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## ATTRACTING TOURIST THROUGH HALAL TOURISM IN SRI LANKA

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism is 'the activities of a person travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure business and other purpose' (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006 UNWTO). The term Halal tourism has gained a lot of attractiveness in recent years among Muslim tourists. Even though Sri Lanka one of the best tourist's destinations of the world has occupied a less interest among Halal oriented tourists compared to others due to the lack of awareness among them on the Halal friendly environment of Sri Lanka. This paper intends to describe the Halal friendly requirements that affect decisions of tourists in choosing the destinations. In addition to that this study also aim to determine the impact of Halal Tourism in Tourism industry of Sri Lanka and to promote Halal tourism sector. This paper would also explain Halal Tourism concept its theoretic al view and some practical examples from few other non-Muslim destinations initiated Halal tourism sector by understanding its positive impacts on their tourism industry. The data will be collected from secondary sources such as Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), Books, magazines, journals, research articles, newspapers and websites for this research, and would be analysed and explained using descriptive analysis with help of the Microsoft Excel. The findings would show the positive potentials Sri Lanka possesses to attract tourists through Halal Tourism sector. Moreover, this paper would provide few recommendations to develop this sector in order to attract Muslim tourists to Sri Lanka.

**Keywords:** Halal Tourism, Muslim Tourists, Muslim Friendly facilities

### INTRODUCTION

According to the state of the Global Islamic Economic report (Reuters, 2015) the global Muslim travelling market was worth \$140 billion in 2013, which represents 11.5% of global expenditure. The same report predicts that the segment is expected to be worth \$238 billion in 2019 and represent 13% of global expenditure. Muslim tourists are one part of the fastest developing market segments and its needs and interest cannot be ignored by destination marketers and tourism operators. Sri Lanka as a best tourist destination of the world that should try its best to attract Muslim tourists.

Halal tourism is one of the fastest-growing facets of the global travel industry. Muslim travellers around the world are hungry for travel experiences and this is driving the sector's phenomenal growth. According to the State of the Islamic Economy Report 2018/2019, Muslim spend on travel will grow to US\$ 274 billion by 2023, up from US\$ 177 billion in 2017, so the future is bright for savvy brands and businesses that cater well to this market. In

2019, the number of Muslim travellers will continue to rise, driving demand for new travel products and services (Elena Nikolova, 2019). Spending by Muslim travelers is expected to rise to US\$220 billion by 2020, with the number of Muslim tourists growing to 156 million from 121 million in 2016. That's according to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GTMI) 2017, which was produced by Mastercard and Crescent Rating, a 'halal-friendly' travel consultancy. 'Halal' tourism is clearly a growing market segment, with Muslim tourists seeking destinations which meet their needs, in terms of diet, dress or rituals. Translated from Arabic, 'halal' means permissible in accordance with Islamic teaching. Alcohol, pork, nudity and gambling are off limits.

Providing any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in tourism industry will increase their arrival to the country. 'This Muslim Friendly Tourism or Halal Tourism has introduced a new area of tourism industry or a new branch of tourism market' (Neveu, 2010; Bhuiya, 2011) which is the encouragement of tourists to meet the requirements of Islamic law, providing travel and tourism service in accordance with Muslim beliefs and practices. Halal tourism is not something hard to understand or practice hence it can be easily defined as a concept of tourism that is not limited to religious tourism, but it extends to all forms of tourism except those that go against Islamic values. Therefore, the two concepts are vague and definitional ambiguities in term of the Islamic law, the target customers (i.e. Muslims or non-Muslims), the location of activity (i.e. destination attributes), the product and service offered (i.e. food, facilities), and the purpose of travel. (Shakiry, 2006). The concept of Halal tourism according to its definitions is not limited to Muslim world. Therefore, it includes services and products that are designed for Muslim travellers in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Furthermore, it considers the purpose of travel is not necessarily religious. It may be any of the general motivations of tourism.

It is important to note that halal tourism is not aimed to alienate Muslim tourists from general tourism activities or otherwise alienate non-Muslim tourist in certain tourist destinations. Rather it seeks to provide opportunities and convenience for Muslim tourists, to perform their religious duties while travelling or enjoying their leisure time. Mainly the resorts and hotels providing Halal food and have no alcohol policy in their premises and have separate pool, Spa and leisure facilities for ladies, rooms with prayer facilities and entertainments are arranged for them or not. And there is Global Halal Certification System named as Crescent Rating which encourages the expansion of Halal Tourism as a whole. This would also be beneficial for both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists too. And let them an opportunity to see and learn about Islam. Tourism has also a lot of positive aspects as Lee calls it a "promising industry." Tourism has global-scale economic impacts, which hold enormous potentialities to prior Muslims' cultural activities as a means of breaking down the barriers between peoples of different nations, and to develop greater understanding between Muslims individuals or people of different nations resulting from this exchange. It also gives tourists good opportunities to develop environmental awareness and makes them think about what to do to ensure the sustainable prosperity of the Earth. Although, the number of travellers has been steadily increasing from Muslim countries, Sri Lanka is not the mostly chosen destination by Halal conscious travellers. This paper discusses the theoretical view of halal tourism, and explains the importance of halal tourism with its marketing strategies and positive potentials which

plays an important role in the tourism industry providing the possibilities that Sri Lanka possess to take successful measures to promote Halal tourism sector.

Nowadays tourism growth is increasingly becoming quite popular as it represents most from global market. Sri Lanka one of the best tourism destination has a rapid growth in this industry (Mubarak, 2019a). Tourist arrivals raise for various purposes such as Pleasure or Holiday, business, culture and religious, sports, health, education and so forth. The motivational factor for increment of tourists is the availability of best hospitality products and services such as hotels, destinations, guides, holiday packages airport guides and restaurants (Mubarak, 2019b). Many countries and business in Asia Pacific region are expected to increase attention to halal tourism and may start to take initiatives to be Muslim friendly. In Muslim Minority countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and South Korea, halal tourism is considered as a good business opportunity. This is because of the awareness of Muslims increased to select halal options currently offered and challenges they have to face in Muslim minority destinations to spend their time accordance to Islamic teachings.

However, tourist arrivals from Muslim countries comparing to others is seen low in Sri Lanka. According to Dinar Standards Muslim tourist spent \$137 billion (Excluding pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia) in 2012 and it is expected that worldwide global brands in hospitality industry may address this opportunity. So comparing to this market size of Muslim tourists, Sri Lanka has occupied a low interest among them with a percentage of 8.6 in 2015. Having an arrival of 152,621 tourists from Muslim nations out of 1,798,380 total tourists in the year. (SLTDA Annual report, 2015). It shows most of the people from Muslim nations have a low interest to visit Sri Lanka as tourists unless a particular percentage of total tourists. So it is believed that this research will identify the requirement of Halal tourism segment and try to establish the halal tourism in Sri Lanka tourism industry. And also, this particular sector of tourism industry has now become an area for research and development.

Comparing to the market size of Muslim tourists globally, Sri Lanka has occupied only a small percentage. Halal tourism is blooming around the world. However, many Muslim travelers hesitate to set foot in Sri Lanka, unaware of the facilities provided to the "Muslim-friendly" travel segment. Establishing Halal tourism would be pertinent to the local industry in order to attract Muslim tourists. It shows most of the people from Muslim nations have a lack of awareness on Muslim friendly facilities available here in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the objective of this research is to identify the potentials that Sri Lankan tourism industry possess to attract the Halal conscious tourists.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Halal tourism is an option for Muslims who avoid conventional tourism due to religious constraints like co enjoyment of women and men in public places such as beaches and swimming pools in religious objectionable dresses, sharing of crockery in hotels and restaurants where pork or wines are served. It is noted recently that Muslim customers become sensitive to consume products and services that Sharia compliant (Battour, Battor & Ismail, 2012; Jafari & Scott, 2014). Moreover, the awareness among Muslim Increased to select Halal option for their needs from the common of options currently offered (Battour & Ismail, 2014). Therefore, some non-Muslim destinations such as Japan, Philippines, and Brazil offered

Muslim friendly solutions/options to scenario seen as problematic by Muslim travellers. For example, Chambers of Commerce in Japan and the Philippine Travel Agencies Association (The National, 2014; TTG Asia, 2014) organized seminars to train the tourism industry to satisfy Muslim tourist needs. Nowadays, the tourism growth is increasingly becoming quite popular worldwide, as it unequivocally represents the largest and most lucrative global market. There are a number of academic researches on different familiar tourism phenomena, such as the medical tourism, the dark tourism, the heritage tourism, the eco-tourism, the e-tourism and so forth. However, as the drive on tourism begins to gain momentum, the Islamic tourism (IT) has introduced a new area of industry or a new branch of tourism market (Neveu, 2010; Bhuiya 2011).

This new development in the world of halal tourism has given rise to the need for the closely associated industry players including airlines, restaurants, hotels, suppliers and tour operators to standardize their products and services so as to adequately and professionally cater for the needs of this growing market segment of high economic potentials as there are more than 50 Muslim countries with 1.6 billion Muslims, a good proportion of which will need the Muslim-friendly tourism products and services throughout the whole world (ITC,2014). Moreover, prayer rooms are allocated at major airports and restaurants offer Halal Food in Japan. Muslim friendly guide is also published to provide information on Halal Food and prayer places. (The National, 2014). Recently, some practices related to Halal tourism has been observed. These practices are which are applied in some destinations could be used as a benchmark for other destinations to target Muslim tourists and /or to market the destination as ‘Muslim friendly destination’. For example, the number of Sharia compliant hotels are growing in some Muslim and non-Muslim destinations. (Carboni et al., 2014).

Muslim friendly hotels deliver Muslim guests with all services that are complaint with Islamic teachings such as Qibla Direction, Halal food, alcohol-free beverages, and prayer room with call for prayers. (Javed, 2007; Stephenson, 2014). The availability of Halal food and beverages is vital for destinations that target Muslim travellers. It is now common for Muslim tourists to request Halal food and beverages when they visit non-Muslim destinations. (Euro Monitor Internationals, 2015). Thailand is one of non-Muslim country that takes initiatives to launch Muslim friendly application to help further enhancement tourism industry in Thailand. (Lefever, 2015). Muslim friendly airports is recently one of the best practises to satisfy Muslim travellers. It was reported that the number of visitors from the Southeast Asian Muslim countries of Malaysia and Indonesia in recent year increased in Osaka. (KIX, M.F.A. 2015). Therefore, Kansai International has taken initiatives to satisfy Muslim. The airport allocates three prayer rooms for use of travellers. One room is located on the third floor on terminal one and another two rooms are located at the international departure gate. Fifteen restaurants prepare Halal food promoted as “pork-free & alcohol-free menus” and three restaurants are Halal certified. Moreover, Narita Airport and Haneda International Airport in Tokyo opened a prayer room in 2014. (The National, 2014).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper used documents analysis and conceptual that have identified, various documents related to the topic and analysed based on the research objectives. This study focused on secondary sources to evaluate the practice and theoretical view of Halal Tourism.

Qualitative research is done by descriptive data from secondary sources which are used to identify the potentials that Sri Lanka possess to examine the possibilities of halal tourism in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, secondary data were collected from Annual Reports of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, Books, websites and previous researches related to the topic. The tourist's arrival details of 7 years (2011-2017) have been analysed and explained using descriptive analysis with the help of MS Excel in order to reach the findings and conclusion of this paper. This study has been carried out by examining halal conscious travellers based on tourist arrival from Muslim majority nations of Middle East and Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the below graph prepared based on annual reports of Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, it shows that Sri Lankan tourism industry has more opportunities and attract the tourists coming from all over the world. From 2011 to 2015 arrival of Muslim tourist from Muslim nations (Middle East and Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and Bangladesh) shows a rapid growth. In the year 2012 number of Muslim tourists' arrival has been increased to 89348 from 65002 with the difference of 24346 tourists. And raised up to 113010 in 2013. In 2014 Muslim tourists to Sri Lanka has achieved 151674 visitors an increment of 388664 tourists from the previous year. But there is no much difference in the number of Muslim tourists between 2014-2015. And in the year 2016 and 2017 it has decreased than previous years. Anyway, it shows Sri Lanka can attract tourists from Muslim nations by taking measures to introduce the country as a Muslim friendly destination.

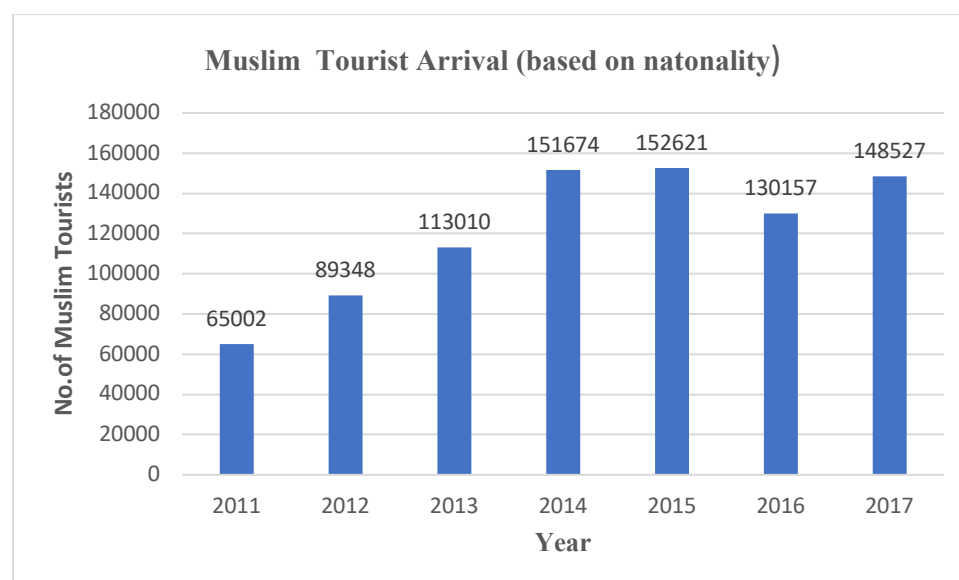


Figure 1: Muslim Tourists arrival

Source: SLTDA, Annual Reports, 2017

It shows that majority of Muslim tourists select Sri Lanka as their holiday destination. This is due to the climate, natural beauties and geographical location of this country. The botanical gardens, Rain forests, National parks, waterfalls, Exotic coastal sceneries, historical places, friendly people, UNESCO World Heritage Sites, lush green tea plantations, fantastic

food of the Island add value to the tourist attraction for pleasure. Visiting friends and relatives accrue the next major purpose of visit. Therefore, Sri Lankan tourism industry can capture the interest of Muslim tourist market by promoting this sector of tourism by introducing halal tourist packages.

A new ground-breaking study, 'Global Muslim Lifestyle Travel Market: Landscape & Consumer Needs,' shows that Muslim tourists globally represent a major niche market worth \$126.1 billion in 2011 growing at a 4.8% through 2020, compared to global average of 3.8%. In a challenging global economic environment, the Study highlights how airlines, tourism destinations, and hotels/resorts can benefit by engaging with a market that has a young demographic, is growing in affluence, and is increasingly asserting its unique needs on the tourism industry.

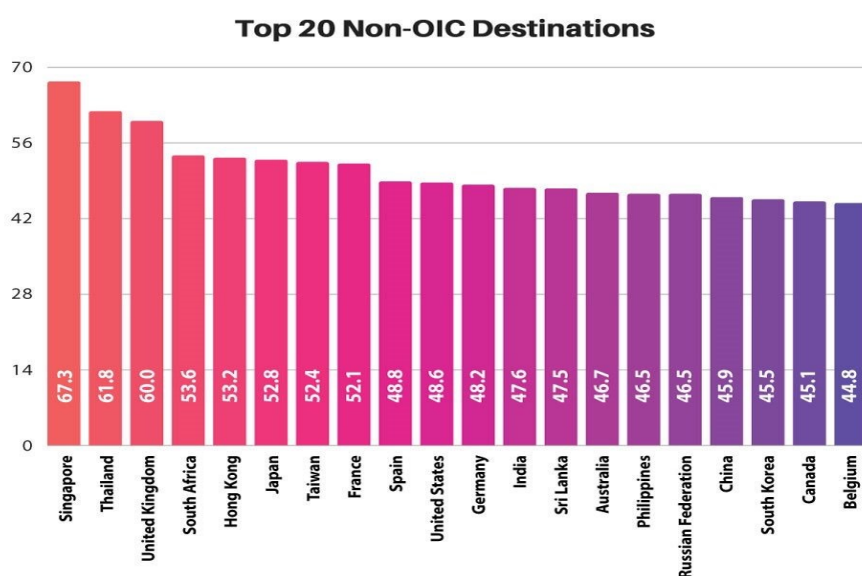


Figure 2: Top 20 Non-OIC destination

Source: <https://hospitalityinsights.ehl.edu>

Above chart shows that Sri Lanka has got 13<sup>th</sup> place in Halal friendly non Islamic destinations which is listed as top non OIC destinations. Therefore it seems that Sri Lanka has ability to attract more Muslim tourist by promoting the concept of Halal tourism. Muslim tourists are one of the fastest growing travel segments in the world and thus it is worth paying attention to. The tourism industry is highly competitive and innovation in terms of Halal tourism is crucial to the economy. One of the best adoptions we could adhere to is to make the destination Muslim-friendly. Sri Lanka is already home to a large number of Halal restaurants. Its main airport also provides segregated prayer rooms for both men and women. Reading obligatory prayers is also convenient, with many mosques available even in the small villages of Sri Lanka. It is important to exhibit to the world how well Sri Lanka appeals to Islamic Sharia. Catering to the requirements of Islamic law can provide a competitive advantage for the tourism industry. Most countries have already adapted to Halal tourism, which can be used as a benchmark to attract Muslim travelers. Many hotels have become Sharia compliant and provide additional services for Muslim guests such as Qiblah directions, Halal food, prayer

facilities and non-alcoholic beverages. A few hotels take a step further to provide prayer mats and a copy of the Quran in guest rooms. However, there are challenges in endeavoring to market Halal tourism. Standardization is useful to identify Halal tourism, but using terms such as "Halal tourism" or "Muslim-friendly" segregates Muslim as "other".

### CRESCENT RATED HOTELS IN SRI LANKA

Crescent Rating is the world's leading authority on Halal Friendly Travel. Their aim is to enable Muslim travellers to explore the Halal Friendly facilities available in destinations as a globally trusted brand. They have ranked Sri Lanka as a best non-Islamic destination for Halal Friendly Travel. There are number of Crescent Rated Hotels available in Sri Lanka.

Table 1: Crescent Rated Hotels in Sri Lanka

HOTEL	CRESCENT RATING
Galadari Hotel – Colombo	4
Hotel Hilltop – Kandy	3
Earls Regency – Kandy	3
Cinnamon Citadel Kandy	3
Randholee Luxury Resort - Kandy	3
Heritance Tea Factory – Nuwara Eliya	3
Jumairah Grand Apartments – Nuwara Eliya	3
Avani Kalutara Resort - Kalutara	3
Heritance Kandalama - Dambulla	3
Bandarawela Hotel	3
Cinnamon Lodge Habarana	3
Club Hotel Dolphin - Waikkal	3
Heritance Ahungalla	3
Turyaa Kaluthara	3
Hikkaduwa Chaaya Tranz - Hikkaduwa	3

Above listed hotels are rated for their Muslim Friendly facilities such as Water-friendly washrooms, Halal Restaurants nearby, Halal Restaurant in the Hotel, Prayer direction marked in the room, Prayer room in Hotel, No adult TV channels in the room, not part of a gambling resort. Although some of these hotels are not certified by the halal certifying body, they claim to serve halal food. Prior requests need to be made for the hotel to provide Halal meal options. Muslim visitors also need to be aware that the restaurants at most of the hotels serve alcohol and some hotels may even house a bar within their premises. Other than this there are plenty of options to find Halal food in Sri Lanka. Due to the large and active Muslim community Halal Food in Sri Lanka, is widely available across the island. Hotels and Restaurants have got themselves certified as Halal by the All Ceylon Jamiyyathul Ulama (ACJU), which is the main Halal Certifying body in Sri Lanka. There are also number of restaurants which assure that they serve Halal food, although they have no certification. Most of them are Muslim owned.

Therefore, Halal tourism can be developed through its marketing strategies as the Halal food is a major component in this sector. Islamic banking and finance is another factor which constitute the Halal Tourism industry. Sri Lanka as a country practicing Islamic banking and finance too will be a motivating factor of halal tourism.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study recognize that Sri Lanka has huge potential to attract more halal conscious tourists to the country. According to the findings of this study we can observe a growth in number of Muslim tourists from 2011 to 2017. Sri Lanka as a nation always appreciate all countries regardless of religious beliefs to enjoy their visit can concern on this Muslim friendly tourism to enhance the means and methods of attracting Muslim tourist of the world. This paper attempts to address that the Islamic compliance facilities that have possibilities to be initiated would attract more Muslim tourists to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka as a country blessed with the natural resources attracting people from other nations with no doubt would drag the interest of Muslim tourists too. And promoting Halal tourism would not be a difficult process as there are enough Hotels and restaurants to get halal food, places of worship available all over the country and Muslim tourist guides to help them. However, halal tourism cannot be motivated unless taking measures to bring up some important resources such as ways to verify halal food or pork free food, alcohol free drinks, bathrooms provided with Islamic facilities, separate pools and leisure facilities for men and women, open beaches separate males from females, family oriented leisure facilities, prayer facilities with qibla direction in rooms. Development of this segment can bring a positive impact to the tourism industry by promoting it through a properly designed strategy. Because tourism as one of the major economic generating factors must be steadily expanded into various forms of attraction.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF HALAL TOURISM**

Taking measures to develop tourism through introducing new market products that can drag the interest of tourists from all the nations. Providing awareness for agencies about the Halal tourism concept, agencies play a key role in tourism so they could plan and design innovative products to attract Muslim tourists. Introducing Muslim friendly packages for Halal conscious travellers fully customizable by customers. Starting Halal hotels that serve halal certified food, alcohol-free with gender segregated swimming pool. Giving instructions to Hotel and Restaurant owners to provide Muslim friendly arrangements. Motivating research and developments of this sector.

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