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Developing *Halal* Standard for Malaysian Hotel Industry: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

There has been a significant growth in the hotel industry in Malaysia. Each year, a large number of tourists especially from the Middle East countries visit Malaysia. Due to this, a lot of initiatives have been taken in its attempt to attract this group of tourists. This is done by offering hotel facilities in accordance with the religious beliefs of the Muslim tourists. Due to the above trend, it is therefore important to examine the current policies and regulatory framework relating to *halal* or Shariah Compliant hotel in Malaysia. Apart from that, this paper will also identify the prospect and challenges of developing halal hotels in Malaysia. The study will be conducted using qualitative research in which data is collected through library research and sessions of interviews with the relevant authorities. It is hopeful that the finding of this paper can provide information to the authority bodies and to industry players as well regarding the existing policies for Shariah compliant hotel. The results of this paper will also indicate the importance for the hoteliers to have knowledge and fully prepared with the prospects and challenges that they might be facing prior to developing Shariah Compliant Hotel in Malaysia.

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Keywords: Halal Standard; Malaysian Hotel Industry; Shariah Compliant Hotel

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1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a multiracial country with Islam being the largest practiced religion, comprising approximately 61.4% Muslim adherents, or around 17 million people, as of 2010. In 2011 Malaysia comprises with 28.9 million of the total population and out of that 61.4% are Muslim population which equivalent to 17.7446 million. The *halal* industry which consists of *Halal* food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, packaging and logistics products as well as in services become highlighted by many countries especially Malaysia.

In recent years, it has been observed that there is a growing interest in a new tourism concept such as 'Islamic tourism' or '*halal*' hospitality which similar to the concept of *Halal* food which had been recognized in many countries including those in the Middle East. (World Travel Market, 2007 cited in Battour, Nazari et.al, 2010). In the tourism industry, Mohd Salleh, Othman & Mohd Noor (2010) cited in Nor Shahrul Nizam & Norzaidi Daud (2012) notes that it has been drastically dropped of tourist from the Middle East of UK and US after Sept 11, 2000 and shift to other Muslim countries such as Malaysia. Similar views given by Henderson (2003) cited in Battour, Nazari et.al, (2010) claims that the traditional Arab and Muslim choice of USA and Europe destinations has changed since the September 11 attacks with Middle Eastern and hence, Muslim countries becoming increasingly popular destinations for Muslim tourists.

In response to this, the current study is an attempt to greater understands this concept by scrutinizing the current policies and regulatory framework on Shariah compliant hotels. Therefore there are the needs to discuss in depth on the issue policies and *halal* standard that can be designed in order to enable the hotelier in Malaysia keep adhering to this standard prior to being recognized as Shariah Compliant Hotel. It should be stressed that Shariah Compliant hotel was not to replace the existing hotel concept but rather to offer an alternative service and operation especially to cater Muslim tourists and others.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

It has been significant growth in the hotel industry in Malaysia. Malaysia, for instance, has been leading the way in the *halal* tourism industry and has been successful in trying to attract Muslim tourists from all over the world, especially the Middle Eastern travellers, by offering facilities in accordance with the religious beliefs of these Muslim tourists.

Even though the *Halal* certification is an option for hotels, many have decided to embed the logo into their operational processes, with the aim of capturing a bigger tourism market especially tourists from the Middle East and the Gulf countries. It can be proven by the year 2011 it foresees close to 500,000 tourists from the region. Due to this trend, many hotels are adapting their services more and more to their Muslim guests. It should be emphasized here that one of the importance of having *halal* standard for hotel industry in Malaysia is it can boost the confidence of the the general public that all the practices and activities are in compliance with the Shariah at all times whether in its products, instruments, operations, practices, management etc. . However, according to *JAKIM* (Department Of Islamic Advancement Malaysia) until now there are no legal guidelines or standard being regulated for the hotelier in order to enable them to fully abide and equip with the requirement as Shariah compliant Hotel as a whole which covered the whole premises when applying *halal* certification. What they have only is a *halal* guideline and certificate on food and beverage outlet but not covered the whole premise and management. (Yuni Aryanty, 2010). There were few empirical studies done on the needs of hotel operation according to Shariah Compliant as well as Shariah compliant perspective in hospitality and tourism industry. In fact, Islamic tourism, relationship between tourism and religion has been widely addressed in the literature on tourism. In spite of this widely acknowledged fact and research, there remain a shortage of theoretical publications and research in the area of the regulators framework or a specific *halal* standard for

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