

Tourists' Behaviour Towards Islamic Tourism Characteristics in Kota Bharu Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

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Islamic tourism, sometimes referred to as halal tourism, is a developing trend in the market that is gaining popularity among tourists who want to enjoy many travel perks while keeping in mind their religious commitments. On the other hand, Islamic tourism is a global industry that generates a billion-dollar economic impact and provides thousands of employments. The study's goal is to examine how behaviour among tourists and Islamic tourism in Kota Bharu are related. A total of 421 domestic tourists completed the questionnaire survey and six Subject Matter Experts (SME) participated in the structured interview as part of the sequential explanatory mixed-method research. Relative Importance Index (RII) and content analysis were applied to the data analysis. According to the results, the majority of the respondent were satisfied and agree with Kota Bharu Islamic Tourism indicators and components. The findings of this study will be helpful to the Kota Bharu tourism industry in improving Islamic tourism, which will boost the number of visitors to the city. Furthermore, it is believed that this research will serve as the basis for Islamic tourism in other Islamic cities around the globe.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on Islamic tourism characteristics highlighted by Abdullah et. al (2020) focusing on Kota Bharu where this city is known for its strong Islamic culture. This paper provides an in-depth assessment of the current status of Islamic tourism, its challenges, and opportunities for growth. Furthermore, this research seeks to develop recommendations for governments and tourism stakeholders to facilitate the development of Islamic tourism in a sustainable and responsible manner.

1. Introduction

One of the tourism industries with significant demand from Muslim visitors is Islamic tourism, which is widely acknowledged as one of the key drivers of economic expansion. Islamic tourism is seen as a newly emerging tourism industry concept on a global scale (Suid et al., 2017). In addition, Othman and Jamal (2017) explain that most Muslim countries realize that there are tourism development opportunities that are aligned with Islamic principles, which can give rise to tourism service providers that are better equipped to fulfill the needs of Muslim tourists. For example, a Muslim-friendly hotel should be available at the destination or at least have separate sections to prevent physical contact between persons of the opposite sex or unmarried couples staying in the same hotel (Kovjanić, 2014) as well as serving no alcoholic beverage, no pork and providing halal food (Rayendra, 2017).

In order to ensure that tourist amenities and activities are offered in accordance with Islamic standards and guidelines, Islamic teaching should be applied into this industry. Otherwise, it could lead to conflict as a result of failure to uphold the moral standards established by Islam. For instance, the level of satisfaction of Muslim visitors may be lowered by a lack of gender segregation in tourism-related activities, which will ultimately affect the number of visitors who will visit the destination in the future.

Islamic tourism in Malaysia could be a brand-new tourism product that strengthens the domestic travel sector and contributes to the nation's economy (Kamarudin & Nizam, 2013). According to Suid et al. (2017), the Muslim tourism industry is expanding tremendously year over year. As a result, Malaysia, which is renowned as an Islamic nation, should seize the chance to promote Islamic tourism more widely in order to draw tourists and so boost the country's overall tourism numbers. Despite the fact that Islam does not regard any of Malaysia's tourist attractions as sacred or holy, the nation can nonetheless provide visitors additional amenities such as easy access to halal cuisine and prayer spaces that meet Muslim compliance standards.

2. Literature Review

Islamic tourism, which is defined as any practice or action in tourism that is "permissible" under Islamic doctrine or Sharia, is distinguished from other forms of tourism by the intent of a visit, wherein in Islamic tourism, religion is the root of a visit's purpose (Battour, 2017). Contrarily, Islamic tourism can be perceived as *ibadah* and *dakwah* because the ability of tourists to travel from one place to another is considered as a blessing from God through the avoidance of any wrongdoings while travelling. This kind of tourism comprises a range of services, primarily in the food and beverage, hospitality, and leisure industries (Laderlah, 2015). For Muslim travellers to enjoy their travels, it is important to have access to halal food, Muslim-friendly locals, and an environment that is acceptable in Islam (Bangsawan et al., 2019).

In addition, Islamic tourism is also known as Sharia-compliant or Muslim-friendly and promotes the value of Islam to the tourist, which does not benefit only Muslims but also non-Muslims as they can get exposure to Islam (Ismail & Nasiruddin, 2014). For instance, certain non-Muslim countries, like Japan, the Philippines, and Brazil, have provided Muslim-friendly answers and choices perceived as troublesome by Muslim travellers (Battour & Ismail, 2016). These non-Muslim nations hope to draw Muslim travellers by offering prayer spaces, Halal eateries, and other activities that adhere to Islamic precepts.

In order to boost Islamic tourism prospects and products, many countries are starting to introduce tourism services with an Islamic or halal approach (Abdullah et al., 2020). According to Al-Hammadi et al. (2019), this kind of tourism necessitates not only accommodations but also an innovative environment, product, and service. For example, they bring up groups and events like international Islamic sports organisations, conferences, panels, and seminars about Islamic topics, as well as Ramadan programmes (Bilim, 2017). By providing these events and services, the tourist destination will be better able to draw in Muslim visitors and increase non-Muslim tourists' understanding of Islamic tourism globally.

This study involves two components of Islamic tourism characteristics according to Abdullah et al. (2020). The first component is "Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility which refer to tourism activities that can provide cheerfulness, freshness, and serenity to tourists visiting the city. In addition, it can provide an experience for tourists to enjoy the beauty of nature created by Allah SWT. This component consists of six indicators which can be measured to reflect towards the orientation and tranquillity in Kota Bharu city according to Islamic Tourism characteristics. The second component is "Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom" which refers to appreciating the value of differences and respecting diversity. Islam encourages a harmonious life despite different backgrounds, beliefs, and races. There are four indicators listed under this study related to measure the condition of Islamic Tourism in Kota Bharu city.

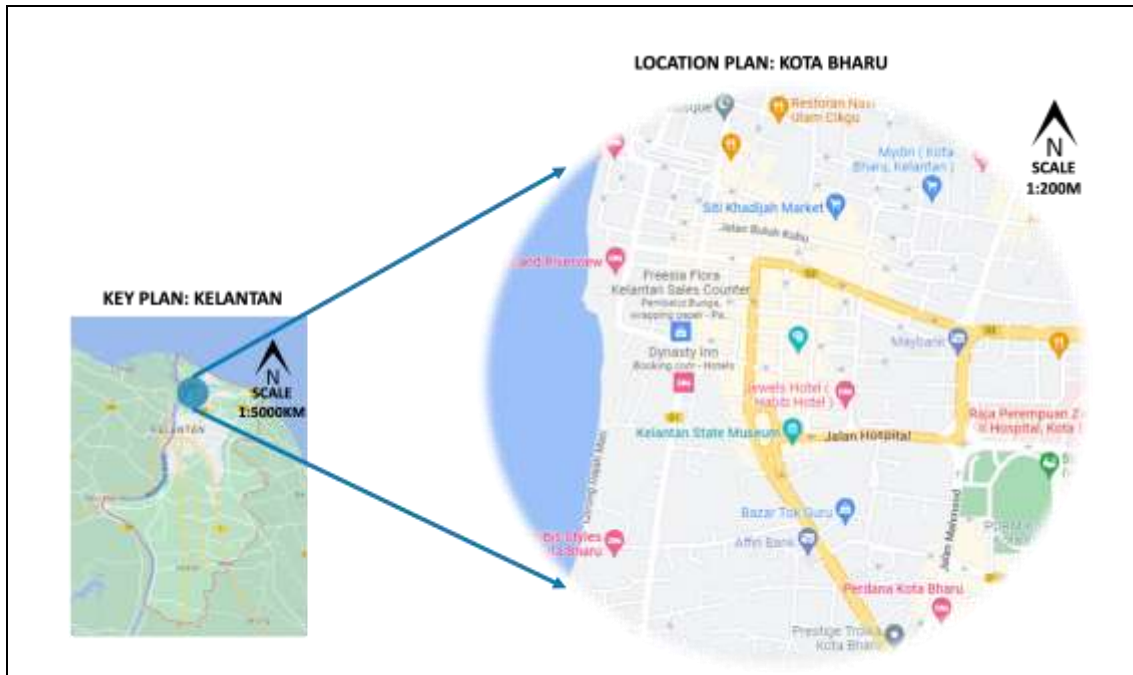
3. Methodology

In this study, a sequential explanatory mixed method was used to collect qualitative data, analyse it, and then verify its conclusions using qualitative methods. The reason behind this method is that by an in-depth examination of participants' perspectives, the quantitative data, qualitative data, and analysis clarify and explain those statistical results (Subedi, 2016). 400 domestic tourists who had visited Kota Bharu were given questionnaire surveys using the sample random sampling method. Six Subject Matter Experts (SME) with deep expertise and prominent positions in the tourist sector later validated the findings.

3.1. Research Location

The city of Kota Bharu, which has a total size of 115.64 km² and occupies 2.62% of the state of Kelantan, has been chosen for the study area. Previously, Kota Bharu city was known as a 'Cultural City' in 1991 as announced by its previous king, Sultan Ismail Petra ibni al-Marhum Sultan Yahya Petra (Hasnina & Roslizawati, 2017). It is located in the northeastern region of Peninsular Malaysia. The Kota Bharu Municipal Islamic Council is in charge of administering the state capital of Kelantan, Kota Bharu (MPKB-BRI). Furthermore, the administrative and commercial hub of Kelantan is Kota Bharu, which is situated on the east coast of Malaysia (Nasir & Salleh, 2014) and the new city centre was planned to be along the shoreline (Yusoff & Yun, 2015). The focus area in this study is the Kota Bharu city centre, which can be explored within walking distance. This area was chosen based on the concentration of tourist attractions, which allows easy access for tourists. Figure 1 below shows the location of the study area:

Figure 1: Focus area of study in Kota Bharu



Source: Google. (n.d).

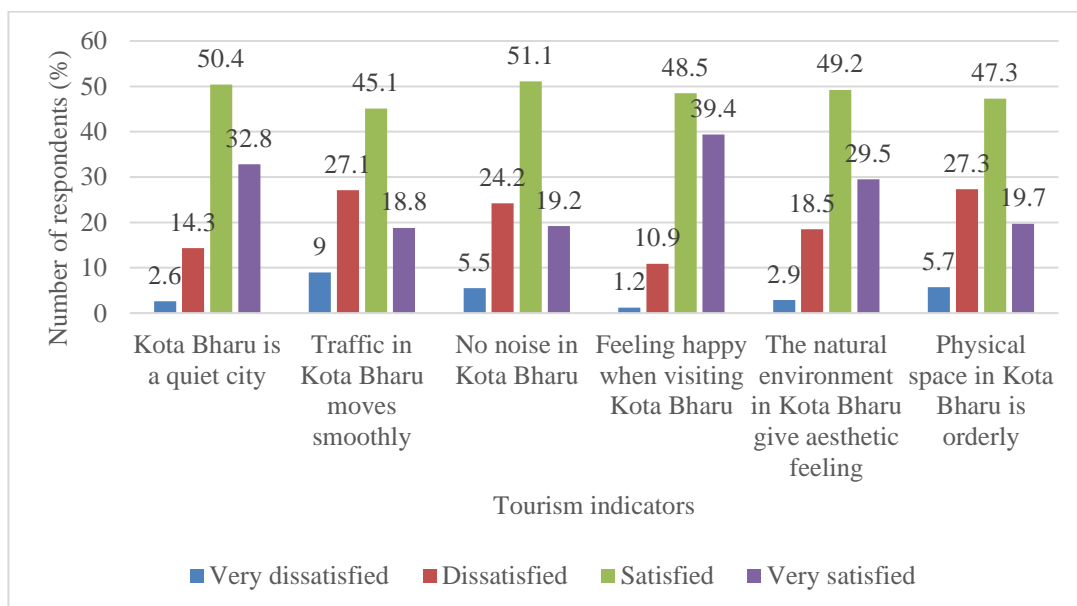
4. Result

The research on tourists' behaviour regarding Islamic tourism indicators is summarized below. The findings were approved by SMEs with expertise in Kota Bharu's tourism sector.

4.1. Component 1: Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility

Figure 2 shows the feedback of tourists' satisfaction with the Islamic Tourism component 'enlightenment and orientation of tranquillity' in Kota Bharu.

Figure 2: Tourists' Satisfaction with Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility



Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2021

The majority of the respondents were satisfied with all the indicators, which are 'quiet city' (50.4%), 'traffic moves smoothly' (45.1%), 'no noise in the city' (51.1%), 'feeling happy when visiting the city' (48.5%), 'the natural environment gives aesthetic feeling' (49.2%), and 'physical space in Kota Bharu is orderly' (47.3%).

According to Table 1, the highest-ranking among the indicators is 'feeling happy when visiting Kota Bharu', with RII value of 0.8153. Secondly, the 'quiet city' in Kota Bharu was also perceived as highly satisfactory among respondents, with RII value of 0.7832. The indicator 'natural environment gives an aesthetic feeling' is next in rank with the RII value of 0.7630.

Table 1: Relative Important Index (RII) of Tourists' Satisfaction with Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility

Indicators	Tourists' Satisfaction				RII Value	RII Rank
	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very satisfied (4)		
Kota Bharu is a quiet city	11	60	212	138	0.7832	2
Traffic in Kota Bharu moves smoothly	38	114	190	79	0.6840	6
No noise in Kota Bharu	23	102	215	81	0.7102	4
Feeling happy when visiting Kota Bharu	5	46	204	166	0.8153	1
The natural environment in Kota Bharu gives an aesthetic feeling	12	78	207	124	0.7630	3
The physical space in Kota Bharu is orderly	24	115	199	83	0.7024	5

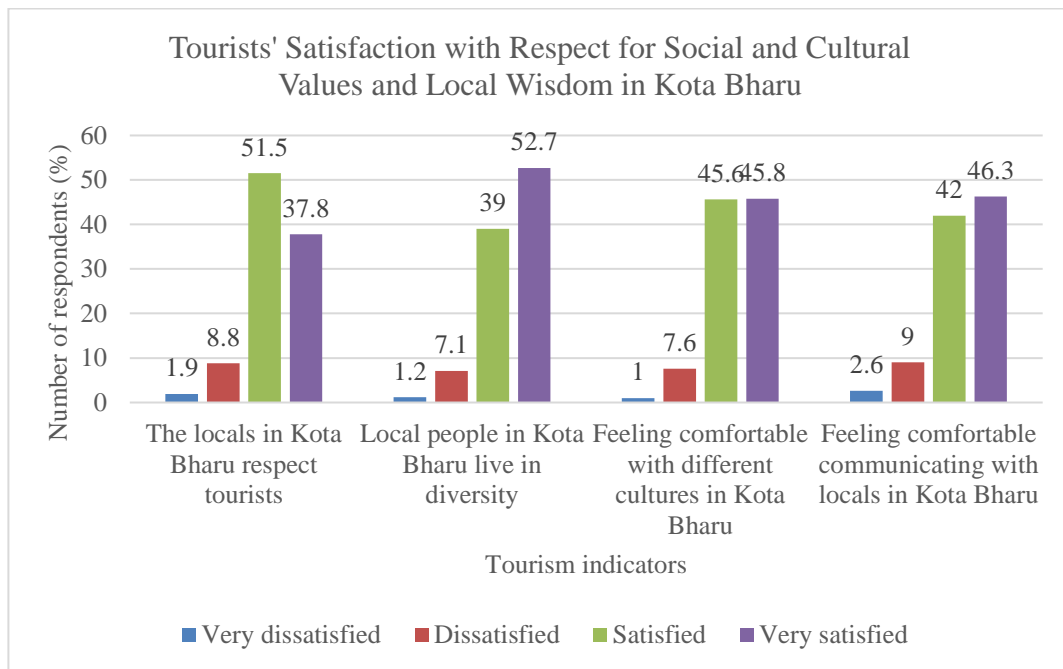
Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2021

Furthermore, the noise level in Kota Bharu ranks fourth with the majority of the respondents expressing their satisfaction, recording an RII value of 0.7102. Next is orderly physical space in Kota Bharu, with RII value of 0.7024. Meanwhile, the lowest ranking among the indicators is the movement of traffic in Kota Bharu which only has RII value of 0.6840.

4.2. Component 2: Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom

Figure 3 shows four indicators ranked by the respondents which are the respect for tourists among locals, the diversity of local people living in the city, the level of comfort with different cultures in the area, and the level of comfort communicating with the locals in Kota Bharu. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents are very satisfied with all the indicators in Kota Bharu, which are 'local people in Kota Bharu live in diversity' (52.7%), 'feeling comfortable with different cultures in Kota Bharu' (45.8%) and 'feeling comfortable communicating with locals in Kota Bharu' (46.3%).

Figure 3 Tourists' Satisfaction with Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom



Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2021

However, there is only 1 component that the respondents deem as satisfactory instead of highly satisfactory, which is ‘the locals in Kota Bharu respect tourists’ (51.5%).

Table 2 shows that the highest ranking among the indicators is the diversity of local people living in Kota Bharu with the RII value of 0.8580. It is followed by feeling comfortable with different cultures offered in Kota Bharu with the RII value of 0.8408. Next is the feeling of comfort communicating with locals in Kota Bharu with the RII value of 0.8301.

Table 2: Relative Important Index (RII) of Tourists' Satisfaction with Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom

Indicators	Tourists' Satisfaction				RII Value	RII Rank
	Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Satisfied (3)	Very satisfied (4)		
The locals in Kota Bharu respect tourists	8	37	217	159	0.8129	4
Local people in Kota Bharu live in a diversity	5	330	164	222	0.8580	1
Feeling comfortable with different cultures in Kota Bharu	4	32	192	193	0.8408	2
Feeling comfortable communicating with locals in Kota Bharu	11	38	177	195	0.8301	3

Source: Questionnaire Survey, 2021

Meanwhile, the lowest ranking is the respect for tourists from locals in Kota Bharu, with the RII value of 0.8129. However, this lowest value remains acceptable as most of the

respondents are satisfied with the indicator, showing that they still feel respected by the locals when visiting Kota Bharu.

4.3. Expert Validation on Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu

In response to the question in [Table 3](#), four interviewees (66.67%) verified and agreed with the results of 'Tourists' Satisfaction with Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu', while two (33.37%) disagreed with the results.

Table 3: Expert's Validation of Tourists' Satisfaction with Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu

Q: Do you agree with the results of Tourists' Satisfaction with Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu?			
Stakeholders	Yes	No	Total
Kelantan Tourism Information Centre (State Government)	1	0	1
Kelantan State Museum (State Government)	0	1	1
Kelantan Handicraft Village (State Government)	0	1	1
Kota Bharu Municipal Council (Local Authority)	1	0	1
Khalifa Suites (Accommodation)	1	0	1
Nasi Ulam Cikgu (Food & Beverages)	1	0	1
Total	4 (66.67%)	2 (33.337%)	6 (100%)

Source: Structured Interview, 2021

Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to explain and justify their verification of the results of 'Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu' as presented in [Table 4](#):

Table 4: Justification of the agreement among interviewees regarding the result of Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu

Theme Code	Reasons	F	%
T1*	Kota Bharu is a calm city	4/4	100

Source: Structured Interview, 2021

According to the description above, all four interviewees (100%) agreed and verified the results from the questionnaire survey with regard to 'Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu', by stating that Kota Bharu is a calm city. The atmosphere and environment in Kota Bharu create a calm feeling for the visitor as the city is not busy compared to other state capital cities, and the noise quality is controlled because of the smooth traffic with fewer vehicles on the road.

Meanwhile, according to the description in [Table 5](#), out of the two respondents who disagreed, one interviewee (50%) believed that the traffic congestion level in Kota Bharu is unsatisfactory. Lastly, the one interviewee (50%) who disagreed mentioned that there is a need to improve public transportation services in Kota Bharu.

Table 5: Justification of the disagreement among interviewees regarding the result of Enlightenment and Orientation of Tranquility in Kota Bharu

Theme Code	Reasons	F	%
T2*	Unsatisfactory level of traffic congestion	1/2	50
T3*	Need to improve public transportation	1/2	50

Source: Structured Interview, 2021

4.4. Expert Validation on Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom

In response to the questions in Table 6, all six interviewees (100%) verified and agreed with the results of 'Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom in Kota Bharu'.

Table 6: Expert's Validation of Tourists' Satisfaction with Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom in Kota Bharu

Stakeholders	Yes	No	Total
Kelantan Tourism Information Centre (State Government)	1	0	1
Kelantan State Museum (State Government)	1	0	1
Kelantan Handicraft Village (State Government)	1	0	1
Kota Bharu Municipal Council (Local Authority)	1	0	1
Khalifa Suites (Accommodation)	1	0	1
Nasi Ulam Cikgu (Food & Beverages)	1	0	1
Total	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	6 (100%)

Source: Structured Interview, 2021

Subsequently, the interviewees were asked to explain and justify their verification of the results of 'Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom in Kota Bharu' as presented in Table 7:

Table 7: Justification of the agreement among interviewees regarding the result of Respect for Social and Cultural Values and Local Wisdom in Kota Bharu

Theme Code	Reasons	F	%
T1*	Respect each other	2/6	33.33
T2*	Living in diversity	4/6	66.67

Source: Structured Interview, 2021

According to Table 7, out of six interviewees who agreed with the results, two of them (33.33%) claimed that the locals in Kota Bharu who are from multi-racial ethnicities respect each other's culture and religions, including the tourists from outside the city. Meanwhile, four interviewees (66.67%) claimed that the locals in Kota Bharu live in diversity, and the community can be seen practising the concept of a Malaysian family where everyone can live in happiness and peace. Moreover, most locals in Kota Bharu converse using the Kelantanese dialect in their daily speech, regardless of their background or race.

5. Discussion

The first component shows that most respondents gave positive feedback where there were no issues or complaints regarding all the indicators mentioned in the open-ended question section. Hence, it is clear that the city of Kota Bharu can provide good experiences for tourists. However, several indicators caused dissatisfaction among respondents. In response to the open-ended survey questions, the dissatisfied respondents said that seasonal holidays like school breaks and public holidays might cause traffic congestion, which can slow down traffic movement. Additionally, a few respondents noted that Kota Bharu frequently experiences traffic congestion, particularly during peak hours when many road users travel simultaneously. The second component portrayed most indicators showing positive feedback, and the respondents were satisfied with most of the components. Despite the fact that the majority of residents of Kota Bharu are Malay or Bumiputera, there are generally no issues with racism or discrimination in this city where locals live together peacefully in diversity. In addition, by experiencing Kota Bharu from various cultural perspectives, the respondents can enjoy its uniqueness. The residents of Kota Bharu, or more particularly the entire state of Kelantan, speak their dialect. However, communication is acceptable for tourists when there is mutual respect, which fosters positive interactions between people, especially tourists.

Based on the research's findings, a few suggestions are proposed to improve Kota Bharu tourism, which is identical to the concept of Islamic tourism. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism has suffered from restrictions imposed by the government to control the movement of tourists, which were intended to prevent the spread of the virus that recently harmed people everywhere. Therefore, extensive promotional campaigns should target tourists in order to increase the number of visitors. The first suggestion is to strengthen Kota Bharu City's promotion and products for tourism. In order to attract tourists to select Kota Bharu as one of their trip locations, it is proposed that promotional efforts be intensified both online and offline. Since tourists to this city love the local cuisine, there may be opportunities for campaigns that highlight the distinctiveness of the local cuisine in an effort to draw in additional visitors. For instance, Kota Bharu city should have a local food festival, like the Halal Food Festival, where foreign participants or merchants can advertise their Halal foods or products while also assisting in the global promotion of Kota Bharu.

Next, Kota Bharu's current tourism products should be preserved, and it is strongly advised that they be improved. This might be accomplished by enhancing the tourism attractions in the area of Kota Bharu with assistance from the public and private sectors. For instance, related tourism agencies might work together to offer a service that allows visitors to go from Kota Bharu's Tambatan D'Raja jetty to other nearby jetties that are close to potential tourist destinations. As a result of the range of tourist services and activities, visitors to Kota Bharu may stay longer and return more frequently. In addition, it is suggested to improve infrastructure and facilities where both roles in a city affect tourists physically and mentally. For instance, their sense of safety and comfort helps them feel confident to travel and explore. Therefore, it is advised that surveillance camera installation be done around the city, especially at tourist attractions and pedestrian walkways, to boost the feeling of security among tourists. This design can help increase tourists' security to walk around the city and increase their confidence to explore the city without worrying about safety issues such as pickpocketing. Taking precautions is essential to prevent potential incidents because safety concerns are present anywhere, regardless of the background of the tourist site.

6. Conclusion

This study's objective is to find out how tourists' behaviour towards Islamic tourism in Kota Bharu. Throughout Kota Bharu city, the study has demonstrated a better understanding of how tourists perceive the elements of Islamic tourism. As a result, in response to better Islamic tourism in Kota Bharu city, a discussion of relevant recommendations and improvements are proposed. It can help to ensure sure that tourists are as satisfied at the highest satisfaction with their journey to this city. Additionally, this research offers to additional insight and viewpoints on Kota Bharu's Islamic tourism, which may be helpful for the city's tourism industry's future growth.

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Conflict of Interest

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