

WP143

HIJABABES TRAVEL: INSIGHTS FROM ASIAN FEMALE MUSLIM MILLENNIAL TRAVELERS

Eunice Tan, School of Arts, Murdoch University
Barkathunnisha Abu Bakar, School of Arts, Murdoch University
Tania Lim, School of Arts, Murdoch University
Sumesh Nair, Department of Marketing, Australian Institute of Business

ABSTRACT

Asian female travelers have gained increased attention from academia and tourism industry in recent years, in tandem with the upsurge of interest in the millennials and Muslim travelers. Within the context of Halal travel, Muslim millennials (GenM) exhibit distinct tourism characteristics from previous generations of Muslim travelers in terms of their values, needs and expectations. Despite rising attention on the GenMs, there has been no significant study to date on the Asian Female Muslim Millennial Traveler (AFMMT). This study examines the tripographic profiles and tourism experiences of AFMMTs (aged 18-36), with a specific focus on their: (1) travel behavior and characteristics, (2) travel planning and key influencing factors, and (3) experiential attributes and activities. These preliminary findings indicate that AFMMTs are independent, intrepid travelers, who embrace both faith and modernity proudly. They value authentic, affordable and novel tourism experiences positioned to accommodate their Muslim sensitivities and lifestyles.

Keywords: *Muslim Millennial Travelers (MMTs), GenM, Female Travelers, Asian Travelers, AFMMT, Halal Travel.*

INTRODUCTION

The Asian female traveler today occupies a growing segment in contemporary tourism (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). Female travelers currently make up almost two-thirds of travelers, with women outnumbering men in leisure travel (Marcus, 2016). Concurrently, the rapidly expanding Muslim travel market has become highly lucrative, with 156 million travelers projected to spend an estimated USD\$220 billion by 2020 (CrescentRating, 2017), with younger Muslims identified as one of the important drivers for growth. The Muslim millennials (hereafter GenM) are tech-savvy, self-empowered and enthusiastic consumers whose identities proudly encompass both faith and modernity (Janmohamed, 2016). Muslim millennial travelers (hereafter MMTs) are distinct from their previous generations and other millennial travelers, with a unique set of values, needs and expectations in their travel consumption and expenditure patterns (HalalTrip, 2017).

While there has been increasing attention and research on the millennials (e.g., Leask, Fyall, & Barron, 2014; Moscardo & Benckendorff, 2010), Muslim travelers (e.g., Henderson, 2016; Kim, Im, & King, 2015; Oktadiana, Pearce, & Chon, 2016; Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016), and female travelers (e.g., Asbollah, Lade, & Michael, 2013; Tan & Abu Bakar, 2016; Yang et al., 2017), there has been no significant study focusing on the female MMTs in the Asia-Pacific region. There is a need to consider gendered and generational differences that distinguish the Asian female MMTs (hereafter AFMMTs) from other tourist segments. This study examines the tripographic profiles and tourism experiences of AFMMTs, with a specific focus on their: (1) travel behavior and characteristics, (2) travel planning and key influencing factors, and (3) experiential attributes and activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Responding to the upsurge in female travel, there has been increasing research on women's tourism experiences. Research on Asian female travelers have focused primarily on (1) travel motivations, (2)

tourist gaze, and (3) cultural/gender-influenced behavioral patterns (Yang et al., 2017). Scholars have steadily highlighted a need to recognize the diversity in female travel experiences; and women should not be perceived as a homogenous segment, due to the multiplicity of regional, religious and ethnic differences (Asbollah et al., 2013; Yang & Mura, 2016). Tan and Abu Bakar (2016) had examined this diversity within the context of the Asian Female Tourist Gaze, in which they presented the emic voices of Asian female tourists framed within cultural- and gender-based dimensions of travel experiences. They posit the interaction between self-directed (antecedents/self-identity) and other-directed (situational/interpersonal) factors which influence the cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual attributes of Asian female tourism experiences. Within the context of the AFMMT, she shares a similar cultural- and gender-based identity, but with the intersection of her faith-based needs and value propositions through which she interprets and consumes tourism experiences.

Asbollah et al. (2013) emphasizes this prominence of the Muslim identity and influence of religion on Muslim women’s tourism experiences, lifestyles and travel patterns and/or behaviors. The GenM woman however is unabashed about fusing her Islamic faith and comfort with modernity. Youthful, educated and increasingly affluent, the GenM woman is self-empowered to assert her right to Muslim-friendly products and services accommodating her Islamic sensitivities (Janmohamed, 2016). She is driven by an independent, vibrant spirit and desire to seek out tourism experiences and discoveries that are authentic, affordable and accessible (3As) (HalalTrip, 2017). While Muslim-inspired consumption is core to her identity, she is also adventurous, creative and fun-loving. To successfully cater to this market, tourism destinations and industry must be sensitive to their religious and cultural needs – e.g., Muslim-friendly amenities and activities, halal food and facilities for daily ablutions (HalalTrip, 2017; Yang et al., 2017), but also deliver tourism experiences and lifestyles to fulfill the 3As.

METHODOLOGY AND PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

This paper presents preliminary results from an exploratory study of AFMMTs aged 18-36, from the Asia Pacific Region ($n=167$), drawn from a wider transnational research project investigating MMTs. This study comprises two stages: (1) an online survey, and (2) in-depth interviews with AFMMTs and influencers. This section presents some preliminary findings from the online survey.

Travel behavior and characteristics

The results indicate that AFMMTs were fairly active travelers, with most traveling 2-5 times a year (42%), or at least once a year (32%). Most trips lasted between 4-5 days (41%) and 1-2 weeks (35%). Figures 1 & 2 below illustrate their main travel purposes and companions.



Fig.1: Travel purpose

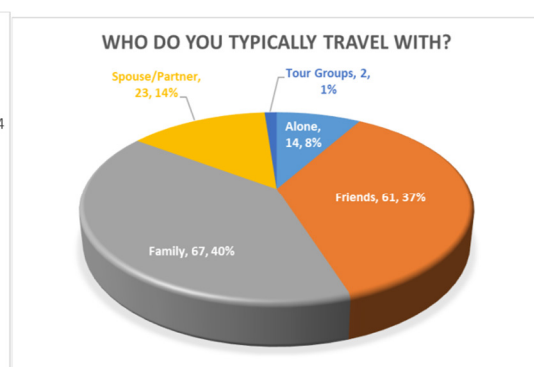


Fig.2: Travel companions

Travel planning and key influencing factors

Being free-spirited and adventurous, the majority of AFMMTs preferred free and independent travel arrangements (72%) or free and easy packages (17%). Thus, they generally spent more time researching and planning for their trips (56% planned 1-6 months ahead). Although AFMMTs are independent, intrepid travelers, they are also concerned about personal safety and security. Safety and terrorism

concerns was rated the most influential factor in travel planning (Figure 3). Particularly for female solo travelers, safety assurance was a vital consideration. Additionally, while AFMMTs sought novel and interesting experiences, they were also prudent and cost-conscious. With this in mind, AFMMTs were significantly influenced by content shared by other travelers, online review sites, and recommendations from family and friends. Social media and digital platforms were also keenly utilized to find information, stay connected and engaged with the wider e-Ummah (global Muslim community).

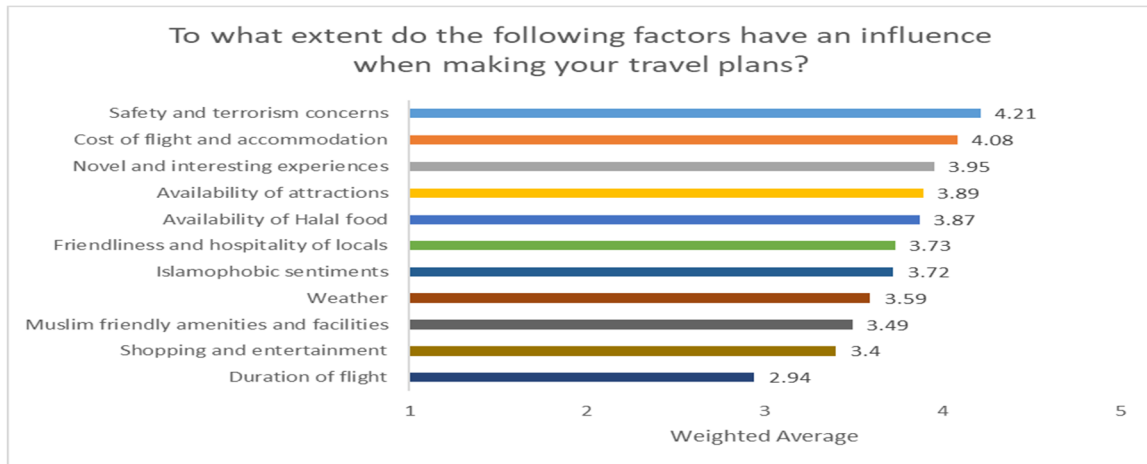


Fig.3: Influencing factors

Muslim-friendly amenities

In terms of Muslim-friendly hospitality services and amenities sought whilst traveling, the results indicate that AFMMTs valued providers that accommodated their Muslim sensitivities. However, they were also practical and partial to the 3As in their choices (Figures 4-7).

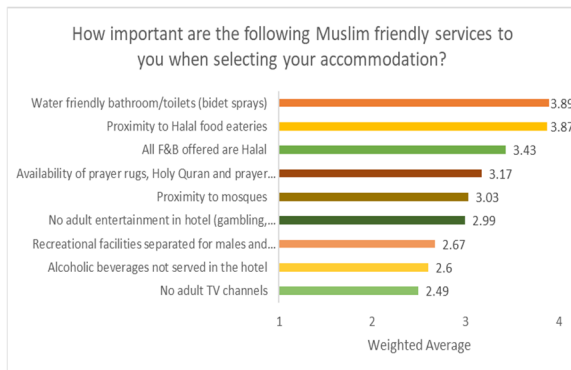


Fig.4: Accommodation

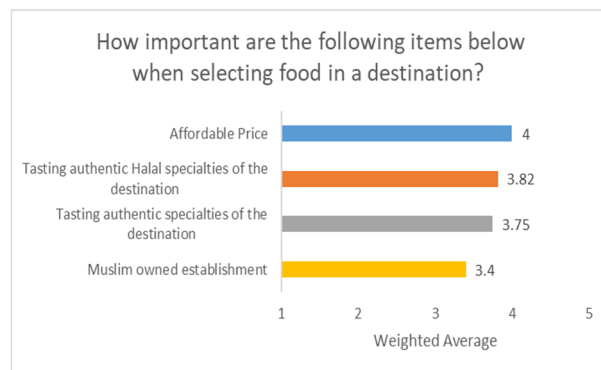


Fig.5: Food and beverage

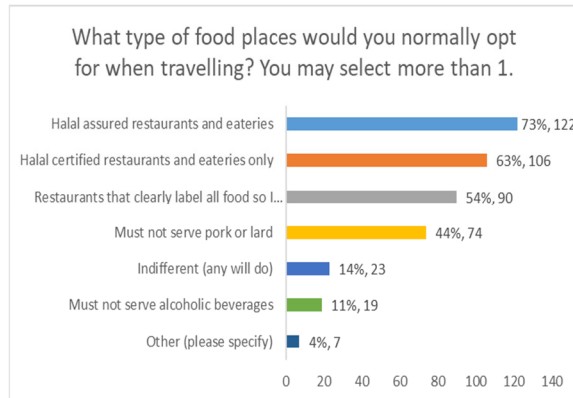


Fig.6: Food options

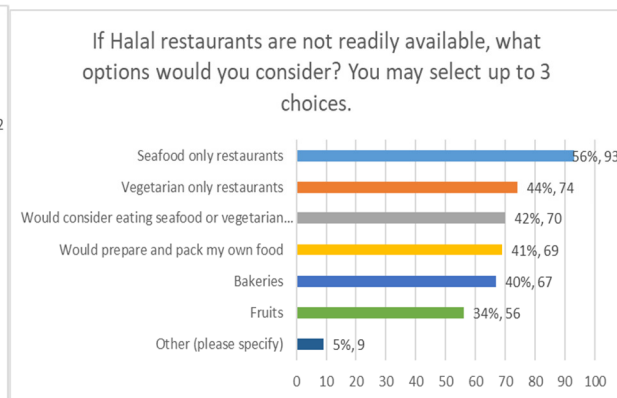


Fig.7: Non-halal options

CONCLUSION

It is acknowledged that current research into AFMMTs is still embryonic and while this study offers useful insights, it is not intended as a generalization of all AFMMTs. We recognize the regional, cultural and social differences within this heterogeneous segment. The GenM woman is predisposed by her Muslim-inspired way of living, framed around her individual, social and practical realities. However, she also embraces a new cultural cool and Muslim lifestyle that goes beyond the technical necessities of halal food and shariah compliance (Janmohamed, 2016). In order to appeal and connect with the AFMMT, businesses must look beyond just faith- and gender-based depictions of these travelers. Future research will analyze in-depth interviews conducted with AFMMTs and influencers. The collective data derived from this investigation will offer an opportunity to yield further valuable insights into the psyche, travel behavior and tourism experiences of the AFMMT, and recommend strategies that will allow us to better engage and connect with the Asian GenM women travelers.

References

- Asbollah, A.Z.B., Lade, C., & Michael, E. (2013). The tourist's gaze: From the perspective of a Muslim woman. *Tourism Analysis*, 18(6), 677-690.
- CrescentRating (2017). *Global Muslim Travel Index 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.crescentrating.com/reports/mastercard-crescentrating-global-muslim-travel-index-gmti-2017.html>
- HalalTrip (2017). *Muslim Millennial Travel Report 2017*. Retrieved from: <https://www.halaltrip.com/halal-travel/muslim-millennial-travel-report/>
- Henderson, J.C. (2016). Muslim travelers, tourism industry responses and the case of Japan. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 41(3), 339-347.
- Janmohamed, S. (2016). *Generation M: Young Muslims Changing the World*. London: I.B. Tauris & Co.
- Kim, S., Im, H.H., & King, B.E. (2015). Muslim travelers in Asia: The destination preferences and brand perceptions of Malaysian tourists. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 21(1), 3-21.
- Leask, A., Fyall, A., & Barron, P. (2014). Generation Y: An agenda for future visitor attraction research. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 16(5), 462-471.
- Marcus, J. (2016, August 11). Most travelers today are women, and the industry may finally be catching on. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/lifestyle/travel/2016/08/10/most-travelers-today-are-women-and-industry-may-finally-catching/MrBBK7ZqAt13VqT6Kp50PJ/story.html>
- Moscardo, G., & Benckendorff, P. (2010). Mythbusting: Generation Y and travel. *Tourism and generation Y*, 16-26.
- Oktadiana, H., Pearce, P.L., & Chon, K. (2016). Muslim travelers' needs: What don't we know? *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 20, 124-130.

- Samori, Z., Salleh, N.Z.M., & Khalid, M.M. (2016). Current trends on Halal tourism: Cases on selected Asian countries. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 19*, 131-136.
- Tan, E., & Abu Bakar, B. (2016). The Asian female tourist gaze: A conceptual framework. In C. Khoo-Lattimore & P. Mura (Eds.). *Asian Genders in Tourism* (pp.65-87). Abingdon, OX: Channel View Publications.
- Yang, E.C.L., & Mura, P. (2016). Asian gendered identities in tourism. In C. Khoo-Lattimore & P. Mura (Eds.). *Asian Genders in Tourism* (pp.6-22). Abingdon, OX: Channel View Publications.
- Yang, E.C.L., Khoo-Lattimore, C., & Arcodia, C. (2017). A narrative review of Asian female travelers: Looking into the future through the past. *Current Issues in Tourism, 20*(10), 1008-1027.