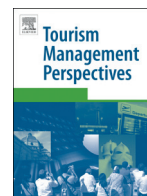




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Tourism Management Perspectives

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tmp

Review

Muslim world: A study of tourism & pilgrimage among OIC Member States

Hamira Zamani-Farahani^{a,*}, Riyadh Eid^b^a Astiaj Tourism Consultancy & Research Centre, Tehran, Iran^b United Arab Emirates University, UAE and Tanta University, Faculty of Commerce, Tanta, Egypt

ARTICLE INFO

Available online xxxx

Keywords:

Organization of Islamic cooperation (OIC)
Muslim countries
Islam
Tourism in OIC
Islamic pilgrimage & tourism
Tourism development

ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with tourism in general and pilgrimage in specific among Muslim countries. Reference is made to conditions in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Member States and their travel and tourism industry and the role of religion (Islam) in tourism and society. Selected literature, other relevant documents and data derived from previous studies and personal observations/experiences were examined to provide insights on the subject and to help achieve the objectives of study. Findings revealed that tourism and pilgrimage have great potential in most Muslim countries. However, in general, it constrained by several internal and external factors, which lead the industry's contribution to economic growth and unity among Muslim nations relatively limited.

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1. Introduction

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was established on 1969 representing the majority of Muslim States. It is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations with membership of 57 Islamic States (OIC, 2010a) located in a wide geographical contribution in four continents. The organization has consultative and cooperative relations with the UN and other inter-governmental organizations to protect the interests of the Muslims in the spirit of promoting international peace and harmony among various people of the world (OIC, 2010b).

Tourism cooperation among Muslim countries is one of described objectives by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). In various

developing countries, tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors and an effective tool for foreign investment and financial reserves. International tourism activity has become the main source of foreign exchange revenues for several OIC Member States such as Benin, Chad, Gambia, Maldives, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Tourism could see as a multidimensional, multifaceted activity, which touches many lives, and many different economic activities (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 2008). It is generating growth in economy, income, and employment, positioning the country as a leading global destination, upgrading and developing tourism products, infrastructure, facilities, and services.

Following of September 11, 2001, the Muslims preferred to travel to and within destinations deemed friendlier. On the other hand, some Muslim countries have also been benefiting from the shift in tourism. These countries tried to attract Muslim tourists, as one of the best ways to generate foreign exchange revenue, improve their position and image as popular tourism destination of the world.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hzfara@gmail.com (H. Zamani-Farahani), riyad.aly@uaeu.ac.ae (R. Eid).

This study is concerned with tourism and pilgrimage among OIC countries. Reference is made to introducing the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the position of tourism in OIC, role of tourism and pilgrimage in Islam and among OIC Member States. It is followed by implications of the results and suggestions. Selected literature, other relevant documents and data derived from previous studies and personal observations/experiences were examined to provide insights on the subject and to help achieve the objectives of the study.

2. An overview of the OIC Member States

Each OIC Member State has its own diversity in natural, geographic, politics, historical, heritage economic and cultural assets. They also differ in view of level of development, national priorities, and policies as well as level of composing Islamic laws in their country. The OIC Member States have a total number of populations of 1,468,119,824 from Indonesia with highest number of population 245,452,739 to Maldives with lowest (359,008) (WorldLingo, 2010). Although Islam is often associated with the Arab world and the Middle East, however fewer than 15% of Muslims are Arab (Huda, 2010).

There is a gap in view of economic situation among OIC countries. The GDP per capita of six richest Member States exceeds \$US 10,000 per year while 46 members have per capital income of less than \$US 1000 (OIC Tourism Directory, 2008). In fact, they have an average per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$5746 and an average official unemployment rate of 15.44% (Sarsar & Strohmetz, 2008). The 22 countries out of 57 countries (about 40%) are considered least developed (OIC Tourism Directory, 2008).

In order to coordinate and boost in various fields of cooperation – political, economic, cultural, social, spiritual, and scientific among Member States, the organization has formed different committees, majority at Ministerial level, a number of which are chaired by Heads of State. They are including: Al-Quds Committee (1975), Bayt Mal Al Quds Agency (1995/1998), the Standing Committee for Information and Cultural Affairs (COMIAC) (1981), the Standing Committee for Economic and Trade Cooperation (COMCEC) (1981), and the Standing Committee for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (COMSTECH) (1981) (OIC, 2010b).

The OIC has also created several institutions for purposes of promoting greater cooperation among Member States, including Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group; the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC); the Islamic Center for Development of Trade (ICDT); the Islamic Chamber for Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and Organization of the Islamic Ship-owners Association (OISA). To-date more than twenty six Tourism Islamic Summit Conferences, seminars, meetings, forums (see Table 1) and 41 Councils of Foreign Ministers (CFM) (OIC, 2015) were organized by OIC.

3. The OIC and tourism

The September 11 and other terrorist attacks collapsed tourism in some Muslim countries, which are dependent on North America, Europe, and Japan markets. Besides, due to this event the Muslim tourists are not welcomed in western countries as before. This led to more and more Muslim tourists' desire to spend their holidays in Arab or Muslim countries. The Persian Gulf countries are becoming important export tourist markets to several Muslim countries like Malaysia, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and Indonesia. On the other hand, the traditional Arab oriented destination like Cairo, Beirut, and Bahrain are booming and other destinations like Sharjah, Ain Sukhna, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur are becoming as new placement. However, in general the pilgrimage destinations have been less damageable by world crises.

A number of OIC general objectives indirectly encourage promoting tourism cooperation among Member States, they are included:

Table 1

List of main tourism conferences/gatherings/workshops organized under OIC.

Conference/Gathering/Workshop	Year	Place/Organizer
The 1st Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2000	Iran (Isfahan)
The 2nd Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2001	Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)
The 3rd Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2002	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh)
The 4th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2005	Senegal) Dakar(
The 5th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2006	Azerbaijan)Baku(
The 6th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2008	Syria)Damascus(
The 7th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2010	Iran (Tehran)
The 8th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2013	Gambia (Banjul)
The 9th Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers	2015	Niger (Niamey)
The 1st OIC International Forum on Islamic Tourism	2014	Indonesia (Jakarta)
Forum of Tourism in Islamic Countries	2007	Saudi Arabia (Jeddah)
Forum of Silk Road Tour Operators of Islamic Countries	2008	Azerbaijan (Baku)
International Scientific Conference on Role of Tourism in the Economies of OIC Countries	2007	Azerbaijan (Baku)
International Islamic Tourism Conference & Travel Mart	2010	Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)
Religious and Health Tourism Conference: Organization of Spiritual and Physical Recreation	2008	Azerbaijan (Nakhchevan)
International Seminar on Development of E-tourism Technologies in Islamic Countries	2008	Bangladesh (Dhaka)
Seminar on Development of Tourism in the Muslim World	2009	Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus
Meeting on the implementation of the Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between the OIC Member States	2009	Syria (Damascus)
Meeting on the implementation of the Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between the OIC Member States	2010	Turkey (Antalya)
Workshop on Tourism Statistics and Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) for the Arab Countries	2009	Syria (Damascus)
The 1st Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2011	UAE)Dubai(
The 2nd Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2011	UAE (Abu Dhabi)
The 3rd Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2012	Egypt)Cairo (
The 4th Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2013	Turkey)Istanbul(
The 5th Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2014	Malaysia)Kuala Lumpur(
The 6th Global Islamic Marketing Conference	2015	Turkey)Istanbul(

Source: OIC official website, SESRIC and International Islamic Marketing Association (IIMA).

- Enhance and consolidate the bonds of fraternity and solidarity among the Member States,
- Ensure active participation of the Member States in the global political, economic and social decision-making processes to secure their common interests,
- Strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation, in order to achieve economic integration leading to the establishment of an Islamic Common Market,
- Protect and defend the true image of Islam, to combat defamation of Islam and encourage dialog among civilizations and religions (OIC, 2010b).

Promoting and developing tourism among OIC countries could be studied in three views: Religious, Socio-cultural and Economic. Religious concept referring to pilgrimage potential among Member States, the host country of Hajj (Saudi Arabia) and a center of Shia pilgrimage (Iran and Iraq) are the most important religious destinations among the OIC Member States. Furthermore, most of Islamic countries, benefit from Islamic cultural heritage as second ranging markets like shrines, tombs, old battle sites, old mosques, holly caves, ancient pilgrim routes, etc. that could be addressed in tourist promoting program among Muslim countries. Furthermore, respecting Islamic codes and ethic in most Islamic countries, facilitate traveling by Muslim among them. In economic perspective, Muslim countries with high demographic and destination potentials can work together in tourism fields by considering

inter-Muslim market to improve the economic welfare of their nations. Furthermore, tourism is a peaceful encounter among people and it can promote cultural contacts, understanding, cooperation and friendship as well as mutual respect among Muslim countries.

To reach above points, the importance of intra-Islamic cooperation between OIC Member States was first referred during the 7th Islamic Summit, held in Morocco in 1994 and the first conference of Tourism Ministers initiated by Iran in 2000 in Isfahan and proceed in Malaysia (2001), Saudi Arabia (2002), Senegal (2005), Azerbaijan (2006), Syria (2008), Iran (2010), Gambia (2013) and Niger (2015) (OIC, 2015).

According to the third meeting of Islamic conference for Ministers of Tourism (ICMT) in 2003, the OIC countries adopted “Riyadh Declaration”. The main point of this declaration aims to ease the visa, investment, and cash flow restrictions between the Muslim countries. Joint marketing, financial support, experts’ meeting, revival of Islamic cultural heritage and common codes of behavior were on the agenda (OIC Tourism Directory, 2008).

During the 6th session of the Islamic conference of Tourism Ministers in 2008, coordination and monitoring of the implementation the framework for development and cooperation in the domain of tourism between OIC Member States were confirmed under the OIC Ten-Year Program of Action for a period of ten years (2008–2018). Following this agreement, the coordination committee meeting on the implementation of the “Framework for Development and Cooperation in the Domain of Tourism between the OIC Member States” was held in Syria (2009) and Turkey (2010). These Meetings were attended by Azerbaijan, Cameroon, Egypt, Iran, Malaysia, Senegal, Syria, and Turkey as the members of the coordination committee, which acts as an advisory board to the OIC. Other OIC representatives like the OIC General Secretariat and The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESERIC), Research Center For Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA), the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT), Islamic University of Technology (IUT), Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ICCI) and Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) Coordination Office (CCO) also attended the above-mentioned Meeting. However, there is still a need to adopt a strategic plan in the area of tourism (Naji Otri, 2008).

The main agreement on tourism cooperation among the OIC Member States in the above meetings could be summarized as follows:

- Establishment of direct contacts among the relevant parties concerned with tourism to promoting tourism.
- Developing tourism as an important poverty alleviation tool.
- Encouraging and facilitating joint tourism ventures and other investments in the Member States.
- Promotion of ecotourism and protection of the environment.
- Increasing the public awareness about the existing tourist attractions, resources and facilities with a view to encourage tourist visits among Islamic countries by providing full information.
- Protecting of the true image of Islam through tourism activities and developing unified approach among the Member States.
- Using of the OIC permanent missions in Western countries as an effective tool for dissemination of information about the tourist potentials of OIC Member States.
- Increasing the role of the private sector in tourism development.
- Creation of an OIC web site dedicated to tourism in OIC official languages.
- Providing the framework for facilitation of tourist visa arrangements, including possibility of issuing electronic visa.
- Promotion of “Youth Tourism” in the OIC Member States.
- Exchange of information among the Member States.

During the recent years, the OIC has been active in organizing several conference, meeting/gathering, fair, and workshop in tourism fields

(see Table 1). The OIC Member States also hold several Experts Group Meeting on tourism development during the recent years. However, the effectiveness of the above-mentioned conferences/meeting still stayed unknown.

4. Islam and tourism

Religiously motivated tourism is probably as old as religion itself and is consequently the oldest type of tourism. In many Muslim nations, Islam is the foundation of society and order of Islamic law principles supports tourism policy, development objectives, management, and operation of the industry. Therefore, it is evident that religion (Islam) does have influence on the mode of tourism development and marketing in most Muslim countries. Religion also influences tourist behavior such as the choice of destinations and tourist product preferences (Weidenfeld & Ron, 2008). It is essential to satisfy Muslim religious needs in the tourism industry, especially related to hospitality, attractions, transportation, and food outlets. In consequence, Muslim may prefer to remain within a familiar culture when traveling (Shoup, 1985). This is due to “the revival of Islamic cultures and the spread of Islamic values, economic benefit for Islamic societies and strengthening of Islamic self-confidence, identity, and beliefs in the face of negative stereotyping in comparison to other cultures and cultures and lifestyles” (Al-Hamarneh, 2008, p. 2).

In contrary to public belief, Islam is receptive to tourism and encouraged it. When looking at Shari’ah and Islamic religious principles generated from the Qur’an (Islam’s holy book) and Sunnah (teachings, guidance and practices of Prophet Mohammad) it is found that travelers are considered to be closer to God and their Doaa (asking God for something) and prayers are more responded to while traveling (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Furthermore, the religious responsibilities and duties for travelers are less as a traveler can pray shorter prayers, can postpone prayers and can postpone his/her fasting during the holy month of Ramadan (Eid, 2015). Furthermore, Quranic evidence (Islam’s holy book) has been presented regarding the vital importance of travel. The Holy Quran state explains in Surat Al-Ankabout (literally, The Spider): “Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things” (Surat Al-Ankabout, verse number 20”. Therefore, based on this quote from Qur’an, Muslims are encouraged to do so for historical, social, and cultural encounters, to gain knowledge, to associate with others, to spread God’s word, and to enjoy and appreciate God’s creations (Timothy & Iverson, 2006). The lessons are that more complete submission to God is possible through seeing firsthand the beauty and bounty of His creation; grasping the smallness of man reinforcing the greatness of God. Travel can enhance health and well-being, reducing stress and enabling Muslims to serve God better. It leads to the acquisition of knowledge and is a test of patience and perseverance (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010, p. 80).

However, Muslims practice two different types of tourism activities. First pilgrimage–tourism activities or what is called Hajj. Hajj in Islam is performed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia within a specific geographical territory (Almasha’er Almoukadasa) includes the holy mosque in Makkah, Arafat, Muzdalifah and Mina. It is performed in a specific period, from the 8th to the 13th of the twelfth month (Dhul-Hijja) according to the Hegira calendar. Allah (SWT) says in the holy Quran, (Surat Albakara), verse number 197: “Al-Hajj Ashoron Maalomat” which means that Hajj is performed only at a particular time of the year (Eid, 2012). Muslims who are taking place in this great event should act in a good manner. Allah says in the holy Quran, chapter 2 (Surat Albakara), verse number 197: “If any one undertakes that duty therein, Let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj”. It means that whoever decides to go for Hajj should have good manners, so, there shouldn’t be any immortality, sensuality or arguments in Hajj. In the case of a female under 45 age to perform Hajj, she must be accompanied

with Mehrem (the husband, father, brother, uncle, or nephew) according to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia rules.

The second type of tourism activities that could be practiced by Muslims is called Islamic tourism. According to *Jafari and Scott (2013)*, Islamic tourism is essentially a new “touristic” interpretation of pilgrimage that merges religious and leisure tourism. Thus, it is “unlike mass tourism which for Muslims is characterized by hedonism, permissiveness, lavishness” (*Sonmez, 2001, p. 127*). Islamic travel instead is proposed as an alternative to this hedonic conceptualization of tourism. Muslims are encouraged to practice such type of tourism activities for historical, social, and cultural encounters, to gain knowledge, to associate with others, to spread God's word, and to enjoy and appreciate God's creations (*Timothy & Iverson, 2006*). Undoubtedly, religious beliefs influence and direct Muslim adherents to travel to particular sites and influence their attitudes and behavior, perceptions, and perhaps emotions at those sites (*Jafari & Scott, 2013*). Therefore, trends in forms of religious tourism may vary between adherents of different faiths.

5. Tourism and pilgrimage among Member States of OIC

Travel and tourism industry structure among OIC countries are different. International tourism activity in OIC countries is characterized by geographical spread and diversification of tourism products and services. They have own tourism characteristics in terms of purpose of visit, geographical distance and tourism policy and development. While tourism in Iran and Saudi Arabia as two most important religion destination for Hajj and Shia pilgrimage has a religious-conservative configuration, others like UAE, Malaysia, and Turkey are an international, liberal, shopping events and leisure oriented destination.

Pilgrimage is an accepted element of Islam with a long history. It has been argued that overall, pilgrims want to feel near to God and to find the calm and solace ensuing from this proximity.

(*Betteridge, 1992*). Saudi Arabia is known as the birthplace of Islam and home of the Prophet Mohammad. It is the guardian of the holy sites and most of the 8.6 million arrivals reported in 2006 were pilgrims from across the world taking part in the Hajj or Umrah (*EIU, 2008*). Shia Pilgrimage is also a popular feature of Islam with a long history. Referring to two Quranic verses (42:23 & 24:36) which are cited by Shia as evidence of Prophet Muhammad's intention that the shrines of his relatives should be revered, tended, and visited. The tombs of the Imams and their immediate descendants and close associates (known as Imamzadihs, a name also given to their shrines) evolved into places of Shia pilgrimage as Islam spreads across Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. Iran is estimated to have about 9000 holy places and a large number of these are shrines, 1200 of which are documented in the official register of National Cultural and Natural Heritage (*Kheimehnews, 2007*). A visit to Iran's holy sites might be less expensive than the hajj to Mecca and unlike the hajj, these journeys are not a once in a lifetime affair, but can be repeated regularly and easily (*Zamani-Farahani, 2010*).

At historical perceptible, the OIC countries are rich in heritage sites. 48 countries among OIC Member States are listed on the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (*UNESCO, 2015a*). Iran with 19 world heritage sites located in first among OIC countries (*UNESCO, 2015b*). About 32 OIC countries were inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO. Turkey with 12 and Iran with 10 world Intangible Cultural Heritages are distinguished among 57 OIC countries (*UNESCO, 2015c*). A total of 50 OIC countries are members of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) that is a specialized agency of the United Nations and the leading international organization in the field of tourism with 156 Member States (*UNWTO, 2015*). According to the global ranking on the Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI) which reflects the multi-dimensional aspect of environmental sustainability of 146 countries around the world only 5 OIC countries (Guyana (8th), Gabon (12th), Albania (24th), Malaysia (38th), Mali (41st) and Cameroon (50th))

are found to be included in the top 50 ranks (*SESRIC, 2006*). In terms of the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), which ranks the performance of 130 countries around the world based on different factors like travel and tourism regulatory framework; travel and tourism business environment and infrastructure; and travel and tourism human, cultural and natural resources, only 5 OIC countries are found to be included in the top 50 ranks. These are Malaysia (32nd), Qatar (37th), Tunisia (39th), United Arab Emirates (40th), and Bahrain (48th) (*WEFORUM, 2008*).

The share of the OIC countries in the world tourism market has annually some progress. It was 9.8% (2000), 10.6% (2001), 9.2% (2002), 10.3% (2003), 12.9% (2004), 13% (2005) and 12.1% in 2006 (*SESRIC, 2008*). Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Tunisia, Indonesia, Bahrain, Syria, and Kazakhstan are found to be the top 10 OIC international tourist destinations in 2006, altogether, corresponding to a share of 82.5% of the total OIC tourism market and Turkey, Malaysia, Egypt, Morocco, Lebanon, U.A.E., Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Tunisia and Syria were the top 10 OIC international tourism earners corresponding to a share of 86.5% of the total OIC tourism receipts in that year (*SESRIC, 2008*). Since 2005, Turkey and Malaysia (until 2012) among all Islamic countries are listed in the 10 top tourism destinations in the world by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Besides according to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) Malaysia, Turkey, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar take the top five destination respectively in the Muslim travel market in 2014 (*SBR, 2015*).

Examining the economic role of the tourism in the OIC countries in terms of its net contribution to the GDP reflects a widely different situation. With the exception of few countries, in general the economic role of the international tourism sector in the OIC countries in function of the size and the level of affluence of the economy is negligible. During the period 2002–2006, the net contribution of international tourism activity to the total GDP of the OIC countries accounted, on average, for only 1%. However, as cited before, there are some exceptions such as Maldives with an average of 43.7% of GDP during this period. This ratio reached to almost 12% in Gambia and Lebanon (2006). The nine other OIC countries (e.g. Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Malaysia, Lebanon, Turkey, Egypt, and Syria) also have an average, for between 3 to almost 7%. Nevertheless, international tourism still plays a limited role in generating foreign exchange earnings in 31 OIC countries (*SESRIC, 2008*).

The figures reflect the diversity of aims in developing tourism among OIC countries. Saudi Arabia (*IINA, 2010*) and Iran (*Parseh, 2006; Parseh, 2007*) are given priority to pilgrimage among OIC Member States. Iran focused on meeting cultural objectives on attracting tourists who are familiar with and have an interest in the country's rich history and culture and who respect Iranian people as well as Iranian cultural-religious tradition. At present, due to unavailability of accurate data, any evaluation on number of Muslim tourists/pilgrims arrival in Iran is not feasible. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as guardian of the holy sites without any serious efforts is able to attract a considerable number of Muslim pilgrims from across the world taking part in the Hajj or Umrah annually. However, both countries show less enthusiasm to attract other kind of tourists. The reasons for this focus are economic and socio-cultural. The two above-mentioned countries as oil rich nation have little call for extra revenue. As an Islamic country, they wish to prevent the erosion of religious devoutness and convention (*Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010*). However, in other Muslim countries (i.e. UAE, Maldives, Malaysia, and Turkey) tourism is one of the main economic resources. According to the report of the sixth session of the Islamic Conference of Tourism Ministers (*OIC, 2010c*), the number of international tourist arrivals in the OIC countries increased significantly to an average annual growth rate of 7.1%. This rate was higher than the world average as well as the averages of the traditional tourist-receiving regions of Europe and the Americas during the same period (*Ihsanoglu, 2008*). However, a large part of tourism potential of the OIC region remained unutilized and there is no accurate/complete data on inbound and outbound tourism among OIC Member States.

The availability of data on tourism demand and supply among the majority developing countries including OIC Member States is limited, unreliable, and incomplete as there is no proper system to gather statistics related to tourism. Due to inaccessibility of this kind of data, the tourism flow between Islamic countries neither a function of number of Muslim tourist arrival nor of the level Muslim tourists expenditure (by country) and net contribution to the GDP of host country, stays relatively indefinite. However according to *SESRIC (2008)* in terms of intra-OIC tourist arrivals, except Turkey and Tunisia, the volume of those tourists in the remaining 38 OIC countries (for which the data are available) are coming from member countries in the same region. It is estimated that the total intra-OIC tourism is concentrated in a few countries like Saudi Arabia, Syria, Bahrain, Turkey, Tunisia, U.A.E., Kuwait, Jordan, Nigeria, and Egypt as the top 10 intra-OIC tourism destinations in 2005. These countries hosted 32.5 million tourist arrivals (a share of 83.3% of the total intra-OIC tourism market) from other OIC Member States.

Beside the internal factors, the tourism in OIC countries is also affected by natural, political and man-made crises. These are mainly including exchange rate fluctuations, economic and political uncertainties, conflicts and wars, terrorist attacks, the SARS panic in Asia/Pacific, tsunamis in the Indian Ocean, oil prices change, climate change and the world weak economic conditions.

6. Conclusion and suggestions

It is estimated that there are 2.08 billion Muslims around the world (Religious Population, 2014), accounting nearly one-fourth of the world's population today. The number of Muslims is thought to be growing fast in the world. The fifty-seven OIC countries have Muslim-majority populations that considered an enormous market. Tourism and pilgrimage have great potential in most Muslim countries. The OIC countries have a vast natural, geographical, historical, cultural and religious (pilgrimage) potential for the development of a sustainable tourism inter OIC. However, in general, it is constrained by several internal and external factors, which lead the industry's contribution to economic growth and unity among Muslim nations relatively limited. Considering OIC Member States' low share in the world tourism market and the concentration of tourism and pilgrimage activity in just few of them, it seems that a large-scale tourism potential in these countries remains unutilized. Besides, the natural, heritage, and religious resources cannot make a successful tourism industry by itself, unless appropriately planned and managed. Particularly, to develop tourism and pilgrimage among the OIC Member States, there is the need to a real desire by public and private sectors as well as the local community. It also requires the construction of main basic travel services like appropriated hotel, transportation, foods, OIC Internet guide for tourism and well infrastructures. Moreover, it is necessary to develop a program of travel and visit and strategic marketing plan among these countries. Up to date a considerable number of conference, meeting, and gathering in tourism were held by OIC Member States (see Table 1); however, the governments and the business community in all OIC Member States should take serious steps on their agreements and decision-making and ensure effective implementation.

The challenges facing tourism development and cooperation between OIC Member States need creating the appropriate financial, institutional, and administrative conditions to support an expanded tourist activity among the members. One of the biggest challenges within OIC countries is the vast economic imbalances among them. Muslim countries with the exception of a small number of oil producing countries are generally recognized as low-income states with limited purchasing power. Furthermore, peace and socio-political stability in the OIC Member States is another challenge. Lack of proper education, training, investment opportunities and the involvement of the private sectors and local community is another difficulty across. To develop tourism as an important element to improve poverty and ensure sustainable

development of economies, the OIC countries need sufficient tourism-related infrastructures, investments, and tourism diversification, political stability, safety and an effective marketing planning. Lack of enough technical awareness and knowledge by local human resources is another problem in majority Muslim countries.

To prompt collaboration among the OIC Member States, they should share technical resources and expertise. The OIC Member States should also increase public awareness about their existing tourist attractions, resources, and facilities with a view to encouraging Muslim tourists visit other Islamic countries by providing full information to potential visitors. Developing a marketing strategy through joint programs and facilities for visa issue processes are some ways to arrive to this point. Advertising among Member States is the most effective way to inform Muslim people about the existence of a tourism potential in Muslim countries. The lack of an official committee in tourism in OIC provides evidence that there is still no real effort at promoting tourism among OIC countries. Creating "Tourism Committee" will help to boost various fields of cooperation (political, economic, cultural, social, spiritual, and scientific) among the OIC Member States.

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Dr. Hamira Zamani-Farahani has worked as a tourism researcher, writer, consultant and lecturer for several years. She is an assistant professor in tourism and founder of the Astiaj Tourism Consultancy & Research Centre in Tehran. Publications include international and local journal papers, book chapters and three books. She reviews regularly for several journals and is a member of the Editorial Board of tourism and hospitality journals. She has traveled extensively throughout Iran and abroad. Her research interests are wide and summarized to: tourist/host attitudes, tourism impact, religious/Islamic tourism, event & special interest tourism, tourism development & management, rural/urban tourism, tourism marketing & entrepreneurship and train cruise tourism.



Prof. Riyad Eid is a professor of Marketing at Tanta University – Egypt and Associate Professor of Marketing at the United Arab Emirates University – UAE. Prior to the UAEU appointment, he was an Assistant Professor at the Marketing Department – Wolverhampton University – UK. Prof Eid's main area of marketing expertise and interest is in the domain of International Internet Marketing and Islamic tourism and marketing. Prof Eid has published a significant number of articles in the area of Marketing and tourism marketing journals such as the *International Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Tourism Management*, *The Service Industries Journal*, *Journal of Euro-Marketing*, *Journal of marketing Intelligence and Planning*, *Journal of Industrial Management & Data Systems*, *Benchmarking International Journal*, *Tourism Management* and *Journal of Internet Research and Tourism Analysis*. Prof Eid is the founding and current editor-in-chief for the *International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management*.