

Conference Paper

Re-Discovering the Ingenuity of Contemporary Malaysian Mosques' Architectural Characteristic As One of the Prime Symbol of South-Asian Islamic Tourism Hub

Nangkula Utaberta^{1,2}, Azmal Sabil^{3,4}, and Nayeem Asif^{3,5}

¹Halal Products Research Institute, Universiti Putra Malaysia

²Linton University College

³Department of Architecture, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia

⁴Department of Architectural & Design Engineering, Faculty of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

⁵School Of Architecture and Built Environment, UCSI University

Abstract

To develop Malaysia into the most popular Islamic tourism hub in the world, it is important to identify and promote the uniqueness of Malaysia in terms of tourist spots, facilities and Muslim-friendly practices. Currently Malaysia faces tough competition with similar Islamic tourism hubs such as Turkey and the UAE. Staying ahead in this race requires efficient 'Rebranding' of the tourist spots and facilities. Malaysia's tourism potential is enhanced by its rich cultural diversity. This is reflected by the wide range of architectural styles that contribute to Malaysia's unique architecture. This is particularly evident in the country's mosques which are constructed in various styles reflecting colonial, modernism and modern contemporary stylistic influences inspired by a number of ethnic subcultures, foreign influences, technology utilization, and the political environment. In this research, three contemporary mosques have been selected for investigation. Generally, the architectural styles of the modern mosque can be grouped into two categories. The first category contains the modern styles which emphasize the advancement in building technology and engineering (i.e. Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin). The second category covers the Islamic influences found in countries including Turkey, the Middle East, and Northern Africa (i.e. Masjid Putra). This research will attempt to formulate framework to re-evaluate the classifications for these two categories, before suggesting how these distinctive features might encourage Islamic tourism in Malaysia.

Keywords: Tourism, Uniqueness, Contemporary Malaysian Mosque.

Corresponding Author:

Nangkula Utaberta
 drnangkula@ktg.edu.my

Received: 2 May 2020

Accepted: 4 July 2020

Published: 14 July 2020

Publishing services provided by
 Knowledge E

© Nangkula Utaberta et al. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICIEHI Conference Committee.

OPEN ACCESS

1. Introduction

Travel and religion are interrelated since antiquity. Discussion on the Muslim world tourism is not just limited to hajj and pilgrimage, but it covers a wider scope. People travel for sacred places, like the obvious example; people travel for pilgrimage to Amritsar (Sikhism), Mecca (Islam) and Jerusalem (Abrahamic Faiths). Believers realized by visiting religious places can increase their awareness and faith to God (Norman 2011). In these recent years, religious tourism is widespread but it presents the least research interest among scholars in the tourism research (Timothy & Olsen 2006). There are numerous sites to be visit for religious tourism, among them are mosque, chapels, temples, museum and universities. Tourism is an unexhausted activity and it will dynamically be growing through years. Based on an analysis, World Tourism Organization (2011) forecasted approximately 300 to 330 million tourist visiting religious sites around the world every year.

Based on their forecasting until the year 2020, East Asia country will continuously be receiving the rate of 5% tourists increase per year, the second highest after Europe. The number is estimated to increase through years and the number of destinations will also increase. This estimation indicates the dynamic and fast growing phenomenon of religious tourism segment in the future (Kamenidou and Vourou 2015). It is important to develop research in this area as it can figure the potential of religious places for religious or spiritual tourism marketing and promotion.

Religious tourism is substantial and vibrant in Malaysia and the country is now fast becoming a major tourist attraction. Spiritual tourism is another subfield of religious tourism in Malaysia as this country own varies destinations for spiritual tourism purposes. The Islamic Tourism Centre (ICT) Malaysia has been launched 67- package booklets to promote Islamic tourism in Malaysia including mosque as one of the destinations besides museums, university, events and programs (Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia, 2014).

During the Prophet's time, mosque is the higher institution playing integral roles and functions to the Muslim community. Then, it was a multifunction institution, not only mend for congregational prayers, but it is also functioned as the center for various political and nonpolitical purposes. Become a 'concrete symbol' of Islam, mosque in the early days has significantly promoted and being the role model to promote Islam to the other nations and races. More significant, mosque has played a wider role to spread Islam to the other places. Until today, mosque has still standing as a pivotal institution to

Muslim community, but it does not really work as it was before (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2014).

Large, iconic and heritage mosques serving as a the hub of spiritual activity for communities in a city, yet their iconic architectural features, heritage value, unique characteristics and accessibility, make them a magnet for large scale tourist visits. Some tourists may visit sacred places out of curiosity or because the site is a 'must see' destination. In the case of mosques, such as in other religious sites, the space for worship how now turned into a kind of 'commodified' place. Islam prompted Muslim to learn and knowing each other. Hence, it is crucial that the holistic information of the mosque delivered appropriately to the tourists intrinsically and extrinsically. Perhaps, this kind of information not just acted as an medium in triggering the momentum of Islamic tourism based in Malaysia, but to be acting as an eye opener to the non-Muslim about what the Islam are in celebrating the differences in diversity and multiracial in constructing and developing the society.

There are several notable scholars who contributed to this sector with their research and writings such as Abdul Halim Nasir, Besim Selim el Hakim, Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi, Ismawi Zen, Spahic Omer and Nangkula Utaberta. Their works will be the initiation point for identifying potential study cases inside Malaysia. (Kosman, Ismail, & Tazilan, 2008; Omer, 2013; Rasdi, 2010; Utaberta & Mohd Rasdi, 2010). There are two aspects to prioritize while choosing study cases for this research. It is including the historical value and the Architectural value of the mosques. By respecting the given time frame, Three Malacca traditional mosque have been selected in this study. It's included Tengkeru Mosque, Kampung Hulu Mosque, and Kampung Kling Mosque, which located nearby each other in the heart of Malacca city.

2. Methodology

At overall, the project conducted in Qualitative study in identifying the unique attributes of Islamic architecture in Malaysia. It executed in several phase and stages, started by compiling the existing literature, follows by obtaining the data from the mosques personnel and follows by documenting the data of the mosques at the last phase of the research process.

2.1. Compilation of existing literatures to identify attributes of Islamic architecture in Malaysia.

Sources of literature are mostly books. For example, one of the heavily used book is *KALAM monograph Vol 2: Traditional Muslim architecture in Malaysia*. Among other books there are *Masjid: Selected Mosques and Musollas in Malaysia* by ATSA Architects Sdn Bhd, *The Architectural Heritage of the Malay World: The Traditional Mosque* by Tajuddin Haji Rasdi and so on. Apart from the above mentioned books, reports are purchased from KALAM UTM.

2.2. Experts' interview

In justifying the design characteristic of the selected mosques, the expert inputs are collected throughout the interview and discussion session. The primary options of the expert respondents are the architects who are designing the mosque. Literally, there is no specific person or architect has been recorded as a designer of the selected traditional mosque that have been chosen as a data in this research. Contradict to the contemporary mosques, all of them are been designed by the specific professional architect. In this research, two of the chosen contemporary mosques are specifically design by Kumpulan Senireka architect firm. The interview and discussion session was successfully conducted in Kumpulan Senireka office. There are 2 respondents for the interview which are Ar. Achmad Moerdijat as the architect of Masjid Putra and Hj Ar. Nik Arshad Nik Mohamed as the architect of Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin.

2.3. Visual documentation in terms of image, drawing and video

During the field trips, professional photographer accompanied the researcher to do visual documentation of the selected mosques. All pictures, drawings and videos documented and recorded at the final stage of the research. This documentation is crucial, which will be the record of the mosque condition in 2018, by expecting the renovation, restoration and repairing works may conducted in future which may resulted the changes of the physical characteristic of the studied mosques.

3. Result and Discussion

Many local architects were involved in the design of new mosques in Malaysia since independence. The architectural styles of the modern mosques have changed gradually in parallel with the development in structural advances, construction methods, contemporary designs of mosques as well as increased local interests toward Islamic architecture. With the advent of science and technology, modern mosques are constructed on a larger scale to accommodate the increasing number of Friday congregations. Concrete, bricks, steel, stone, and marble are commonly used in the construction of modern mosques. Onion-shaped or topshaped domes, tall minarets and high ceilings are common features found in the modern mosques. The modern mosques usually incorporate well-designed landscape elements including plants, water features, patterned pavements, garden lightings, and signage.



Figure 1: (Left) Masjid Putra, (Middle) Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin (Right) Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan

The Architectural characteristic of Masjid Putra follows a fusion of Middle Eastern and Traditional Malay architecture. In the mosque, there are much pinkish stones carved onto art motifs found on the wall and the dome. At first glance they look like normal stone or ordinary colored marble, but no, they are indeed real pink colored stone. For the case of Iron Mosque, it is a mosque which has a unique design, attractive and distinctive. Design created by local designers have influenced Islamic architecture concept of a large endowment. The characteristics of Islamic architecture in terms of lighting systems, ventilation lot, where prayers segregation between men and women and the construction of the mosque facing Mecca. Architecture Masjid Besi became a symbol of the greatness of Islamic architecture. Wilayah Persekutuan Mosque In order to achieve its concept of a mosque within a pooled garden, this mosque ended up with having a complex floor plan. The main function of building a mosque (as a place to perform prayer) has somehow been regarded as a secondary factor.

The construction method of these three contemporary mosque generally using the same basic conventional modern construction. The main different element is the type

of the materials used in the construction, specifically on the finishes. The Putra Mosque stands approximately at 85.5 meters in height from ground level until the tip of the dome. The mosque is covered by a composite dome structure sitting on a concrete base. Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin uses 6,000 tons of iron or 70 percent of the building materials in its construction. Thus it became known as Masjid Besi. The main components of the construction of this mosque are the mosque building and a walkway titled Qibla Walk. 35 Materials used in the construction of the Iron Mosque in Putrajaya, mostly imported from abroad, namely Germany (iron), Italy (carpet) and Japan (lighting) of which as much as 80% and only 20% of the materials in the country. The material used in the interior and exterior of the Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan of the Region is based on wood and stone. Carvings are more focused on components made of wood as seen on doors, windows, and partitions on the walls of the mosque. Conferences in the women's prayer hall and pulpit are also made of carved wood.



Figure 2: (Left) Concrete column of Masjid Putra, (Middle) Steel structure of Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin (Right) Concrete columns of Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan

The interior of the Putra presents an attempt to combine Quranic verses carved on gypsum by craftsmen from Morocco, with floral carvings done by local Malay craftsmen on cengal hardwood decorative panels. The local woods which are brought from Kelantan and Terengganu States are mainly used on the balcony, main frame for doors to the prayer area and the multi-purpose hall. The interior of Masjid Besi decoration is covered by Asmaul Husna carving using Calligraphy. The main door leading to the main prayer hall is illustrated the holy verses of the Quran. There is a bridge that connects to the Dataran Putrajaya mosque known as the Qibla Walk area of 13.639 m². The bridge is decorated with such water is in the area of ancient castle Al-Hambra, The interior backdrop carving Asma ul-Husna use writing calligraphy of type khat Thuluth, The main entrance leads to the main prayer space carved verses Al Quran from Surah Al-Israa ' verse 80. For the case of Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan there are five sets of inscriptions on the Mihrab itself, two of which are in circles and all these calligraphy

panels are written in Thuluth script. The two calligraphy circles are on both upper sides of the Mihrab and written in round Thuluth scripts.



Figure 3: (Left) Ornamentation of Masjid Putra, (Middle) Ornamentation of Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin (Right) Ornamentation of Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan

The Putra mosque consists of three main functional areas – the prayer hall, the Sahn, or courtyard, and various learning facilities and function rooms. The prayer hall is simple and elegant, supported by 12 columns. The dome structure works as a medium to bring natural light inside the large prayer hall. However, the prayer hall is designed with a preference for the mechanical cooling system. The highest point below the dome is 250 feet above ground level. The 650-hectare Putrajaya Lake is designed to act as a natural cooling system for the city and for recreation, fishing, water sports, and water transport.

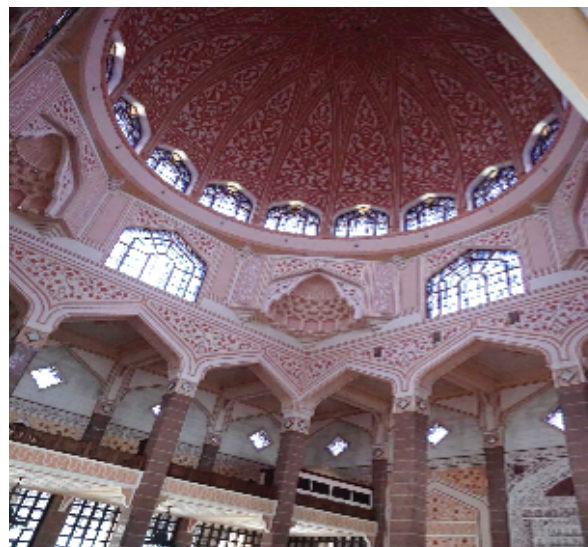


Figure 4: Natural roof lighting Masjid Putra

Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin mosque also known as the Iron Mosque is one of the early sustainable mosques in Malaysia. The mosque also is known as one of the best

natural air conditioning in Malaysia. By doing some reserch and review from the other articles, I can conclude the building was designed to achieve the simplicity, airiness and also the transparency feel "from outside to inside and inside to the outside".



Figure 5: Windows for cross ventilation at Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin

The prayer hall of Masjid Wilayah Persekutuan is 30m x 45m and is made-up of pre-stressed concrete. There are 1.2m x1.5m beams supporting the dome structure whereas special steel frames measuring 10m x 16m x 16m were used to support specific areas. Interior is equipped with artificial lighting system as well as mechanical cooling systems.



Figure 6: Natural light at Masjid Tunku Mizan Zainal Abidin

The women prayer hall is segregated from the Main Prayer Hall. It is on Level 4, one level above from the Main Prayer Hall. Space is blocked by screens, which are made up of beautifully carved wooden panels. Lady congregants, nonetheless, are still able to see the Imam and Khatib through the wooden screens and a number of speakers are installed in women prayer hall to amplify their sermons. Hence the prayer hall remains cool and bright although the lights are not being switched on.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

This research extensively explore and identify most of the architectural elements of Contemporary Mosques with the focus on the quality of spatial configuration, architectural elements and architectural language of the mosques. From the observation and visit of this research we can conclude that the information related with the architectural aspects of our modern mosques as representative in this study was really low. The explanation and information of the architecture of the mosques only depending on the short brochure and the briefing by the tour guide. This research propose a short training for the tour guide and mosques committee so they can become tourist agent to explain on the architectural aspects of the mosques. Architecture elements are the main attraction factors for the tourist to come and visit the mosques. This make an architectural explanation become very urgent and crucial in developing these mosques as tourist attraction. Simple and detail explanation in lay man's language is the one needed by the tour guide and tourist who visit these mosques. Our heritage and contemporary mosques have huge architecture features potential to be developed as tourist destination because of its unique character and architecture language that differ with other country's mosques. They are excellent in detailing and has a strong character and architectural style. It is recommended to have detail documentation in measured drawing, picture and video and as the same time cross comparative analysis with a mosques in the region. The modern mosques explanation need to be focusing on its architecture element and how they constructing a quality spaces. This research has explored and explain the mosques from seven architectural elements which are; Architectural style, Construction method and material, Exterior and interior spaces, Building ornaments, Lighting and ventilation, Infrastructures and Tourist facilities. It is expected the findings can be used as basis for the training and visual rebranding items towards the development of tourist main attraction features of these respected mosques.

Acknowledgments

This study was conducted with the aid of 'ISLAMIC TOURISM RESEARCH GRANT (ITRG)' for the research project "*Through the lens of Nusantara: Rebranding the uniqueness of Islamic Architecture in Malaysia as the prime symbol of South-Asian Islamic tourism hub*" granted by Islamic Tourism Centre, Ministry of Tourism and Culture. Authors also acknowledge the support of WARIS Research Group, Halal Products Research Institute,

Universiti Putra Malaysia and Faculty of Design and Architecture (FRSB), Universiti Putra Malaysia.

References

- [1] Nasir, A.H. (2004). *Mosque Architecture in the Malay World*. Terj. Omar Salahuddin Abdullah. Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- [2] Ahmad, A. G. (1999). The Architectural Styles of Mosques in Malaysia: From Vernacular to Modern Structures. Published in *Proceedings of the Symposium on Mosque Architecture: The Historic and Urban Developments of Mosque Architecture*. (Riyadh: King Saud University), pp. 147–169.
- [3] Isa, S. M., Chin, P. N. and Mohammad, N. U. (2018). Muslim Tourist Perceived Value: A Study on Malaysia Halal Tourism. *Journal of Islamic Marketing* _____.
- [4] Kosman, K. A., Ismail, A. H. and Tazilan, A. S. M. (2008). The scholar's involvement in dissemination of Malaysian architecture ideas from 1957-2004. *Jurnal Rekabentuk Dan Binaan*, vol. 1. Retrieved from <http://journalarticle.ukm.my/1815/>.
- [5] Najafi, M. and Sharif, M. (2014). Public Attachment to Religious Places: A Study of Place Attachment to Mosques in Malaysia. *Environmental Psychology*, vol. 8, issue 1, pp. 299–310.
- [6] Melaka, P.M. (1993). *Senarai Pewartaan Masjid-Masjid Warisan di Negeri Melaka*.
- [7] Zakaria, R.M.A., Tohar, S.N.A.M. and Rahman, R.A. (2018). Warisan Ketara Seni Islam Tempatan: Mahkota Atap Masjid Tradisional Melaka. *Asian Journal of Environment, History and Heritage June 2018*, vol. 2, issue 1, pp. 185-196.
- [8] Utaberta, N. and Rasdi, M. T. M. (2010). Deskripsi tipologi, klasifikasi dan analisis perancangan masjid di malaysia. *El- Harakah Journal Budaya Islam*, vol. 12, issue 2, pp. 85–100.