

# UNDERSTANDING MUSLIM FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY<sup>1</sup>

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A PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

(RECEIVED – 1/11/2023; REVISED – 17/11/2023; ACCEPTED – 21/11/2023)

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## ABSTRACT

Muslim Friendly Hospitality has spread to every part of the world with different tags such as Islamic-friendly, Halal, or Islamic tourism. Muslim-friendly hospitality management has gained popularity since the service sector has become one of the main sectors contributing greatly to the economy. The statistical department of Malaysia stated that almost 50.82 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is from the service segment. The development of the Muslim-friendly hospitality and tourism industry has encouraged travellers to spend approximately USD225 billion on global outbound travel. Understanding the concept of Muslim-friendly hospitality based on al-Qur'an and hadith is important to strengthen the recognition and support towards this industry. This paper aims to explore the niche segment of Muslim-friendly hospitality with the objectives of sharing and providing an understanding of Muslim Friendly Hospitality (MFH) with its newly developed concept. Document research is used as the methodology to obtain different types of theories and concepts with traditional content analysis in answering its objectives. The outcome exposes that the friendly hospitality concept has been carried out in Islamic practices a long time ago as stated in the al-Qur'an and hadith is in line with the need to develop MFH. This study will also help to provide stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to cater to the unique concept of MFH, an effort that will benefit the Muslim travel market and the broader travel industry.

Keywords: Islamic hospitality, Islamic tourism, Muslim-friendly hospitality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of contemporary hospitality management originates with the word hospitality derived from the French word *hospice*, meaning providing good care for those travelling (Mabalot, 2015). Hospitality has become part of many cultures around the world. In India, they believe in the principle of *Atithi Devo Bhava* meaning 'the guest is God' (Tripathi, 2014) whereas hospitality is often categorised by an ancient set of ethics in Asia and the Middle East

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<sup>1</sup> Part of the paper is from the Ph.D thesis Azreen Hamiza Abdul Aziz (2017) on Conceptualising Islamic Hospitality Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

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(Marcus, Karl and David, 2010). Hospitality is the act of kindness in welcoming and looking after the basic needs of guests or strangers, mainly in relation to services, food, drink and accommodation. The history of the hospitality industry can be traced back to the 1700s in the colonial period. The hospitality industry has experienced significant development over the years as it has faced the World War, the Depression and various social changes (Hendrick, 2018). The hospitality industry began to take form in the early 1950s and continuing to lead the way for growth into more dynamic industry today.

The early story of hospitality exists in the Greek and Roman culture as early as 40 BC. It serves as the major social and religious purposes. In the ancient Greek, guest right was an establish set of conventions that were accepted amongst the different cultures in the Greek world. Whereas in the ancient Roman, Roman businessmen travelled as the Roman were the first pleasure travellers. After the fall of the Roman Empire, public hospitality fell into religious orders leaving the history of hospitality behind. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, travelling began after World War II, starting in the 1950s with the introduction of cross-continental flights and trans-Atlantic flights. Then travelling boomed in the 1960s and beyond with mass tourism, the introduction of package travel, growth of chain restaurants and hotels.

From a basic personal view of the world economy, most countries have their service industry as one of the main contributors to the economy. The service industry has created the tourism and hospitality sector to be part of it. The development of the hospitality industry has grown from year to year in order to cater for the rising demand from travellers. Hospitality generally means treating people to feel most welcome especially when travelling. The first impression of good hospitality will create a good feeling of ambience. According to Sunil (2005), hospitality activities include offering attentive and good services. Muslim Friendly hospitality on the other hand means indulging guests to feel most welcome in any situation with the guidance from Qur'an and hadith.

In Islam, Muslim-friendly hospitality represents a bigger scope that covers the needs of the travellers or people in the world and the hereafter. It focuses on the vertical and horizontal relationship between the Creator; Allah SWT and the servant; human beings and the relationship among human beings and other creatures (including nature). Since Muslim Friendly hospitality is a new unexplored field in the service industry, the need to understand the significance of Muslim Friendly hospitality has become pertinent. This paper generally aims to initiate the understanding of Muslim-friendly hospitality. More specifically, this conceptual paper intends to identify the real understanding of the friendly hospitality concept based on the main source of the Qur'an and hadith.

## **2. EMBRACING MUSLIM FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY**

In contrast from the contemporary hospitality, Muslim-friendly hospitality can be considered as the main contributors in the service management industry. It has become more important today because travelling has become as part of living. Unleashing the potential of Muslim-friendly hospitality management is a huge challenge in order to bring out the real Islamic services that emphasise Islamic philosophical underpinning. Based on the Global Muslim Travel Index 2023 (GTMI 2023), a total of 110 million Muslims travelled abroad in 2022, making up 12% of all foreign tourists. This represents a significant increase of over 68% over the pre-pandemic levels observed in 2019. In the Malaysia context, Malaysia has become one of the world's favourite destinations among Muslim travellers. Malaysia has been one of the world's top destinations for Muslim travellers. In 2022, the growth of tourist arrivals in Malaysia improved at 10.07 million with the tourist receipt contributing to RM28.2 million to Malaysia's revenue (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). This post-pandemic growth pattern in the Malaysian tourism industry has created a bigger potential for Malaysia to become the major player in the hospitality and tourism industry to offer the best Muslim-friendly hospitality services for both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) (2023), in quarter three, 2023, the percentage of Muslim population in Malaysia is 58% of the total population of 33.4 million with an annual growth of 0.6%. By the means of the large population of Muslims living and residing in Malaysia has opened up a massive potential and opportunities for Islamic services especially Muslim-friendly hospitality to develop. The increasing number of Muslims worldwide, including Malaysia, means that providing halal food and locations to pray is not enough. It demands a thoughtful approach in light of Muslim tourists' unique cultural customs, religious beliefs, and sensitivities. Muslim arrivals are predicted to surpass 230 million by 2028, propelling the Muslim tourism market to previously unheard-of heights. This is a notable increase from the year 2019, suggesting that the Muslim travel market is expanding rather than just recovering. Furthermore, it is estimated that by 2028, Muslim visitors will have spent USD 225 billion. This highlights the economic significance of this market segment and its ability to support the expansion and recovery of the travel and tourism sector worldwide (GTMI 2023).

According to a study conducted by Crescent Rating (2023), Muslim tourists are spending more money on experiences—such as dining out, entertainment, and outdoor activities—than on items like jewelry, clothes, and electronics. People are searching more and more for

authentic experiences that link them to their passions, particularly those that they were unable to pursue due to travel restrictions. Muslim travelers have also been identified as having a relatively high spending capacity, particularly in travel, accommodation, and dining, as they generally tend to travel as families. Since then, the industry's rapid growth can be seen clearly without any doubt. Having a step ahead from the growth, Tourism Malaysia (2015) classifies Malaysia due to its unique multi-ethnic character population. The uniqueness of the multi-ethnic character population did not prevent Malaysia from being a country that is leading and advancing in the introduction of Muslim-friendly hospitality. Due to this, Malaysia to claim the joint top position this year in the GTMI 2023 followed by Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey, and Qatar.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The aim of this study is to examine the concept of Muslim Friendly Hospitality. This study used qualitative method to gain information and opinions from the previous research on the related field. Basic qualitative study is use to understand the concept of hospitality by using secondary document analysis as the method of collecting data. According to Merriam (2009) the goal of basic research is to expand knowledge and is driven by an intellectual curiosity about a phenomenon. Basic research aims to learn more about a phenomenon, even though it may eventually inform practice. The principle of basic qualitative research is proper and reasonable with the aim of this study. This study is conducted to identify the real meaning of hospitality and conceptualise Islamic hospitality management based from al-Qur'an and Hadith through library research. This study grouped the data collection from two main sources which are from the primary source and secondary source. The data will be collected through a three tier data collection method. The first tier is the data collected from the primary source of al-Qur'an and Hadith. Meanwhile, the second tier involves the data collected from the secondary source of three exegeses of al-Qur'an and one exegesis of Hadith. The third tier of data collection of this study is the secondary data which represents the data that available from materials such as thesis, journals, articles and other sources of secondary data. Content analysis is use to allowed the research analysis to be in depth with the examination and explanation of the contents of documents that are being studied is done in a systematic manner.

#### **4. THE NEW CONCEPT OF MUSLIM-FRIENDLY HOSPITALITY**

The early research on hospitality in the early 1980s by Tideman (1983), Khan and Olsen (1988) and Edgar and Umbreit (1988) are focusing on a narrower, commercial and economic perspective in defining hospitality. Tideman (1983), defined hospitality as the way to gather the needs of guests in order to make them happy at most in supplying goods and services in an excellent quality desired by the guest at a value worth paying the price for. This definition has been used in almost any hospitality economic activity. Five years later in 1988, Khan and Olsen and Edgar and Umbreit have called for hospitality management research community to raise the outline in the importance of hospitality research because the current definition of hospitality is imprecise. A decade after that, Brotherthon (1999) mentioned that hospitality is closely related to tourism and leisure most of the time. He also agreed that the restriction line for hospitality is also drawn to other service industries that include financial services, marketing, transportation and storage, communication and government services.

In the later study done by Abdul Aziz (2018) Muslim friendly hospitality and tourism has been identified as all tourist-related services and facilities that comply to Shariah law, with a focused-on hotels, food and beverages and travel events. There has been some confusion in the use of several terminologies used to generally describe services offered to Muslim tourists and travellers (Zawawi & Ramli, 2016). Prior to the emergence of the terms "Muslim friendly hospitality services" and "Shari'ah compliant hospitality services," the most widely used terms were "Islamic tourism" and "halal tourism" (Battour, M. and Nazari, M., 2015). In Malaysia, the term muslim-friendly has been used to describe touristic products or services that are suitable for Muslim tourists travelling to Malaysia (ITC, 2019).

However, there is a lack of the terms, concept, structure and data of muslim-friendly hospitality because the basic nature of hospitality itself remains unclear. From the few researches mentioned, it can be surmised that the structure and definition of hospitality are more general with a social scientific approach taken by these researchers to define hospitality that has some merit as it seeks to reflect the holistic nature of the concept.

On the other hand, apart from the contemporary definition of hospitality, Abdul Aziz (2017) discovered the definition of Muslim-friendly hospitality can be sourced from the primary book of Islam, the al-Qur'an. The scholar found out that from Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:23-27, the definition of hospitality should be welcoming guests with the utmost respect, greet them politely and providing them with the best facilities that we could offer immediately.

Then, by the Lord of the heaven and the earth, it is the truth (i.e. what has been promised to you), just as it is the truth that you can speak. Has the story reached you, of the honoured guests [three angels; Jibrael (Gabriel) along with another two] of Ibrahim (Abraham)? When they came in to him, and said, "Salam, (peace be upon you)!" He answered; "Salam, (peace be upon you )," and said: "You are a people unknown to me," Then he turned to his household, so brought out a roasted calf [as the property of Ibrahim (Abraham) was mainly cows]. And placed it before them, (saying): "Will you not eat?"

(Surah Adh-Dhariyat, 51:23-27)

Ibn Kathir (1998), mentioned that in the verse in Surah Adh-Dhariyat, Allah SWT told the story of honoured guests of Prophet Ibrahim PBUH the words honoured guests is referring to the angels who came to bring good news to Prophet Ibrahim PBUH. The honoured guests greet Prophet Ibrahim with *Salaman*. He answered, *Salamun* that means, "Upon you." In Ibn Kathir explanation, scholars have said that Prophet Ibrahim PBUH answered the greet with alludes to affirmation and eternity. Afterwards Prophet Ibrahim PBUH left in rush in order to serve them food which was a roasted calf and placed it before them. Ibn Kathir mentioned that the verse of 26 and 27 of Surah Adh-Dhariyat contains many aspects of the etiquette of hosting guests. Ibn Kathir clearly explained in verses 24 to 27 in Surah Adh-Dhariyat embraces the real definition of hospitality as well as the way of honouring and providing services to guests.

In the similarity, Abdul Aziz (2017) discovered that Prophet Muhammad PBUH also shows a good example in treating guest. The hospitality of Prophet Muhammad PBUH is not only focused on serving the Muslims only, but also to anyone, whether they are Muslim or not (Afzalur Rahman, 1992). The basic belief that Prophet Muhammad PBUH taught us that has been passed through many religions and traditions is to be generous and nice in entertaining guest. Prophet Muhammad PBUH is reported to have said that Abu Hurairah r.a, reported, Prophet Muhammad PBUH said:

“He who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him show hospitality to his guest; and he who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him maintain good relation with kins; and he who believes in Allah SWT and the Last Day, let him speak good or remain silent!”  
(Hadith al-Bukhari, No, 1704)

From the *syarah* of *Fathul Baari* by Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani (2009), Imam Bukhari mentioned in the hadith that whoever believes with absolute faith in Allah SWT specifically focusing on devoted oneself to Allah SWT and the hereafter, Allah SWT will grant him with reward for his good deeds. Imam Bukhari also revealed that by honouring guests or be kind to

guests has been mentioned in hadith narrated by At-Thabarani from Baz bin Hakim has the same meaning where when he mentioned on *akhlak* on the rights towards neighbour where Prophet Muhammad PBUH said,

“It is to give help if he asks for your help, to lend him if he asks to borrow from you, to satisfy his needs if he becomes poor, to console him if he is facing any hardship, to congratulate him if has good fortune, to visit him if he becomes ill, to attend his funeral if he dies, not to make your house higher than his without his consent, to offer him fruit when you buy some or keep it clandestinely if you do not have anything to offer, or letting your children out just to create jealousy to his children, or to bother him by the tempting smell of your food unless you want to share by sending some to him”.

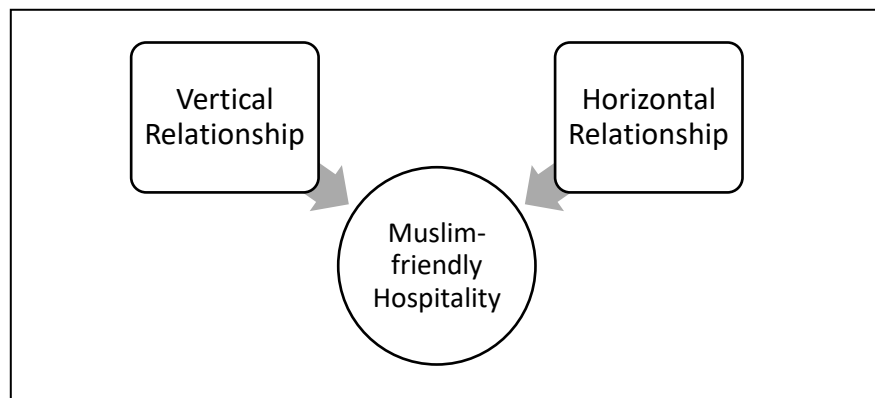
It shows that showing good hospitality towards neighbour also is a good deed. In this hadith, it consists of three significant which are good *akhlak*, good words and good deeds. Whoever has a complete faith which is *Iman*, will have the love towards all living things created by Allah SWT either by showing good *akhlak*, saying only good words or presenting good deeds. In the history and practice of Muslim-friendly hospitality or *Diyafah* of Prophet Muhammad PBUH, he often entertained guests by providing the best accommodation, best food and other facilities needed by the guests based on his capabilities even though the socio-economy condition at that point in time was not as stable and sophisticated as today. The most important thing Prophet Muhammad PBUH has shown a good example in welcoming guests is to be always prepared and gesture to them with an open mind as well as showing compassion towards them regardless of the status of the guests or where the guests are from (Abdul Aziz, 2017).

In Islam, hospitality is an essential devotion towards Allah SWT. The fundamental nature of Muslim-friendly hospitality prove that guests should be welcome without any sense of negativity and an arrangement of good hospitable services should be offered to the guests. The real Muslim-friendly hospitality is to serve the guests with optimism, just like when Prophet Ibrahim PBUH served his strangers guests. Also, the scope of hospitality practiced by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is holistic in nature, covering all segments of the society; including both Muslims and non-Muslims. Welcoming guests willingly with pleasure, entertaining guest with the utmost capacity and have full regard to their comfort is generally carry out the meaning of Islamic hospitality. Hospitality for Muslims is to accommodate a guest for a day and a night; hospitality extends to three days; and what is beyond that would be considered charity. Prophet Muhammad has the best *akhlak* a human can have. He taught love and kindness and was seen to be the most loving and compassionate of all of them. Al-Quran mentioned Prophet Muhammad kindness and goodness attitude in Surah Ali ‘Imran:

“And by the mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh-hearted. They would have broken away from you; so pass over (their faults) and ask (Allah’s) forgiveness for them, and consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision but your trust in Allah, certainly Allah loves who put the trust in me!”

(Surah Ali ‘Imran 3:159)

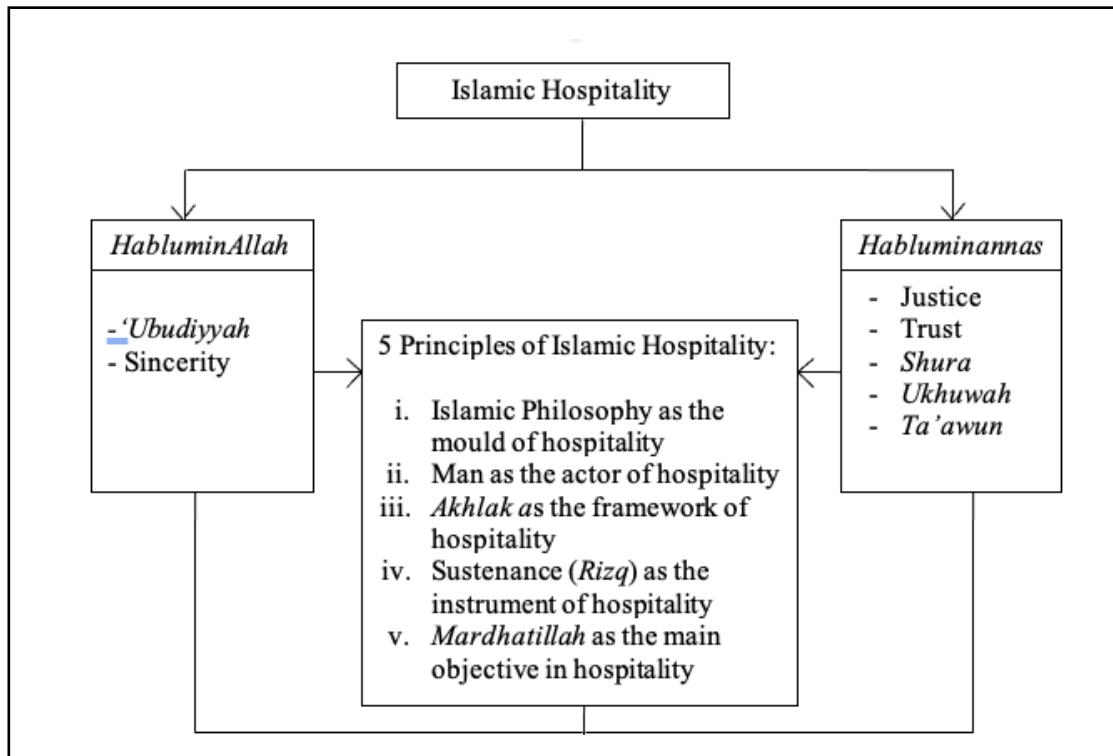
In Muslim-friendly hospitality, the services provided are in line with the Islamic principle with the base of *Aqidah*, *Akhlak* and *Shariah*. Hospitality in Islam means services provided by an individual serve as a duty and obligation to be honour the guest and act with honourable attitude. Apart from tauhid, the added important element in hospitality is morality or good behaviour (*akhlak*) towards Allah SWT and towards human being and nature. This shows the concept of horizontal (*habluminAllah*) and vertical (*habluminanas*) relationships take place even in managing hospitality. The first role of human in the Islamic perspective is the relationship with Allah SWT. This is a vertical relationship, where man is a khalifah, a servant of Allah SWT.



**Figure 1: The Objectives of Islamic Hospitality (Abdul Aziz, 2017)**

Muslim Friendly hospitality concept should be given a huge attention as the field is expanding in the contemporary hospitality industry. The concept of Muslim-friendly hospitality should be in accordance with the view of Islam or in simple words we say comply with the Shari’ah. Hospitality in Islam includes the way to honour guests, amiable and outgoing attitude of the host, providing a comfortable atmosphere to guest and making the guest feel welcome and happy with their stay by helping them mix and introduce them to another friend. The concept of muslim-friendly hospitality is summarised in the figure 2.





**Figure 2: The Concept of Muslim-friendly Hospitality (Abdul Aziz, 2017)**

## 5. CONCLUSION

Muslim-friendly hospitality has become an important sector in the economy nowadays since the demand for Muslim-friendly accommodation and tourism services is on the rise too. Managing hospitality based on Islamic philosophical underpinning is a must in order to cater and fulfil the needs of either Muslim and non-Muslim tourist. Muslim-friendly hospitality means managing hospitality based on the Islamic principle with the base of Aqidah, Akhlak and Shariah that are based on Qur'an and Hadith. Muslim-friendly hospitality has the necessary ingredients to develop such a unique approach in hospitality industry. A comprehensive and complementary Islamic approach hospitality practiced by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and Prophet Ibrahim PBUH is holistic in nature, covering all parts of the world. Setting up the real basic structure of Muslim-friendly hospitality nowadays is the major challenges but the need in developing Muslim-friendly hospitality based on the Muslim-friendly philosophical underpinning fall into a crucial responsibility for Muslim to show the huge potential for Muslim-friendly hospitality to develop in the near future. Future research should explore and consolidate the Muslim-friendly hospitality structure to ensure the stability of the tourism and hospitality sector. For this, more research in Muslim-friendly hospitality must be created to

fulfil the growing industry's needs. It also will serve as a guideline to the hospitality industry towards achieving the ultimate objective of gaining *mardhatillah* in the world and the hereafter.

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