

STUDY ON SPA TYPOLOGIES, SPATIAL ORGANISATION AND SOCIAL INTERACTION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ISLAMIC BUILT ENVIRONMENT ATTRIBUTES

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ABSTRACT

Spas have become increasingly popular and have emerged as important profit centers for hotels. However, the uniqueness of this market has been largely overlooked in terms of Shari'ah compliance to better cater to Muslim needs. This study repositions spa typologies, their spatial organization and social interaction in the context of Islamic built environment. A survey was administered at four case different spas in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor to identify the dimensions of a Muslim-friendly spa. Cluster analysis was then applied to classify spa premises into different groups based on the typologies, services and spatial organization. The analysis was performed according to the groups to determine Muslim-friendly elements. Based on the findings, a Shari'ah-compliant considers security, privacy, and segregation of genders in its design. This research provides further information on the understanding, practice, features, and requirements of Muslim-friendly spas which will help to boost Malaysia's potential to become a prominent destination for Islamic or Shari'ah-compliant tourism.

Keywords: Spa, Islamic Built Environment, Muslim-Friendly, Spatial organization

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a Muslim country in Southeast Asia that receives billions of tourists from across the world (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2018). Spa industries have become an important profit centre for hotels (Foster, 2016). Muslim-friendly spas are now emerging due to the demand of Muslim women and their unique requirements such as covering their awrah (covering all parts of their body except their face and hand) even in front of non-Muslim women (Yaman et al., 2012). In Islamic basis, there are a lot of things to consider such as the using of beauty products either halal or non-halal and they should consider about the services offered meets the Muslims needs. It forms part of the larger Muslim hospitality industry which includes Shari'ah-compliant hotels, halal restaurants, halal food, and gender segregation in the use of facilities and services (Mat Som et al., 2016). Moreover, every woman wants to be beautiful and healthy and believe that spas help boost their well-being from the inside. Accordingly, Muslim women are looking for spas that cater to their religious sensitivities and promote a healthy lifestyle (Othman et al., 2015).

Spa treatments enhance the quality of daily life, highlight the pleasure of self-care and improve well-being (Henry and Taylor, 2005). There are several spa types in the health and beauty industry as detailed by the ASEAN Spa Standard (2016):

- i. Day spa – it takes about 1-5 hours of treatment or a full day. This type of spa can be found in shophouses, shopping centres, or at an airport. Accommodation is not provided;
- ii. Club spa – the spa is located in a club where access requires membership. It focuses on strengthening the body, including yoga and other treatments. No services are provided to visitors;
- iii. Hotel or resort spa – these are spas inside the hotel or resort that offer services such as massage, sauna, steaming, and exercise. Since it is located inside the hotel, most of its customers are guests. Accommodation is not available in this type of spa;
- iv. Mineral Spring spa – a natural or artificial hot spring spa or mineral spring spa with healing properties. This type of spa is considered a recreational place, and some mineral spring spas are developed into resorts;
- v. Cruise Ship spa – located on a cruise ship that provides beauty treatment services as well as pampering. It also offers a place to undergo health training or other health-related activities; and
- vi. Destination spa – a full set of treatment provided in this spa. It offers customers customised treatment to improve the lifestyle through various activities and services such as a guide to proper living and balanced diet. Accommodation is provided in this type of spa, along with spa services and healthy food.

The typologies and the spatial organization of the spa are influencing the spatial environment of users in and around the organization. Whereas, the social interaction also influenced by the typologies of the spa. For example, the social interaction between host and therapists at the hotel spa are differ than the social interaction at day spa. The social interaction at the hotel spa is more exclusive since the hotel spa has their own standard that need to be maintained.

Hence, this research aims to reposition spa typologies, spatial organisation and social interaction in the context of Islamic built environment. It focuses on current spa premises and how principles of Islamic built environments can be integrated into the design and services of spas.

METHODOLOGY

Site inventory and analysis

Site inventory and analysis is performed to study the design elements, spatial organisation and social interaction of the spa. Information is obtained through observation and case studies in an existing spa that may or may not follow Shari'ah-compliant regulations. As mentioned earlier, there are six types of spas in the market (ASEAN Spa Standard, 2016). This study focuses on the day spa and hotel spa. These were selected because they are the most frequented and accessible. Hotel spas are more exclusive, larger and offer more services offered, while day spas are smaller and offer fewer services. The sampled day spa was Ayur-V Hair and Beauty Salon located in Gombak and Lanna Thai Spa located inside Wangsa Walk Shopping Mall, Wangsa Maju. The spas are operated in shop lots and do not offer accommodation. While the sampled hotel spa are Mandara spa located inside Sheraton Hotel and Anggun spa situated inside Hotel Maya Kuala Lumpur.

This inventory and analysis will be covered three aspects: 1) service and management, 2) social interaction and 3) spatial organisation of the spa.

Interviews

An interview was conducted with *Mufti Wilayah* (Islamic State Counsellor) for his opinion regarding spa premises from an Islamic perspective.

Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected directly or indirectly from books, journals, reports, articles and guidelines. This method is used throughout the study. The documents are used as a preliminary study to form an overview of the subject and to strengthen and complement the data acquired from interviews and observations.

Data Analysis

The data was collected during the site visit. A checklist was prepared before going to the site to ensure all the primary data needed were covered. After the checklist was updated and recorded, the collected data were analysed in detail, and the results were presented.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected from the sites, observation and interview, each spa had a different theme and concept resulting in different layouts and compositions. For Ayur – V, the spa had an Indian theme that offers Indian treatment called Ayurvedic. This spa claimed to be Muslim-friendly whereby they offered treatment to Muslim women and had a curtain as a barrier to cover their guest's *awrah*. From observations, the curtain in the treatment area for covering the *awrah* of Muslim women cannot completely cover the guest's *awrah*, as the curtain was often opened by others.

Further, the waiting and treatment areas in the premise do not segregate their area by gender. This does not guarantee the privacy of the guest. Figure 1 shows the plan for the spa premise with the area in the red box being the most used area for daily treatment such as washing hair, threading, and massage.

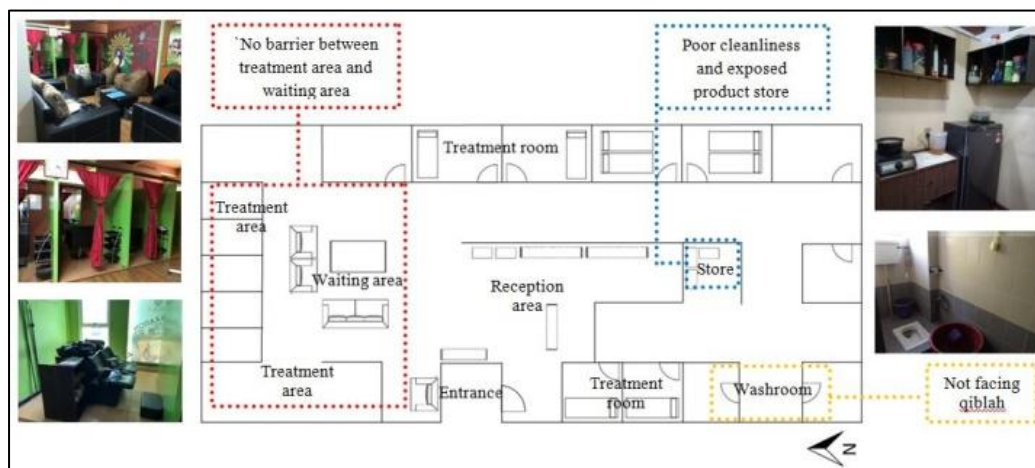


Fig. 1: Floor plan for inventory and analysis of Ayur – V spa

Also, behind the treatment area was space utilised by staff to rest. The waiting area located in front of the treatment area caused the area to congest during their peak hours. As for the washroom, it was not separated between staff and guest and was not well maintained. This

highlighted the need for a proper composition between the treatment area and waiting area to improve the spatial organisation.

The next sampled spa was Lanna Thai located at Kuala Lumpur. This spa offers a Thai theme with traditional Thai massage. Lanna Thai spa had a communication problem between staff and guest. The procedures for recovering treatment were inadequate as there was no consultation with the guest beforehand. Interestingly, the therapists were segregated by gender upon request. The cleanliness of the spa was acceptable but could be enhanced. Lanna Thai spa provided calm Thai music for guest entertainment as they enter the premise and while waiting for their turn. Figure 2 shows that Lanna Thai spa consists of the treatment area, waiting and reception area. From the observation, the main issues in the spatial organisation of Lanna Thai were that the treatment area was exposed to other guests and there was insufficient space for guests in the waiting area. These challenges occurred because of the limited space inside the spa. This reduces the privacy of the spa.

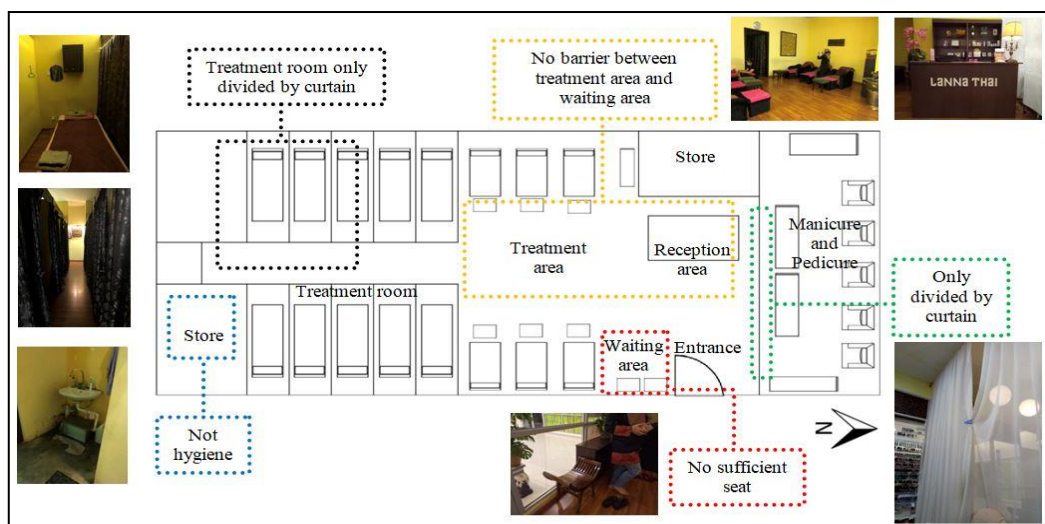


Fig.2: Floor plan for inventory and analysis of Lanna Thai Spa

Figures 3 and 4 represent a hotel or resort type of spa with Balinese treatment. For both spas, the services and management are well organised, starting from the moment a guest enters the spa until the guest ends their treatment. There were consultation forms before a guest commenced any treatment. The spa staff were friendly and cooperative. However, the service in Anggun spa, Hotel Maya was not as good as Mandara spa due to a lack of staff as well as no segregation between males and females during the treatment. In contrast, Mandara spa had separate treatment areas for each gender, where the female therapist will only give treatment to female guests and vice versa. Through this, the *awrah* of the guest was protected and Shari'ah-compliant. Also, the composition of the layout was well arranged, where the waiting and treatment areas are well separated. The treatment area comprised six rooms including single and couple rooms.

This was enough to cater for hotel and non-hotel guests. This showed that although Mandara spa was not claimed to be Muslim-friendly spa, the management controlled the social interaction of therapists and guests to maintain their reputation as a 5-star hotel.

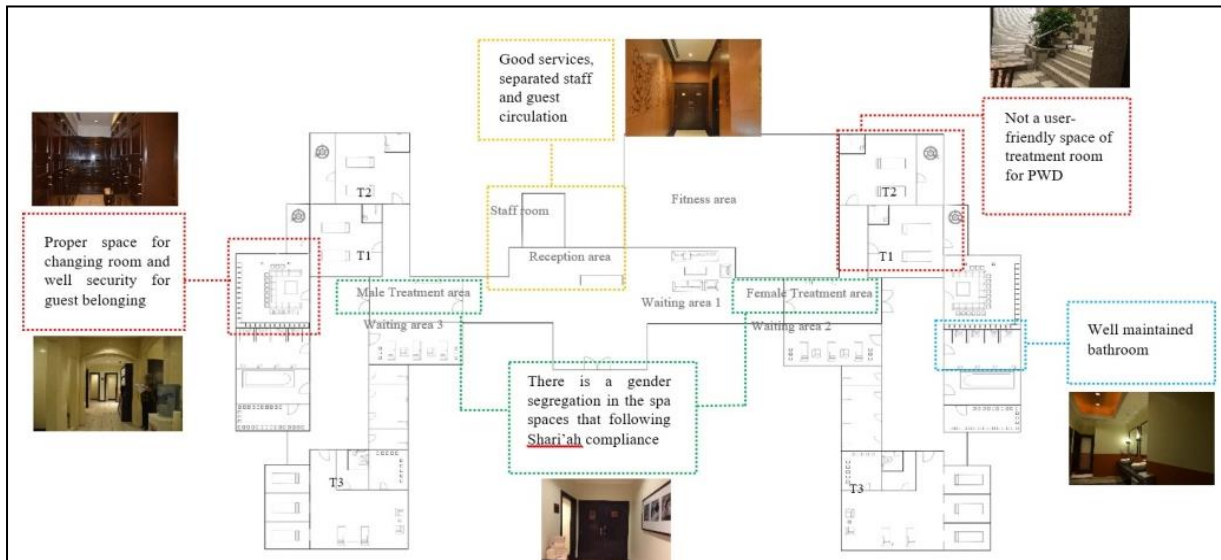


Fig. 3: Floor plan for inventory and analysis of Mandara spa, Sheraton Hotel

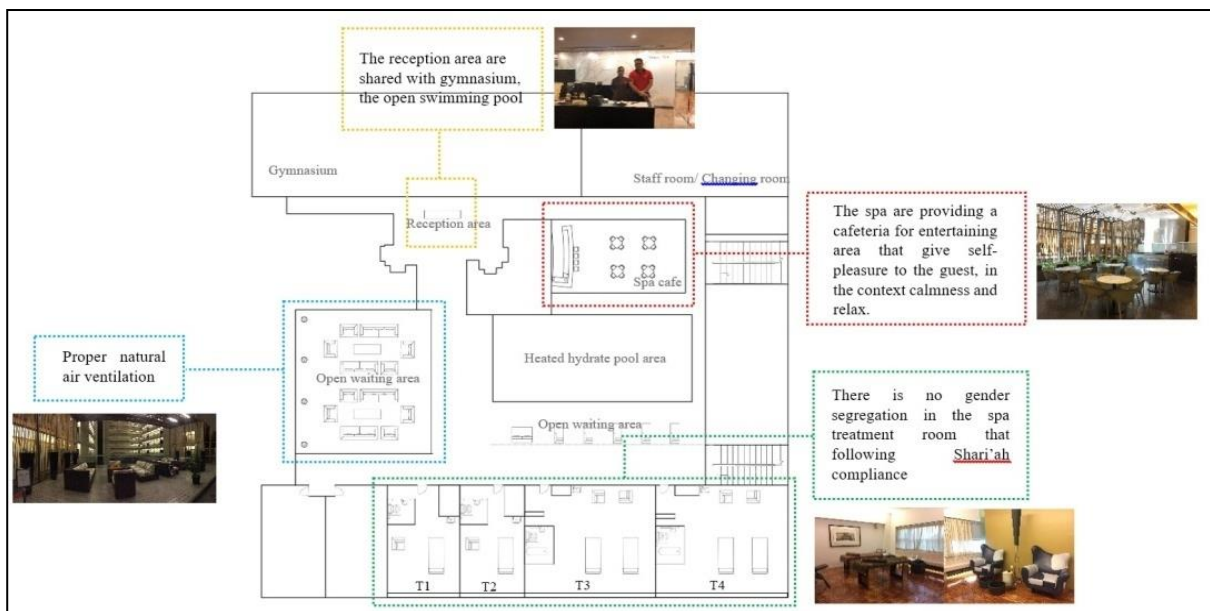


Fig. 4: Floor plan for inventory and analysis of Anggun spa, Hotel Maya

Figure 4 shows that the area in the blue box was the centre of the spa where there is an open waiting area. In the yellow box, the reception area for Anggun spa was separated with waiting area, but the reception for the gymnasium and spa were combined. The treatment rooms are highlighted in green, where all treatments such as massage, scrub, and sauna are provided. Lastly, in the red box, a café is provided for guests to rejuvenate their mind.

Table 2 sums up three main aspects of services and management, social interaction and spatial organisation related to Muslim-friendly attributes for all the samples spas.

Table 2: Islamic Built Environment Issues and Challenges

Criteria	Spa name			
	Ayur-V	Lanna	Mandara	Anggun
Services and Management	o	o	o	o
Social Interaction	x	x	o	x
Spatial Organisation	x	x	o	x

The “o” symbol indicates the spa has that criteria, while “x” means the spa lacks in that criteria. From Table 2, our findings on all case studies identified that Mandara spa in Sheraton Hotel is more Muslim-friendly compared to others due to the excellent environment inside and outside the spa. The spa has excellent services and management, good social interaction and the spatial organisation of the spa is well designed with separated areas for male and female clients. Thus, the *awrah* of the clients is well-preserved, and clients are secured their privacy.

An interview was also conducted to further understand the concept of a Muslim-friendly spa. The findings from the interview with *Mufti Wilayah* (Islamic State Counsellor) are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Data from the Interview Session

Data from the interview session	Spa premise is permissible if it follows Islamic guidelines.
	The layout of the spa should be divided by gender.
	The spa allows for medical purposes.

From the interview, *Mufti Wilayah* (Islamic State Counsellor) highlighted that, the spa operation is permissible if the spa services and management follow the Islamic guidelines. The other important aspect is the segregation in space. The spa spaces should be divided by gender in order to preserve the privacy aspects of both parties. Lastly, the operation of spa is acceptable for medical purposes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a conclusion, Muslim-friendly spa premises that are Shari’ah-compliant can be implemented to support the needs of Muslim tourists. Shari’ah-compliant spas offer high-quality services and treatments. Thus, every service offered to the guest as well as the products and ingredients of the substance used during a spa treatment should be Shari’ah-compliant and Muslim-friendly. Technically, the concept of privacy in Islam is divided into four. The first is segregation between gender in space. This means that segregation of gender in a particular area is needed to avoid harm to other family members, especially from strangers. The second point is security and safety which refer to the *awrah* that needs to be covered. The third point is privacy which includes visual and acoustic privacy. Last is the architectural or design component or the need for privacy in the architectural building. Each spa should emphasise hygiene and safety measures to improve the quality of the premise. Islam states that cleanliness (*nazhofah*) is part of the faith. On top of that, the spa premises should provide facilities such as *musolla* to enable its Muslim clients to fulfil their religious obligations. Equipment for the disabled should also be included such as ramps, information in braille and special bathrooms. Lastly, as highlighted by *Mufti Wilayah* (Islamic State Counsellor), the most important point is that, spa premises are permitted if the spa operated according to Islamic guidelines.

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