

Cultural issues in tourism, hospitality and leisure in the Arab/Muslim world

Author(s):

[Yvette Reisinger](#) (Marketing and Management Department, Gulf University for Science & Technology, Mishref, Kuwait)
...Show all authors

Publisher:

Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Citation:

[Yvette Reisinger](#), [Omar Moufakkir](#), (2015) "Cultural issues in tourism, hospitality and leisure in the Arab/Muslim world", International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Vol. 9 Issue: 1, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCTHR-01-2015-0003>

Downloads:

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 8344 times since 2015

Article

Cultural issues in tourism, hospitality and leisure in the Arab/Muslim world

Section:

Article Type: Guest editorial **From:** International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Volume 9, Issue 1

There has been a significant increase in the number of studies investigating cultural influences on consumer behavior in tourism, hospitality and leisure, particularly in Australia, the USA, Europe and New Zealand. However, despite the tradition of rich culture and hospitality, despite the importance of tourism to the economies of Arab/Muslim countries, despite the natural and cultural resources with which Arab/Muslim countries are divinely endowed and despite the popularity of tourism in these countries, studies focusing on consumer behavior in hospitality, tourism and leisure in the Arab/Muslim countries as well as studies about the Arab/Muslim tourists are still sparse. This special issue aims to encourage research and stimulate academic discussion about tourism, hospitality and leisure issues in the Arab/Muslim world, with particular focus on consumer behavior.

As we all know, the Arab world is composed of many countries and so is the Muslim world. There are Arab people who are not necessarily Muslim and Muslim people who are not Arab. For a long time, Western scholars have been ignoring the study of Arab/Muslim world and academic dialogue occurring in the context of Arab/Muslim cultural phenomena. This neglect affects the whole field of tourism, hospitality and leisure studies. Westerners are still having stereotypical images of the Arab/Muslim world. Information about Arab/Muslim tourism, hospitality and leisure and related fields is scattered. Arab, Muslim and international academicians have long acknowledged this gap during tourism and leisure research conferences. How do Arab/Muslim tourists conduct tourism, is under-researched and remains

speculative at best, despite the growing number and diversity of this tourist market. A quick scan of major tourism and hospitality journals supports the paucity of existing articles on consumer behavior regarding Arab/Muslim tourists. The existing literature on Arab/Muslim tourism mostly centers on themes, such as the effects of terrorism on tourism, with a special interest in perceived risk of traveling in the Middle East; the impact of tourism on attitude change with a limited focus on Israelis visiting certain neighboring countries. From a supply-side perspective, the importance is on tourist arrivals, receipts and number of beds.

In 2010, there were 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, representing 23.2 per cent of an estimated 2010 population of 6.9 billion. More than 61 per cent of Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region and about 20 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa (Pew Resource Center, 2011). In 2010, 5 of the 10 countries with the largest Muslim populations were in Asia: Indonesia (209 million), India (176 million), Pakistan (167 million), Bangladesh (133 million) and Iran (74 million). Of the remaining five, three were in North Africa (Egypt, Algeria and Morocco), one in Europe (Turkey) and one in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria). Russia, China and the USA also have a sizable Muslim population. The world's Muslim population is projected to grow by about 35 per cent between 2010 and 2030 to 2.2 billion (Pew Resource Center, 2011).

Muslim consumers are one of the fastest growing market segments in the world (Stephenson, 2014). The global revenue from Muslim tourists in 2011 was estimated at \$USA 126 billion, constituting 12.3 per cent of the total global outbound tourism revenue. These numbers exclude religious pilgrimage of Haj and Umrah. Saudi Arabia is the largest outbound tourism source country, with an estimated tourist expenditure of \$USA 23.8 billion in 2011, followed by Iran, United Arab Emirates, Indonesia and Kuwait. Revenue from Muslim tourists is forecasted to rise by 4.79 per cent annually for the following eight years. It was also estimated that tourists from the Middle East and North Africa accounted for around 60 per cent of the total global Muslim outbound expenditure in 2011, an amount predicted to reach \$USA 192 billion by 2020 (Dinar Standard and Crescentrating, LLC, 2012).

In a globalized world, information about tourism, hospitality and leisure and events in Arab/Muslim countries is needed, not only because leisure and its fields are fundamental to human development but also because of the important influence that leisure and its fields have on business and cross-cultural learning and understanding. This special issue hopes to add depth and width to existing scholarly articles and scholarship in the general field of consumer culture and behavior. General questions related to tourist motivation, attitudes, behaviors, constraints and experiences remain pertinent and warrant answers. Simple questions in these regards yet need to be explored.

The guest editors called for paper submissions related to the Arab/Muslim world addressing issues such as:

- core values in tourism and leisure behaviors;
- the role of national culture and religion in tourism and leisure behaviors;
- the influence of communication style on tourism and leisure behavior;
- image and identity construction and expression through tourism and leisure consumption;
- service perception and the rules of hospitality;
- the impact of technology on the tourism and leisure consumption style and communication;

- the impact of technology on the tourism and leisure experience;
- cultural differences and similarities in tourism and leisure consumption in the Arab/Muslim versus the Western world;
- tourism experiences and quality of life;
- consumer satisfaction and/or complaining behavior in tourism and leisure;
- marketing practices in tourism, hospitality and leisure and how they relate to national cultures;
- destination marketing and national cultures;
- global issues and their impact on tourism, hospitality and leisure;
- consumer conceptual models/theories and constructs;
- future trends in hospitality, tourism and leisure; and
- hospitality, tourism and leisure education.

A call for theoretical, empirical/research-based and practice-oriented papers was sent to major tourism and hospitality academic networks. Nevertheless, despite the generic nature of the themes and the multiple attempts to encourage submissions, the response to the call remained small. Out of the few proposals received, we have been able to select only five papers. Our speculative reasons concerning the lack of submissions include: lack of interest in the topic by international academics, lack of funding for this type of research, a general lack of interest in tourism and hospitality research from domestic universities. Furthermore, the exploratory nature of the research, although needed, might be perceived to be too simplistic and thus is not easily accepted by mainstream academic journals. Another reason could be the desire of and pressure on academics to publish in high-ranked journals. In addition, non-English speaking academics encounter language difficulties to publish in English academic journals. Funding for proofreading and editing is not always accessible. Moreover, despite the growing number of people from this part of the world who begin to partake in *leisure* tourism activities, this trend is still in its infancy, namely, because of economic as well as visa-related issues.

The papers that have been selected for this issue attest to the diversity of themes and hence to the great publication opportunities on the topic. Surely, to understand the Arab/Muslim tourists and tourism, there is literally a need to rewrite tourist studies to the extent that simple (but robust) exploratory studies become a rare, important, interesting, and wanted and needed managerial commodity, academic generosity and an intellectual endeavor. Looking at archives and back issues of established academic journals in tourism, there is a clear and logical research orientation and progress from opinion pieces about the importance of tourism, to impact studies, travel trends, advertising and market research, toward more sophisticated papers about the sociology and social-psychology of tourist behavior. More research needs to be done to uncover the “doing” and “being” in tourism of the Arab/Muslim tourists overseas, as well as regionally and domestically. More focused and sophisticated research about Westerners touring Arab/Muslim destinations is also important. What is there to be done to advance understanding of tourism in this world, including tourist motivation, attitudes, behaviors, constraints, experiences and enjoyment of the Arab/Muslim tourists and also their guests remains a question of timeliness, importance, availability of funding, incentives and research/publication choice.

For future research considerations, academics are encouraged to write about the profiles and trip characteristics of these tourists, as this market is not a homogeneous market; their trip motives and typologies; their tourism constraints and negotiation of constraints and travel barriers; their tourism experiences; and optimization of tourism enjoyment. Such themes

constitute the backbone of tourist studies and can serve as a strong basis for further research and more sophisticated analyses. Such studies have the opportunity to take advantage of existing general tourism research scholarship from its inception in the 1960s to the most recent articles, and capitalize on their limitations and progresses. Capitalizing on existing hundreds of academic journals and thousands of articles in the field can make our research designs more reliable, our analyses more valid and our conclusions more sound. A combination of research focused on Arab/Muslim tourists and existing scholarship in tourism management and tourism studies, is a treasure that can be cherished and used appropriately for desired programs, tailored curricula; and good education for enlightened policies, strategic management, sustainable planning and development, as well as for the shaping of tourist behaviors toward tourists becoming more responsible and ethically oriented.

To bridge the gap that exists between what is known about Western tourists and what is known about non-Western tourists, including the Arab/Muslim markets, is going to be marathonian in scale and complexity, but the routes of this marathon seems to be less complicated, as “the wheel is already there”. The papers presented in this special issue mirror such a complexity. They have been selected for publication because of their relative importance, exploratory nature or sophisticated research approach. As such, because of their diverse line of inquiry, they are here presented in a non-logical order. It is important also to note at this stage that discussing religion is a thorny matter in itself; discussing religion in daily matters, including participation in leisure and tourism activities remains an even more intricate issue because of different interpretations of religion, because of the degree of religiosity of Muslims and, subsequently, because of the desired and achieved type and degree of tourism development in respective Arab/Muslim countries. For such “value-laden” reasons, as the editors of this special issue, we leave it to the imaginaries and intellectual capacities of the reader to critique and challenge the present content for a better understanding of both religion *per se* and its impacts on leisure and tourism. Such an intellectual combination becomes necessary if, we, as academics in tourism and related fields, would like to play an *intelligent* role in current world events and crises and contribute to bridging cultural gaps and misunderstandings.

The first paper titled “Shaping destination image and identity: Insights for Arab tourism at the Gold Coast, Australia” by Jamila Abodeed, Erica Wilson and Brent D. Moyle discusses, how Australia is promoted to tourists from the Middle East. Using a content analysis of marketing Web sites, the authors compare the images of the Gold Coast, which are projected by Australia DMOs to the Middle Eastern tourists with those promoted by DMOs in the sending destination. Discrepancies were found to exist between the two induced images, begging for a closer collaboration and partnership between destination promoters in both the sending and receiving destinations. Maloud Shakona, Kenneth Backman, Sheila Backman, William Norman, Ye Luo and Lauren Duffy in the second paper titled “Understanding the traveling behavior of Muslims in the USA”, discuss the influence of religion and religiosity on travel behavior of Muslims living in the USA, with a focus on the Clemson Muslim community, South Carolina. They discuss what beliefs play a role in determining where, when and how these tourists would like to spend their free time, including the importance of having a mosque nearby, availability of Halal food and the observance of a few Sharia practices. In the third paper titled “Factors influencing travel to Islamic destinations: An empirical analysis of Kuwaiti nationals”, Mohamed A. Nassar, Mohamed M. Mostafa and Yvette Reisinger address a few important hypotheses in regards to the relationship between travel motivation of a sample of Kuwaiti travelers, Muslim-friendly amenities, destination image and quality of service and Kuwaitis’ intention to visit Islamic tourism destinations. Travel motivation and

destination image play a major role in exerting a strong pull on this tourist market. This finding puts a real pressure on Islamic destinations to differentiate their offers in terms of affective and cognitive-centered destination images that create unique motivations for visit. Winning Islamic destinations will be those that uniquely position themselves in the minds of existing and potential tourists. In the fourth paper titled “Involvement and brand equity: A conceptual model for Muslim tourists”, Fatemah Shafaei and Badaruddin Mohamed offer a conceptualization of Islamic tourism in relation to tourists’ religiosity, destination images, destination choice and destination branding. Accordingly and based on an important review of related literature on the aforementioned themes and existing literature on Islamic tourism destination and Muslim tourists, they advance a relevant series of hypotheses and propositions for future research considerations. In the fifth paper titled “A framework for understanding the website preferences of Egyptian online travel consumers” by Lillian Clark, Wegdan Haga and Colin Wheeler, the authors engage into categorizing and understanding Egyptian customers’ cultural variations in Web design preferences. Accordingly, because national culture plays an important role in consumer behavior in general, the authors developed a framework specific to understanding the Egyptian online customer who is searching for travel- and tourism-related information. Subsequently, the authors offer specific recommendations to marketers, based on cultural differences, for effective online strategies pertaining to better reaching this travel market segment.

Overall, we are pleased with the outcome of this special issue, and would like to thank the authors for their contributions. We would also like to thank those who have submitted their proposals for inclusion, and encourage them to keep on writing about this timely, complex, important and interesting topic. Surely, current world events and crises make this area of investigation even more intellectually challenging. As academics who primarily use national culture as a base to shed more light on tourism and leisure-related phenomena in particular, and on world relations in general, our challenge is to begin by deconstructing established theories and views, as well as asking questions about the relevance and importance of some concepts, which we sometimes take for granted. For valid conclusions and enlightened recommendations, we need to pay more attention to our use of words, such Islamic, Muslim, religion and religiosity, which are most often used interchangeably or mistakenly. For example, due to probable effects of certain variables on attitudes, behavior or motivation, etc., we need to factor in, in our conceptual and empirical models socioeconomic, variables such as gender, age, place of residence, country of origin, education level, type of employment, etc. Considering religion as an explanatory variable, it is highly important to take into consideration perceived religiosity of respondents.

The Global Index of Religiosity (Win-Gallup International, 2012) defines religiosity based on the question: “Irrespective of whether you attend a place of worship or not, would you say you are a religious person, not a religious persons, or a convinced atheist?” In response to this question 59 per cent of the world representing 57 countries said that they think of themselves as being religious, 23 per cent think of themselves as not religious, whereas 13 per cent think of themselves as convinced atheists (p. 2). Interestingly and contrary to common belief, only Iraq is the Arab country which features on the list of the top ten religious populations. In general, the study found interesting variations among believers. For example, religiosity was found to be higher among the poor and lower among college-educated respondents. In addition, while religiosity dropped in some countries, it increased in others. Moreover, differences in the degree of religiosity might also exist among the believers. In other words, religiosity can also be measured based on the extent to which the believer observes Islamic practices prescribed by the Hadith and the Sunna, etc. Such research considerations and clear

operationalizations of concepts and variables, can help to overcome major research limitations. Certainly, religion, tradition and national culture play a significant role in tourism development and tourists' behavior, but these important factors also interact with other "exogenous" factors to negotiate development and shape participation. The Arab/Muslim world is a diverse world with commonalities and differences that also need to be taken into consideration for future research considerations. We are certain that the reader will take these into consideration for future research and further understanding. It is this hope that the editors of this special issue seek to achieve.

Yvette Reisinger is a Professor based at the Marketing and Management Department, Gulf University for Science & Technology, Mishref, Kuwait

Omar Moufakkir is based at the Hospitality Business School, Saxion University of Applied Sciences, Deventer, The Netherlands.

References

Dinar Standard and Crescentrating, L.L.C. (2012), "Global Muslim lifestyle travel market-landscape and consumer needs study-executive summary", available at: <http://advisory.dinarstandard.com/travelstudy/#top> (accessed 7 August 2012).

Pew Resource Center (2011), "The future of the global Muslim population", available at: www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/ (accessed 13 January 2015).

Stephenson, M.L. (2014), "Deciphering 'Islamic hospitality': developments, challenges and opportunities", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 40, pp. 155-164.

Win-Gallup International (2012), "Global index of religiosity and atheism", available at: www.wingia.com/web/files/news/14/file/14.pdf (accessed 13 January 2015)