EXAMINING THE IMPORTANCE OF MUSLIM FRIENDLY FACILITIES PERCEIVED BY INTERNATIONAL MUSLIM TOURISTS TO MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the importance of difference types of Muslim friendly facilities perceived by international Muslim tourists to Malaysia. The increasing demand of the Muslim travel market has urged the destination to offer Muslim friendly facilities to cater these groups of tourists' needs. As for Muslim tourist, they require specific needs especially when they planning to travel abroad from their home country. It is important for a destination to understand the types of facilities that is required by Muslim tourists. Questionnaires were distributed to 462 international Muslim tourists visited the country. This study managed to discover about the important of Muslim friendly facilities which includes general Islamic moralities and the availability of place of worship that is being practiced in Malaysia as perceived by the Muslim tourists.

Key Words: *Muslim friendly destination, Muslim friendly facilities, Islamic tourism, international Muslim tourists*

INTRODUCTION

The Muslim travel market is growing rapidly and has become an important market segment in the travel industry. According to Global Muslim Travel Index (2017), the Muslim international tourists estimated about 121 million in 2016 and is expected to grow to 156 million by the year 2020. Furthermore, the total travel expenditure by Muslim tourists is also projected to increase from USD 220 billion to USD 300 billion by 2026 (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2017). World Travel Market (2007) reported that the development of Muslim tourists' market cannot be overlooked by decision makers because this market is a significant contributor to the international tourism market. As the population of Muslim travellers shown a significant growth, there is an increase in demand on travelling to a Muslim friendly destination (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2011; Battour, Ismail, Battor and Awais, 2014; Rahman, 2014). Battour and Ismail (2015) defined Muslim friendly destination as any tourism activities that is allowed according to Islamic regulations and to be followed by Muslims.

It is important for a destination to develop and offer service and facilities especially for the Muslim travel market. By strengthening the Muslim friendly service and facilities in Malaysia, it can inspire Muslim tourists to come to Malaysia because of the differentiation compared to the other countries (Fatemeh and Badaruddin, 2015). The availability of Muslim friendly service and facilities is vital because Muslim friendly items is one of the most important factor that influence Muslims' decision when they decide to travel abroad (World Travel Market, 2007; Battour, 2018). Furthermore, Muslim tourists will avoid choosing a particular destination without the presence of Muslim friendly items (Battour et al., 2011). To understand the Muslim friendly facilities from the perspective of Muslim is important because a study of the particular service and facilities of a destination would provide insights or/and clues which could help destination marketers in promoting and developing the destinations (Uysal, Li and Sirakaya, 2008). This information can help the government to

decide which of the Muslim friendly items to be focused in helping Malaysia to stay above competitors in attracting the Muslim market.

Global Muslim travel pattern

Kessler (2015) stated that Muslim travel refers to a type of tourism relating with Islam or Muslim tourists. Muslim tourists refers to a person with religious conscious types of tourist (Battour et al., 2014). Muslim tourists refer to tourists who abide with the Sharia law, which refers to rules and regulation that has been stated based on Quran and Hadith. Sharia law is the way of life prescribed by Islamic teachings. Muslim tourists are more restricted to consume anything that is 'Halal' especially when they want to travel abroad of their home country. Halal refers to anything that is permissible or allows according to Sharia law, and has been used as a guidance to all Muslims.

One of the factors to shape the travelling pattern of Muslim tourist to the Muslim destination is the manifestation of 'Islamophobia'. According to Henderson (2003) and Baker (2014), September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center is one of the major reasons that changed the travel pattern to Muslim countries. This incident has significantly impacted the journey of populations associated with the religion of Islam. 'Islamophobia' is defined as a widespread distrust on mainstream Muslims (Stephenson and Ali, 2010); fear or hatred to Arab and/or Muslim individuals and communities (Kessler, 2015); and discrimination towards Muslims based on their religion or race which has led to act crime and other acts of violence (Lambert and Githens-Mazer, 2010).

'Islamophobia' has driven negative sentiments towards Muslim people all around the globe especially from the recent terrorist attacks (COMCEC, 2016). As a result, Muslims preferred to travel to and within destinations deemed friendlier (Zamani-farahani and Eid, 2015). Furthermore, safety issues were found to be one of the reasons why people were afraid to travel to the non-Muslim country. Eventually, it has lead Muslim tourists to travel to Muslim country as they felt insecure and targeted if they visit non-Muslim countries. This could be one of the explanations of why there has been an increase in travel pattern of Muslim travellers within OIC countries as reported by Crescentrating (2015).

Malaysia as a Muslim friendly destination

Malaysia is a moderate Muslim country with multi-faith and multi-races in the society where Islam is constitutionally the country's official religion (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016). Some of Muslim countries are open to receive more tourists into their country (Henderson, 2003) and Malaysia is one of the country that is being moderate to accept tourists from different countries (Rahman, 2014). Malaysia have two sets of laws, which are for Muslims and non-Muslims (Din, 1989). Islamic laws only apply for Muslims, while those who are non-Muslims are not required to follow the Islamic laws.

Muslim friendly Malaysia is the tagline used by Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) in order to develop and promote the Malaysia's Islamic tourism sector. Malaysia has the potential to become one of the top Muslim friendly destination for tourists. Hence, Malaysia tourism

industry offers tourism products that have Muslim friendly attributes and facilities to provide the tourists with a better service. The Malaysian tourism industry provides products and services that are suitable for Muslims in order to cater to the need of Muslim tourists (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2016). Furthermore, the availability of Muslim friendly facilities at the destination is important to cater the Muslim tourists. According to Samori and Rahman (2013), Malaysia tourism and hospitality industry has the capacity to be developed as a Muslim friendly destination because the country offers variety of arts, heritage and unique culture of Muslim people. The variety of cultures, way of life and the Islamic environment has distinguished Malaysia from other countries.

Muslim friendly facilities

The growth in Muslim tourist market is driving a huge potential of the Muslim friendly facilities (Crescentratings, 2018). The growing interest in Muslim travel has captured both practitioners and researchers to develop and market Muslim friendly facilities based on Sharia law (Battour and Ismail, 2015). Muslim tourists are becoming more concerned about Muslim friendly facilities especially when they are travelling away from their own country (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2011). With regard to this, Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) stated that Muslim friendly facilities are referring to the characteristics of Islamic norms and values being practices at the destination. In addition, Muslim friendly facilities can be defined as any type of services and facilities offered, to fulfil the Muslim tourists needs and that must be Halal and compliant with Sharia regulations. For example, Muslim friendly services and facilities must consist of Halal dining options, easy to access to prayer locations, airport services and facilities, and accommodation options (Global Muslim Lifestyle Tourism Market, 2016).

A survey conducted by Creative Minds Media in Muslim Travel Index Europe (2014) revealed that Muslim friendly services and facilities were found to be the important factors to Muslim tourists when considering to travel abroad. Therefore, it is important for a destination to develop and offer products and services especially for the Muslim travel market. For example, Salat is a compulsory action for Muslims to perform their prayer anywhere in the world. Consistent with that, it requires Muslim tourists to know the direction of Qibla and thus, they will request prayer mats and other facilities to perform the ritual ablutions wherever they are. Other than that, Muslim tourists will be looking for availability of Mosque or any suitable place to perform the congregational prayers as well as accommodations that can meet their needs while abroad. On top of that, the serving of alcoholic drinks is among the major issues for Muslim tourists, whereby the consumption of any alcoholic items are prohibited to all Muslim. The increased demand of Muslim travel have resulted on the rise in demand for Muslim friendly services and facilities at the destination.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The population of the study includes the international Muslim tourists to Malaysia because the Muslim travel market is now a significant segment for the tourism and travel industry. According to Tourism Malaysia (2019), the international Muslim tourists to Malaysia was

recorded at 5.2 million in 2018. Quota sampling technique were used for the current study as a method to collect data. A self-administered questionnaire for the study was distributed to international Muslim tourists who come to Malaysia. The questionnaire was developed and adopted based on previous studies to gather Muslim friendly attributes of a destination (as conducted by Battour et al., 2010; Battour et al., 2011; Battour et al., 2013, Rahman, 2014; Battour et al., 2014; Fatemeh & Badaruddin, 2015; and Global Muslim Travellers Index, 2018). The questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Arabic language to cater to English-speaking tourists and also Arabic-speaking tourists from the Middle Eastern countries. Respondents were asked to rate the list of Muslim friendly attributes based on a given scale. The scale was developed on a five point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all Important) to 5 (Very Important). The questionnaire for this study was divided into two sections. Section A of the questionnaire involves demographic information such as gender and age. Section B seeks to examine the tourists' perception on the importance of Muslim friendly facilities when they are travelling to Malaysia. The questionnaire for this study was distributed from October 2018 to January 2019, at four major international airports in Malaysia namely Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA); and Kuala Lumpur International Airport 2 (KLIA2), Penang International Airport and Langkawi International Airport.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographic profiles

Table 1: Demographic statistics of respondents (*N*=462)

Characteristics	*N*	Percentage (%)	Characteristics	*N*	Percentage (%)
Gender			**Travelling companion**		
Male	238	51.5	Solo	95	20.6
Female	224	48.5	Couple	165	35.7
Age			Group of friends	106	22.9
<19 years old	27	5.8	Family with children	96	20.8
20 - 30 years old	274	59.3			
31 - 40 years old	106	22.9	**Purpose of travel**		
41 - 50 years old	43	9.3	Business	77	16.7
51 - 60 years old	11	2.4	Leisure	290	62.8
>61	1	0.20	Other	95	20.6
Marital status					
Single	163	37.4			
Married	260	56.3			
Divorced	18	3.9			
Widowed	11	2.4			
Travelling pattern in Malaysia					
Package tour	185	40.00			
Frequent Independent travellers	277	60.0			

A final valid sample of 462 respondents were used in this study. Table 1 shows the diversity of respondents in terms of gender, age, marital status, travelling companion, purpose of travel and travelling pattern of the Muslim tourists. The statistics for gender indicated that the respondents were fairly evenly distributed, with 51.5% (238 male) and 48.5% (224 female). In relation to age, the purpose was to ensure data from different age groups were gathered to represent real tourists' profiles. Respondents from the age group of 20 – 30 years old represent the highest percentage, which is 59.3% (274). This was followed by 106 (22.9%) respondents who are aged between 31 – 40 year old; the 41 – 50 age group, which consists of 43 (9.3%) respondents; below 19 years old age group comprised of 27 (5.8%) respondents; 11 (2.4%) respondents who are in the 51 – 60 years old group, with the lowest percentage of respondents 0.2% (1) aged 61 and above. Data about the marital status showed that 37.4% (163) of the respondents were single, 56.3% (260) married, 3.9% (18) divorced and 2.4% (11) widowed.

In references to tourist's travelling pattern in Malaysia, the findings of this study showed that majority of respondents, 60% (277) were frequent independent travellers, while 40% (185) of them were using package tour in terms of their travelling pattern to Malaysia. As shown in Table 1, 35.7% (165) travelled with couple, 22.9% (106) travelled in a group of friends, 20.8% (96) travelled with their family and children, and further 20.6% (95) travelled alone. Most of the international Muslim tourists visited Malaysia because of leisure purposes, which comprised of 62.8% (290), followed by other reasons 20.6% (95), and 16.7% (77) were on their business trip.

The importance of Muslim Friendly facilities

This section explores the importance of Muslim friendly facilities as perceived by international Muslim tourists. The construct of Muslim friendly products and services consisted of four factors. The means and standard deviations of indicators on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 being "not at all important"; 2 being "not important"; 3 being "Neutral"; 4 being "important"; and 5 being "very important". Attributes were considered positively or negatively assessed if their mean score was above or below 3.00 respectively. This measurement scale consisted of 11 items reflecting the two factors, namely General Islamic morality and Place of worship facilities. Table 2 shows the findings of this study regarding the perception of international Muslim tourists towards the importance of Muslim friendly facilities based on these two factors as indicated earlier.

Based on the results of the data analysis, respondents generally had positive perception about the importance of Muslim friendly facilities when planning to travel abroad of their home country. The summated mean scores ratings of each item of Muslim friendly items are extracted using the descriptive analysis of the SPSS. The summated mean scores ranged from 3.88 to 4.35, indicating that all Muslim friendly items were perceived to be positive (refer Table 2 and Figure 1).

In term of place of worship facilities, participants likely to rate this factor as the most important with the summated means score of 4.35. In particular, respondents agreed that it is

almost "very important" for a destination to offers place of worship or known as facilities and amenities which compliment them to perform their duty to Allah. The highest mean score of 4.40 indicated that it is almost very important to have the "availability of Mosque (Masjid) in Malaysia", "provide proper ablution (wudu') facilities at tourism sites" (M = 4. 39), "easy access to prayer facilities such as at tourism sites and public places (airports, shopping mall, hotel, etc.)" (M = 4.36), and "the availability of loud public pronouncement of Azan to indicate prayer time" (M = 4.15).

The remaining summated mean scores, as shown in Table 2, was General Islamic morality factor (3.88). This shows that respondents agreed that it is almost "important" for a destination to impose and strengthen the General Islamic morality at the destination. Even though the summated mean scores for these factors are all above the average score of 3.0, all of the items comprised for each factors showed a low to high mean score ranging between 3.6 to 4.10. For instance, respondents agreed that it is important for them that "No alcoholic drinks served in halal restaurants" (with the highest mean score of 4.10), followed by "The local authority posed a strict rule of banning gambling activities at public places (such as tourism sites, hotels, parks, etc.)" (mean score of 4.00), "Prevalence of Islamic dress code at public places [e.g. Malaysian men and women wear the proper attire AND Muslim women covers their body and hair (aurah)]" (mean score of 3.98), and "The local authority posed a strict rule of banning alcoholic drinks at public places (such as tourism sites, hotels, parks, etc.)" (mean score of 3.94). There were two items listed as "neutral" to "important" with the mean score of 3.6 and 3.65. In particular, respondents stated that agreed "The hotel and restaurant staff wear uniform that follows Islamic code of attire" (mean score of 3.65) and also "Hotels offers extra TV channel / programme for Muslim guests" (mean score of 3.6).

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Muslim friendly Facilities (*N* = 462)

Factor/Item	*M*	*SD*	Summated Means for Factor
General Islamic morality			
1. The local authority posed a strict rule of banning alcoholic drinks at public places (such as tourism sites, hotels, parks, etc.)	3.94	1.080	3.88
2. The local authority posed a strict rule of banning gambling activities at public places (such as tourism sites, hotels, parks, etc.)	4.00	1.029	
3. Prevalence of Islamic dress code at public places [e.g. Malaysian men and women wear the proper attire AND Muslim women covers their body and hair (aurah)]	3.98	.990	
4. The hotel and restaurant staff wear uniform that follows Islamic code of attire	3.65	1.110	
5. No alcoholic drinks served in halal restaurants	4.10	1.113	
6. Hotels offers extra TV channel / programme for Muslim guests	3.6	1.136	

Place of worship facilities			
1. Easy access to prayer facilities such as at tourism sites and public places (airports, shopping mall, hotel, etc.)	4.36	.825	4.35
2. Availability of Mosque(Masjid) in Malaysia	4.40	.862	
3. Provide proper ablution (wudu') facilities at tourism sites and public places (airports, shopping mall, hotel, etc.)	4.39	.785	
4. The availability of loud public pronouncement of Azan to indicate prayer time	4.15	.928	
5. The hotel rooms have clearly marked prayer direction (Qibla sticker / direction points towards Makkah city)	4.45	.760	

Based on these results, international Muslim tourists' found that it is still "important" for a destination to offer a Muslim friendly facilities listed above in order to fulfil their needs a Muslim tourists. Figure 1 below shows the overall summated mean score of Muslim friendly facilities in the 2 factors discussed earlier.
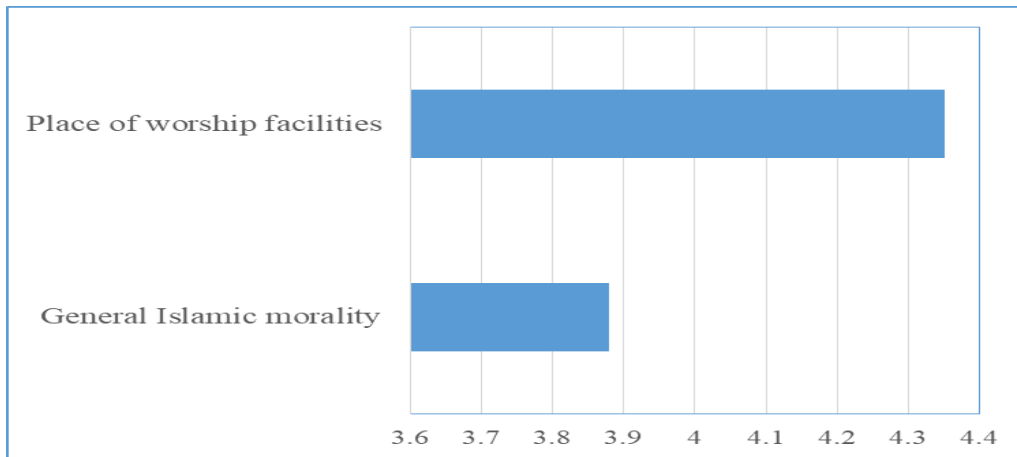

Figure 1: Summated Means Score for Muslim friendly facilities

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The Muslim travel market is and will continue to be one of the biggest contributors to the world travel market. Malaysia, as a Muslim country, has been recognised as one of the main destinations for Muslim visitors from around the world (Yusof, Ramli, and Mohd. Shariff, 2016). The importance of understanding their travel choice and spending pattern is therefore undeniable. The main objective of this study is to explore the importance of Muslim friendly facilities as perceived by international Muslim tourists to Malaysia. This study has been conducted among international tourist who is visiting Malaysia, who can be categorised in various demographic groups.

The existences of Muslim friendly facilities at the destination are very important to cater the needs of tourist especially Muslim tourists. As stated by Battour (2018), offering Muslim friendly facilities at the destination will influence tourist decision to travel and consequently, Muslim tourists will avoid selecting destination without the presence of Muslim friendly facilities (Battour et al., 2011).

Based on the result of the survey, it was found that most of the international Muslim tourists indicated that place of worship facilities was found to be one of the important factor when they plan to travel abroad (refer Table 1.1). In particular, the items in those factors were rated from "important" to "very important" with the mean scores ranging between the scales. For instance, items rated to be highly importance for Muslim friendly destination to offer Muslim tourists are facilities with the availability of Mosque, as well as having a clearly marked prayer direction (Qibla sticker / direction pointing towards Makkah city) in the hotel rooms. The findings of this study is consistent with Taha and Center (2015), where they reported that more than 80 percent of the Muslim tourists prefer their accommodation to provide the direction of qibla in their rooms.

The findings of the study also revealed that Muslim tourists viewed the availability of Mosque as important for their holiday destination selection. Furthermore, mosques are not just being used as a place to perform Muslims' prayer but also have been part of tourism itself. For example, Kessler (2015) stated that many of the Mosques in Malaysia have become part of the country's attractions. With regard to this, non-Muslim tourists were allowed to visit the mosques, while Muslims can access it as tourists or worshippers.

Another important facility that is being highly regarded by the Muslim tourists is the availability of proper ablution (wudu') facilities at tourism sites and public places. The ablution, also known as wudhu facilities is defined as a cleansing ritual to be completed before performing Salah. It includes the washing of the hands, face, forearms, forehead, ears and feet with water. The findings from the current study agrees with finding by Battour et al. (2014), where they claimed that it is important to provide the ablution facilities in the tourism sites such as airports, shopping malls, hotels and others.

Other than that the availability of Muslim friendly facilities such as providing tourist with prayer facilities is also important because Muslims have perform their religious belief and activity while enjoying their holiday. Wardi, Abror and Trinanda (2018) suggested that it is compulsory for a destination to improve the Muslim friendly facilities in order to increase the tourists' satisfaction. This study also found similar feedbacks where the Muslim tourists preferred that the prayer facilities to be easily accessible especially at tourism sites and public place. This study highlights the importance of proper planning, in this case when developing a mosque that is within the vicinity of a tourist destination, should provide easy access such as beside the main street or public places. This is important because previous studies (such as Battour, et al. 2010 and Battour, et al., 2013) found that the easy access to the prayer facilities at tourist destinations might increase the level of tourist satisfaction. This proves that while tourists were at tourism sites or when they visiting the destination, they want it to be easy for them to perform the Salat at these prayer facilities without jeopardizing their faith and belief. In addition, according to Musa, Ali and Moghavvemi (2016), Muslim tourists will have a pleasant experience if they were provided with prayer rooms at public places where they can perform prayer five times a day. This is supported by Oktadiana, Pearce and Chon (2016) found that the resorts with Islamic facilities were mostly preferred by Muslim tourists.

According to Rahman (2014) there were more mosques been built than any other place of worship throughout the world nowadays because of the recent grow of the religion globally. This proves that it is important for Muslim friendly destination to facilitate tourists with the availability of loud public pronouncement of Azan to indicate prayer time. According to Battour et al. (2014), the present of loud public pronouncement of Azan (public call to Salah which is delivered from the mosque) to indicate the prayer times contribute to the satisfaction of tourists. This study proves that as a Muslim, they are best advised to perform their prayer as soon as the prayer time starts.

This study also found that the importance of general Islamic morality factor at a Muslim friendly destination was rated as almost "important" from the perspectives of international Muslim tourists (refer Table 1.1). In particular, respondents found that it is important for Muslim friendly destination to impose strict rules with the principles of "no alcoholic drinks were meant to be served at the Halal restaurants". Muslims are abiding by the Sharia laws that stated that any alcoholic items were forbid by the Islamic law. Consistent with that, this study also found the international Muslim tourists agreed that it is importance for a Muslim friendly destination to impose a strict rule of banning of alcoholic beverages and gambling activities at public places (such as tourism sites, hotels, parks, etc.). Respondents of the study perceived that all of these rules and regulation have to be under the responsibilities of the local authority at the destination. Consequently, several authors have suggested that it is necessary as a Muslim country to ban the consumption of alcohol and gambling activities (Battour, 2010); Samori and Sabtu, 2012; and Idris and Wahab, 2015). Furthermore, according to Masouri (2014), selling and drinking alcohol, discotheques, bars and any other types of entertainments are deemed against the Sharia law (Mansouri, 2014).

The international Muslim tourists also stated it is also important for a Muslim friendly country to have a prevalence of Islamic dress code at public places, where Malaysian men and women wear the proper attire AND Muslim women covers their body and hair (aurah). In addition, respondents also prefer if the hotel and restaurant staff wear uniform that follows Islamic code of attire. According to Battour, Battor and Bhatti (2013), dress code is a source of Islamic morality. Al Hamarneh and Stainer (2004) asserted that considerations of prescribed dress codes of Muslim should be respected. For example, a Muslim man must cover from his navel to his knee and wear loose and unrevealing clothing (Yusof and Muhammad, 2013). Meanwhile, as a Muslim woman, they must cover their body and hair, as well as wearing loose clothing whenever they want to go. Muslim women must cover the details of their body from the public. In addition, Mina (2012) stated that Muslim women must cover their body and hair according to Sharia law and any inappropriate way if dressings are prohibited (Mansouri, 2014). For example, Muslim women are supposed to wear hijab and loose clothes to cover their body and for men, they are supposed to cover their thighs. The Muslim dress code can minimize sexual enticement for both men and women (Yusof and Muhammad, 2013). This could best describe respondents feel safe and secure to be at the similar environment related to their religious belief.

The least rated item was when the hotels offers extra TV channels or programmes that is suitable for the needs of Muslim guests. This study found that as a Muslim tourist, it is not

very important for them to have or providing them with the in-house guest entertainment that is based on Islamic programmes. This might best to explain that the main purpose of Muslim tourists coming to the country is because the want to have leisure (where they can enjoy and relax), or for business trip. Probably, much of their time (leisure or business tourists) will be filled with schedule, activities or business trips and meetings. Less of their time will be on spending time at their own room during their travel.

In conclusion, for a country to become a Muslim friendly destination, it is vital to follow the Islamic rules and obligations. Muslim friendly destination should take into consideration the facilities that have been regarded as important for Muslim tourists. The importance of place of worship and general Islamic morality have been discussed in details throughout this paper. It is hoped that tourism planners and marketers at the destination will benefit to offer facilities that appear to be importance from the perspective of the Muslim tourists coming from all over the world.

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