

## Fundamentals of Tour Guide in Muslim Friendly Tourism

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**Abstract:** *This study aims to explore the concept and characteristics of being a tour guide in Muslim-friendly tourism. The study identifies tour guides need to possess effectively and cater the needs of Muslim travellers and provide them with a positive and inclusive travel experience. The research utilizes a qualitative approach, employing data collection based on secondary resources such as books, journals, and articles. The findings of this study contribute to a better understanding of tour guides in Muslim-friendly tourism and provide practical recommendations for tour guides to enhance their services for Muslim travellers.*

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Tourism is an industry that has the potential to generate significant revenue for a country. As a result, the growth of the tourism sector will aid in the advancement of the real sector. The tourism industry is constantly evolving and growing, with new markets and segments emerging all the time (Aziz, 2018; Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2011). One such segment that has gained significant attention in recent years is Muslim-friendly tourism industry (Cetin & Dincer, 2016; Mahliza *et al.*, 2021). Data shows that the number of Muslim travellers is expected to reach 140 million in 2023, and market growth is projected to reach 160 million in 2024, due to the expansion of international travel. Thus, the 230 million arrivals projected before the epidemic will only realize in 2028. Globally, Muslim travellers are projected to spend USD 225 billion by 2028 (McConor, 2022).

Muslim-friendly tourism has experienced significant growth in recent years, with a variety of sectors emerging to cater to the needs and preferences of Muslim travellers. The

food sector plays a crucial role, with restaurants, cafes, and food establishments serving Halal food in high demand (Abdrakhmanova and Moghavvemi, 2022; Aziz, 2018). These establishments adhere to Islamic dietary laws and offer a wide range of cuisines suitable for Muslim consumers. Muslim-friendly accommodations have also emerged, providing facilities such as prayer rooms, Qibla direction indicators, and separate areas for men and women in swimming pools or spas (Aziz, 2018; Saffinee *et al.*, 2022; Salleh & Nor, 2015). Besides, tour operators and travel agencies have developed specialized Halal tourism packages that include visits to mosques, Islamic heritage sites, accommodation, and Muslim-friendly activities (Hussain, Jamaludin & Has-Yun Hashim, 2021), considering prayer times, Halal food options, and other religious requirements (Kamarudin & Ismail, 2018). The fashion and clothing industry has embraced Muslim-friendly tourism by offering modest fashion options such as hijabs, abayas, and modest swimwear (Buckley, 2003; Ric & šálková, 2021). Additionally, organizations and certification bodies play a vital role to ensure Halal standards are met. Certifying Halal products which include food, cosmetics, and personal care items, provides assurance to Muslim travellers (Henderson, 2016; Katuk *et al.*, 2021). It shows the significance of the Halal segment, and its benefits to the society and industries.

A Muslim Friendly Tour Guide will ensure to provide services and experiences that caters to the specific needs, and requirements of Muslim travellers. This study highlights the concept and characteristics of being a tour guide in Muslim-friendly tourism, identifying the characteristics of a good tour guide, and providing practical recommendations for tour guides to effectively cater to their needs, and ensure a positive, and inclusive travel experience.

Islam serves as the basis for laws, governance, and overall societal structure in many Muslim countries (Aziz, 2018). Additionally, Islam encompasses additional tangible requirements, including regular prayers, fasting during Ramadan, and adherence to dietary guidelines. As a result, Muslim tourists often prioritize honouring their religious beliefs, behaviours, and customs during their vacations. This can pose a challenge, where catering to the diverse needs of Muslim travellers, while simultaneously meeting the expectations of other tourists becomes crucial (Mahliza *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, integrating Muslim-friendly products and services into tourism destination planning, such as the provision of prayer rooms at airports and public areas and customized meal plans becomes essential in ensuring an inclusive and satisfactory experience for all visitors.

Tour Guides have been present for over 2,500 years, and with the advent of modern mass tourism, they have gained significant importance within the travel industry (Cetinkaya & Öter, 2016). In contemporary times, the absence of tour guides would make it exceedingly challenging to manage organized tourism, as they fulfill crucial roles as tour managers, tour leaders (accompanying the group during the journey), and tour guides (providing a warm welcome to the group at the destination) (Cohen, 1985). Furthermore, tour guides not only

serve as knowledgeable companions, but they also play a pivotal role in bridging cultural gaps and enhancing the overall travel experience, making them indispensable for creating unforgettable memories for tourists worldwide.

A proficient tour guide holds immense value for a tourism company, as they often serve as the public face and representation of the business. Many international visitors perceive tour guides as representatives of the region or country they are visiting. Early studies on tour guides primarily focused on examining their roles. Cohen (1985) proposed that the modern tour guide's origins can be traced back to two primary lines: the “pathfinder” and the “mentor”. These two distinct roles intertwine to form the backbone of a proficient guide, who not only navigates travellers through unfamiliar landscape, but also imparts wisdom, historical context, and cultural insights, fostering a deeper connection between visitors, and the destinations they explore. As such, the multifaceted nature of a tour guide’s responsibilities highlights their significant contribution in shaping tourists’ perceptions and experiences, and, the success of the tourism company they represent.

There are five characteristics of tour guides in MFTG. First is the cultural sensitivity (Cetinkaya & Öter, 2017; Lin, Lin & Chen, 2017). Tour guides in Muslim-friendly tourism should have a deep understanding and appreciation of Islamic culture, traditions, and religious practices. They should be sensitive to the diverse needs and preferences of Muslim travellers and demonstrate respect for their beliefs and customs. Second is the knowledge of Islamic practices. Tour guides should possess comprehensive knowledge about Islamic practices, such as prayer times, Halal dietary requirements, and appropriate dress codes. This understanding allows them to effectively guide Muslim travellers and provide accurate information regarding religious obligations and considerations. Third is language skills (Lin Lin & Chen, 2017). Proficiency in languages commonly spoken by Muslim travellers can enhance communication and rapport between tour guides and Muslim tourists. This enables better engagement and facilitates a smoother travel experience. The level of proficiency of tour guides in English should be taken into consideration because it is the language that is used to give information about the historical interest to visitors from other countries (Chanwanakul, 2021). Fourthly, familiarity with Halal Services. Tour guides should be well-informed about Halal-certified/Muslim Friendly restaurants, hotels, and other facilities that cater to the dietary needs of Muslim travellers. They should be able to recommend suitable options to ensure that the preferences of Muslim tourists are accommodated throughout their journey. Lastly, excellent communications, and interpersonal skills (Lovrentej, 2015). A tourist guide is the individual who engages in direct communication with both tourists and the local population. Their task is to introduce nearby sites so that the group would be able to relate to and understand them (Lovrentej, 2015). Effective communication and interpersonal skills are essential for tour guides in any setting, including Muslim-friendly

tourism. They should be able to establish rapport with travellers, actively listen to their needs, and provide clear and accurate information while being sensitive to cultural nuances.

In summary, being a tour guide in Muslim-friendly tourism requires knowledge and experience related to cultural sensitivity, comprehensive knowledge of Islamic practices, language skills, familiarity with Halal services, and excellent communication and interpersonal skills. By embodying these characteristics, tour guides may refer it as recommendations also can provide a positive and inclusive travel experience for Muslim travellers, contributing to the growth of Muslim-friendly tourism.

Tour guides can excel in catering to the unique needs and preferences of Muslim travellers through recognizing the significance of cultural sensitivity, deep understanding of Islamic culture and practices, effective communication skills, and a commitment to providing a positive and inclusive travel experience. The findings of this study offer practical recommendations for tour guides to enhance their services, ensuring that they create an environment where Muslim tourists feel respected, welcomed, and valued. By embodying these characteristics and implementing the provided recommendations, tour guides can contribute significantly to the growth and success of Muslim-friendly tourism, fostering meaningful connections between travellers and the destinations they visit.

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