
4 A panorama of Muslim tourists' queries: What do they want to know about travelling?

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Examine the information sought by the Muslim travellers prior to travel, from their posts in the TripAdvisor forum;
- Analyse the responses given by the contributors of the TripAdvisor forum to the Muslims' posts;
- Compare the travel information sought in this Muslim study and the general study;
- Provide results that show how Muslims emphasize facilities and services that cater to the important Islamic values.

Keywords: Muslim tourists, Muslim travel needs, travel queries, travel planning, online information

Introduction

Searching for information is considered an important component of travel purchasing behaviour and trip experience. Good information assists tourists' decision-making and reduces anxiety, uncertainty and risks (Kang et al., 2020; Morrison, 2019; Xiang et al., 2015; Pabel and Prideaux, 2015; Yagi and Pearce, 2019). Three main sources of information include destination-dominated information (e.g. DMOs' marketing and promotion campaigns and websites), interpersonal and third-party information (e.g. TripAdvisor, Michelin, Lonely Planet) and internal sources (e.g. memories from past travel experiences) (Morrison, 2019). Nowadays, the popularity and trends

in using the internet for travel planning is widespread; indeed it has been identified as a major source of information (Xiang et al., 2015). Moreover, traveler review sites such as TripAdvisor and Lonely Planet have grown in popularity due to the consumers' perspective that these sources are credible and easy to access (Morrison, 2019).

Multiple studies have been done in the area of information search (Yagi and Pearce, 2019). Some examples of this research are: tourist information search/behaviour (cf. Ho et al., 2012; Jacobsen and Munar, 2012; Kambele et al., 2015); the use of internet and smartphone for searching information (c.f. Kang et al., 2020; Toh et al., 2011); and gender differences in information search (c.f. Barber, 2009; Kim, Lehto, and Morrison, 2007). Yet there is still a deficiency in these studies in the context of understanding Muslim tourists. Since Muslim tourists are one of the fastest-growing market segments in the global travel industry, it is becoming very important for hospitality and tourism businesses to build a good understanding of their needs (Battour, 2017; Kamin, 2019). Meeting the Muslim tourists' faith-based needs (need to have, good to have, and nice to have services) as well as managing their services experiences should be done throughout the service touchpoints (pre-trip, main trip, and post-trip) (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2019a). Although the importance of all the service touchpoints are recognized, this chapter only examines the pre-trip facet. The chapter has two purposes. The first is to examine the information sought by the Muslim travellers prior to travel from their posts in the TripAdvisor forum. The second is to explore the responses given by the contributors of the TripAdvisor forum.

Muslim travel market

The number of Muslim travellers continues to rise from year to year. Twenty-five million Muslim travellers were recorded in 2000. In 2010, the number rose to 98 million, then to 140 million in 2018. It is predicted there will be 160 million travellers in 2020 and 230 million in 2026 (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2019a). In the latest report issued by Mastercard-Crescent-Rating, *Halal Travel Frontier* (2020), there are 16 leading trends related to this market:

1. The emergence of the Muslim social impact travel spirit,
2. Ensuring off-track destinations are on track with Muslim travel needs, as more Muslims are interested to visit less-travelled destinations,
3. Overcoming Islamophobia,
4. Global travel wallet,
5. The rise in the number of female Muslim travellers,
6. Halal gastronomy becoming mainstream,
7. The Daud Kim effect (a former Korean singer who tells his journey

into Islam through his vlog which aids in enhancing the perception of Muslim travelers globally),

8. The *ertugul* phenomenon (highlights Islamic history and heritage and drives Muslims travelers to visit historical sites and places where the shows occur),
9. Diversity evident in the responsible content of stories shared by Muslims,
10. Resurrection of lost heritage sites and Islamic history (destinations such as Saudi Arabia and Uzbekistan for example may potentially develop Islamic Heritage Tourism or Ziyarah (Islamic pilgrimage),
11. Sustainability as core for Halal travel,
12. Umrah DIY – technology innovation and the gold rush for data about behaviour,
13. Transition points in Halal lifestyle events,
14. Muslim business travellers as service catalysts,
15. Reframing Halal tourism for inbound market (reinforce to tourism and hospitality stakeholders that the concept of Halal tourism is not exclusively for Muslims), and
16. Thinking about the future ready travel sector for Gen Z and Gen Alpha who will play important roles in shaping the next phase of Halal travel and travel behaviours of families.

Within Muslim travel markets, Muslim women travellers are perceived as an important segment. A survey conducted by Mastercard-CrescentRating (2019b) on “Muslim Women in Travel” shows the rising number of Muslim female travellers. This emerging travel market made up 45% (63 million) of the global Muslim visitor arrivals in 2018. The majority of this segment (67%) consisted of Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z. The surge of Muslim female travellers is due to a number of factors such as the growth of young and educated Muslim women, the growing middle class in large Muslim population countries, higher disposable incomes and female participation in the workforce, and the empowerment of women to travel. Muslim female travellers generally travel with their family (71%), but there are also all-female group travels (29%) and solo travellers (28%). The study recorded that Muslim female travellers are quite influential, double that of their partners, in planning family trips and in making travel decisions.

A number of studies have discussed aspects of Muslim tourists' behaviour and characteristics such as their travel motivations, their needs, and their experiences (e.g. Battour, 2017; Battour et al., 2017; Eid, 2015; Han et al., 2019; Oktadiana and Pearce, 2018; Oktadiana et al., 2017; Tichaawa and