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Cover Page Footnote

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Core Dimensions of Islamic Hotel Service: Towards their promotion in the Global Marketplace

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This study works to identify the core dimensions of the so-called 'Islamic Hotel'. The main purpose is to provide some insights on how the resulting dimensions could be utilised as a competitive advantage to promote Islamic Hotels in the global market rather than to confine them merely to the Muslim segment. This study involving 782 tourists and employed both in-depth interviews and questionnaire surveys as the methods for data collection. The results of the Exploratory Factor Analysis showed that there are seven dimensions of Islamic Hotels, labelled as Aurat, Halal Food, Mahram, Ibadah, Islamic Entertainment and Decoration, Islamic Management and finally Islamic Events. The discussion on the implications of this study indicates that Islamic hotels have huge potential to be successfully promoted as a form of theme hotel in the global tourism and hospitality market.

Key Words: Islamic tourism, Islamic hotel, Hotel marketing, Religious tourism, Halal hotel

Research background

The Islamic tourism market is one of the fastest growing tourism segments in the world, primarily due to increasing wealth combined with conscious lifestyle living in the Muslim communities worldwide (Rosli & Ariffin, 2017). The Islamic tourism market is reported to represent 10% of the world tourism market and the average spending consumption is 10% to 50% higher than of the global average for leisure or business travellers (Heyer, 2011). The bottom line is that conscious lifestyle tourism among Muslims is expected to grow at a rate of 20% per annum, five times more than the average traditional market segment (Ithnan, 2016).

To cater for the needs of this new lucrative market, many hotels in popular countries for Muslim tourists, such as Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia as well as Thailand and Japan have been promoted as being Islamic or Muslim-friendly (Othman *et al.*, 2015). Due to the seasonal nature of tourism demand as well as building a strong global brand image in the long run, these so-called 'Islamic hotel' will not confine their business only to Muslims, but need to leverage on their uniqueness to create a competitive advantage in the tourism market as a whole.

Currently, there are several terms that are used to describe Islamic-style hotels such as Syariah Hotels, Muslim-friendly Hotels, Halal Hotels and Dry Hotels (Jais, 2016). The difference between these types of hotels is not evident and until now there is no common

definition being accepted for each of these (Battour & Ismail, 2016). As the name suggests, Syariah Hotel should refer to a hotel that operates based on Syariah law while a Muslim-friendly Hotel in general means a hotel that facilitates practising Muslim guests to perform prayers and fulfil Islamic principles. Halal Hotel describes hotels whose food and beverage service is recognised as halal by the authorities, while Dry Hotel specifically refers to a hotel that does not offer alcohol in its premises (Ithnan, 2016).

The term used in this study is 'Islamic hotel' which refers to the hotel whose operations are based on Islamic laws and values and aims to promote Islam as the best and most ideal way of life for all humankind. Financial gain is not the only objective of Islamic hotels, more important is the responsibility to spread the religion of Allah by promoting the Islamic way of life. The hotel hosts guests who come and spend the night. They eat, sleep, get entertained and work in the hotel premises. Therefore, an Islamic hotel should take advantage of this situation to 'preach' through demonstrating of an Islamic way of life.

This study aims to understand what service attributes are necessary and should be offered by a hotel that wishes to be labelled as an Islamic hotel as defined above. These to-be-identified service attributes are particularly based on Islamic consumers' perspective

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in Malaysia. These attributes will then be analysed to determine the factors or dimensions of the service that can explain the uniqueness of an Islamic hotel.

Knowing and understanding the dimensions of Islamic hotel service is important in providing an input to entrepreneurs in the tourism industry who are keen to build a hotel based on genuine Islamic law and values. The findings of this study are also theoretically important as they offer a new opportunity for other researchers to validate the influence and importance of the Islamic hotel Service dimensions and to observe the inter-relation of these dimensions with other Islamic hotel marketing constructs.

Literature review

Henderson (2010) defines Islamic tourism as the development of tourism offerings and marketing strategies targeted at Muslims. This could also be extended to non-muslims primarily those motivated to travel in Muslim countries. The travel motivations are not necessarily religious, whereby individuals could be pursuing similar travel experiences as Muslims, albeit within parameters set by Islam.

According to Duman (2012) many definitions do not reflect the motivational background that initiates travel. In Islam, travel is regarded as a purposeful activity based on Islamic motivations such as acting in the cause of Allah, submission to Allah through hajj and umrah, realisation of the smallness of humans and the greatness of Allah, enhancing the Muslim fraternity, as well as conducting business activities (Din, 1989). Apart from these, the other main Islamic travel motivations are promoting Islam or da'wah, health and relaxation, education and cultural purposes (Aglamaz, 2009; Kusursuz, 2011).

Malaysia was ranked as the number one destination in the Global Muslim Travel Index carried out by Crescent Rating in the year 2018. The increased tourist arrivals from the Middle East as well as Muslims from other parts of the world implies an enormous potential demand for Islamic tourism, particularly in the accommodation sector (Razalli *et al.*, 2012). The need for special accommodation in the form of Islamic hotels has not been given enough attention by the industry as well as scholars. Islamic hotels are still considered to be in their infancy according to life cycle models (Alserhan *et al.*, 2018), and therefore, nothing much is known about their pertinent characteristics including their service dimensions.

According to Alserhan *et al.* (2018) the self-presentation of Islamic hotels could offer attractive insights into the self-concept, personality as well as cultural identity of Muslim society. Thus, further studies are required to investigate the core service dimensions of Islamic hotels to be projected as positioning strategies with strong competitive advantages. While conventional or western-oriented hotels attempt to enhance their guest service experiences by offering augmented service amenities, Islamic hotels have the competitive advantage through their unique method of enhancing the experience of their guests (Alserhan *et al.*, 2018). Islamic hotels should realise that there is no way for them to successfully compete with conventional hotels using the same business model, due to the incompatibility of Islamic norms, values and practices with some provisions of the conventional business model (Alserhan *et al.*, 2018). Thus, promoting an Islamic hotel explicitly as a theme hotel is one of the best solutions. Targeting to Muslims could attract those who seek a hotel stay in accordance with their Islamic faith, while targeting non-Muslims is about promoting the product to those who seek a distinctive cultural experience (Alserhan *et al.*, 2018).

The concept of Islamic hotels has evolved from simply gratifying religious requirements to satisfying lifestyles or patterns of living with a focus on family and health (Salleh *et al.* 2014). According to Karia and Fauzi (2019), the idea of creating Islamic hotels should be seen as the perfect platform to promote true Islamic concepts and their implementation in contemporary lifestyles, with family and health-oriented concept as the value propositions (Herderson, 2010). Many tourism analysts as well as hotel management experts contend that Sharia-compliant hotel services may be found attractive by non-Muslims (Henderson, 2010) if they are more transparently and more objectively promoted. Alcohol bans for example can be turned into a strong value proposition conducive to a healthy lifestyle and exposure to an Islamic environment in a hotel setting offers a distinctive experience not available in the Western world (Rosenberg & Choufany, 2009). After all, Sintes and Mattson (2009) argue that hotels need to be innovative in order to stay competitive in today's globally competitive tourism industry. Islamic concept or theme hotels are considered as a new service innovation that could be implemented for that particular purpose (Salleh *et al.* 2014).

Based on the principle of Islamic marketing, apart from the need to be consistent with the Sharia Law by being *halal* or lawful, Islamic hotels also need to be *tayib* or pure with regards to service provision, which covers the whole business process, operation and resources (Alserhan, 2015). Sharia law is the basis of requirements and regulations related to diet, dress and personal as well as interpersonal interactions. Based on this, Stephenson (2014) identified five areas of business process that need to be considered and integrated by all Islamic hotels namely human resources, private rooms, dining and banquet facilities, public facilities and business functional operations including financing and marketing.

Rosenburg and Choufany (2009) in their study have developed a framework that outlines the requirements that a Sharia-compliant hotel need to fulfilled. The framework is not considered as exhaustive and serves to identify the minimum standards. The framework covers three main components identified as operations, design and interiors, and financial:

Operations - no alcohol, halal food only, majority of staff of Muslim faith, female staff for single female floors and male staff for single male floors, conservative television service, and Al-Quran and prayer mats available in every room.

Design and Interiors - larger function rooms to cater for males and females separately, markers in rooms indicating the direction of Kaabah in Mecca, No entertainment venues, bed and toilets should not be placed to face the direction of Kaabah in Mecca, Art in the hotel should not depict the human form, separate wellness facilities for males and females, and separate floors for single males, single females and families.

Financial - financed through Islamic financial arrangement, should follow the zakat principles (giving back to the community).

These authors (Rosenburg & Choufany, 2009) also commented on the significant number of non-Muslim tourists, particularly Westerners, who interested in different cultural and lifestyle experiences when travelling. Sharia-compliant or Islamic hotels are often confused with dry hotels which essentially only refers to alcohol-free hotels. According to Rosenberg and Choufany (2009), dry hotels have a huge potential to attract a significant numbers of non-Muslim travellers who are particularly looking for a more family-friendly hotel experiences.

By examining the observations of industry practitioners and analysts, Henderson (2010) proposed the following 13 items as the dominant attributes of so-called Sharia-compliant hotels:

- No alcohol to be served or consumed on the premises
- Halal food
- Quran, prayer mat and arrows indicating the direction of Mecca in every room
- Beds and toilets positioned so not to face the direction of Mecca
- Bidets in bathrooms
- Prayer rooms
- Appropriate entertainment
- Predominantly Muslim staff
- Conservative staff dress
- Separate recreational facilities for men and women
- All female floors
- Guest dress code
- Islamic funding

The Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM) is the leading authority responsible for Halal certification in Malaysia. The certification process involves several steps to prove materials and production processes comply with the standard of Islamic principles and measured using 12 criteria namely:

- Halal Documentation,
- Management responsibility
- Raw materials
- Location
- Exterior area
- Premises
- Facility
- Tools and equipment
- Staff characteristics
- Staff policy
- Pest control
- Waste management (JAKIM, 2012).

Their halal certification process applies for all type of business and not specifically for the hotel industry.

The various lists and literature reviewed in this section, particularly JAKIM (2012), Henderson (2010), Rosenburg and Choufany (2009), Stephenson (2014) and Alserhan *et al.* (2018) were used to generate the items and themes for further analysis in this present study.

Research issue

The business model employed by a substantial number of Islamic hotels has been condemned for not being transparent enough, particularly in their marketing communication plan. A very recent study by Alserhan *et al.* (2018) pointed out that all properties which consider themselves as Islamic hotels, that operate in accordance with Islamic law, should communicate their values or distinctive Islamic service attributes more transparently to all potential guests. This is primarily to avoid disappointment among those guests who were actually looking for a conventional hotel stay, particularly non-Muslims. Thus, this study suggests that promoting Islamic hotels explicitly as a type of theme hotel. It is suggested that this is one of the best solutions to address this issue positively. Islamic hotels will capitalise on their unique approach to providing an entirely different service experience for their guests. What are the distinctive service attributes that could be employed as the positioning theme of an Islamic hotel? As mentioned earlier, this present study aims to uncover the service dimensions of the Islamic hotels as a whole which could be employed as the unique selling proposition to promote them as a theme hotel in a more open marketplace.

Research methods

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative method of in-depth interview techniques is not only aimed at generating new service attributes but also to verify the related hotel service attributes derived from the literature review. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven respondents who were academics in Islamic and tourism studies, as well as Muslim professionals and non-professionals who frequently stay in hotels. A total of 28 service attributes were obtained from this literature study and in-depth interviews.

These service attributes for hotel were later validated by three experts who are scholars in Syariah, as well as the hotel and tourism industry. A total of six attributes were removed through that validation process, leaving 22 attributes (as presented in Table 1) considered appropriate for further analysis of this study. The six eliminated attributes were factors that did not clearly represent the unique or true nature of an Islamic hotel experience according to at least two of the three expert judges. A questionnaire was then developed using the 22 attributes, to be distributed to a total of 1,000 Malaysian respondents who are frequent guests to hotels. Apart from that, to qualify as the respondents of

this study, the individual must be a Muslim and be at least 18 years of age.

The respondents were required to assess the extent to which those attributes should be offered or created for a hotel to be classified as an 'Islamic hotel' as previously defined. Data were collected in a mall-intercept questionnaire which was conducted in different well-known shopping complexes popular among tourists in Kuala Lumpur City as well as in the departure hall / floor of Kuala Lumpur International Airport. Out of 1,000 questionnaires distributed, due to missing values, only 782 were found to be complete and usable. These were fully analysed in this study. As suggested by Ariffin (2013), and Ariffin and Maghzi (2012) who conducted similar study in the context of service hospitableness, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation was employed to extract the service dimensions.

Research findings

The results of Exploratory Analysis Factor (EFA) using Varimax rotation found that there are seven dimensions of service that could be used to explain Islamic hotel service from the perspective of Islamic consumers in Malaysia. These dimensions cover 22 items or service attributes, describing 78 percent of the Islamic hotel attribute variance. In other words, 22 percent of attributes are not covered by these research findings. However, scientifically speaking the 78 percent variance is sufficiently adequate to best explain Islamic hotel attribute dimensions from the perspective of Islamic consumers in this country.

As illustrated in Table 1, the most important dimension describing Islamic hotels is 'Aurat' followed by 'Halal Food', 'Mahram', 'Ibadah', 'Islamic Entertainment and Decoration', 'Islamic Management' and finally 'Islamic Events'. Table 2 specifically lists hotel attributes for each resulted service dimension together with their factor loadings. The internal consistency for each dimension is within the acceptable range from 0.81 to 0.92. As explained, these findings to no emphasise the relative importance of these dimensions but more so focus on the depth of these dimensional needs in order to qualify as a truly Islamic hotel.

The main purpose of this study is to develop tactical promotional strategies to publicise Islamic hotels in the global tourism market without confining them to the Muslim segment, by utilising all the competitive advantages of the dimensions identified in the factor analysis. The discussion of the findings in the

	Dimensions	No. of Attributes	V.E
1	<i>Aurat</i>	5	13.7 %
2	Halal Food	3	13.4 %
3	<i>Mahram</i>	2	13.2 %
4	<i>Ibadah</i>	4	13.0 %
5	Islamic Entertainment & Decoration	3	9.8 %
6	Islamic Management	3	8.3 %
7	Islamic Events	2	6.7 %
		22	78%

following section clearly indicates that Islamic hotels have their own distinctive attractiveness that could be promoted as a form of theme hotel particularly to non-Muslim tourists.

Results and Discussion

As presented earlier, the seven dimensions of Islamic hotel service are consistent with the findings reported by the two highly cited studies on the characteristics of sharia-compliant hotels, namely, Henderson (2010) and Rosenburg and Choufany (2009). However, it was not the aim of these studies to identify the underlying dimensions.

Islam is considered as a way of life for all Muslims and covers every single aspect of its followers' life including while they are travelling on vacation or for business (Kessler, 2015). Travelling means one needs to be outside of their home for quite some time and therefore, '**aurat**' is unquestionably the most important factor (see Table 2) that needs to be given extra attention by all followers particularly women. The importance of the '**aurat**' aspect in the context of hotel services may also appeal positively to non-Muslim guests who also value modesty when travelling as a family with small children.

After the '**aurat**' factor, this present study reveals that the '**halalness**' of the food served is the second most important dimension for an Islamic hotel. This finding in particular is consistent with the findings of many previous studies that indicate halal food as a vital criteria which a Muslim would consider when making travel decisions (Rodrigo & Turnbull, 2019). Based on Battour *et al.* (2018), the importance of halal food offerings may also appeal positively to non-muslim guests, primarily due to safety and hygiene matters.

The third most important dimension of Islamic hotel services is '**Mahram**'. Based on Sharia law, unmarried couples must not be allowed to check in to the same

room (Salleh *et al.* 2019). The mahram factor is very relevant in the context of hotel services because hotels could provide a place for couples to commit unlawful sexual conduct which is not only considered to be sinful in Islam but also in other religions as well.

'**Ibadah**' is the next most important service dimension of an Islamic hotel and in the context of this study, it refers to the ritual worship of Allah in the form of daily obligatory prayers (Azim, 2017). Daily prayers or solah / salat is one of the five pillars of Islam which constitute the core belief and practices of the faith. Thus, it is imperative for a hotel to design its facilities by taking into consideration this very important ritual (Henderson, 2010) as all believers need to perform the five obligatory prayers daily without fail. A mosque is usually the place where Muslims perform congregational prayers and call for prayer will be heard before the ritual starts.

The fifth service dimension is pertaining to the '**entertainment and decoration**' of the hotel. Islam is a religion in tandem with human nature and does not deprive its followers of all activity related to entertainment. However, the core aim of entertainment in Islam is for the sake of being closer to Allah. Thus, entertainment needs to follow the rules set by Allah (Kamdar 2011). For those many people who stay at Islamic hotels for holiday purposes, entertainment is something that is regarded as very important and must be offered to appropriate standards.

'Islamic **management**' is the sixth service dimension of Islamic hotels. Othman *et al.* (2015) contend that the ultimate goal of Islamic businesses is beyond profit and is more to the attainment of the five goals of Maqasid Al Shari'ah namely protection of human existence, religion, human generation, intellect as well as wealth and resources. A Shariah committee needs to be set up to advise as well as to monitor the compliance. As mentioned by Rosenberg and

Table 2: Core Dimensions of Islamic Hotel

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	FACTORS	FACTOR LOADINGS							α
DIMENSION 1: AURAT									
1	Muslim women staff shall dress fully complying with aurat		0.935						0.92
2	Non-Muslim women staff shall wear decent clothing according to Islamic-style complete with headscarves.		0.864						
3	Muslim women hotel guests shall wear headscarves and decent clothing		0.733						
4	Non-Muslim hotel guests shall wear decent clothing without the need for head covering for the women.		0.712						
5	The hotel shall provide separate recreational facilities or different timings for men and women use.		0.577						
DIMENSION 2: HALAL FOOD									
6	Alcoholic beverages can not be consumed anywhere in the hotel premise including guest rooms.	0.917							0.83
7	Only halal food can be served in the hotel premise.	0.773							
8	All kitchen workers for all the restaurants and cafes within the Islamic Hotel premise shall be Muslim.	0.653							
DIMENSION 3: MAHRAM									
9	Only couples with Mahram relationship can be allowed to check in to the same room.			0.855					0.87
10	The hotel shall allocate a dedicated floor for female guests to check in without a male guest as their Mahram			0.782					
DIMENSION 4: IBADAH									
11	The hotel shall provide a dedicated place or preferably a mosque for congregational prayer and Islamic teaching. Call for prayer shall be clearly broadcast to the rest of the hotel and congregational prayer must be established for the five compulsory daily prayers.						0.885		0.91
12	All guest rooms shall be equipped with means that facilitate Muslim guests to comfortably pray. Prayer mat, holy Quran, and Qiblat signs, the three basic facilities, are compulsory in all rooms.						0.823		
13	The bathroom as well as the bed is not positioned in the direction of the Kiblah.						0.765		
14	A bidet shall be provided for all bathrooms in guest rooms.						0.733		
DIMENSION 5: ISLAMIC ENTERTAINMENT AND DECORATION									
15	The hotel shall not allow entertainment centers offering any form of service that contains immoral elements.							0.851	0.86
16	For room entertainment, only conservative and Islamic television channels can be provided by the hotel.							0.753	
17	Hotel decoration using statues or images of living objects should be avoided.							0.677	
DIMENSION 6: ISLAMIC MANAGEMENT									
18	The majority of the hotel staff should be Muslim, particularly the management.					0.752			0.84
19	The whole aspects of the hotel management shall be based on the principles and models of Islamic management especially the financial aspects.					0.665			
20	The hotel must ensure that donation and zakat responsibilities are paid according to the annually earned profit.					0.598			
DIMENSION 7: ISLAMIC EVENTS									
21	The hotel must ensure that all events held within the premises are carried out according to the Islamic way or syariah.				0.745				0.81
22	The hotel should regularly organise events related to Islamic teaching and knowledge.				0.671				

Choufany (2009), the whole hotel operation and administration must be financed using Islamic financial systems.

Finally, the seventh dimension of Islamic hotel services is identified as '**Islamic events**'. Apart from providing accommodation services, a hotel is also a place where people hold their events such as wedding reception, birthday party as well as business functions. All these events must be carried out according to the Islamic values and principles.

The following section will discuss each of the resulted dimensions and offer insights on how they could be utilised to create competitive advantage to promote Islamic hotels in the global hospitality market.

Aurat dimension - Promoting Islamic hotels as theme hotels

The Aurat dimension clarifies most of the pre-requisites that a hotel has to fulfil for it to be called a Syariah-compliant hotel. Aurat basically means 'disgrace', while its *fiqh* definition refers to the body parts that must be covered from sight. Aurat in the context of Islamic hotel service is related to the way each party involved in service is dressed while in the hotel's public premises such as hotel lobby, hotel restaurant, swimming pool and garden. The parties involved are not only the entire hotel staff but also the hotel guests, regardless of being Muslim or not.

The requirements relating to aurat are the rules that are almost impossible to enforce or put into practise by conventional hotels, especially those regulations applicable to their guests. This is a factor that may cause the Aurat dimension to be the most noticeable and prominent in describing what the Islamic hotel is, especially in the context of Malaysian hotel users comprising various races and religions. Furthermore, believers of Islam in this country, especially women, are not obliged to wear headscarves when they go out to public places unlike in some other Muslim countries.

Service is a product that is focused on intangibles and therefore, consumers and the public will evaluate each service encounter by looking not only at the facilities and physical amenities of that service organisation, but also at the skills of the employees delivering such services. The aspect of each front-line individual or customer service staff member is more prominent as these individuals interact face-to-face with guests within the hotel premises. Therefore, for a hotel to be labelled as an Islamic hotel, its employees should dress

as close as possible to Shariah law. Therefore, Muslim hotel employees shall dress up fully according to aurat. This is not limited to the use of head scarves. Muslim women employees' uniform (or non-uniform) should be loose, not body hugging or tight fitting revealing the body and should wear a longer head scarf covering the chest. For non-Muslim women staff, it is stipulated for them to wear decent clothing according to Islamic-style complete with headscarves. Decently dressed in this Islamic-style is basically refers to clothing that does not expose any part of the skin except for the face and palm. Hotel employees should be the best example or role model that guests could emulate to reflect how Muslim men and women dress.

As for Muslim women hotel guests, they are required to wear headscarves and decent clothing while non-Muslims, are only required to wear decent clothing without the need for head covering. Decent in the context of hotel guests basically means non-revealing clothing. However, all female guests regardless of religion are 'extremely encouraged' to don headcoverings or ideally, a scarf. This strong encouragement should clearly be stated in the hotel's dress code. The dress code for hotel guests needs to be clearly outlined and non-confusing along with a clear pictorial example. This dress code should be displayed not only at the hotel premises but also on the hotel website and clearly explained during the room booking by the prospective hotel guest.

In general, requirements of the Aurat dimension may be seen by some as inconvenient and restrictive on the freedom of the guests. However, in terms of marketing, this dimension, it actually exemplifies the uniqueness of an Islamic hotel, which provides a distinctive competitive advantage for property. Indirectly, it results in an Islamic hotel being known as a Theme Hotel that has begun to gain recognition among tourists in this decade, especially foreign tourists. There is a segment of tourist or guest, especially non-Muslim who wants to experience the intriguing uniqueness of staying in an Islamic hotel. This exciting unique experience appears when they have an opportunity to dress up as a Muslim, observe and interact with other guests (including hotel workers) who are also similarly dressed.

The Muslim-themed hotel experience can be further enhanced with the enforcement of attributes from the other six service dimensions of Islamic hotels. In order to create the experience and to facilitate prospective guests, the hotel may provide Muslim men's and women's clothing rental services at the hotel lobby

and/or sell it in the hotel's own boutique or shop. Of course, these purchased clothes will be an unforgettable souvenir for the guests of the hotel themselves or for loved ones at home. This experience can also be promoted by organising events such as 'Let's try a Hijab' or a casual workshop on wearing hijab or a Muslim fashion show at the hotel premise. Hotel staff should be trained to always be ready to provide assistance or opinions to the guests, in relation to the proper way of dressing according to the Shariah. Detailed research is required to describe the needs of the Aurat dimensions, including attributes related to makeup, appropriate ways to interact, the colour of clothing and many more such themes.

Finally, the Aurat dimension also leads to the need for the hotel to provide recreational facilities such as separate pools or different timings for use by men and women. The implication of this service attribute is that it restricts families with boys and girls from performing recreational activities together at the hotel. In this regard, an Islamic hotel can not avoid having more than one swimming pool as the pool could be a main attraction in a hotel, particularly a holiday hotel or a resort as opposed to a business-categorised hotel. This service attribute is important if the hotel wishes to move towards recognition as an Islamic hotel and to ensure an Islamic hotel in its true sense can be recognised as a five-star luxury product.

In general, this Aurat dimension not only provides mental and physical comfort to all guests while in the hotel premise but it is also able to create a sense of equality regardless of status and social class as no guest excessively exhibits their clothing or jewellery which involves an intent to show off. The Aurat dimension requires all hotel guests, regardless of their religions, to dress decently when they are around the hotel public areas. This phenomenon creates a special experience because it is different from what we normally observe at conventional hotels. As a conclusion to the discussion on this factor, the Aurat dimension offers guests the opportunity to experience certain elements of Muslim lifestyle.

Halal food dimension - Promoting hotel to a local Muslim market

The 'Halal Food' dimension is a service attribute for the Islamic hotel which is considered as a fundamental and cannot be compromised at all. However, presently in Malaysia, this dimension is not unique only to Islamic hotels but also to some other conventional hotels such as 'Dry Hotels' which also aim at Muslim guests.

As a hotel based on Shariah law, only halal food can be served. The hotel can be offer international-class restaurants like Chinese, Japanese and Western restaurants, but all meals served must be fully halal. To ensure the food provided is totally halal and clean as stipulated by Islam, all kitchen workers for all the restaurants and cafes within the Islamic hotel premise must be Muslim. This will ensure that all food is prepared and served 'in the name of Allah' and starts with the word Bismillah. Food is something that will turn to a person's flesh and blood, thus, the parties involved in the preparation should also be those who understand the religion of Islam itself.

The need to fulfil the Halal Food dimension does not only include meals or food menus prepared at hotel restaurants but also involves processed foods, and other snacks such as chocolates and biscuits sold in the hotel's convenience stores as well as those supplied in the mini fridge inside the guest rooms. Islamic hotels should definitely not be selling or serving alcoholic beverages. Guests are also not allowed to purchase alcohol outside the hotel and bring it in, or drink alcohol anywhere in the hotel premise, even in their room. This is to ensure that an Islamic hotel is always in the mercy and blessing of Allah. This must be communicated to all guests so that they would appreciate the Islamic values underpinning this strict prohibition.

The prohibition on drinking alcohol has become a main barrier for most non-Muslim western tourists when choosing Islamic hotel, as they are generally unwilling to forego alcoholic beverages. Therefore, it is expected that these groups would only stay in an Islamic hotel for a very short period of time as they will generally only spend up to two nights without consuming alcohol. However, there is a fairly large market including western travellers who do not drink alcohol. That market segment needs to be explored by Islamic hotels.

As the hotel business is seasonal and highly influenced by factors such as natural disasters, infectious diseases, violence and war, it is important to gain a strong support and acceptance in the local market where the property is located (Ariffin *et al.*, 2018). Locals usually enter hotels near their residential area solely to attend events such as weddings, birthdays or workshops and seminars. Promoted as a theme hotel, an Islamic hotel is certainly not for all, but, is highly suitable for those who are Muslims as well as non-Muslims who prefer to live a healthy lifestyle. This creates a competitive

advantage, because it has a product offering that cannot be found at any conventional hotels.

Mahram dimension - Promoting Islam as a healthy and noble way of living

In some ethnic cultures, including the Malay's, particularly in the past, the word 'Hotel' itself carries a rather sinful meaning and implies an unspeakable image of free-mingling between men and women. Hotel can be interpreted as a house of prostitution and a brothel that provides a place for unmarried couples to commit adultery. Such perceptions still exist to this day, not only in this country but also around the world. There is no doubt of this happening not only in budget hotels, but also in luxury hotels. Consequently, this perception has resulted in some people being quite reserved in setting foot into any hotel, despite the fact that it is for good purposes. This perception causes these people to be very careful and cautious in making a hotel selection during vacation or any other time they are away from home.

Constantly seeking Allah's blessings and acceptance is at the core of Islamic life. Thus, a property that would like to be labelled as an Islamic hotel must have clear rules regarding the Mahram issue, in order to gain the trust of the world's Muslim community, especially the Hotel's Islamic target market. Mahram refers to an understanding relationships are considered either haram or illegal in Islam. Only couples with a Mahram relationship can be allowed to check in to the same room. A clear checking mechanism at registration or during check-in must be established to ensure this Shariah-compliant service attribute can effectively be implemented.

An Islamic hotel must also allocate a dedicated floor for female guest to check in without a male guest as their Mahram. At this floor recreational facilities such as a women's swimming pools could be accommodated to meet the dimensions of 'Aurat' that has been defined above. Apart from the previously discussed 'Halal Food' dimension, the 'Mahram' dimension is an obstructing factor that causes the Islamic hotel to be unattractive for many non-Muslim guests or tourist segments. However, the end target in achieving business profits does not justify the means. Viewed from a positive angle, this 'Mahram' dimension if properly and effectively promoted by the hotel, can help promoting Islam as a healthy and noble way of life. It will surely be a da'wah message that can be demonstrated at the hotel premise.

Ibadah dimension - Promoting Islamic hotels through their iconic mosque

Although the 'Ibadah' dimension is not highly ranked in term of its requirement intensity, it is a dimension at the core of Islamic practice as a way of life dictated by the creator of all beings. The symbol for religious service in Islam has always been the mosque, a surau (prayer room) or a dedicated place for congregational prayer. Accordingly, a key attribute for an Islamic hotel is the existence of a mosque or surau built as part of the hotel facilities. The mosque should be located within the hotel premises to facilitate access for guests and hotel employees for prayer and other religious activities. The mosque does not solely serve as a hotel facility but it should be made as a central feature to the existence of the Islamic hotel. Islamic hotels should be well-known for their mosque whereby the mosque is a unique icon for the property.

As an icon and central to an Islamic hotel, the mosque must be active and lively. Azan (prayer call) signifying the time of prayers must be clearly broadcast to the rest of the hotel and congregational prayer must be established for the five compulsory daily prayers. When approaching prayer time, hotel operational levels should be minimised to allow the majority of hotel workers to perform congregational prayer at the early period of prayer time. This operational level minimisation during prayer is something that should be included in the basic procedures of an Islamic hotel, that all hotel guests should understand. For example, during that time only one counter is open for both check-in and check-out. Work schedules need to be arranged to ensure that tasks during the time of prayer can be conducted by rotation among the workers based on the five prayer times. In other words, congregational prayer time is a must for all Islamic hotel employees. For non-Muslim guests, this attribute can promote and demonstrate Islam as a way of life.

In order for the mosque to permanently and continuously function, the mosque must have its own management unit consisting of at least one manager and one permanently employed Imam at the hotel. On a larger scale, an Islamic hotel can create not only a mosque institution but an Islamic Centre where the roles and responsibilities are far greater. The Islamic centre or mosque should also be open to the public who live or work around the hotel premises.

Not all guests have the chance or opportunity to pray at the mosque due to their respective constraints.

Accordingly, all accommodation rooms must be equipped with means and facilities that facilitate patrons to pray comfortably. Prayer mat, holy Quran, and Qiblat signs are three basic objects that are compulsory in all rooms. As these three objects are provided by conventional hotels in the country, an Islamic hotel should provide more facilities than those mentioned. Since these rooms may be occupied by non-Muslim guests, a rule should be established to ensure that the honour of the holy Quran is always preserved.

To ensure the perfection of prayer for guests in the rooms, a bidet should be provided for all the bathrooms. Apart from that, Islamic hotels should also ensure the bathroom (and also bed) is not positioned towards the direction of the Kiblah. This is a unique service attribute for Islamic hotels. The quality level of an Islamic hotel should also be measured by looking at equipment and facilities provided for religious service in terms of quantity and quality.

Islamic entertainment and decoration dimension - Promoting true peace for the soul

Entertainment is a form of strong desire that humans can naturally be interested in. Entertainment or self amusement is one of the fundamental reasons why a person travels to resorts. In this regard, offering entertainment is something that can not be taken for granted, especially by hotels or resorts that aim to attract tourists or are located at tourist centres. However, for those labelled as Islamic hotels, the offered type of entertainment must not deviate from the Islamic principles outlined by Jakim in the second edition of *Entertainment Guidelines in Islam* approved by the 107th Muzakarah of the National Fatwa Committee in the year 2015. In this regard, an Islamic hotel is not supposed to allow entertainment centres offering any form of service that contains immoral elements leading to negligence. For example, if the hotel wants to open a karaoke centre, only religious and not sexually induced songs should be allowed.

As for visitors of this entertainment centre, any form of interaction and free-mingling between men and women who are not mahram is totally prohibited not only among guests but also between employees and guests. It is justifiable for a hotel to offer spa and beauty centre services for men and women guests but for an Islamic hotel, these should be operated separately. Even when the spa is exclusively for men or women, the aurat among the same gender should be kept to as high a standard as possible in the interaction between employees and guests as well as among the guests. For

in-room entertainment, only conservative and Islamic television channels can be offered by an Islamic hotel.

In term of this hotel service attribute, an aspect that is not much different from entertainment is that associated with hotel decoration. Decoration for an Islamic hotel must strongly reflect Islamic art and culture itself and should be blended with local art and culture. Hotel decoration using statues, images of living objects as well as items related to other religions' rituals should be avoided. Preferably, the decorations used should encourage those who see them to think of Allah and His messenger.

Among the core objective of a person traveling is to relax the mind. Therefore, an Islamic hotel, promoting Islam as a way of life, attempts to demonstrate how peace of mind and true peace of the soul can be achieved by practising the principle of entertainment based on Islamic law.

Islamic management dimension - Promoting hotel's concern for society

As an Islamic hotel, adherence to Islamic law and principles should not only be applied to service offered for the guests but also to the hotel management aspect itself as a business organisation.

According to Islamic leadership principles, a leader should be a devoutly religious individual. Hence, Islamic hotel management, specifically the top management, should all be Muslims. This is to ensure that all business planning decisions are based on strong belief in Allah and His messenger. As for the hotel staff, the majority should be Muslim. Having non-Muslim workers can be important in helping non-Muslim guests in meeting specific needs, particularly related to their religious demands, since Muslim workers are forbidden to handle guest needs in matters relating to the worship of other religions.

For a hotel with an Islamic image, the hotel management should be based on the principles and models of Islamic management especially in relation to financial aspects. Islam places an important emphasis on the source or origin of a word or object. If something is formed from a good source, then most likely it will result in something better. Therefore, the principles of Islamic financial management should be fully utilised by Islamic hotels in dealing with funds for management and development. Apart from that, the hotel also needs to ensure that donation and zakat responsibility are paid according to the annually earned

profit. In a broader context, an Islamic hotel has to carry out its social responsibility very actively at the local, national or even international levels, especially in relation to Muslim needs themselves. A Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program targeting non-Muslim groups is not wrong, because such effort can help promoting Islam as a way of life that emphasises concern to society irrespective of race and religion.

Islamic event dimension

A Hotel not only serves as an accommodation provider, but also as a location for events such as weddings, birthday celebrations, corporate seminars and organisational meetings. As a host, an Islamic hotel should ensure that all events held within the hotel premise are carried out according to the Islamic way. Among other things, the event should not involve free-mingling between men and women, totally halal food is served for guests, as well as no bad influence entertainment that contains elements violating Islamic law. To ensure that compliance with these requirements can be enforced, the hotel must produce clear guidelines and clearly communicate their requirements, including a detailed itinerary to each allowed event which takes place in the premises.

Such strict rules certainly will limit the hotel's marketability value in developing the event segment. However, the Muslim community and organisations, as well as corporate companies have specifically started to emphasise Islamic practices and values in their daily activities. Therefore, this 'threat' is expected to transform into a golden 'opportunity' for Islamic hotels.

As an Islamic hotel which has the responsibility to promote Islam as the best and most ideal way of life for all humankind on earth, the hotel should regularly organise events related to intellectual and religious knowledge. Events such as religious lectures and discussion forums should be held at the hotel's banquet hall or meeting room instead of at the hotel's mosque as its audience target may also include non-Muslims.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a hotel that wants to be labelled as an Islamic hotel in the real sense according to consumers perspectives should design their hotel operation based on these seven service dimensions and the 22 service attributes that have been discussed in this paper. The seven service dimensions of an Islamic hotel proposed by this study, in accordance with the requirement intensity sequence are Aurat, Halal Food, Mahram, Ibadah, Islamic Entertainment and Decoration, Islamic Management and Islamic Events. As the 22 attributes involved in this study only describe 78 percent of all Islamic hotel attributes, there are still other attributes that need to be explored by future studies.

The overall results of this study indicate that Islamic hotels possess unique tangible and intangible service characteristics that could be promoted as a form of theme hotel, particularly to non-Muslim tourists in the global market. Islamic hotel operators should find ways to fully utilise or leverage these seven dimensions as competitive advantages rather than market limitations, to penetrate the global tourism and hospitality market. Finally, although this study is quite large in scale, it can still be considered as a preliminary study, requiring more systematic verification by subsequent studies.

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