

DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABILITY INDICATORS FOR MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Muslim friendly tourism is a tourism segment that adheres to the religious needs of Muslim tourists. It includes a wide range of services and facilities including transportation, restaurants, entertainment, and accommodations that designed for and directed at Muslims. Malaysia is one of the fastest growing countries in the Muslim friendly tourism industry sector, holding a sizeable market share. As sustainable tourism has emerged as the way forward for Muslim friendly tourism, specific sustainability indicators should be developed to be used in planning and decision-making of Muslim friendly tourism related matters. Yet, the majority of the existing sustainability indicators reflect other tourism niche such as ecotourism, small tourism enterprises, adventure tourism destinations, festival tourism, and ecological resort. Malaysia's tourism industry contributed 12.8% to the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021 and contributed 23.4% to the total employment. Hence, sustaining Muslim friendly tourism as a niche tourism segment is one of the country's priorities. This study is on-going aims to develop sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia. For this purpose, stage 1 of this research aims to identify sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism and stage 2 aims to evaluate the relative importance of the indicators identified. Findings of this study is in line with the National Tourism Policy (2020-2030), which aiming to ensure the continuity of the country's tourism industry and will support the Malaysian government specifically Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 on "decent work and economic growth" as tourism has the potential to contribute, directly or indirectly, to this goal.

Keywords: sustainable indicator, tourism, Muslim-friendly, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Muslim friendly tourism denotes a wider concept of halal tourism whereby it does not only offer plenty of 'halal' services (such as transportation, food premise, travel packages) but also comfortable places for Muslims to perform their daily prayers. Malaysia is one of the fastest growing countries in the global tourism known for offering a wide variety of Muslim-friendly

tour packages for travellers, accessibility to a large selection of halal food, beautiful beaches, diverse culture, and tremendous shopping experiences. In 2022, Malaysia has maintained its position as the preferred destination in the Mastercard-Crescent Rating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) and won the “Top Muslim-Friendly Destination of the Year” at the Halal in Travel Awards. The prospect of the Muslim traveller market is promising for Malaysia as it contributed to 5.3 million international arrivals with an expenditure of RM16.72 billion (USD3.8 billion) in 2019 and it is forecasted that 230 million Muslims travelling by 2028 (Mastercard-Crescentrating, 2022).

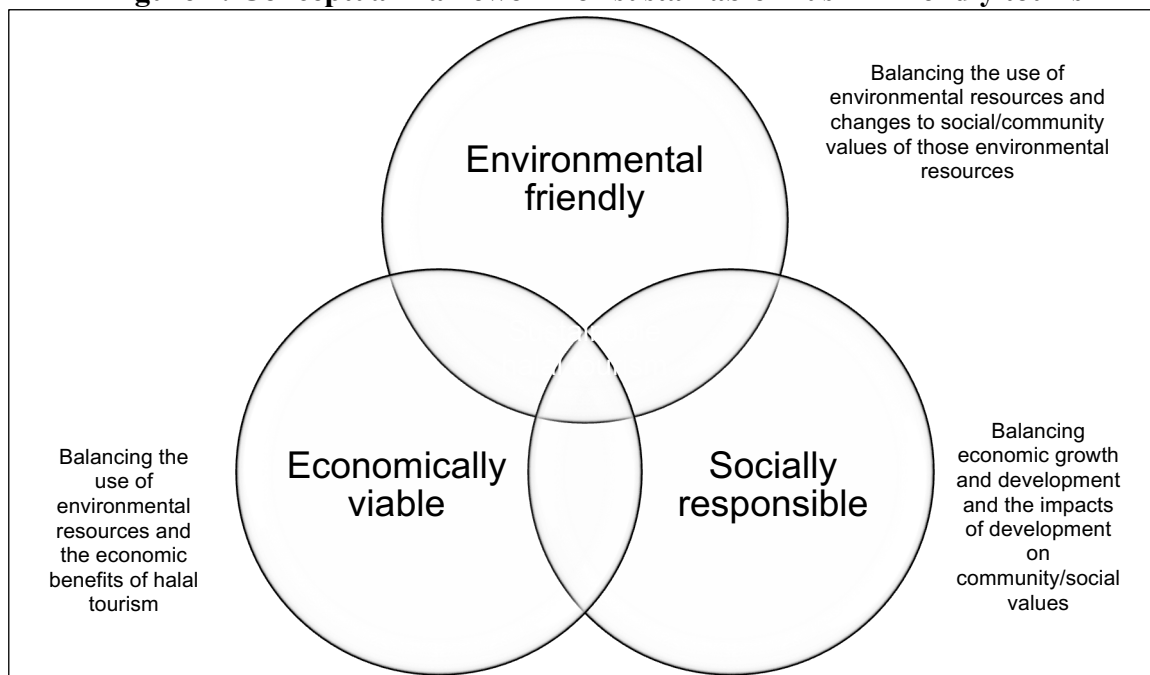
Muslim friendly tourism is an attempt to make the tourism experience enjoyable to Muslim travellers by allowing them to perform religious duties (Battour, 2016). To implement this type of tourism, there are basic items or things that to be included such as the transportation, food premise, finance, travel packages and hotel and this thing shall be operated and fulfilled the Shariah compliant requirements (Ariff Irshad et al., 2022). While tourism activities have brought economic benefits (Boley et al., 2018) such as contributing to GDP (direct, indirect, and included impacts), exports, and job creation (United Nation World Tourism Organisation [UNWTO], 2016), Raza et al.'s (2017) indicate that tourism development may contributed to global warming and environmental damage. In particular, religious tourism is associated with environmental concerns (Alipour et al., 2017; Olya, 2018). As most countries including Malaysia has adopted the 2030 Agenda for SDGs by United Nations, the notion of sustainable tourism has emerged as the way forward for tourism including halal tourism. Former Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture, YB Dato' Sri Hajah Nancy Shukri, mentioned that “sustainability has taken on a new meaning that encompasses the sustainability of the environment and beyond including the tourist, the investor, the industry player, the community, the government, the country, and more” (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2022).

Sustainable tourism fully considers its present and future economic, social, and environmental implications as well as the needs of tourists, industry, and local communities (UNWTO, 2004). It aims to enhance local wellbeing by optimizing the local economic benefits of tourism, while protecting the natural and built environment, and providing a high-quality experience to tourists (UNWTO, 2004). To assess sustainable tourism practices, previous studies have suggested the use of sustainable indicators (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Lozano-Oyola et al., 2012). Indicators serve as an early warning system of potential risks and a signal for possible action for destination managers. It also acts as a key tool that provides specific measures of changes in the aspects of a destination's tourism industry that are most important to its sustainability (UNWTO, 2004). Scholars have developed sustainability indicators in different countries for various tourism niche including ecotourism (Pasape et al. 2015) small tourism enterprises (Roberts & Tribe, 2008), adventure tourism destinations (Tshipala et al., 2019), festival tourism (Liu et al., 2019), and ecological resort (Lee et al., 2021). To date, attempt to develop sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism has been limited and more research from the sustainability perspective are needed (Al-Ansi et al., 2022). Thus, in view of Malaysia's direction of sustainable tourism, the development of sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism is important. This research aims: 1) To investigate sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism businesses, 2) To develop sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism businesses, and 3) To evaluate the relative weights of each sustainability indicator develop for Muslim friendly tourism.

1.1 Conceptual framework for sustainable Muslim friendly tourism

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. The definition given reflect the main forms of sustainability that are important for sustainable development through sustainable Muslim friendly tourism that includes economic, social, and environmental sustainability as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for sustainable Muslim friendly tourism

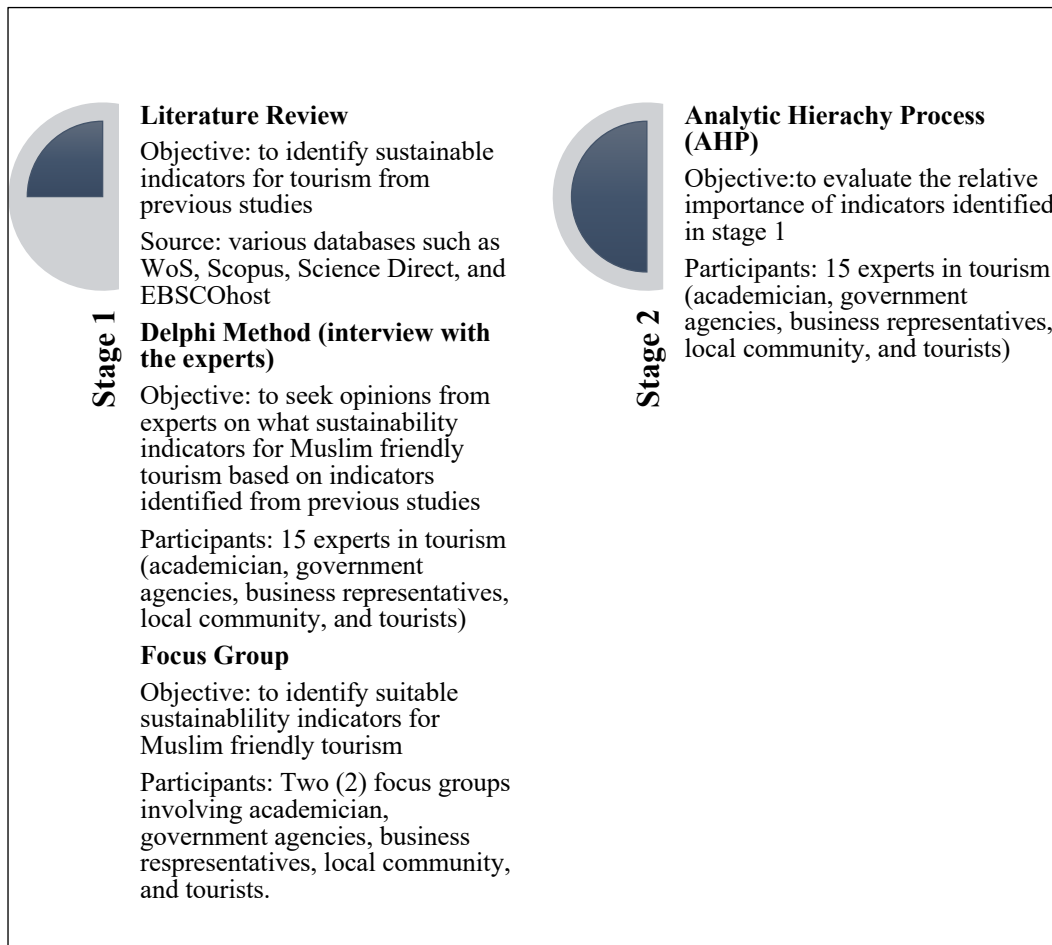


Source: Adapted from Dredge and Jenkins (2008)

2. Methodology

The aim of this research is to develop sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism. In achieving the objectives, the research will involve two stages of research as shown in Figure 2. Stage 1 of this research aims to identify sustainable indicators for tourism from previous studies while in Stage 2, evaluation of the relative importance of indicators identified in stage 1 will be carried out.

Figure 2: Research stages



3. Discussion and Conclusion

In line with the National Tourism Policy (2020-2030), which aiming to ensure the continuity of the country's tourism industry, this research emphasis on one of the six main strategic thrusts: "practice sustainable and responsible tourism". The development of sustainability indicators for Muslim friendly tourism will be able to assist the MOTAC in planning and decision-making of halal tourism related matters. In addition, businesses involve in Muslim friendly tourism industry will be able to identify sustainability indicators for planning, managing, and monitoring sustainable halal-based tourism businesses in achieving sustainability.

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