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## THE RISING WAVE OF THE MUSLIM MILLENNIAL TRAVELLERS

By 2020, Muslim travel is set to generate an income of up to US\$220 billion, as reported in the Mastercard-Crescentrating Global Muslim Travel Index 2018.<sup>1</sup> Based on the Index, this is no small trend to be ignored and cast aside. It represents an enormous opportunity for countries and organisations who can successfully address the Muslim market’s needs, and an enormous threat for those who ignore its impact. Muslim travellers have never let their religion prevent them from travelling; as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> Century, Islamic explorers such as Abu al-Hasan al-Mas’udi, the ‘Herodotus of the Arabs’, and Ibn Battuta travelled the world, examining the culture, geography and history of far-flung countries. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Muslim travel is accelerating at an ever faster speed, and brings with it millions of travellers who want to see the world in a faith-compatible manner.



To tap into this growth, all tourism industry stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the broad tenets of Muslim-friendly travel. This article will examine those faith-based needs and how Muslim travel agencies can take advantage of those needs to successfully capture market share.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.crescentrating.com/halal-muslim-travel-market-reports.html>



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## WHO ARE MILLENNIALS?

Millennials are famously labelled “Generation Y” or the “Net Generation”. The term Millennial usually applies to individuals who reached adulthood around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however the precise delineation varies from one source to another. Neil Howe and William Strauss are often credited with coining the term.<sup>2</sup> Howe and Strauss define the Millennial cohort as individuals born between 1982 and 2004.

Though there is a great deal of variation from one individual to another within any generational cohort, the particular generational environment affects those individuals in observable ways speaking to broad tendencies. This definition of the term encompasses reported tendencies of Millennials in the workplace, Millennials and technology and Millennials’ involvement in culture.

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## MILLENNIALS CHARACTERISTICS

Millennials have been characterised in a number of different ways. Unfortunately, Millennials have been cast in a negative spotlight in many studies conducted by researchers and psychologists, which describe Millennials as lazy, narcissistic and prone to jump from job to job.

Millennials are popularly described as a generation of “Me, Me, Me”. By now, all of us are familiar with new terms such as “selfie” and “YOLO”. A story in Time in May 2013 titled “The Me Me Me Generation,” begins: “They’re narcissistic. They’re lazy. They’re coddled. They’re even a bit delusional. Those aren’t just unfounded negative stereotypes about 80 million Americans born roughly between 1980 and 2000. They’re backed up by a decade of sociological research”.<sup>3</sup> The article also points out that Millennials may be simply adapting quickly to a world undergoing rapid technological change.



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<sup>2</sup> Authors of the 1991 book *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069*, and the 2000 book *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*

<sup>3</sup> <http://time.com/247/millennials-the-me-me-me-generation/>



## GENERATION ME

There is a lively, if not exhausting, debate about whether Millennials are self-entitled narcissists or open-minded do-gooders; surely the truth lies somewhere in-between. Generally, however, there seems to be more of an emphasis on the self than in previous generations, which is one reason why this group has been called Generation Me. Research presented at the 2016 annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP) in San Diego found that Millennials themselves do believe that they are more narcissistic than previous generations, but they don't like it.<sup>4</sup> Further, the uptick in narcissism is only very slight when compared with other generations.

Open Minded



Despite some negativity, Millennials have also been described in many positive ways. They are generally regarded as being more open-minded, and more supportive of women rights and equal rights for minorities. Other positive adjectives used to describe them include confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and receptive to new ideas and ways of living.

## MUSLIM MILLENNIALS & TRAVELLING

We are in the era of digitalisation, technology and exuberant modernisation. However, even in this changing modern world, one thing is evergreen: humans are wanderers at heart, and travelling has fast become a lifestyle rather than just a dream. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, travelling has become more than a trend, and many people can afford to travel no matter how fragmented the travel industry has become.

Interestingly, approximately one billion Muslims under the age of 30 in Muslim majority countries make up a large portion of Muslim Millennials! By 2030, Muslims are projected to make up 29 percent of the global young population aged 15–29.<sup>5</sup> These Millennials are avid travellers, and based on *The Mastercard-HalalTrip Muslim Millennial Travel Report 2017 (MMTR2017)* this is a sector predicted to inject US\$100 billion worth of travel expenditure into travel industry by 2025.<sup>6</sup>

These figures were released during the Arabian Travel Market's Global Halal Tourism Summit 2018, which took place at the Dubai World Trade Centre on 24th April this year.<sup>7</sup> Faez Fadhilallah, Founder & CEO of Salam Standard and Tripfez, highlighted the growing importance of Muslim millennial travellers that is illustrated by the changing global socio-economic trends, and underscored potential pent-up demand in the first seminar of the Summit, entitled "Halal Tourism – How far have we come?"

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.spsp.org/news-center/blog/spsp2016-in-the-news>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ceif.iba.edu.pk/pdf/ThomsonReuters-stateoftheGlobalIslamicEconomyReport201617.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://newsroom.mastercard.com/asia-pacific/press-releases/the-rising-wave-of-muslim-millennial-travelers-shaping-a-us100-billion-market/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://news.wtm.com/muslim-travelers-will-spend-157-billion-by-2020/>



At 35 days a year, Millennials log more travel days than any other generation. While they share Gen Z travellers' #YOLO philosophy, they prefer all-inclusive, worry-free beach vacations and spa treatments. Seventy percent of Millennials stayed in a hotel on their last trip, more than any other generation. However, they also spent less of their budget on hotels than other generations.

According to the MMTR2017, approximately 46 percent of Muslim Millennials travel between two to five times a year. A majority of their trips were for leisure and holidays, experiencing local culture and heritage or visiting friends and relatives. Travel agents must account for the factors that come into play when Muslim Millennials plan their journeys. Among these factors are the cost of flights, the cost of accommodation and, of course, the availability of halal food. Additionally, agents must cater to the fact that Muslim Millennials also value first class experience, affordability and accessibility in various aspects of their travel.



The growth of the young Muslim market segment, which is increasingly affluent, signals a huge potential for the international market of Muslim-friendly, travel-related products and services.

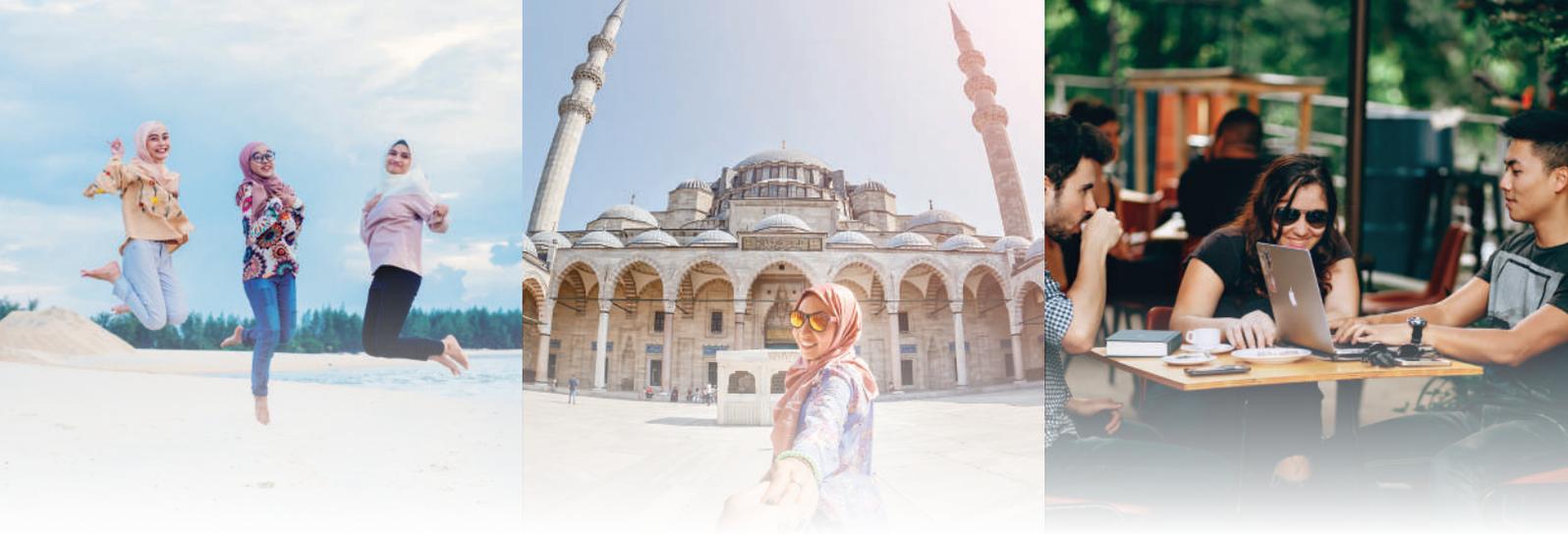
Travel within this young generation of Muslims is booming as consumers with increased disposable income seek more exotic experiences and far-flung destinations than their parents.

As the Muslim Millennial market continues to expand, there is no denying that they will be a key driver of growth for the travel industry. Service providers looking to tap into this segment need to understand Muslim Millennials' relationship with travel and what research shows they value; things such as authenticity, affordability and accessibility. Providers must also cater to Muslim Millennials' faith based needs and requirements.

According to a study<sup>8</sup> by The Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA), of all the countries in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and Turkey are the largest outbound travel markets for Muslim Millennials. Germany, the Russian Federation and India rank as the top three outbound travel markets for Muslim Millennials in non-OIC countries.

MATTA estimates that more than 30 percent of Muslim travellers in 2016 were Millennials, with another 30 percent belonging to Gen Z, the demographic cohort chronologically subsequent to Millennials. With 121 million Muslim international visitors in 2016, over 72 million Muslim travellers were members of either the Millennial or Gen Z cohort.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.comcec.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/7-TUR-AN.pdf>



Muslim Millennials surveyed stated that, in addition to traveling for leisure and holiday purposes (93%), they travel to experience local cultures and heritage (63%) and to visit friends and relatives (43%).

Below are some basic challenges that Muslim travellers face when determining how to travel in a way that is compatible with their Islamic beliefs.

## THE CHALLENGES FOR MUSLIM MILLENNIALS

CONSUMER'S CHALLENGE	STAKEHOLDER AFFECTED
How can I find somewhere to pray and eat at the airport?	Airport Airline National Tourism Organisation (NTO)
How can I get halal in-flight meals?	Airline
I need my hotel to have a prayer mat and halal meal options	Hotel NTO
Where can I find Muslim-friendly hotels to book online?	Hotel NTO Destination Management Company (DMC) Online Travel Agency (OTA)
Where can I find a clean and comfortable prayer room for my afternoon prayers?	NTO DMC Attraction Restaurant
Where can I find travel information about Muslim-friendly hotels / restaurants / attractions?	NTO Hotel Attraction OTA
Where can I find 'authentic' halal food?	NTO Restaurant
What certification is used?	NTO Hotel DMC Travel Agency
How can I travel during Ramadan?	NTO Hotel DMC
How can I have a more authentic and adventurous holiday?	NTO DMC

Many of these questions involve multiple stakeholders, but one stakeholder appears more times than all the rest: the National Tourism Organisation (NTO). This one stakeholder, above all, must communicate Muslim travellers' needs and challenges to the other stakeholders who represent their interests: hotels, Destination Management Companies (DMCs), attractions, airlines, airports and so on. The NTO must also advocate for ground-level changes to create a welcoming destination for Muslim travellers.

Reviewing these challenges, it seems that there is one possible overarching solution: a Muslim-friendly urban environment.

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## MUSLIM-FRIENDLY URBAN ENVIRONMENT



Some of the most welcoming features to Muslim travellers in an urban environment are facilities that allow Muslim travellers to perform the five obligatory daily prayers, each of which must be performed within a specific window of time: pre-dawn, afternoon, evening, sunset and night. As prayers are staggered throughout the day, Muslim travellers benefit from ready access to a dedicated and clean space where they may perform these prayers before resuming their journey or activities.

In countries with a sizeable number of Muslim visitors, it is common for public spaces such as airports, bus and train stations, shopping complexes and tourist attractions such as theme parks to provide dedicated prayer facilities for their patrons, sometimes referred to as “mushollas”. However, such spaces do not need to be reserved for the sole use of Muslims; indeed, it has become increasingly common for places such as universities and airports, particularly those in non-Muslim majority countries, to provide multi-faith prayer rooms or chapels. Such facilities should be clearly signposted and marked in the building directory.

For a facility to be conducive to prayer, the space should be clean, enclosed, segregated between men and women (with clear labelling on the respective doors) and equipped with facilities for ablution. In the prayer area, the building manager is encouraged to install an arrow pointing towards Mecca, the direction Muslims must face while performing their prayers (qibla).

While not essential, the availability of prayer mats, a wall clock (to ascertain prayer times), women's prayer robes and copies of the al-Quran also significantly improve the Muslim-friendliness of the facility.





## CONCLUSION

Based on projections, young Muslims aged 15-29 will comprise nearly 30 percent of the global population by 2030.<sup>9</sup> To ignore this trend would be foolhardy. As technology makes booking travel even easier, flights and transportation create links across the Middle East, and North Africa and Asia rapidly expand, Muslim travellers are being offered a choice of destinations previously unavailable to them. These are often destinations which have traditionally been thought of as difficult for Muslims to visit. However, thanks to an increasing number of NTO campaigns and informational websites dedicated to Muslim-friendly travel, these destinations are now firmly on the radar of Muslim travellers, and are having positive impacts on the overall tourism GDP of those countries.

A whole new landscape of travel start-ups dedicated to solving issues faced by Muslim travellers has sprung up, from sites rating a hotel's Muslim-friendliness to sites reminding travellers of prayer times or identifying where to find halal restaurants on-the-go. Furthermore, with such a sizeable market that is only set to grow, there are plenty of commercial opportunities that are still untapped.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Erica Annuar** worked in marketing and corporate communications for nearly 10 years. She now leads the content and offline marketing wing for **Tripfez** on weekdays and in her free time, she's affectionately known by her students as Teacher Erica at Cambridge English for Life.

Erica's passion for travel was ignited when her parents made her pack her bag and join them on an Islamic Historical tour to Turkey, Spain and Morocco when she was 10. When her travel needs can't be achieved, she will find an alternative to indulge her travel lust in between pages of her favourite books.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/the-future-of-the-global-muslim-population/>

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