

# MOSQUE TOURISM IN MALAYSIA: A MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** *Mosque tourism is one of the niche areas in the field of Islamic tourism that is expanding rapidly. The presence of mosques with outstanding historical, heritage, and aesthetic values have attracted foreign and domestic tourists to visit, appreciate, and experience these Muslim places of worship. As Islamic tourism is gaining popularity and the importance of mosques as tourist attractions is growing, it is therefore useful to explore mosque tourism in the context of Malaysia. While a number of investigations have researched mosque tourism in the contexts of motivations, residents' attitudes, and architecture uniqueness, limited studies have examined Muslim places of worship from the perspective of marketing. Hence, this paper focuses on how Malaysian mosques have been promoted in tourism materials. Content analysis was utilised in the assessment of textual descriptions and visual images of mosques that have been featured in tourism promotions for over seven decades. Findings of this paper uncovered that mosques have been represented in tourism brochures published from 1969 to August 2019. Two of the earliest mosques that appeared in tourism brochures are Kapitan Kling Mosque and the Malay Mosque (Masjid Kampung Melayu) in the promotion of Penang as a tourist destination. Over time, Zahir Mosque and Ubudiah Mosque are two of the religious buildings that have been incorporated into tourist brochures prominently. From a holistic point of view, the representation of mosques is primarily integrated as part of the presence of various places of worship and multi-ethnic societies living in Malaysia. Indirectly, this portrays the image of harmony and peace among multi-ethnic communities, which further highlights Malaysia as a "Truly Asia" destination and contributes towards uniting plural societies via cultural and heritage resources.*

**Keywords:** mosque tourism, Islamic tourism, tourism marketing, content analysis

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## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, Islamic tourism is mainly associated with the journey to the holy land of Mecca for hajj and pilgrimages (Zamani & Henderson, 2010). However, Jafari and Scott (2014) argue that the academic field of travel and tourism in the Muslim world involves much more than the discussions on topics related to hajj and pilgrimages. The study of tourism in the Muslim world is relatively broad and encompasses aspects such as worldviews, cultural heritage attributes, and

Western conceptual of tourism, including behaviours of pleasure seekers while on holidays (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Henderson (2003) argues that historically, tourism is intimately connected to religious beliefs in which they act as a strong motivation to travel. It is claimed that attributes associated with religions, which consist of build heritage and intangible heritage can attract believers of specific religious beliefs and casual visitors (Henderson, 2003).

As a multi-ethnic country, various Malaysian cultural heritage resources, including religious attributes, have been projected and marketed to tourists for years. Attractions associated with religious beliefs and places of worship such as mosques, temples, churches, and spiritual festivals are often showcased in tourism promotional materials. Malaysia is a country rich with outstanding Muslim places of worship consisting of ancient mosques with historical values and modern mosques with unique architectural designs. In fact, it is claimed that more than 30 Malaysian mosques have been presented as places of interest for tourists (David, 2017). In the effort of incorporating religious buildings as tourism attractions in Malaysia, a mosque trail has been created in the state of Perak. Mosques constructed relatively early such as Masjid Dato' Panglima Kinta, Masjid India Muslim, and Masjid Ubudiah have been included as part of a trail (Yeoh, 2014).

## 2. Literature Review

It is recognised that mosques are among primary attractions in the development of tourism. As Islamic population is rising around the globe, mosques with different designs and purposes have been constructed (Kessler, 2015). In general mosques are the house of God or places of worship for Muslims (Mustappa, 2012). It is claimed that the term mosque or *masjid* in Malay originated from the word *sajada*, which denotes to prostrate and a mosque is a site for Muslims to prostrate (Rahim, Sarkawi, Tukiman & Samad, 2015). In Islam and the way of life of the Muslims, mosques play a number of important functions (Farrag, 2017). Aziz, Ibrahim, Jahnkassim and Abdullah (2016) claimed that mosques have been used for various purposes since the era of the prophet. In the past, mosques play diverse roles, including for educational, political, and community events. As known to the public, mosques are primarily utilised for congregational prayers. Symbolically, mosque is a direct manifestation of Islam, which portrays the Muslim identity (Farrag, 2017). The presence of mosques represents a strong Islamic character for many Muslim countries and these places of worship demonstrate the spread of Islam as well (Aziz et al, 2016).

Mosque tourism is a subset of religious tourism and the progress of tourism in Muslim countries has shown the interest in the promotion of mosques as core tourism attractions (Mansor et al., 2015). A number of mosques in Malaysia have been frequented by tourists and among those are Zahir Mosque in Kedah, Putra Mosque in Putrajaya, Kuala Kangsar Mosque, and the Kristal Mosque in Kuala Terengganu (Mansor et al., 2015). In fact, four mosques in Malaysia have been listed among the top ten landmarks for tourists visiting this country in 2017 (David, 2017). Among well-known mosques that were featured in the list include a mosque in Selangor, Sultan Sallehuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque, Putra Mosque in Putrajaya, Zahir Mosque, and the Selat Malacca Mosque. This demonstrates that Muslim places of worship have been projected among famous landmarks for foreign tourists to experience Malaysian cultural and heritage attractions.

Furthermore, the interest among visitors from diverse backgrounds and different religious beliefs in visiting mosques have encouraged the travel industry to offer tours to Muslim places of worship (David, 2017). As mentioned by Mansor et al. (2015), those who are interested to visit mosques can be either religious tourists or culture and heritage tourists. Therefore, tours to mosques offers foreign tourists' opportunities to watch Muslim performing their daily prayers and Friday prayers directly and allowing them to view the historical and heritage aspects of Islam.

Based on previous studies, it is evident that architectural design has been one of the most important criteria in the evaluation of mosques from cultural heritage and tourism perspectives. In the analysis of mosques in non-Muslim countries around the world, Farrag (2017) argues that both environmental and man-made factors shaped the architecture of mosques. These factors include the background of Muslims migrants to these countries, colonialism, laws, history and cultural traditions, and materials available during the constructions. It is worth noting that those individuals who funded the building of these mosques in non-Muslims countries had the power to influence the designs as well (Farrag, 2017). In relation to the influence of colonialism, the encounter of the British with various forms of architecture linked to Hinduism, Westerners, and Indian-Islamic styles has made them transport these designs to the building of mosques in the Southeast Asia (Metcalf, 1989; cited in Aljunied, 2018). Historically, in terms of structure and functions, many early mosques in the Malay world were constructed based on the oldest mosque in the region named Masjid Agung Demak, which was erected in the 13th century and located in the central Java. One of the architectural components of mosques in the Malay region is the onion-shaped domes and this feature has been the defining characteristics of the mosques (Aljunied, 2018).

In the analysis of the architectural designs of Malaysian mosques, Ahmad (1999) argues that Muslim places of worship in this country can be categorised into three types according to the periods they have been constructed. These categories are the vernacular (18th century to date), colonial mosques (1795 to 1957) and modern mosques (1958 to date). Some of the characteristics of mosques built during colonial period include domes in the forms of onion or top shaped, towers, pillars and others. The combination of the Moorish and the classical styles of mosques built during this era had become the symbol of Islam. Modern mosques are the ones constructed after 1957. Some of the features associated with modern mosques are the incorporation of concrete, bricks, steel, stone and marble, onion-shaped or top-shaped domes, tall minarets and high ceilings, and stylish landscape consisting of gardens and water features (Ahmad, 1999). One example of mosque with unique architecture in Malaysia is the Kapitan Kling Mosque. It is claimed that this mosque appears similar to Taj Mahal as its architectural design adopted a Moghul concept (Azmi & Ismail, 2016). Several mosques in Malaysia featured unique architectural designs with the influence of Chinese attribute such as the Beijing Mosque in Rantau Panjang, Kelantan, and the Al-Saadah Complex in Negeri Sembilan. These rare designs can enhance the attractiveness of selected mosques and attract foreign and local tourists to visit (David, 2017).

A study by Fattah and Eddy-U (2016) investigated the factors that motivated non-Muslim tourists to visit and experience Al-Azhar Mosque in Egypt. Among main reasons reflected through this research include the interest to learn about Islam and its heritage places, gazing at Islamic icons, taking photographs, and direct communication with Muslims (Fattah & Eddy-U, 2016). In terms of residents' attitudes Egresi and Kara (2018) analysed the residents' attitudes towards tourists

visiting mosques and views on development of Islamic tourism. In general, local residents are supportive towards tourists visiting these mosques in Istanbul. However, their levels of support are not similar. The levels of their support are influence based on their profiles and the number of tourists visiting a particular mosque. Findings of this study indicates that local residents have positive attitude towards tourist and non-Muslims visiting their mosques. Allowing non-Muslims and non-religious Muslims to visit their mosques could bring them closer to Islam.

### **3. Problem Statement**

With growing fear for safety and security issues in some parts of the world make Muslims feel less welcome in non-Muslim countries particularly in Europe and North America. Nevertheless, this scenario open opportunities for Muslim and Asian countries to attract Muslim tourists especially from the Middle East and Asia. Geographically, Malaysia is located in the Southeast Asian region in which Muslims represent the majority of population living in the country (Henderson, 2003). Malaysia has great potential to be a well-known Islamic destination worldwide because of the existing Islamic environment (Shafei & Mohamed, 2015). In evaluating Malaysia as a Muslim-friendly country, this nation provides a variety of products and services to cater to both Muslims and non-Muslim needs and wants including halal food and beverages, accommodations and facilities such as mosques and prayer rooms.

Parallel to the rising interest in Islamic tourism worldwide, foreign fascination with mosques have increased over time (Aziz et al., 2016). Some mosques are appealing as they are considered sacred and classified as must-visit sites for tourists. However, in terms of tourism promotion, some Islamic sacred sites, including mosques, have not been presented and highlighted as they are regarded least appealing to non-Muslim tourists (Fattah & Eddy-U, 2016). In fact, it is argued that more emphasis has been given to non-religious sites and holy places of religious beliefs that are more familiar and attractive to Westerners (Fattah & Eddy-U, 2016). Thus, it is imperative to explore how religious sites such as mosques have been positioned and marketed in the context of tourism in Malaysia, as this area of research is under studied. It is recognised that places of worship, including mosques, represent key assets in the growth and promotion of tourism industry since the early days. Therefore, it is valuable to investigate how Malaysian mosques have been represented and incorporated as places of interest by the national tourism organisations of this country. The analysis carry out in this paper starts from first promotional material published by the official tourism organisation until the most recent promotion. This assessment is necessary in order to identify representations, trends and transformations which have presented over the years.

#### **4. Method**

A content analysis method was adopted for this paper rather than thematic and semiotic analysis. This method was selected as the assessment in this paper involves quantitative and qualitative analysis, whereas thematic and semiotic methods focus more on qualitative and interpretative aspects. This is because content analysis allows researchers to conduct both quantitative and qualitative examinations of the data. In general, content analysis is one of the primary research techniques in social investigations (Hou, 2017). One of the most cited definitions of content analysis as proposed by Krippendorff (2013) claims that it is “a research technique for many replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use” (p.24). Although the definition developed by Krippendorff (2013) does not specify whether content analysis is a quantitative or qualitative method. It appears that the analysis of contents can project meanings, and how contents have been presented are also important in signifying particular themes. From a quantitative perspective, this method allow researchers to analyse textual data that spanned over a long period of time (Boettger & Palmer, 2010). Kort-Butler (2016) argue that content analysis lies in between quantitative and qualitative approaches. This is because in performing content analysis, many assessments started with quantitative examination before continuing with qualitative evaluation.

This method can be used to examine communication contents, particularly narratives, features and trends in the messages (Putra, Saepudin, Adriansyah & Adrian, 2018). Boettger and Palmer (2010) states that content analysis is mainly utilised to evaluate textual contents such as words, phrases, and their relationships. They further argued that “texts can be broadly classified to include printed matter, images, maps, art, sounds, signs or symbols” (p.346). This classification reveals that the term ‘text’ is relatively diverse and content analysis can be used to investigate various textual items and not just wording. In terms of the layers of meaning, this method has been utilised to explore messages directly projected on the surface and the symbolic themes underneath. As mentioned by Putra et al. (2018) this method can be adopted to examine the manifest and latent components of messages communicated through text.

In general, this renowned research method has been adopted by researchers to analyse many different kinds of textual documents. Although historically, this method started in the field of mass media by Laswell in 1927 to investigate propaganda in 1920s (Macnamara, 2005), this technique of analysis has expanded to be used in various fields, including tourism. Content analysis is considered a useful method in tourism field as there are many textual documents available to be investigated either in printed or online forms. One valuable document in tourism is promotional brochure. The publication of tourism brochures over the years not only play significant role in attracting tourists, but these promotional materials can reveal valuable information about the destinations. In analysing promotional brochures published by the national tourism authorities of Malaysia from 1960s to 2018, both printed and online brochures have been evaluated. As the main objective of this paper was to explore the representation of mosques in tourism brochures, textual descriptions, and visual images of mosques have been selected as unit of analysis in the process of content analysing. After the collection of brochures published for almost 57 years, the analysis started with quantitative investigation which was carried out through the assessment of the



manifest contents. This is followed by qualitative evaluation of the latent meanings and themes reflected in the representation of the mosques in Malaysian.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

In general, mosques have been portrayed widely in tourism brochures published from 1969 to August 2019. It is uncovered that Muslim places of worship have been among the earliest features to symbolise Islamic faith depicted directly in tourism brochures. In the analysis of the earliest brochures published in the 1960s, there are two mosques mentioned in two brochures that marketed Penang as a tourist destination. In the brochure titled *Penang Western Gateway to Malaysia* published in 1969, it is stated that

*The Malay Mosque in Acheen Street has a finely-balanced minaret which is reminiscent of the Egyptian minaret – a radical departure from the Moorish architecture of most mosques in Malaysia. The Kapitan Keling Mosque in Pitt Street is one of the larger mosques in Malaysia and is built in the Indian Moorish form – its minaret standing separate, very slender and tall by the side of the huge domed roof of the mosque*

(Brochure Penang Western Gateway to Malaysia, 1969).

A visual image of the Malay Mosque in Acheen Street was also included in this brochure. Another brochure promoting Penang included textual descriptions of these two mosques in the publication dated 1969/1970. In the 1970s, these two mosques kept on appearing in the promotional materials, including a visual image of the Malay Mosque in Acheen Street. Both textual descriptions and visual images of these mosques were included in several categories of brochures, namely state, general guide, and thematic published in 1970s and 1980s. These two mosques remained in tourism promotional brochures for seven decades. There are a number additional information added to the descriptions of these mosques in the brochures published from 1990s to 2019.

Besides descriptions about the uniqueness of their architectural designs particularly the minarets, there are textual information to those who contributed to the buildings of these mosques and historical background are supplied to readers as well. For example, brochures published from 1995 to 2007 stated that the name Kapitan Kling Mosque originated from the Indian Muslim merchant named Caudeer Mohudeen who was the headman or known as “Kapitan Kling”. On the other hand, it is claimed that Masjid Melayu was constructed on the land donated by Syed Sheriff Tengku Syed Hussain Aidid. He originated from Acheh in Sumatera. Interestingly, five brochures published from 1995 to 2007 claimed that “the 1920 mosque features a small window halfway up the minaret, said to have originally been a hole made by cannonball fired during 1867 triad riots. Permission to enter need to be sought from mosque officials” (Brochures Penang Guide, 1995; Penang, 2002; Map of Georgetown, 2008; Penang Pearl of the Orient, 2007).

The analysis over seven decades found that two prominent mosques presented widely in tourism brochures are Zahir Mosque and Ubudiah Mosque. Zahir Mosque has appeared in the promotion of the state of Kedah since 1972. The Malay version of the brochure titled *Kedah Jelapang Padi Malaysia* featured this mosque in textual description of the places of interest surrounding the capital city, Alor Setar, in the form of textual description. This mosque is listed as an interesting heritage attraction together with Balai Besar and Balai Nobat. It is mentioned that Zahir Mosque is one of the most beautiful mosques in Malaysia, which officially opened its doors in 1912. This brochure claims that quranic competition at the state level every year is held at the compound of the mosque. Nevertheless, in the publications of brochures in 1978 and 1986, both textual description and a visual image of this mosque featured strongly. Based on the size of Zahir mosque presented in the brochures, it appears that this place of worship is a very important site for the Kedahans and it acts as a symbol for the state of Kedah. The significance of this mosque is directly manifested through its selection as the sole image on the front cover of tourism brochure published in 1994 and relatively recent brochure published in 2014. The description of the mosque in the more recent brochure is slightly longer than the brochures published earlier. It is mentioned that

*Built in 1912, Masjid Zahir is one of the oldest and most beautiful mosques in the country. Occupying an area of 124,412 sq ft, the mosque was built on the burial site of warriors who died defending Kedah against Siam in 1821. It has one of the main dome and five smaller domes which represent the five pillars of Islam. The design of this mosque is inspired by the Aziz Mosque in Langkat, North Sumatera. Masjid Zahir is regularly voted as one of the top ten most beautiful mosques in the world*

(Brochure Kedah Map and Guide, 2014).

Ubudiah mosque is another mosque that have been included in promotional brochures significantly as one of the places of interest found in Perak. This mosque has been presented in the travel brochure as early as 1976. A visual image and textual descriptions of this mosque have been incorporated into brochures until the most recent ones. It is considered as ones of the most beautiful mosques in Malaysia. An example of textual information of this mosque is manifested in the brochure published in 1996. The brochure claims that

*The Ubudiah Mosque is reputed to be one of the most beautiful mosques in the country and a symbol of pride and faith for all Muslims in Perak. The most magnificent golden dome and minarets are testaments to the beauty of Islamic architecture. The construction of the mosque began in the reign of Sultan Idris Murshidul Adzam Shah I, the 28<sup>th</sup> Sultan Perak, but was interrupted a number of times. Once, when two elephants belonging to Sultan Idris and Raja Chulan ran over the imported Italian mable floor, and again during the First World War. The mosque was officially opened by Sultan Jalil Karamatullah Shah in 1917.*

(Brochure Perak, 1996)

From early 2000 until the most recent brochures, the Ubudiah Mosque featured on the front cover of the state promotional materials. In the early 2000 to 2007, this mosque featured on the front cover together with other side attractions, including a temple, local fruits, a cave, and seaside scenery. However, the scale of Ubudiah Mosque is larger than other attractions on the cover. This mosque appears more strongly on the fairly recent brochures published from 2013 to 2015 as it is the sole visual image of the front cover. The size of Ubudiah Mosque is larger in this brochure than the previous years. The inclusion of this mosque since the early days as an interesting site to be visited by tourists and its prominent feature in the fairly recent promotional materials demonstrate its significance to the state of Perak.

Melaka is one of the states that featured early mosques constructed in Malaysia. In fact, three mosques built relatively early have been incorporated the promotion of Melaka (refers to Table 1.1). Tranquerah Mosque, which is mentioned as one of the earliest mosques in Malaysia, has appeared in the promotional materials starting from 1971. In the description of this mosque, it is claimed that “Adding still another architectural facet to the Malacca scene is the 150-year old Tranquerah Mosque of typical Sumatran design which also provides a link to british rule in the area. In the mosque is the tomb of the Sultan of Johore who signed the cession of the island of Singapore to Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819” (Brochure Malacca Malaysia’s Historic City, 1971). These textual descriptions are included in the state brochure published in 1972 and in the Malay version brochure published in 1972/1973 as well. In the description of Tranquerah Mosque, it is claimed that “architecturally this mosque is unique, instead of minarets a pagoda has been built in its place, the mosque itself is somewhat pyramid-shaped instead of dome-shaped as in Moorish type mosque. Here the is evidence that Islam has had a place of honour in Malacca for more than 600 years” (Brochure Malacca Map and Guide, 1985). This mosque has been represented in tourism brochures until recent brochures. Similar to Transqerah Mosque, Kampong Kling Mosque has influence from Sumatra in its architecture and its minaret appears like a pagoda. It is mentioned in the brochure that these mosques are among the oldest in Malaysia. The foreign influences identified from these mosques, including its architectute and minarets, show the state of Melaka as a famous entreport in the past.



The longitudinal analysis of the mosques in the promotional material uncovered that there are 14 mosques that have been presented in tourism brochures for three decades (refers Table 1.1). These mosques, located in nine different states, have been included as part of places of interests. During this period, Melaka featured the highest number of mosques. There are three mosques that been included in promotional materials published from 1960s to 1980s: i) Tranquerah Mosque; ii) Kampung Hulu Mosque, and iii) Kampong Kling Mosque. Penang, Kelantan, and the capital city Kuala Lumpur incorporated two mosques. The earliest mosque built in Malaysia, which is Masjid Kampung Laut, has been integrated in the promotion of Kelantan. Many of the mosques incorporated in the brochures published during early stages of tourism development in Malaysia represent the most prominent mosques in each state that were built relatively early in this country.

**Table 1.1: Representation of Malaysian Mosques in Tourism Brochures Published from 1960s to 1980s**

No.	Mosques	Locations
1.	Tranquerah Mosque / Masjid Tengkerah	Melaka
2.	Kampung Hulu Mosque	
3.	Kampong Kling Mosque	
4.	The Malay Mosque / Masjid Kampung Melayu	Penang
5.	Kapitan Kling Mosque	Kelantan
6.	Masjid Kampong Laut	
7.	The State Mosque	Kuala Lumpur
8.	Jame/Jamek Mosque	
9.	National Mosque	
10.	Zahir Mosque	Kedah
11.	Ubudiah Mosque	Perak
12.	Kuching Mosque	Sarawak
13.	Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque	Johor
14.	Masjid Negeri	Negeri Sembilan

Over time, there are more mosques included in promotional brochures as places of interest to be visited by tourists. Besides the states listed in the table above, other states and destinations also featured mosques as tourist attractions. As the number of brochures increased over time so did the number of mosques included in these promotional materials. Mosques built fairly recent, such as Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque, Putra Mosque, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque, and Crystal Mosque, featured prominently in the brochures published during the last 10 to 20 years. However, early mosques keep on appearing in the tourist brochures until the publication of relatively recent brochures from 2010 to 2019 because of their historic and outstanding values.

The analysis of the mosques via textual descriptions and visual images uncovered that one of the dominant ways in projecting Islamic attributes in tourism promotion is via the representation of Muslim places of worship. Mosques have been marketed in tourism brochures in order to accentuate Malaysia as an Islamic country and Islam as the main religious belief. As the majority of population in Malaysia are Muslims, many mosques have been built in this country for over 50 years and many of these mosques have been incorporated into promotional materials, particularly mosques that are grand in terms of size and architectural designs like Putra Mosque, Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Mosque and Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin Mosque. This a reflection of the statement made by Kessler (2015) that the number of mosques had increased over time parallel to the rising number of Muslim populations around the globe and this is evident in the promotional materials. As mentioned by Farrag (2017) and Aziz et al. (2016) the inclusion of mosques in all states in Malaysia, including on the front cover of state brochures of Kedah and Perak, is the way to showcase Muslim identity and symbolises Islamic character for Muslim population and Muslim identity. For a destination targeting to attract Muslim tourists, it is important for Malaysia to position and highlight its Islamic attributes, including religious buildings. The existing Islamic resources in this country have been used to attract Muslim tourists as it is a lucrative market. In fact, many Asian countries including Thailand, Singapore, Japan, and Korea are emphasising their destinations as Muslim-friendly. The value of mosques as tourist attractions is also apparent in Malaysia as four mosques have been listed as top landmarks of experiencing Malaysia as stated by David (2017). This is also reflected in tourism brochures as these four mosques are included as places of interest for tourists.

In terms of the narratives, the assessment uncovered that textual descriptions supplied in the brochures to accompany the promotion of Malaysian mosques mostly consist of stories of the uniqueness of architectural designs, the year these religious buildings had been erected, information related to the founders, and historical events. The projection of many mosques highlighted the rare and unique architecture of these mosques in order to attract visitors. There are textual descriptions that accentuated the time the mosques were built in order to portray their historical and heritage values. From cultural heritage perspective, the value of many mosques are often associated with their architectural designs and these aspects are reflected in previous studies by Farrag (2017) and Aljunied (2018). Findings of this paper support and extend the point made by these scholars to the context of tourism promotion, which demonstrates that architecture of particular mosques, especially their union-shaped domes from Moorish influence have been the focus through textual description and visual images.

The evaluation from the context of the representation of mosques in tourism promotional materials found that these Muslim religious buildings are part of the wider projection of places of worship of multi-ethnic societies living in in this country. As cultural heritage attributes, including places of worship, are among primary tourism attractions since the early stage of tourism development in Malaysia, these assets have been incorporated fairly early in tourism promotional materials since 1960s until the present days. Many brochures incorporated mosques as part of the promotion of Malaysian places of worship. In addition to mosques, various religious buildings, including temples, wats, and churches have been promoted together since the early days to showcase diversity of religions and cultural heritage. There are brochures that allocated a special section named “places of worship” to market multi-religious buildings to tourists. Indeed, Tourism Malaysia published a brochure especially dedicated to promote places of worship in Malaysia in 2014. The significance of places of worship, including mosques, to tourism growth is clearly depicted through 50 years of brochures publications.

Another aspect ingrained through the context of the mosque tourism promotion is the reflection of harmonious relationship between various ethnic backgrounds such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, and others ethnicities. It is mentioned in the brochures that it is common to find one street with several places of worship associated with different religious beliefs. This indirectly shows that societies in Malaysia from different ethnic backgrounds and religions live in harmony. In a way, this can project to potential tourists that Malaysia is safe to visit. This portrayal is clearly evident in the brochure that maintains that

A short walk along Jalan Masjid Kapitan Kling, otherwise known as the street of harmony, demonstrates how the island’s four main communities can coexist peacefully. At the northern end of the street is St. George Church, the first Anglican Church in Southeast Asia. Just minutes away is the Goddess of Mercy Temple, one of the Penang’s oldest surviving buildings dating back to oldest Hindu temple on the island. Further along the street, the minaret and dome of the imposing Kapitan Keling Mosque rise above the rooftop  
(Brochure Penang, 2014).

Features commonly associated with other cultures and religions, such as pagodas and *Mandi Safar*, are also integrated into Muslim places of worship.

Although the tagline “Malaysia is Truly Asia” is officially adopted in 1998, in practice, the promotion of this country as “Truly Asia” destination has been manifested far earlier. Besides, through the descriptions of mosques, it can be seen that these religious buildings have influence beyond the Asian region. For example, there are many foreign influences, which can be observed via the mosques’ architectural designs, architects, materials used, and founders. The assessment of the representation of mosques fit into current and future slogan “Visit Truly Asia Malaysia 2020” which focuses on “Asia” as a tourism brand for Malaysia. Overall, findings of this paper also support one of the objectives of Tourism Policy, which is to strengthen national unity using arts, culture, and heritage attributes.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper analyses how Malaysian mosques have been marketed in the tourism promotional materials from 1962 to August 2019. It is found that Muslim places of worship have been incorporated into promotional materials from 1969 to August 2019. The earliest mosques included into tourism brochures are the Kapitan Kling Mosque and Malay Mosque (Masjid Melayu) in Acheen Street. As part of the promotion of Penang as a tourist destination, both of these mosques have utilised as places of interest to attract tourists. The longitudinal assessment over 50 years identified that Zahir Mosque and Ubudiah Mosque are two of the most prominent and widely used mosques in marketing tourist attractions in the states of Kedah and Perak. The significance of these two mosques as tourism icons is apparent as they appeared on the front cover of state brochures for a number of years. Over seven decades, it is uncovered that the number of mosques featured in the brochures keeps on increasing. Both early and modern mosques have been included in the promotion brochures published during the last 10 to 20 years. Mosques are mostly represented and positioned as part of the diversity of places of worship and the portrayal of Malaysia as a “Truly Asia” destination. Lastly, the incorporation of mosques in tourism brochures can accentuate the image of Malaysia as an Islamic destination and enhance national unity through arts and heritage resources.

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