

Leading towards Islamic Tourism City by Managing the Sensitivity of Society: A Case Study of Terengganu

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Abstract

Terengganu is one of the states in Malaysia with a unique identity that can attract local and foreign tourists. The state has been very welcoming towards tourists, which has made them an attractive Islamic tourist destination in 2018. To retain its reputation, the state government needs to ensure proper planning and strategies in ensuring the Islamic principles are implemented accordingly. Thus, this study aims to examine the significant factors for the success of Terengganu as an Islamic tourism city in managing the sensitivity of society. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research methodology which consists of text document was used, and then the data were analyzed by using content analysis and constant comparative techniques. The results have shown that the sensitivity of the local society has been taken into consideration by Terengganu's state government. In ensuring the preservation of the image of the Islamic state, the government needs to consider the sensitivity of the Muslim society in governing the Islamic tourism city.

Keywords: *Islamic city, Islamic tourism, managing sensitivity, Terengganu.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Islamic tourism is becoming among the vital niche halal segment nowadays in many places around the world including Terengganu. Based on the reports from UNWTO World Tourism Organization (2018), it has been mentioned that the arrival of tourists all around the world increased at 7.0% in 2017, that represents 1,326 million tourist's arrival, whereby this arrival is more than 86 million compared to the year 2016. This increase in number is regarded as the highest since the world economic crisis in 2009. Furthermore, UNWTO has assumed that the tourist arrival will steadily increase about 3.8% every year from 2010 to 2020. Consequently, Malaysia gets benefits from

this arrival in which it becomes catalyst for the economic development for the country (Suhaimi *et al.*, 2011), and this been confessed by the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, Muhammad Bakhtiyar Wan Chik whereby he has mentioned that the arrival of the tourists to Malaysia in 2017 increased about 25.9 million, that contributes to 14.9% of the Malaysian economy (Bernama, 2018). Following to this, it is regarded as a great opportunity for every state in Malaysia to promote their destinations and tourism products in order to keep abreast with the arrival of tourists to Malaysia.

Inevitably, Terengganu has taken a proper step in ensuring the Islamic tourism industry keeps

developing in this state. Terengganu apparently aims to be an International Islamic tourism corridor in the future in line with the vision of "*Terengganu Maju, Berkata, dan Sejahtera*". With the keen initiative of the government to uphold the Shariah spirit in the government administration, the uniqueness of the state itself that occupied mostly the Muslims society and the availability of tourism products such as beaches and islands, Kuala Terengganu Bandaraya Persisiran Air, art and culture heritage (Jabatan Pelancongan Negeri Terengganu, n.d.) could assist the state to achieve the objective. Thus, there is a need to examine the state government administration and its planning on the tourism sector by considering the life of society. Indeed, society perception and conditions are among the indicators which portray the success of Islamic tourism.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Islamic Tourism City*

Submit your manuscript electronically for review. Tourism has become among several significant segments in the economic development where the host will have to ensure that the travellers would come to visit their place. Islamic tourism is another concept that could expand and put the tourism in a higher place for consideration due to its intimate relationship with religion and belief. However, the concept of Islamic tourism has alternatively used the term halal tourism interchangeably with Muslim-friendly tourism as well, owing to different reasons. Duman (2012) defines tourism activities by Muslims that originate from Islamic motivations and are realized according to Shariah-principles. Another definition is provided by Battour and Ismail (2016), "any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to be used or engaged by Muslims in the tourism industry". The Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), which is associated with the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, defines Islamic tourism as "any activity, event, experience or indulgence undertaken in a state of travel that is in accordance with Islam" (Crescent Rating, n.d.). Based on these definitions, it could be understood that Islamic tourism concept and its practices are

governed by the main reference of Islamic law.

Indeed, the governance of Islamic tourism must adhere to Shariah requirements and its principles whereby all the activities that are related to the Islamic tourism must comply with the requirements. As mentioned by Timothy and Iverson (2006) for instance emphasized that the Islamic tourism planning must be underpinned with the principles of Islamic law in order to sustain the Islamic tourism since Islam is a foundation of a society and it is an obligation to the Muslim society to follow the orders. Thus, Islamic tourism is not merely limited to the location of the Muslim world per se, but it also includes the non-Muslim countries as long as the purpose of the tourism is to provide the Shariah compliant services and halal products to the Muslims since it is the Muslims' need. Additionally, the implementation of the Islamic tourism is due to the recognition of the location in upholding the Shariah law. This simultaneously ensure that all the activities are Shariah compliant and regardless of any religion, the travellers have to abide by certain rules and regulations required.

There are several studies that have been conducted on the Islamic tourism city internationally and nationally. A case study focuses on the tourism in the middle east conducted by Orbasli (2007) has asserted that the tourism activities will determine the conservation and continuity of traditional urban patterns. This is because maintaining the existing local culture instead of remembering the past history is more significant in sustaining the livable of Islamic tourism city since the latter exposed to the deterioration. Moreover, policymakers have a responsibility to ensure the development of the Islamic tourism city. If the rulers do not take seriously the tourism development, the tourism city could not develop well and benefit the travellers and the local inhabitants.

Alipour and Heydari (2005) have suggested that mutual participation between the policymakers and the local society is urgently needed in ensuring the formidable tourism system could be established. Unlikely for the Iran case, both seemingly see the

tourism planning at the urban areas and rural have remained alien. Due to this matter, the tourism sector is still underdeveloped compared to the other countries. This subsequently needs for the special model to ensure the tourism industry could be well developed in Iran although the de facto of the disfavour is due to the political view, the international political economy and the national conflicts as well.

With regards to the Malaysian study on the Islamic tourism city establishments, it has been found that the idea of the Islamic tourism city mostly focused on the Kelantan state. The management study has dominated the discussion in the tourism realm. Cheam, Othman and Khir (2018) for instance discussed on the perception of the tourists towards Kota Bharu Islamic city whereby the elements of spirituality, brand destination and cultural attributes are among the affecting factors of the tourists' arrival to the Islamic city of Kelantan. Another study focused on the importance of conservation and caring of the Malay cultural landscape instead of introducing contemporary designs since the objective of tourist attraction is apparently reflecting the traditional sense of the destinations (Nasir and Salleh, 2014). Following to this, Harun, Md Ali and Zawawi (2011) have shared the similar idea on the Islamic tourism city planning must ensure that the implementation should synchronize with the image and identify of the Islamic city. Hence, there is a need for consistency in the amalgamating the past and present concept of architecture so as to reviving the Islamic identity of the city in order to sustain the architectural historical values. Based on the previous study, it is very important to understand life, the past, and the existing traditional values of the city so as to ensure the preservation of the values of the city.

B. Islamic Tourism Planning

Proper tourism planning and its strategies drive the Islamic tourism city development and, of course, lead to economic growth and the stability of the local inhabitants' live. Thus, every host puts the Islamic tourism planning and its strategies as a priority in the management process, albeit, the

implementation could be varied either rigid or relax in terms of the greater degree of liberalism in accepting the tourist's arrival. A study carried out at the Maldives Resort Island, for example, found that a tight policy was introduced to the Resort Island in ensuring Muslim society is entirely protected from harmful cross-cultural conflict caused by foreign visitors and tourism. The Ministry of Tourism, and Planning and Environment of Maldives is authorized to apply wide statutory powers of environmental regulation and enforcement on the tourism industry (Domroes, 2001).

Moreover, Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) have explained that Islam has influenced on the governance of tourism particularly for the theocratic countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran in terms of determining the policy content and its implementation, sometimes may have the inbound tourists visit as not favourable, due to the negative socio-cultural impact to the host. Consequently, the preservation of the locality from the adverse effect to the host becomes an important consideration in Islamic tourism planning although the international flows could generate a lucrative income to the country.

Furthermore, the political conditions have marked to influence government planning in managing the Islamic tourism activities. Turkey for instance gradually develops its tourism planning by introducing Tourism Incentive Act in 1982 and doing mass tourism aggressively during the economic downturn in 1992-2002 in order to back up for their economic stability. Thereafter, this country has successfully leveraged their tourism products and destination simultaneously introducing diversified tourism policy in the period of 2002-2011 (Duman, 2012). A similar study was also carried out by Carboni, Perelli and Sistu (2014) on the impact of the perception of the rulers towards the Islamic tourism in Djerba Tunisia where this country is among the Arab countries that is quite liberal in the tourism activities. It is due to not showing their determination either from the government or the local inhabitants to uphold the Islamic principles in the tourism activities, as so-called Islamic tourism. This is so due to their

stand that there is no halal tourism. However, it exists tourism or “There is no halal tourism. There is simply tourism” (La Presse, 2012 as cited in Carboni et al., 2014). Nevertheless, the adoption of Islamic tourism could become an important priority in this county. However, the Islamic tourism planning could not get a peculiar place if the matter is disregarded top-down.

Based on the existing literatures, there are several factors that could determine the success of the Islamic tourism city establishments within Islamic law. However, the study on the managing the sensitivity of the local inhabitants is extremely limited compared to the study of the tourist’s perceptions and also the opportunity of the Islamic tourism that creates the lucrative income to the host of the tourism destinations. Indeed, managing the sensitivity of the society is very important to the policymakers in the tourism planning and its strategies so as to ensure that the place does not only get benefits for their economic growth, but also the preservation of the local inhabitant rights is maintained and getting the blessing from God.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the qualitative research methodology in which in-text documents techniques were used for the data collection. Then, the data were explored through the Google scholars and links to the authoritative online databases like the Wiley online, Taylor and Francis, Web of Science, Scopus and any related online databases. The literature search has also been carried out at the government authoritative web sites, local and international online newspapers to gather the primary and secondary data related to the Islamic tourism and also the ‘in thing’ triggering issues that need for the Terengganu state government to give clearance and take further actions in managing the issues. Subsequent to this, the data were analyzed by using content analysis techniques in order to investigate the issues and find the related themes for the coherent discussion, and simultaneously applied constant comparative techniques to ensure that data collected were analyzed accordingly, so as to ensure the achievement of the objectives of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Better understanding the reality of the local society is the leading factors towards the success of the Islamic tourism management. Administratively, Terengganu portrays as the main supporter for Islamic implementation in the state. This could be shown by the several reign series that are under the *Parti Islam Semalaysia* (PAS). Hence, this is indirectly showing that Islamic feeling is very strong in this state (Henderson, 2003). With this speciality, the state government is committed to ensuring the Islamic tourism management in terms of planning and its implementation in line with the Islamic principles and its requirements. Therefore, with the recognition of Terengganu by the Universal Crescent Standard Center (UCSC) as Muslim Friendly Destinations of the year 2018 (Hanneeyzah Bariah, 2018) becomes a persuasive evidence on the commitment of the state government to abide by the Islamic principles and instill the perceptions of the outsiders that Terengganu adopts the Islamic element in the government administration. This could depict that Terengganu is in a form of Islamic state, assuring almost all the state matters are under the governance of Islamic law.

Pertaining to this matter, there is a need to meticulously comprehend the reality of the local inhabitants to sustain the Islamic tourism in Terengganu. Since the majority of the population are Muslim, there is a need for preservation of their traditions, lifestyles, perception and taboos that are important in managing the Islamic tourism planning and its implementation. By understanding the sensitivity of the society, it could assist for the economic growth of the place due to the willingness of the local society to participate in the Islamic tourism development (Ibrahim, 2001). Consequently, the Islamic tourism is successful and provides a big impact on the state if the government could manage the local inhabitants’ sensitivity wisely.

Among the sensitivity issues highlighted in this study are on the attitudes of the tourists and event management which were sought through the

newspapers, blogs and the social media platforms. These issues were triggered mostly because of the political mileage agenda from the different parties and the concern of the society, not limited to the local view that Terengganu state is an Islamic state. The issue related to the attitude of the tourists, for instance on wearing the 'bikini' always sparks controversy among the society in which the state government needs to clarify cautiously on this matter. It was identified that the bikini issue was triggered during the ruling of PAS between 1999 and 2003 whereby the state government banned the wearing of bikini, however, foreign tourists were exempted (Amran & Mark, 2011; Paul, 2005). Sequence to this, when PAS resurged again, the Terengganu state government in 2018 took over from *Barisan Nasional*, the issue has been discussed again whereby the reporters tried to manipulate the statement made by the Missionary Work and Information Executive Councilor, Mohamad Nor Hamzah saying that the state government would not restrict non-Muslims from dressing in bikinis by stressing that as long as it is decently accepted by the local society (Kamarudin, 2018; Malaysiakini, 2018). However, this statement was understood differently by the opponent as saying that the method used for having discussions with the non-Muslim tourists particularly by the enforcement officers seemingly regarded as an exploitation form. Therefore, he suggested the state government to put a proper signage at the specific places as a medium of information for the tourists and this is likely to reduce the abuse by the enforcement officer when approaching the tourists (Star Online, 2018).

At this notion, Riduan Tee Abdullah (2018) opined that this issue is insignificant to debate among the parties because the main reason of the tourists visit the places is commonly owing to the beautiful scenery and the attractive local cultures compared to the controversial issue being highlighted. This has been supported with the apparent statement made by the Chief Minister of Terengganu, Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar. He mentioned that the state welcomes the foreign tourists as long as the tourists respect the laws, cultures and the sensitivity of the society. He also

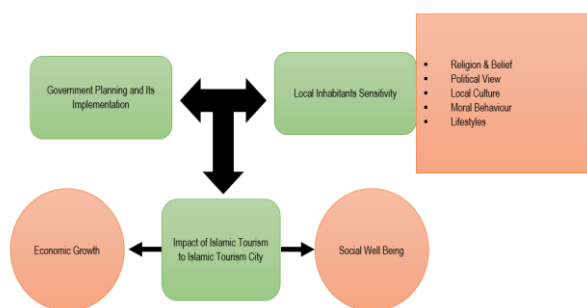
stressed on that the European countries are also subject to their laws in terms of the do and don't (Bulletin Online, 2018; Youtube, 2018). In addition, Brunei practices that govern the Islamic laws but still the tourists could have the freedom as long as it does not go against the local culture (Riduan Tee Abdullah, 2018).

Moreover, the island music festival organized yearly at Redang Island also has challenged the image of Terengganu as a leading Islamic tourism industry for the present Terengganu state government. The music festival was organized at Redang Island under the ruling of previous state government. It was reported that the disapproval factor of the festival is due to the complaints made by the society about the promotional video, showing the bikini women as 'naked' in Octoberfest (Tan Mei Zi and Chris Mohan, 2018). The society dissatisfaction contributes to the negative impact towards the place which based on the views made by the local communities of Redang Island (The Sun, 2018). Hence, the state government has tried to avoid from any negative implications to the society particularly by ensuring that any festival organized in Terengganu cannot contravene with the existing regulations in the State Entertainment Enactment 2003. There is often an inherent conflict between fulfilling the tourists' desire with the reality of a place and the aspirations of the local population (Orbasli, 2007). However, the priority should be given to the local society. Close enforcement and monitoring related to the unauthorized events are needed for the whole activities to take place so as to ensure the layman is not easily influenced with immoral behaviour elements although it is believed that the event will gain attractive revenues to the local and increase tourism activities as well.

Furthermore, disallowing certain people to not participate in a particular event is also one of the ways to manage the Islamic tourism activities under the Terengganu state government. Parallel to the previously rejected festivals, the state government also responded to the SOHO event that invited the immoral celebrity to entertain the visitors. The news has stated that two people were disallowed by the state government from

participating in the show during the event was conducted, namely Liana Rosli (the founder of tonic drinks) and Rosalinda (the dangdut singer) due to not following the conditions that has been already enshrined from the previous events (Rahman, 2018). In order to enhance the compliant of the event management activities, the government has introduced a new guideline for culture and arts programs along the lines of the state's Entertainment and Places of Entertainment Enactment 2002. Among the contents of the guideline is gender separation during public seatings, men-only stage performances; no performances during Muslim prayer times, on Thursday nights and after midnight, and no sleazy music, performance or attire and all stage performances by women have to be conducted in enclosures attended by women fans only (Noraini Jusoh, 2018). Likewise, the opponent party argued that the guideline is stricter which believed could lead to unnecessary limitation to the society like the tourists shun away and the business affected. Meanwhile, the local non-Muslim community is still in positive hope that their rights in terms of their belief and practices are still preserved (Adlan, 2018; David, 2018). On this occasion, it denotes that the state government gives priority to the social impact towards the local society by shutting the door of any tendency to create harm to the society even though there will be a possibility of reducing the revenues because of the established guidelines.

Figure 1.0 Proposed Framework in Managing Islamic Tourism City of Terengganu



In relation to this matter, underpinning the Islamic tourism industry with the Islamic principles could be shown by the significant initiatives made by the state government although it causes discomfort among the opponent parties particularly non-Muslims. The figure 1.0 shows the

relationship between the commitment of the state government with the elements of the sensitivity exists among the local inhabitants. Indeed, the way the state government manages the sensitive issues of the local society could be an exemplary to the other places. This is how the rulers should execute in ensuring the implementation of the Islamic tourism activities are not only on a paper, but it must also be followed by the enforcement and monitoring from the authoritative people.

With the vision of the state government, *"Terengganu Maju, Berkat, and Sejahtera"*, implied that the blessing of God by following the Islamic law becomes the priority instead of merely thinking on the economic growth. As the existing literatures discussed on the willingness of the local society to participate in the tourism activities (Laurian 2004), it also relied on how the authority manages the sensitivity of the local Muslims and non-Muslims, and also the existing local cultures in ensuring the objectives of implementing the Shariah principles in tourism activities could be done accordingly. Subsequently, the positive attitudes and perceptions of the local society are vital to attract the tourists to come and repeat visit in the future (Afthanorhan, Awang and Fazella, 2017). In contrast, the failing of the government to plan and implement the Islamic tourism activities could give harm to the local inhabitants like tarnishing the image of the Islamic state and increasing the immoral behaviour among society.

CONCLUSION

Managing the sensitivity of the society throughout the Islamic tourism planning, strategies and its implementation needs a good support system particularly from all stakeholders, especially the local society. The success of the Islamic tourism in the Islamic city relies essentially on the participatory willingness from within the society itself. It has to come with committed rulers to permeate the elements of Islamic law in the Islamic tourism activities by taking into consideration the sensitivity and the existing local culture could assist in the process of Islamic tourism development. The challenge of the variance understanding of the political parties has

to be tackled wisely since it could influence the society views on the existing government rulings and the outsiders' perception on the image of Islamic tourism city.

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