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Muslim-Friendly Tourism in Australia: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Muslim travel market is seen as an untapped and potential market by tourism destinations around the world, both OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) countries, and non-OIC destinations. Muslim spending on tourism has increased from US\$58 billion to US\$102 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow by 50.0% in 2022 to US\$154 billion and reach US\$189 billion in 2025 at a 4-year CAGR of 16.5% [1]. Australia is one of the countries that have begun introducing itself as a Muslim-friendly tourism destination and has gained recognition in the Muslim travel market over the years and has successfully secured the 10th position among the non-OIC destinations in the global Muslim Travel Index 2022 rankings, [2]. As a tourism destination, Australia has been competitive for many decades on the global stage in attracting inbound tourists from a variety of countries and cultures [3]. This paper examines the challenges, and prospects regarding Muslim-friendly tourism in Australia and provide recommendations for developing this lucrative sector in Australia. The literature review and other document reviews have been undertaken in this study.

Keywords: Halal; Tourism; Australia; Challenges; Prospects; Muslim-friendly

1 Introduction

Australia's tourism industry is an important sector of the country's economy, contributing significantly to employment, income, and economic growth. Australia's natural beauty and diverse cultural experiences make it a popular destination for international and domestic tourists. The country is home to numerous iconic attractions, such as the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru national park, the Sydney Opera House, Blue Mountains National Park, and the Great Ocean Road, among others. Australia is a world-leading tourist destination, and the tourism sector contributes \$152 billion to national economic growth, supports more than 300,000 businesses, and employs more than 660,000 Australians [4]. Moreover, Australia is currently one of the highest-yielding destinations in the world, with international visitors spending \$44.6 billion in 2018-19, [4]. There are several agencies responsible for promoting tourism in Australia at the national and state levels. At the national level, Tourism Australia is the government agency responsible for promoting Australia as a tourism destination to international and domestic markets. Tourism Australia is responsible for attracting international visitors to Australia, both for leisure and business events.



2 Types of tourism promoted by Tourism Australia

According to Tourism Australia [5], they promote various types of tourism to cater to a wide range of interests and preferences. Here are some of the types of tourism promoted by Australia: Nature and Wildlife Tourism, Coastal and Beach Tourism, Adventure Tourism, Indigenous Tourism, Food and Wine Tourism, City and Cultural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Outback, and Indigenous Cultural Experiences.

3 Muslim-Friendly tourism in Australia

Australia has been trying to project its image as a Muslim-friendly tourist destination for several years. The first visitor guide has been launched by Tourism Australia in 2015 which is a significant milestone for Australia in promoting itself as a Muslim-friendly destination. There are several places that Muslim tourists would prefer visiting during their trip such as the Islamic Museum of Australia (IMA) situated in Melbourne provides insights into Islamic art, culture, and history through various exhibits and interactive displays. Islamic Cultural Centres and prominent mosques in the main cities including the Auburn Gallipoli Mosque is an Ottoman-style Mosque situated in a suburb of Sydney. In addition, the Broken Hill Mosque in NSW is one of the most intriguing heritage sites built in 1887, it's now the only surviving mosque built by Afghan cameleers in Australia [6].

In addition to the Muslim visitors from Middle Eastern, African, Americas and European countries, the data is equally compelling for the heavily Islamic south-east Asian tourist market to Australia. Indonesia was Australia's 8th largest inbound market for visitor arrivals and the 15th largest market for total visitor spends and visitor nights. Visitors from Indonesia generated \$0.8 billion in total expenditure in 2018. Malaysia was Australia's seventh largest inbound market for visitor arrivals and the 9th largest market for total visitor spends and 10th for visitor nights. Visitors from Malaysia have generated \$1.3 billion in total expenditure in 2018 [7].

Despite the emerging inbound Arab market, little is known about how Australia is promoted to, or viewed by the "Arab world". This is especially true of the Gold Coast in Queensland, which, because of its renowned beaches, shopping, and family-friendly apartment-style accommodation, is becoming a destination of choice for many Arab visitors [8].

4 Challenges and barriers to developing Muslim-friendly tourism in Australia

Australia is one of the leading tourist destinations in the world with many attractive features for tourists, including its beautiful landscapes, diverse wildlife, and vibrant cities. However, there are several potential shortcomings that could affect its appeal as a Muslim-friendly tourist destination. Some of the shortcomings include the limited availability of halal food particularly in regional areas, finding halal food options can be challenging. In Australia stressors pertaining to socioeconomic, housing and employment precariousness, as well as difficulties in accessing halal foods were identified as challenges [9]. Increasing the halal food

availability and improving its attribute quality is indisputably becoming essential to fulfil Muslim travellers' halal-friendly tourism needs and providing them with pleasant tourism experiences, especially in non-Islamic countries and tourism destinations [10]. Mostafa (2020) also proved in his research that halal food availability factors, halal food health/nutrition factors, halal food accreditation factors (e.g., accreditation with a halal certificate, halal logos), and halal food cleanness/safety/hygiene factors are all crucial constituents of assessing halal food performance at international destinations, [11]. Although Australia has been producing halal meat since the 1950s, there is a need to improve the current understanding of halal food principles [12]. In many non-Muslim countries where Muslims are the minority such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, Europe and the United States where finding halal food and beverages as well as "*Shari'ah* compliant" accommodations and hotels as well as touristic products and activities may prove to be challenging [13].

The lack of awareness is a challenge among tourism service providers about the needs and expectations of Muslim travellers is crucial. Cultural sensitivity, language barriers, knowledge about Islamic practices, and familiarity with dietary requirements play key roles in the Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality industry. Abodeeb et al., insist on their research findings on the importance of culture in tourism marketing from a supply-side perspective [3]. This, in turn, can be used to facilitate more effective destination marketing of Australia as a tourism destination in Arab countries. There has been a significant increase in the number of studies investigating cultural influences on consumer behaviour in tourism, hospitality, and leisure, particularly in Australia, the USA, Europe and New Zealand [14].

The limited availability of Muslim-friendly facilities is another challenge for Muslim tourists. The availability of appropriate prayer facilities, such as mosques or designated prayer rooms at key places such as airports, and key tourist destinations, is an important consideration for Muslim tourists. In some areas of Australia, there may be limited or no dedicated prayer facilities available. Besides consumable products and services, having places of worship (i.e., mosques) at destinations adds to Muslim tourists' confidence about traveling to these places [15]. Nurdiansyah states in her research findings the failure to recognize and fulfil the growing global demand for Muslim-friendly travel experiences means that many international tourism destinations, particularly those located outside of Muslim-majority localities, have been unable to fully benefit from the segment's burgeoning potential, [16].

There are not any certification bodies that offer certification for halal restaurants, halal kitchens (food preparation areas in hotels), or halal food storage facilities in Australia. Moreover, there is not any agency offering Muslim-friendly Hotel Rating System in Australia. Muslim friendly hotels can be found in any bigger city in Australia. Their services are limited to removing any alcohol from the mini-bar, catering halal food and providing information on Muslim-friendly restaurants in their area. Muslim-friendly restaurants in Australia are plenty

and prominently display the halal sign — although be mindful that they are self-certified; currently, there is no official restaurant certification body in Australia [17].

Since there has been very limited research conducted on opportunities for Muslim-friendly tourism in Australia, there has been a lack of awareness or understanding among businesses, destination management organizations, or tourism stakeholders about the potential benefits of developing Muslim-friendly tourism in Australia. In the twenty-first century, there has been an increase in the number of Arab tourists visiting various countries throughout the world, including Australia. Yet very little academic research has been carried out with regard to how Western destinations can appropriately market to Arab visitors and how destinations can be adequately prepared for a more mobile Arab population [3]. According to the study conducted by Nurdiansyah, Muslim travellers remain relatively under-served due to factors such as a lack of awareness amongst tourism authorities and service providers of the market's significant growth potential, as well as poor understanding of this demographic's specific needs and preferences [16].

5 Muslim-friendly tourism and the prospects for Australia

The development of Muslim-friendly tourism products and services will certainly bring greater benefits to the Australian economy and its destination image. Australia's geographical location, its natural beauty, and religious, and cultural inclusiveness are some of the key selling propositions to market Australia as a Muslim-friendly destination. In addition, the existing 813,392 Muslim population in Australia will help boost local tourism since their Muslim-friendly tourism requirements are met, [18].

Australia is a close ally of the organization of the Islamic Corporation (OIC) and has a greater opportunity to promote Muslim-friendly tourism to its 57 member countries. This will further enhance its economic ties and relationship with the Muslim countries. Understanding the true impact that can be created by the halal industry, Australia is currently taking some genuine efforts in developing its halal industry. In September 2022 Austrade, one of the leading Governmental organizations partnered with Malaysia's Halal Development Corporation (HDC) in organizing the World Halal Business Conference Circuit in Melbourne, Australia [19]. During this conference, several halal industry segments and discussions were held, and MOUs were signed. These sorts of partnerships and collaborations will certainly help Australia to place itself as an important player in the halal industry in the Australasian region.

6 Conclusion

This paper examined the challenges, and prospects regarding Muslim-friendly tourism in Australia and provided some recommendations to further develop this lucrative sector in Australia. Further research on this area is highly recommended. There is a lack of awareness being noted amongst all the tourism stakeholders in Australia about the true potential of this fast-growing segment. As a result, there are not any system or guidelines currently existing in

Australia to foster this lucrative tourism sector. Therefore, the true potential to develop, manage, and place Australia as a Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality destination has not been explored yet. Therefore, by introducing a governance framework it will help to design, develop, and manage the Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality sector in Australia, and it will further serve the policymakers and the relevant industry stakeholders to devise strategies based on the recommended framework to take this fast-growing tourism sector to the next level.

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