

Sustainability of Pondok Warga Emas according to Needs and Interests as an Islamic Tourism Destination in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT: Malaysia is expected to be an ageing nation in 2030 where the country must prepare itself to facilitate and accommodate the needs by the elderly. In the meantime, Pondok Warga Emas institutions are growing rapidly throughout the state of Malaysia. In parallel with the growth of Islamic tourism destinations, this study views the institutions as a business opportunity for Islamic tourism in Malaysia. PWE has been increasing in number and demand, which leads to the question: to what extent can PWE become an Islamic tourism destination in Malaysia? How is the sustainability rate? What are the strategies? A qualitative approach is employed and data are obtained through a focus group discussion with 15 senior citizens who are randomly selected from two centers. The data is analyzed using SWOT and TOWS analysis for strategies purposes. There are ten strategies developed involving number or authorities and agencies. There should be a balance between the needs and readiness which can be resolved through ten strategies as the sustainable framework as an Islamic tourism destinations. A further examination is suggested to include foreign tourists and publics on the potential marketability of PWE as an Islamic tourism destination in Malaysia.

KEYWORDS: Sustainability, Needs, Interests, Pondok *Warga Emas*; Islamic Tourism

I. Introduction

The global tourism stakeholders have opened their eyes and recognized Malaysia as one of the exciting tourism destinations. While there is an annual increase of foreign tourists, it can be amplified further by promoting the country to ensure tourists receive real information on tourism products and facilities. Among Malaysia's tourism products are attractive landscapes, unique cultural and artistic performances, sports tourism and the always-preserved historical heritage buildings. This positive performance has always been an agenda of Malaysia's economic development. The 10th Malaysia Plan (RMK-10) targeted a permanent growth of 8% for the tourism

industry, and in 2020, the government has planned to bring in 36 million tourists for a total revenue of RM115 billion [1].

The concept of sustainability was discussed in Agenda 21, where the Malaysian government has promoted holistic development. It was first implemented through proactive policies and strategies at different levels from the 7th Malaysia Plan [2] onwards. There is more than 60 years ago since independence, Malaysia has undergone rapid economic growth. While the development of nation over the last six decades is impressive, the rapid pace of change has shown its' detrimental effects on the natural environment. In order to ensure success and sustainable growth, the government has introduced various tourism-related plans. These include the development of religious tourism packages and scientific activities that are deemed to have substantial potential and impact on Malaysia.

According to the Malaysia Tourism Attraction Profile prepared by the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), there are 80 mosques throughout Malaysia that can become Islamic tourism destinations [3]. There is a demand for this "spiritual" tourism, which arise from various factors, including the desire of tourists to know more about Islam as well as to find peace and happiness. Especially for senior travelers, desire for religious studies in the Malaysian *pondok* (Islamic educational institution) is also emerging. The potentials and benefits of *Pondok Warga Emas* (senior homes; PWE) as an Islamic tourism destination should be further studied to develop the tourism industry further.

Currently, the *pondok* system has not yet been recognized as an official educational institution even though new institutions are continually set up across Malaysia. In fact, there is an increase in the number of *pondok* system as an additional feature of *tahfiz* studies. There are a number of centers that provide both elderly care and commercial health care (for example, Yayasan Al-Jenderami in Selangor). In the 11th Malaysia Plan, the first thrust highlights six target segments, one of which is to support active aging for senior citizens in Malaysia. It was found that that the share of population aged 65 years and over (old age) has increased from 6.3 per cent in 2017 to 6.5 per cent in 2018 [4]. The rising share of working age population and the elderly has also increased the intermediate age in 2018 to 28.6 years. Additionally, the increasing number of pension recipients in Malaysia may also increase the demand for PWE. The number of pensioners is expected to grow to 1.5 million by 2050, taking into account the increase in life expectancy of Malaysians from 75 to 85 years [5].

These shifts may impact the elderly and the demand for physical and spiritual care. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified some major issues facing senior citizens, such as loneliness, depression and anxiety [6]. Noor Hafiza [6] maintained that psychosocial support is crucial in helping the elderly handle these obstacles. Additionally, the aging readiness of the government and public pension recipients would encourage the need for a spiritual program, creating for it a place in the domestic market. As these institutions have the potential to be tourist destinations, the government must introduce a regulatory framework to manage their establishment and operations. What are the strengths and weaknesses of PWE as an Islamic tourism destinations? Is there any opportunities and threats? How can PWE sustain as an Islamic tourism destinations? It is, therefore, essential, to examine PWE based on following objectives:

1. To identify strength, weakness, opportunities and threats of PWE as an Islamic tourism destination in Malaysia; and
2. To establish sustainability strategies for PWE in the Malaysia tourism.

II. Literature Review

The growth of population aging in Malaysia is presented over time by a great number of studies research initiatives through the literary reviews. The components of the elderly population is determined using the most recent research in the subject literature. These components can then be processed to make a comprehensive planning process components related to sustainability factors of PWE in Malaysia. PWE is viewed as a subject of negotiation, where the needs of PWE rely on the readiness of PWE and vice versa. This study, therefore, conflates the concept of PWE with the concept of Islamic tourism; whether the two are similar or different and whether they can be negotiated to sustain as one of Islamic tourism destinations in Malaysia.

A) Needs and Readiness of PWE and Islamic Tourism

The needs and readiness of PWE can be likened to tourism needs in general. According to Mahadewi and Che [7], Bandung tourism agencies consider the characteristics of village products. Most village tourism products in

Bandung are unique attractions, such as Taman Ayun, PlagaAgro and Umabian homestay. The characteristics of these village products are known as education and interpretation, preservation and protection, authenticity and quality, local priority and capacity and partnership.

Providing homes like the PWE are among the efforts for the well-being of the senior citizens. Apart of being alone and lonely, these institutions provide classes and other activities for the residents (senior citizens) to fulfil their times towards enhancing their religious knowledge and better understanding of Islam. This is being done through the supervision of the teachers at the institutions in preparing the daily activities for the senior citizens besides ensuring continuous congregational prayers which will be done in a *surau* or mosque located in the institution. Rather than doing nothing or fully occupied with family agendas, these institutions offer this group to put full focus on themselves at their age. A study found that the senior citizens who are also residents at a senior citizen cottage have gone through a quality life experience at the cottage [8]. Besides providing a conducive place to stay, the senior citizens are also occupied with spirituality activities other beneficial programs.

It is also crucial that these institutions to provide a clean surrounding and comfortable facilities to the senior citizens due to their age factor. At the same time, indirectly, they also helped the residents to be independent as they have to manage and take care of themselves on their own and not depending on others too much. Findings from previous studies showed that there were a number of factors of why these senior citizens chose to spend their lives in these institutions which include *hidayah*, *ibadah*, to gain peace, fulfil daily activities, family, rules, facilities, hygiene, location of the cottage and its popularity [9].

In the current society where sometimes materials are more important than love, there were cases where senior citizens were being left alone and felt unneeded that led towards depression and affecting their health. Other findings stated that financial, motivation, place to stay, charity and safety [9] were also among the reasons on why the senior citizens chose to stay at the institutions. Compared to being alone especially after the death of spouse, these institutions could help them to mingle among them that will keep them busy with the programs organized for them. Therefore, these institutions help to provide a safe place to stay as well as helping them in terms of physical and mental health among this community [8].

Tourist perceptions are found to be less obvious, such as the hospitality of the locals, the atmosphere resulting from certain events, the sense of fear, isolation, or other feeling that a particular destination can produce [10]. Destinations have different appeals to different markets. Some individuals love crowds, others love isolation and find crowded places unbearable. The appeal of the destinations may vary depending on the opportunities and market available in any country and in any region (Hall, 2008). Importantly, compliance to the regulations of State Islamic Departments should be placed as priority when it comes to the process of developing *pondok* institutions [11].

Camelleri [12] found that tourists usually travel to see what a destination has to offer to them in terms of what they can see, do and experience. The features that attract a person to a particular destination are known as attractions. Attractions can be natural wonders, man-made attractions, special events, cultural or historic sites, arts and crafts, sport, music or dance, unusual or unique flora and fauna, night life, etc. Attractions are many and diverse. Therefore, a wide variety of attractions would possibly appeal to a large number of tourists. For a destination to be viable for tourists there must be some way to get to the country, the region and the various attractions [12]. This does not mean that there has to be first class or mass transportation to everything, but it does mean that access must be made possible. Access relates to transport, but it can simply refer to a walking trail or a cycling track.

The length of the package is also significant when the tourists need accommodation for more than just a one-day visit. It is important for tourist destinations to offer a wide array of accommodation facilities with different price ranges. Sometimes, the accommodation is virtually part of the attraction of the destination, especially if it overlooks a spectacular scenery or landmark. Tourists may enjoy doing certain activities whilst at their destinations. These activities include shopping, eating out, using sports facilities and engaging in outdoor recreational journeys [12]. Additionally, amenities are also a priority; these include electricity and water, sanitary facilities, safe drinking water, roads, police and emergency services, postal and communication facilities, media, etc. These structures ensure that the tourists stay safe and sound during their stay in a destination. Tourists need to have access to basic facilities to feel comfortable and secure.

B) Hierarchy of Needs

One of the most useful analyses of human motives is Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. One of Maslow’s assumptions is that needs fulfillment is progressive: one starts at the lowest level and only move to the next if the former has been fulfilled. Therefore, according to Maslow, one is not concerned with security or safety needs until their need for food has been fulfilled [13]–[16]. Importantly, the hierarchy of needs describes the importance of learning new information in order to understand the world. This information provides insightful lessons that motivate an individual to continuously climb the upper stages up to self-actualization.

This study applies Maslow’s model on PWE which explains the lower hierarchical needs that must first be satisfied before an organization can move to higher ones. Lynn explained that the bottom-level needs found the steadiness and capability to move up the hierarchy. Internal and external changes occurring within and without PWE may cause adverse effects to its financial stream, and this can be demotivating [17]. Before such a challenge, PWE must improve its networking, promotion, marketing and facilities.

C) Sustainability

The Latin root of the word “sustainability is sus tenure, which mean to “hold up” or “maintain”. (Jacques, 2015). According to World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (1992), “sustainability as a development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” That means sustainable development is a development process to prevent the worst damage towards nature for the sake of future generations. According to McIntosh and Arora (2001) in SIGMA, they define organizational sustainability is closely related to the survival in the industries for a long term. Meanwhile, for the organization, they focus more on the economic aspect to support operation and to sustain in the market.



Figure 1: Components of Sustainability Development

There are three important components of sustainable development, which are economic, social and environment. Hence, all of these components must align with the development process to ensure the goals outlined by this model are achievable. Based on Figure 1.0, social is one of the components of sustainable development. Social component relates to the human relationship, an interaction between peoples and human behavior [18], [19]. In other words, the social component is about a human being that lives in society and has distinctive patterns of action that distinguishes them from other. The next component is the development in the economic aspect which must have an intensity to create a maximum flow of income in rational use, efficiency in using resources, especially for the limited resources. In this situation, more benefit could be gained if the development of the economic aspect was planned for a long-term period.

The growing number of the senior citizen cottages today proved that there is a crucial need in providing enough facilities to the senior citizens. The change in the trend among this community of people showed that this group preferred to spend most of their times in this type of place [20]. The activities offered mostly lead them towards the preparation for the life in hereafter which the main reason usually focuses on enhancing their religious knowledge. Hence, it is significant to identify the factors that could contribute to the sustainability of these senior citizen cottage institutions.

As a matter of fact, in the beginning, most of the senior citizen cottages were built based on individual initiatives by using their personal funding or *waqf* (mortmain property). However, there is a need for financial assistance for

the maintenance of the institutions especially in terms of management of utilities bills, space rental and education fees for the senior citizens. Due to this, most of the help were gained from the public through advertising the needs in the local printed and online newspapers, television and even social media.

With the continuous requests from the senior citizens for the needs of such institutions, this group needs comfort for them to feel like home so that they will be at peace in enhancing their knowledge [21]. Perhaps, official funding from the government, NGOs and the public could contribute to the sustainability of these senior citizen cottages for a better and comfortable place to stay for the senior citizens. For example, in Selangor state, a study on the senior citizens has found that the economics changes is one of the reasons of why parents could not rely on their children at their when they are old [22]. Although most of the institutions require self-funding from the students (senior citizens), there are huge gaps among these institutions based on the affordability of the residents and the requirements of the institutions. Furthermore, many of the residents use their pensions as their funding sources and others use their life saving money or obtain help from their children.

The awareness among the society on the well-being of the senior citizens is also important as one of the ways in ensuring the sustainability of these senior citizen cottages. Nur Syakiran Akmal Ismail et al. [21] stated that 87 percent of the respondents in their study were not aware of programs organized by the government. An example is the PAWE programs, through a strategic collaboration of the Women, Family and Society Development Ministry and other government agencies and NGOs; which also focuses on the well-being of the senior citizens. Another example is there were cases where children sent their parents to the institutions without knowing that almost all entries to these institutions are through self-willing and the interest to enhance their religious knowledge and *ibadah* [8]. Thus, it is the responsibility of the parties involved with the senior citizens cottages and the government to ensure the efficiency of how to disseminate information on the awareness of the well-being of the senior citizens through the institutions.

III. Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach using a focus group discussion (FGD). The discussion was organized into four sessions of different topics titled, 1) the concept of PWE; 2) needs of PWE; 3) readiness of PWE; and 4) PWE and Islamic tourism. There were 15 participants representing two centers which randomly chosen namely *Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas* (PAWE) for 10 persons and another five from *Yayasan Al-Jenderami* (YAJ). The discussions were analyzed according to strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT). While SWOT analysis is intended to identify the current phenomenon of the PWE, TOWS is used to establish strategies of sustainability for PWE in Malaysia tourism.

IV. Results and Findings

Focus group discussion allows the participants to share their ideas based on their knowledge and experiences. FGD brings the opinions together that enable constructive arguments towards the three important issues namely the needs, readiness and the PWE as an Islamic tourism destination. Regardless of the institution they represented, the researchers were able to construct the discussion which was divided into three groups within seven hours.

Having had the discussions, the data was analyzed according to strength, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) (see Figure 1). The responses of the three groups were translated into the sustainable framework for PWE as an Islamic tourism destination. The SWOT analysis establishes optimistic synergy overcoming threats and weakness and at the same time maintaining the strengths as well as creating opportunities in making the PWE as an Islamic tourism destination a success.

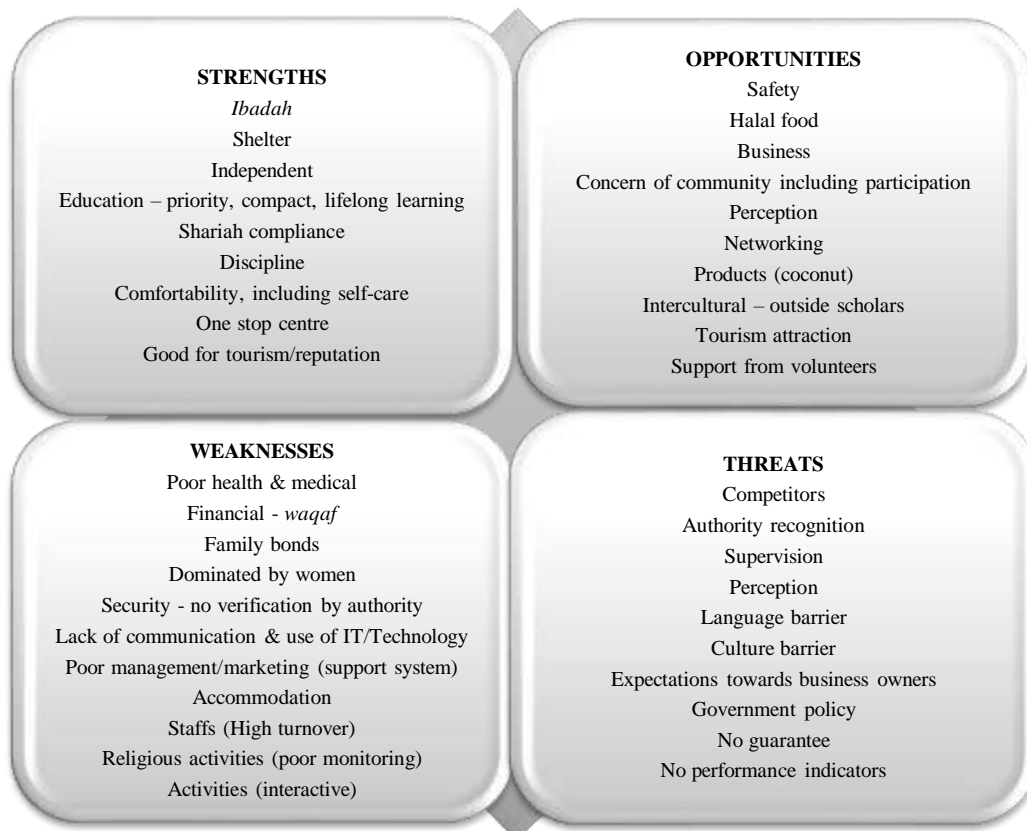


Figure 2: SWOT Analysis of Sustainability Framework of *Pondok Warga Emas* as an Islamic Tourism Destination in Malaysia

4.1 Sustainable framework for PWE as an Islamic tourism destination

This study reveals significant remarks on the needs and readiness of PWE as an Islamic tourism destination. In order to accommodate the gap, this study takes an optimistic approach of SWOT analysis on the data obtained through focus group discussion with 15 senior citizens from Yayasan Al-Jenderami (YAJ) and Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas Putrajaya (PAWE). Based on the SWOT analysis (see Figure 1), this research establishes the sustainable framework of PWE as an Islamic tourism destinations with ten strategies, as follows:

Strategy 1: Making a registration with local council/authority for monitoring and recognition purposes.

Every PWE should make registrations to the authority namely Municipal Council, Department of Welfare, Islamic tourism Centre and make themselves visible to the local travel agencies. Every registration should be made compulsory for following factors:

- *Easy access for information among travel agencies, ministries and tourists;*
- *Monitoring systems that allows inspection on security, safety, activities, teachings and legal aspects of the tourists involved; and*
- *Local products available for tourists attractions;*

Strategy 2: Establishing collaboration among PWEs through Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

In order for PWE to sustain in the landscape of tourism, the collaborations is suggested as strength as opposed to individual entity. Since every *pondok* has different ways of managing the place, a collaboration, for instance, an association of PWE, could be of extra mileage for marketing and promotion purposes. The linkage among the PWE should be

presented in the professional and formality such as MoU or Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the inclusion of details for any particular tourism packages they intend to offer. The documents are crucial for references and improvements can always be done in future. In Kelantan, for instance, every PWE (seven altogether) should develop the collaboration for exclusive packages specifically for tourists.

Strategy 3: Obtaining health checks - cooperation with Ministry of Health (MoH)

PWE should have health checks services from MoH either the general practices or private clinics. Due to the uncertain health conditions among the senior citizen, the PWE should take necessary precautions for their health conditions by having the health checks from time to time. There will implications of the finance, and thus, cooperation with the MoH is an urge.

Strategy 4: Making the business public through the use of media and social media

The existence of PWE should be made known to the public especial local citizens. PWE should have channel of communication that promote and inform others about the products and services they have for senior citizens. Besides media coverage, every PWE should develop the marketing strategy that allows access, not limited to Malaysian and Muslims, for non-Malaysian as well as non-Muslims. This is due to the nature of tourists themselves who are always keen to learn about other places which include cultures, heritages, and religion respectively. While the social media makes it available across places and time, the needs of PWE as Islamic tourism destinations should be created and promoted for tourism destination in Malaysia.

On top of that, the PWE should use the social media such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter to promote every activities as an exclusive program for senior citizen development. The trainers (called as *ustaz* or *ustazah*) can part of you tubers which eventually can generate income for the PWE.

Strategy 5: Obtaining shariah compliance and halal certification by JAKIM

Malaysia is globally known for the halal hub which is managed by JAKIM. Islamic tourism apparently does not belong to any schemes for halal certification. It is, therefore, crucial to PWE to ensure that the place fulfil the Muslims needs by make it compliance to shariah and certified halal for the premises that provide food and beverages. The process may involve financial commitments and human resources which take longer time to accomplish.

Strategy 6: Receiving supports (subsidy, social welfare, marketing, published list) from Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC)

PWE has its own markets and audiences in the landscape of Islamic tourism. Rather than a profitable oriented organizations, PWE provides greater values than the price it has to offer. The mechanism of promoting PWE needs to be assessed from number of sources such as education, health, finance, technology and local authorities together.

It is, therefore, essential to the MOTAC to have proactive actions by synergizing the relevant authorities to work together for the success of PWE as an Islamic tourism destination. The process has to be designed into short and long term operations. The short term plan equips PWE for the establishment while the long term plan aims for the independency of PWE

Strategy 7: Developing rapport and reputation among stakeholders (Partnerships).

PWE stakeholders should develop a healthy network among each other especially the owners of the institutions. The management of every *pondok* vary from one another which shows obvious differences in terms of their strength and weaknesses. Having close and harmonious relationship and good reputation with each other will help to build mutual

understanding and a healthy competition in the development of such institutions. The missing of linkage among them resulted in huge differences for the facilities as well as management from each *pondok* itself. A good relationship will help them to learn each other's weaknesses, create new ideas and make better innovations than previous condition.

Strategy 8: Providing Training of Trainer (ToT) for every teacher from recognized body of academic.

The existing PWEs shows disconnection among other PWEs. The Islamic teaching that is taught at every *pondok* is apparently different from one to another. Having had this condition, this research come out with the strategy that is concerned with the contents of Islamic teaching. The ministry that is involved in the monitoring of PWE should establish guidelines that look into the needs of standardized Islamic teaching contents at PWEs. The Islamic teaching should include teaching modules, trainers or teachers, teaching aids and teaching references. The trainers should be given a Training of Trainer (ToT) to ensure the quality as well as the permissible contents of Islamic teaching according to JAKIM requirement. It is essential to equip the trainers with proper and suitable training especially from authorized parties such as JAKIM and public or private universities or colleges in ensuring the quality and the validity of the contents of the Islamic teachings provided in the *pondok*. Besides that, the teachers should be prepared with basic knowledge on how to teach the senior citizen students they have in improving or developing their teaching skills.

Strategy 9: Seeking financial supports from the Ministry of Finance (MOF)

From the analysis of SWOT, it is found that there is a need in helping these PWE in terms of financial. It is learnt that most of these institutions obtained their source of funds merely from donations (i.e. money and other daily needs) or also known as *waqf* from the public or from certain government, private and NGO institutions. In order to sustain the maintenance of the institutions and the well-being of the senior citizens, the Ministry of Finance could provide assistances on the development of PWE in a form of subsidies, allowance, or grants. It is also learned in terms of financial support in fulfilling the needs of these institutions for a more hygienic and healthier place to stay or live in.

The readiness of PWE is very crucial for tourism purposes. Not only the aspiration and the understanding of Islamic tourism, but the infrastructure as well the logistics preparation should be met by PWE. The readiness is an evident of confidence and needs of tourists to visit PWE and participate in the package for Islamic learning and teaching programmes.

Strategy 10: Registration with the Ministry of Welfare, Community Well-Being, Women, Family and Childhood Development.

Most of the existing PWE are registered as foundations only. If these institutions were seen potential as one of Islamic tourism places in Malaysia, there is a need to upgrade them as registered institutions under the collaborations of the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (as mentioned in Strategy 1), Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development especially when majority of the residents were women as compared to men. With the official registration, these institutions will be more protected under the legal terms and conditions besides gaining potential benefits from future plans under the ministries in contributing to the good reputation of Malaysia either from economics or social perspectives.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, In conclusion, there is a market and needs for PWE as an Islamic tourism destinations in Malaysia. The market is not limited to locals but also foreigners who wish to gain knowledge and experience of senior citizens living in the *pondok* system. PWE has to understand the positioning, in the landscape of tourism, in terms of role, functions, and readiness. There should be a balance between the needs and readiness which can be resolved through ten strategies as the sustainable framework as an Islamic tourism destinations. In the meantime, MOTAC

should design a model of PWE that suits the concept of Islamic tourism, which involves agencies namely Registration of Companies (ROC), Legal Affairs Division (BHEUU), local councils, JAKIM, Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (JKM), Shariah compliance and halal, Islamic teaching, and JAKIM Certified trainers (ToT).

This research believes that PWE has greater potentials in future especially when Malaysia, Indonesia and Japan are among the aging countries that has the oldest population in 2030. Currently, Japan is the first rank of top ten countries worldwide with 28.4% of its population. This study, thus, suggests, a further investigation should include the needs of PWE among the foreign tourists in the aspects of attractions, activities, facilities of PWE as an Islamic tourism destination. The findings will reveal a greater picture of PWE in the landscape of tourism in Malaysia.

Finally, it is hoped that the government is able to have new policies and regulations for these institutions to be recognized in order to sustain them. Besides upgrading the level of this type of service or business, the policies and regulation could protect these institutions in terms of safety and making it legal and convincing. Perhaps, providing funds for these institutions could also help them to provide comfortable facilities that these senior citizens deserve which could also lead to a better management of the institutions in terms of financial.

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