

Muslim Friendly Adventure Tourism among Generation Z in Malaysia: Needs and Preferences

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Abstract – The global Muslim travel market continues to expand rapidly, yet the integration of Muslim friendly principles within adventure tourism remains limited, particularly in addressing the needs of younger Muslim travellers. While Malaysia has positioned itself as a leading Muslim friendly destination, limited attention has been given to the integration of Muslim friendly principles within adventure tourism, particularly for Generation Z. This study aims to analyse Gen-Z's needs, and preferences regarding Muslim friendly adventure tourism in Malaysia. A quantitative research design was employed, with data collected from 150 Malaysian Gen Z respondents selected through purposive sampling based on the criteria of being Malaysian and having interest or experience in tourism-related activities, using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. Descriptive analysis was conducted to examine respondents' awareness, perceived needs, and preferred attributes of Muslim friendly adventure tourism. The findings indicate the key needs identified include the availability of halal food, accessible and hygienic prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, flexibility in religious practices, and the presence of same-gender guides during adventure activities. In terms of preferences, Gen Z travellers favour adventure operators that clearly communicate Muslim friendly features through digital platforms and provide transparent information on facilities and services. The study contributes to the limited empirical literature on Muslim friendly adventure

tourism by focusing on Gen Z, an emerging and influential market segment. Practically, the findings offer insights for tourism operators and policymakers to enhance inclusivity, service design, and marketing strategies in Malaysia's adventure tourism sector.

Keywords: Muslim Friendly Tourism; Adventure Tourism; Generation Z; Needs Analysis;

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Muslim friendly tourism sector has experienced notable growth in recent years, particularly following the recovery of global travel after the COVID-19 pandemic. Muslim travellers increasingly seek tourism experiences that allow them to fulfil religious obligations without compromising leisure and enjoyment (Battour, 2018). Malaysia has consistently ranked among the top destinations for Muslim friendly tourism due to its strong Muslim Friendly ecosystem, availability of prayer facilities, and supportive policy environment (Irshad et al., 2022). Initiatives such as the Muslim friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition (MFAR) programme have further strengthened Malaysia's positioning within the global Muslim travel market.

Concurrently, adventure tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing tourism segments worldwide. Characterised by physical

activity, interaction with natural environments, and elements of risk and challenge, adventure tourism appeals strongly to younger travellers (Janowski et al., 2020; UNWTO, 2023). In Malaysia, the abundance of natural resources including rainforests, mountains, rivers, and marine ecosystems has supported the growth of adventure tourism activities such as hiking, white-water rafting, snorkelling, caving, and mountain biking.

Generation Z (Gen Z), generally defined as individuals born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, represents a significant proportion of adventure tourists. This cohort is known for its digital literacy, preference for authentic experiences, and strong value orientation, including religious and ethical considerations (Mohd R. et al., 2019). Despite their growing participation in tourism, Gen Z Muslim travellers often face challenges in adventure tourism contexts, particularly in relation to prayer accessibility, halal food availability, gender interaction, and safety concerns.

In Malaysia, Generation Z represents a substantial demographic segment, accounting for approximately one-quarter of the national population, which highlights their growing importance as an emerging tourism market (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). As digitally connected and experience-oriented travellers, Muslim Gen Z tourists increasingly seek travel experiences that combine adventure, cultural immersion, sustainability, and religious compliance (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2024).

Despite the growing popularity of adventure tourism among younger travellers, many adventure tourism environments are not fully equipped to accommodate the religious requirements of Muslim tourists. Activities conducted in remote natural settings often lack accessible prayer facilities, halal food options, or gender-sensitive arrangements, which may discourage participation among Muslim travellers, particularly those who are more conscious of religious obligations. These challenges highlight the need to better understand how Muslim friendly principles can be integrated into adventure tourism experiences that appeal to Generation Z. This issue is particularly relevant in adventure tourism activities such as hiking, diving, caving, and eco-adventures that are commonly conducted in remote natural environments where Muslim friendly facilities may be limited (UNWTO, 2023; Janowski et al., 2020).

While previous studies on Muslim friendly tourism in Malaysia have largely focused on hospitality, airlines, and destination image (Bangsawan et al., 2019; Irshad et al., 2022), limited research has examined Muslim friendly practices within adventure tourism. Moreover, empirical studies addressing the specific needs and preferences of Gen Z Muslim travellers remain scarce. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to analyse Gen Z's needs, and preferences regarding Muslim friendly adventure tourism in Malaysia, thereby contributing to both academic literature and industry practice.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Muslim friendly Tourism

Muslim friendly tourism refers to tourism products and services that facilitate Muslim travellers in fulfilling their religious obligations while travelling. These typically include halal food, prayer facilities, appropriate accommodation, and an environment that respects Islamic values (Battour, 2018). Unlike fully Shariah-compliant tourism, Muslim friendly tourism adopts a flexible approach, allowing destinations to cater to Muslim needs without excluding non-Muslim travellers. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) defines Muslim Friendly Tourism as tourism products and services designed to accommodate the faith-based needs of Muslim travellers while maintaining inclusivity for non-Muslim visitors (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2020).

Malaysia's Muslim friendly tourism framework is supported by national standards such as MS 2610, which provide guidelines for accommodation, tour packages, and tourist guides (Bangsawan et al., 2019). However, these standards remain largely concentrated on hospitality and guided tours, with limited application to adventure tourism settings, particularly those located in remote or nature-based environments. Malaysia's Muslim Friendly Tourism ecosystem is further supported by national standards such as MS2610, which provide operational guidelines for Muslim friendly hospitality and tourism services (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2019; Bangsawan et al., 2019).

2.2 Adventure Tourism

Adventure tourism is commonly defined as tourism involving physical activity, interaction with natural environments, and cultural engagement (UNWTO, 2023). It is often categorised into soft adventure (low-risk, guided activities) and hard adventure (high-risk, skill-intensive activities). Although adventure tourism offers transformative and

meaningful experiences, it also raises concerns related to safety, accessibility, and infrastructure, especially for Muslim travellers who require additional facilities to observe religious practices (Janowski et al., 2020).

In Malaysia, adventure tourism has gained international recognition, with the country frequently nominated for global adventure tourism awards. Nevertheless, the integration of Muslim friendly elements within adventure tourism remains underdeveloped, resulting in potential barriers for Muslim participation, particularly among women and younger travellers. Among popular adventure tourism activities include eco-tourism experiences, jungle trekking, hiking, scuba diving, cave exploration, and nature-based excursions, which often require specific physical, psychological, and safety considerations for travellers (UNWTO, 2023).

2.3 Generation Z and Tourism Behaviour

Generation Z travellers differ from previous generations in terms of motivations, information-seeking behaviour, and preferences. They rely heavily on digital platforms and social media for travel planning and value transparency, authenticity, and inclusivity (Mohd R. et al., 2019). Gen Z Muslim travellers, in particular, seek experiences that align with both lifestyle aspirations and religious commitments.

Studies suggest that younger Muslim travellers may exhibit lower awareness of formal Muslim friendly standards but express strong expectations for practical facilities such as halal food, prayer spaces, and modest environments (Irshad et al., 2022). Understanding these expectations is crucial for designing tourism products that resonate with this demographic. Industry reports also indicate that Gen Z travellers increasingly demonstrate independent travel behaviour and strong reliance on digital platforms and peer reviews when selecting tourism services (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2024; DinarStandard, 2023).

2.4 Needs and Preferences in Muslim friendly Adventure Tourism

The concept of needs in tourism is often explained using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, where physiological and safety needs must be met before higher-level motivations such as self-actualisation can be achieved (Maslow, 1943). In adventure tourism, safety, comfort, and basic facilities are essential prerequisites for enjoyment.

For Muslim travellers, needs extend to religious requirements, including halal food, prayer facilities, gender segregation, and ethical conduct (Battour, 2018; Bangsawan et al., 2019). Preferences, on the other hand, reflect subjective choices shaped by individual values, social influences, and technological trends (Mohd R. et al., 2019). In the context of Muslim friendly adventure tourism, preferences may include the presence of same-gender guides, clear communication of facilities, and flexibility in scheduling activities around prayer times. Despite growing interest, empirical research examining these needs and preferences among Gen Z Muslim travellers in adventure tourism remains limited, particularly within the Malaysian context.

Based on the literature discussed above, two key constructs emerge as central to understanding Muslim friendly adventure tourism among Generation Z, namely tourist needs and preferences. Needs refer to essential requirements that enable Muslim travellers to fulfil religious obligations while travelling, such as halal food availability and prayer facilities. Preferences, on the other hand, represent individual choices and expectations regarding how tourism services should be delivered. Understanding both constructs is important in designing adventure tourism experiences that are inclusive and aligned with the values of Muslim travellers.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative research approach using a descriptive design to analyse Gen-Z's needs, and preferences regarding Muslim friendly adventure tourism in Malaysia. Quantitative methods are appropriate for identifying patterns, trends, and generalisable insights within a defined population.

3.2 Population and Sample

The target population comprised Malaysian Generation Z individuals aged between 12 and 27 years. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that respondents met the predetermined criteria of being Malaysian Gen Z and having an interest or prior exposure to tourism or outdoor activities. This sampling approach is appropriate when the objective is to obtain information from respondents who possess relevant knowledge or experience related to the research topic. A total of 150 valid responses were collected, which is considered adequate for

descriptive statistical analysis in exploratory tourism studies.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographic profile, perceived needs, and preferences. Items in Sections B to D were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. An open-ended question was included to capture additional insights on perceived requirements for Muslim friendly adventure tourism.

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical techniques were employed because they allow researchers to identify patterns, trends, and priority attributes within respondents' perceptions, which aligns with the study's objective of analysing Gen Z's needs and preferences in Muslim friendly adventure tourism. The collected data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), which is widely used in quantitative tourism research to generate descriptive statistics and identify patterns in respondents' perceptions (Field, 2018).

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Respondent Profile

The demographic profile of the respondents indicates that the majority were aged 21–23 years, accounting for 74.7% (n = 112) of the sample, followed by those aged 16–19 years at 14.0% (n = 21). Respondents aged 24–27 years represented 8.0% (n = 12), while the 12–15 years age group constituted the smallest proportion at 3.3% (n = 5). In terms of gender, the sample was predominantly female, comprising 78.7% (n = 118), while male respondents accounted for 21.3% (n = 32). Regarding education level, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (84.7%, n = 127), followed by those with a diploma or certificate (10.0%, n = 15), and respondents with secondary school education (5.3%, n = 8). Concerning employment status, the majority of respondents were students, representing 92.0% (n = 138) of the sample, while employed respondents accounted for 5.3% (n = 8), unemployed respondents for 2.0% (n = 3), and self-employed respondents for 0.7% (n = 1). This demographic distribution reflects a strong representation of young, educated Gen Z individuals, which is relevant for understanding their perspectives and preferences toward Muslim friendly adventure tourism.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	12–15 years	5	3.3
	16–19 years	21	14.0
	21–23 years	112	74.7
	24–27 years	12	8.0
Gender	Male	32	21.3
	Female	118	78.7
Education Level	Secondary School	8	5.3
	Diploma/Certificate	15	10.0
	Bachelor's Degree	127	84.7
Employment Status	Student	138	92.0
	Employed	8	5.3
	Unemployed	3	2.0
	Self-employed	1	0.7

4.2 Needs in Muslim friendly Adventure Tourism

Several critical needs emerged from the analysis. The availability of halal food was identified as the most essential requirement, followed by accessible and hygienic prayer facilities. Respondents also emphasised the importance of gender-segregated facilities, particularly for activities involving water or physical contact. Flexibility in scheduling

activities to accommodate prayer times and the presence of same-gender guides were also highlighted as significant needs.

The frequency and percentage distributions in Table 2 indicate that the majority of Gen Z respondents expressed high levels of agreement with statements related to Muslim friendly needs in

adventure tourism. For most items, a large proportion of respondents selected “Agree” (A) and “Strongly Agree” (SA), demonstrating strong consensus on the importance of religious and cultural accommodations.

Notably, 84% of respondents strongly agreed that access to halal food and prayer facilities is essential, with only a very small percentage disagreeing (2.8% combined for SD and D). Similarly, 77.3% strongly agreed that adventure tour operators should provide detailed descriptions of Muslim friendly amenities, while only 2.6% expressed disagreement. The need for clear information about Muslim friendly options was also

strongly supported, with 74.7% strongly agreeing and 22% agreeing.

In contrast, items related to gender-related arrangements, such as gender-segregated facilities and having a guide of the same gender, showed comparatively more varied, responses. Although the majority still agreed or strongly agreed (over 85% combined), these items recorded higher percentages of disagreement (up to 18.7% for same-gender guides), indicating differing levels of importance among respondents. Overall, the frequency and percentage results suggest that core religious facilities and transparent information are prioritized more strongly than gender-specific services.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Gen Z Needs in Muslim Friendly Adventure Tourism

Item	Frequency				Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
	SD	D	A	SA			
Access to Halal food and prayer facilities is essential for my adventure travel experience.	2 (2.1%)	1 (0.7%)	21 (14%)	126 (84%)	3.81	0.501	1
I need adventure tours that offer services accommodating my cultural and religious practices.	3 (2%)	5 (3.3%)	41 (27.3%)	101 (67.3%)	3.6	0.655	5
Gender-segregated facilities are necessary for my comfort during adventure activities.	1 (0.7%)	11 (7.3%)	48 (32%)	90 (60%)	3.51	0.663	6
I require clear information about Muslim friendly options when planning an adventure tour.	2 (1.3%)	3 (2%)	33 (22%)	112 (74.7%)	3.7	0.576	3
It is important for adventure tour operators to provide detailed descriptions of their Muslim friendly amenities.	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	30 (20%)	116 (77.3%)	3.73	0.552	2
I expect adventure tours to be flexible in accommodating my religious practices and needs.	2 (1.3%)	2 (1.3%)	35 (23.3%)	111 (74%)	3.7	0.565	4
I want to have a guide or instructor of my own gender during adventure tourism activity,	6 (4%)	22 (14.7%)	42 (28%)	80 (53.3%)	3.31	0.867	7

*SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

These findings suggest that religious facilitation remains a fundamental determinant in shaping Muslim travellers’ participation in adventure tourism. While adventure tourism is typically associated with risk-taking and physical challenges, the results indicate that Muslim travellers still prioritise basic religious needs such as halal food availability and prayer accessibility before engaging in adventure experiences.

The findings demonstrate that while Gen Z Muslim travellers in Malaysia are receptive to the concept of Muslim friendly adventure tourism, gaps remain in knowledge dissemination and service

provision. The moderate level of awareness observed among respondents is consistent with previous studies suggesting limited understanding of formal Muslim friendly standards among younger travellers (Irshad et al., 2022).

Consistent with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the prioritisation of halal food, prayer facilities, and safety-related concerns underscores the importance of meeting basic and religious needs before higher-level experiential motivations can be fulfilled (Maslow, 1943). This aligns with Battour (2018), who emphasised that religious facilitation is a prerequisite for Muslim tourists’ satisfaction.

The emphasis on gender segregation and same-gender guides reflect findings from earlier Muslim friendly tourism studies, which highlight modesty, comfort, and safety as critical determinants of travel participation, particularly among Muslim women (Bangsawan et al., 2019). Furthermore, the strong preference for clear digital communication supports existing literature on Gen-Z's reliance on online platforms for travel planning and decision-making (Mohd R. et al., 2019).

Overall, the results suggest that adventure tourism operators that proactively integrate Muslim friendly attributes and communicate them effectively are more likely to attract and retain Gen Z Muslim travellers.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study provides empirical insights into Gen Z's needs, and preferences regarding Muslim friendly adventure tourism in Malaysia. The findings highlight the necessity for adventure tourism operators to integrate Muslim friendly elements into service design, particularly in relation to halal food provision, prayer accessibility, gender-sensitive facilities, and effective communication. Given that the majority of respondents were female, the findings highlight the importance of gender-sensitive facilities, privacy, and modest environments in adventure tourism settings, which are essential considerations for Muslim female travellers in fulfilling religious obligations during travel (Battour, 2018; Bangsawan et al., 2019). From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the

application of Muslim friendly tourism concepts to adventure tourism and contributes to the limited literature focusing on Gen Z Muslim travellers. Practically, the results offer guidance for tourism operators and policymakers to enhance inclusivity and competitiveness within Malaysia's adventure tourism sector. Future research may adopt qualitative or mixed-method approaches to gain deeper insights into behavioural motivations and decision-making processes among Muslim Gen Z travellers, as qualitative approaches have been widely recommended in tourism research to capture deeper experiential perspectives.

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