

Current Trends in the Marketing of Islamic Tourism

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to review the available research studies on the current trends in Islamic tourism. The Halal industry is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today. This paper aims to review some of the research studies which have been carried out on the latest trends in Halal tourism. For the purpose of this paper, specific search terms were used in the Google Scholar search engine. The results were then shortlisted according to the year of publication. The results of this review study point towards significant ground being gained by Halal Tourism or Islamic Tourism over the past decade. This study shows that there is possibility that the demand for Halal Tourism will continue to grow over the next decade. With the worldwide population of Muslims growing and with the disposable incomes available with this population increasing alongside, Halal Tourism is set to only grow and evolve over the next few years. It is also possible that more such trends evolve over the next few years.

Keywords: Islamic Tourism, Marketing, Review, Halal

Introduction

With the number of Muslims increasing throughout the world, concepts of Islam, such as Halal, have gained importance. The demand for Halal-friendly products and services increasing throughout the world. This demand for Halal has touched all facets of life including tourism. With increasing number of Muslim travelers around the world, the concept of Halal tourism is really gaining ground.

According to Baker, Ahmad, Alserhan & Zeid Ahmad Alserhan (2011), the Muslim market is generally considered to be a relatively homogenous market as well as consumer group (as cited in Islam and Chandrasekaran, 2013). There are certain values and principles inherent in Islam which bind its followers together. Due to the homogeneity in the tenets and principles of Islam across the world, it is assumed that the Muslim consumer group would also be homogenous in nature. Hence, the concept of 'Ummah' or 'nation' has become very important for marketers in order to engage with Muslim markets and customers and has the potential to be extremely beneficial for the marketer (Baker Ahmad Alserhan & Zeid Ahmad Alserhan, 2012 – as cited in Islam and Chandrasekaran, 2013).

There are authors who argue against this assumption, as they think that there is significant heterogeneity in the Muslim market due to the presence of a number of sub-segments present in this consumer market (Ozlem Sandikci, 2011 – as cited in Islam and Chandrasekaran, 2013).

The field of Halal tourism is impacted by these trends. In this paper, we will cover the current trends in Halal tourism across the world.

Methodology

In this paper, we will review research studies which have been carried out on the subject of current trends in Islamic tourism. Towards this end, search terms such as 'Islamic tourism', 'Halal tourism', 'latest trends', 'Muslim Tourism' etc. were used in the Google Scholar search

engine. The results of these searches were shortlisted as per the year of publication. For the purpose of this paper, only studies published post 2010 were used in order to correctly gauge the current trends in Islamic tourism.

Results and Discussion

The PEW Research Center predicted in 2011 that by 2030, the Muslim population globally will grow to 30% of the world's population (Viverita, Kusumastusti, & Rachmawati, 2017). It is logical to assume then, that this population growth will also lead to a corresponding increase in the demand for Halal products and services in the next decade. This exponential increase in demand for Halal products and services can be connected to different factors such as the rise of Muslim social classes, social groups, trade unions, customers' organizations, business companies, international governments and transnational organizations (Papadopoulus *et al.*, 2008; Lever & Miele, 2012; Kearny, 2010 – as cited in Mahidin, Othman, & Saifudin, 2016). Due to increasing levels of education as well as disposable income of Muslim people across the world have led to changes in their consumption habits. The Halal industry has grown rapidly over the past decades and now encompasses various sectors including food, cosmetics, medicine, textile, finance and transport. There are newer sectors such as logistics, packaging, branding, travel as well as tourism.

Halal Tourism

Today, people across the world are travelling more frequently, and to more unique destinations, than ever before. Across the world, an increasing number of Muslims have also been travelling, mainly due to increase in disposable incomes. Islamic Tourism, also known as Halal Tourism, has been gaining popularity steadily.

Post 9/11, with the West imposing strict rules on Muslims, the travel destination for these travelers has shifted to the East, specifically to Asia. One of the primary destinations in this regard is Malaysia. It is estimated that in 2012, 5.44 million Muslim tourists arrived in Malaysia, or approximately 21% of the total number of tourists that arrived in the country (Samori *et al.*, 2016). As per Mohd Salleh, Othman, Mohd Noor, & Hasim (2010), the market for Muslim tourists in Malaysia has shown very high and sustained growth rate since 2001 (as cited in Samori *et al.*, 2016). The value of Muslim travelers currently represents 10% of the travel market and in 2011, spending was US\$ 126 billion, and is estimated to reach US\$ 192 billion by 2020 (Eid & ElGohary, 2015 – as cited in Liu, Li, Yen & Sher, 2018).

Authors are divided between whether Islamic tourism is a new phenomenon or a popular form of alternative tourism. As per Gabdrakhmanov, Biktimirov, Rozhko & Khafizova, (2016), Islamic tourism or Halal tourism is a relatively new social phenomenon. Authors such as Samori, Salleh & Khalid (2016) state that Halal tourism is a new phenomenon which has emerged from the growth of the Halal industry. These authors say that many Muslim as well as non-Muslim countries are ready to capture the Muslim tourist market by providing people with tourism products, services, facilities and infrastructure which caters to their needs and complies with the principles of Islam. But other authors have postulated differently. According to Kamarudin & Ismail (2018), Islamic tourism is considered as a popular form of alternative tourism where it has been introduced over the years in some countries, especially the Middle East and North Africa.

Definition of Halal Tourism

Halal Tourism or Islamic Tourism has been defined by various authors differently. According to Gabdrakhmanov et al. (2016), even though it doesn't have a specific definition, Halal tourism is a kind of tourism aimed at Muslims which provides an opportunity to the people to rest as per Islamic principles. From the perspective of Islam, tourism can be defined as Rehlah, Ziarah, Siyahah, Umrah and Hajj. The term Rehlah refers as gathering activities at recreational areas while Ziarah associates with visiting people and sacred places. Siyahah indicates the activity of travel throughout the world while Umrah and Hajj is the act of worship that require Muslims to go to Mecca and Medinah (Zulkifli, Rahman, Awang & Man, 2011 – as cited in Kamarudin & Ismail, 2013).

Different scholars have tried to define the term 'Halal Tourism', used interchangeably with the term 'Islamic Tourism'. Halal tourism is "any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in tourism Industry" (Battour & Ismail, 2016, p. 2 – as cited in Wardi, Abror & Trinanda, 2018). Different authors have offered different definitions of the term, although all of them include the concept of Halal in the phenomenon of tourism. Mohsin, Ramli, and Alkhulayfi (2016, p. 138) state that Halal tourism is a "variety of tourism which follows Islamic values" (as cited in Wardi, Abror & Trinanda, 2018). According to Musa, Ali, & Moghavvemi (2015), the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) defined Islamic tourism as "Muslim tourists travelling to destinations in which Islam is the dominant faith of the population, with religious purposes forming the majority of their intention" (pg. 3). The authors define the same as "the act of Muslims traveling and visiting places beyond their residence (to Muslim or non-Muslim countries) for more than one consecutive night for the purpose of pilgrimage, business, leisure or other activities; and the provision of facilities and services to support these activities, all of which are outlined by the requirement of total submission to the will of God, and conformity to Sharia".

In their study, Akyol & Kilinc define Islamic tourism as "the activities of Muslims travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for participation of those activities that originate from Islamic motivations which are not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited" (pg. 175). In this definition, the authors are more specific as to the motivations behind the travel undertaken by Muslims. They have specified that the travel needs to be for the purpose of activities originating from 'Islamic motivations'. This definition is different as it also specifies that these activities must not be related to activities 'remunerated from within the place visited'.

Key Attributes of Halal Tourism

Scholars such as El-Gohary (2016) maintain that Halal tourism involves the offering of tourist packages in line with the Islamic or Sharia law, dealing with Halal hotels and resorts, Halal foods, Halal logistics and Halal financial activities (as cited in Wardi, Abror & Trinanda, 2018). Hence, in their study, Wardi, Abror & Trinanda argue that Halal tourism basically encompasses tourism management activities permissible within the precincts of the Islamic law or the Sharia and that Halal tourism products and services need to follow the tenets in Islamic law. Other scholars such as Battour et al. (2014), Eid and El-Gohary (2015), and El-Gohary (2016), in their studies, have found certain basic attributes of Halal tourism which are the common deciding factors; these include worship facilities, Halal food, no prostitution, and no alcohol and no gambling (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018).

In their study, Battour and Ismail (2014) have talked about the four key attributes of Halal tourism - worship facilities, Halalness, general Islamic morality, and free from alcohol drinks and gambling (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). In this study by Battour and Ismail (2014), the authors state that worship facilities remain an important element for Muslims, even while travelling and on vacation. This element includes worship facilities, such as mosque, Qiblah direction and wudhu (ablution) facilities. The next element, Halalness, encompasses the Halal facilities, such as kitchen, cutleries, and Halal foods. By the element of general Islamic morality, the authors refer to basic rules in Islam which are common throughout the Muslim world including the dress code, banning prostitution, and censorship on entertainment media. The final element in the study by Battour & Ismail (2014) is centered around the regulation surrounding alcohol and gambling. These authors have argued that for restricting alcohol and gambling at Halal hotels and resorts, both Islamic values as well as government regulation are extremely important (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). It can be said that restrictions on alcohol and gambling at hotels are the minimum basic of what makes a hotel Halal.

According to El-Gohary (2016), there are other key elements within the concept of Halal tourism which relate to activities and products based on the concepts within Islam. Research has been conducted on these elements as well as these include what the Muslim tourists want while travelling. The study by Oktadiana, Pearce, and Chon (2016) reveals research on what Halal tourists want, including Halal food, restriction on alcohol, accommodation, and religious practices (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). Hence, it is essential that hotels vying to attract Muslim customers would do well to keep these likes in mind.

Halal tourism encompasses with objects and activities, related to tourism, which are suitable and best suited to Muslim tourists. A study done by Battour & Ismail (2016) found that Muslim travelers had been concerned about the lack of availability of Halal food products and services such as prayer rooms when they visited Japan. Hence, the Japanese government undertook measures to provide Muslim travelers with Halal products and services in places such as international airports. (as cited in Wardi, Abror & Trinanda, 2018). Provision of such facilities at public places such as airports fosters the growth of Halal tourism.

The backbone of the concept of Islamic tourism is the concept of Halal. 'Halal' is a word normally used in relation to consumption of food as per Islamic principles. But it is not limited to food; instead, it covers all aspects of Muslim life. It can be said to be a code which governs the entire life and lifestyle of a Muslim. According to Musa, Ali, & Moghavvemi (2015), Halal is, by itself, an entire system. This system encompasses all activities that a Muslim might undertake and prescribes the 'correct way' for all these activities.

The study by Gabdrakhmanov et al. (2016) says that in Halal tourism, hotels provide accommodation to Muslims, along with food and drinks that comply with all standards of Halal. Such hotels also have separate infrastructure and facilities for men and women, such as swimming pools and isolated beaches. Halal resorts have prayer rooms, even mosques, and announce prayer times (Gabdrakhmanov et al., 2016). Such hotels and resorts also offer special excursion trips for tourists to places related to Islamic history. These tourists can choose to rest without music and are provided with properly organized entertainment, within the principles of Islam.

Muslim Expectations

Considering the importance of Halal in the life of Muslims, it can be surmised that the expectations of Muslim populations from vacation and travelling are different from those of non-Muslims and are predominantly guided by Halal. This is true also because Halal guides the Muslim way of life and all its aspects. Hence, in order to attract Muslim customers, the marketing of hotels and their packages must encompass the 'Halalness' of services they offer.

The expectations of Muslim travelers on vacation have been studied in detail. A survey conducted by Dinar Standard in 2012, cited by Akyol & Kilinc in their 2014 study, showed that among Muslim tourists' expectations and perceptions of a holiday, halal food made up 66.8%, 'Muslim friendly' experience was 49.1%, and hotel/resort stay experience was 37.2%. In case the airlines, hotels and destinations were non-Muslim majority based, most of the Muslim tourists asked for Halal food options. Hence, even amongst Muslims, there are differences in expectations they have of vacation particulars such as hotels and resorts, food, airlines, destinations etc.

A few things that differentiate between Muslim and non-Muslim tourism are a lack of gambling, and drinking, and an inclusion of activities such as visits to mosques and Islamic historical sites. For Islamic tourism, provision of Halal meals at all times and set times for prayer throughout the tourists' stay, are compulsory. The growing demand for Islamic tourism has also given birth to a niche market – 'Halal friendly tourism'.

Halal-Friendly Tourism

As per Akyol & Kilinc (2014), Halal friendly tourism is inclusive of Halal transport (such as halal airlines), Halal hotels, Halal finance, Halal tour packages and Halal restaurants – five sectors which are related to each other.

Halal Hotels – Halal hotels or Islamic hotels are basically hotels which are Sharia-compliant. According to Idris & Razali (2016), Sharia-compliant hotels can be defined as those hotels which provide service to their customers in accordance to the principles of Sharia. Hence, the principles of Islam are used as a yardstick by which these hotels provide services to their customers. According to the World Tourism Organization (2010), Sharia-compliant hotels represented approximately 10% of the global tourism market (as cited in Idris & Razali, 2016). Since then, there has been a rapid increase in the share of Halal hotels in the global tourism market.

Ramli (2009) has classified Halal friendly hotels based on the five-star category, normally used to categorize hotels around the world (as cited in Akyol & Kilinc, 2014). The following is a tabular depiction of this classification:

Table 1: Halal Friendly Hotel Classification

Rating	Muslim Friendly Activities (in addition to other standard facilities in a reputable hotel)				
One Star	Qiblah Pointing Signage; Prayer rug in guest room				
Two Star	Halal Kitchen/Halal Food	Prayer Room	Qiblah Pointing Signage; Prayer rug in guest room		
Three Star	Only Halal Food & Alcohol Free Beverages Served	Dedicated Prayer Room/Surau with ablution space	Qiblah Pointing Signage; Prayer rug in guest room; at least 50% are no smoking guest rooms	Gym & Swimming Pool have dedicated hours for Ladies only	
Four Star	Only Halal Food & Alcohol Free Beverages Served	Dedicated Prayer Room/Surau with ablution space & resident imam	Qiblah Pointing Signage; Prayer rug in guest room; only no smoking guest rooms	Separate Gym & Enclosed Swimming Pool for Ladies	
Five Star	Only Halal Food & Alcohol Free Beverages Served	Dedicated Prayer Room/Surau with ablution space & resident imam	Qiblah Pointing Signage; Prayer rug in guest room; only no smoking guest rooms	Separate Gym & Enclosed Swimming Pool, Spa & Health Facilities for Ladies	Shariah Compliant Entertainment & Recreational Facilities for all ages

Source: Ramli, N. (2009). Halal Tourism: The Way Forward. In: International Conference on Law and Social Obligation, 2009, Kashmir, India.

Halal Transport (Airlines) – For the purpose of any system of transport being categorized as Halal, the standards include cleanliness, non-alcoholic drinks and publications which are coherent with Islam. Examples of Halal airlines include Qatar Airways, Emirates, Rayani Air, Egypt Air, Etihad Airways, Gulf Air etc.

Halal Food at Restaurants – In case of Halal tourism, food served at restaurants must be Halal. This means that animals must be slaughtered as per Islamic principles and the restaurant premises including the kitchens should be maintained and cleaned strictly in accordance with Halal standards. This also means that no alcoholic drinks can be served at the premises of Halal restaurants.

Halal Tour Packages – In Halal tourism, the tour packages being offered must be in accordance with the theme of Islam. This means that Halal tour packages must have itineraries which include visits to mosques and Islamic historical and heritage monuments. During the month of Ramadan, such packages must include events themed on the religion.

Halal Finance – Halal tourism must include ‘Halal financing’ for the hotels, airlines and travel agencies involved. This means that the financial resources of these entities must be in accordance with Islamic principles. Islamic principles in relation to financing state that there must be equal participation in sharing profits as well as losses of all stakeholders involved in the entity (Akyol & Kilinc, 2014).

Muslim Friendly Tourism

Halal-friendly tourism is also known as Muslim-friendly tourism. According to Zulkifli et al. (2011), Muslim friendly tourism (MFT) includes halal hotels, halal transport (halal airlines), halal food restaurants, halal tour packages and halal finance (as cited in Liu, Li, Yen, & Sher, 2018). MFT has been very popular in the recent decades and has become an important segment of international tourism. According to Liu et al. (2018), Muslim tourists are rising faster than the worldwide tourist growth rate. In their study, these authors posit that attributes such as destination image, travel attitude and travel intention play an important role in MFT. Destination image can be defined as “an individual’s mental representation of knowledge (beliefs), feelings and overall perception of a particular destination” (Crompton, 1979; Fakeye & Crompton, 1991 – as cited in Liu et al., 2018, pg. 30). It can also be said to be the “mental portrayal of a destination” (Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996 – as cited in Liu et al., 2018). A destination’s image can be developed based on the estimation or understanding of a region’s characteristics. Studies show that destination image is a key factor which encourages tourists towards particular destinations. In short, a positive destination image bears a higher probability of greater tourist numbers (Liu et al., 2018). According to various authors (Chon, 1990; Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Goodall, 1990), the destination image helps customers in not only choosing a destination, it will also help them evaluate their trip once it is over, forming their future intentions towards that particular destination (as cited in Liu et al., 2018). In their study, the authors maintain that Muslim friendly products and services, such as prayer rooms at public places and airports, customized meal plans during Ramadan etc., must be integrated in tourism destination planning, but the level of experience that the destination offers to other tourists must be maintained as well. This study by Liu et al. (2018) showed that MFT had a positive and significant impact on destination image, tourist’s attitude and travel intention. It also found that travel intention was a direct function of destination image and Muslim attitude. Liu et al. (2018) also identified that destination image positively affected Muslim tourists’ attitude towards a particular destination.

To conclude, it can be said that Halal tourism is on the rise, not just due to the Muslim tourist. For many non-Muslims too, Halal is the preferred option. The term 'Halal' denotes a standardization and perception of quality. Hence, many non-Muslims also prefer Halal. As per Akyol & Kilinc (2014), for both the Muslim as well as the non-Muslim market, Islamic tourism is a new product. Islamic or Halal tourism is an emerging concept, which is likely to gain prominence over the next few decades.

It is clear that people, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, who are interested in Halal tourism will pay attention to the key attributes of Halal tourism whenever they are planning to travel or visit a place. Authors such as Battour et al. (2014), Eid and El-Gohary (2015), Grisseemann and Stokburger-Sauer (2012), Han et al. (2017), and Iniesta-Bonillo et al. (2016) talk about the relationship between tourist perception on Halal tourism and their satisfaction and Word of Mouth (as cited in Wardi, Abror & Trinanda, 2018).

Halal Tourism and Customer Satisfaction

There have been studies which have examined the relationship between the tourism motivation and tourist satisfaction. Battour et al. (2014) examined the relation between attributes of tourism motivation and tourist satisfaction and identified that attributes of Halal tourism had a strong, positive effect on tourist satisfaction (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). Other authors such as Eid and El-Gohary (2015) have identified tourist values like Islamic physical and non-physical attributes as having significant effect on tourist satisfaction (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). In his study on Malaysian tourism, Rahman (2014) came to the conclusion Islamic attributes had a significant impact on tourist satisfaction, and even impacted their loyalty (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). Hence, it can be said that Halal or Islamic tourism and its attributes significantly influenced tourist satisfaction.

Authors have also examined the impact that customer-perceived value has on customer satisfaction. In their study, Eid and El-Gohary (2015) found that customer-perceived value has a significant impact on their satisfaction (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). The customers' perceived value of attributes of Islamic or Halal tourism can also be linked to customer satisfaction. Authors such as Yeo, Mohamed, and Muda (2016) examined the purchase motivation for Halal cosmetics and the effect that it has on customer satisfaction and found that the Halal purchase motivation had a strong, positive impact on satisfaction of Muslim customers. Hence, the Muslim customers' perceived value regarding attributes of Halal/Islamic tourism may affect their satisfaction (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018).

It can also be surmised that Halal practices in the tourism industry will also impact the satisfaction of the Muslim tourists. Authors such as Zailani et al. (2016) state that Halal practices in medical industry including doctors, and hospital services, have significant and positive impacts on the satisfaction of Muslim customers (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018). Hence, it could be said that Halal practices in the tourism sector will also have a significant impact on the satisfaction of Muslim tourists. The study by Iniesta-Bonillo et al. (2016) used Halal tourism attributes based on the study by Battour et al. (2014), and examined the relationship between sustainability, value, and satisfaction. They found that the perceived value of any tourism resort had a significant effect on customer satisfaction (as cited in Wardi, Abror, & Trinanda, 2018).

Islamic Tourism Marketing and the Internet

The internet is an important mechanism for the marketing of Islamic tourism. It offers a huge and easily available and visible platform for promotion of Islamic tourism. Through the internet, hotels can easily advertise their promotional offers using websites as well as social media. There are travel blogs and review websites specifically dedicated to the Muslim traveler, which offer plenty of information as well as reviews on hotels, airlines, tours, destinations as well as restaurants. Hotels, resorts and restaurants interested in marketing their promotional offers can get in touch with bloggers for reviews and recommendations.

Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI)

According to the study by Nisthar & Mustafa (2019), the GMTI is an index that measures and observes growth and development of Permitted tourism industry in the global context. The GMTI is used to analyse the behavioural pattern of Muslim travelers across the world. The Permitted tourism market is analyzed by Crescent Rating (Pvt.) Limited since 2011. The annual GMTI evaluates the destinations of tourism and the Permitted tourism market. GMTI also assesses Muslim-friendly destinations all over the world. GMTI comprises factors which measure and indicate the friendliness of travel and tourism nature in connection with the concept of Permitted/Muslim tourism. These factors include Access, Communications, Environment, and Services. As per the study by Nisthar & Mustafa (2019), access is further divided into factors such as Requirements of Visa, Connectivity of Air, and Infrastructure of Transport. Communications is further divided into the sub-factors such as Outreach, Ease of Communication, and Digital Presence. Safely and Culture, Arrivals of Visitors, and Enabling Climate are the sub-factors of Environment. Prayers and Permitted food (Core Needs), Airports and Hotels (Core Services), and Unique Experiences are categorized as the sub-factors of Services (Crescent Rating, 2018 – as cited in Nisthar & Mustafa, 2019).

These factors are now and then reviewed by Crescent Rating Pvt. Limited in order to fit the current and future requirements of the Permitted/Muslim tourism industry in the tourism destinations which prominently are targeting the arrivals of the Permitted tourists. Accordingly, GMTI in 2018 is further revised and added with some more new factors which measure the latest indications of the better Permitted tourism destinations and to promote the current nature of Permitted tourism in the respective destinations. The factors such as Transport Infrastructure, Digital Presence, Enabling Climate, and Unique Experiences are newly added with GMTI in year 2018.

Capital of Islamic Tourism

Since 2015, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has been declaring Capital of Islamic Tourism every year (Kamrudin & Ismail, 2018). Starting in 2015, Al-Quds Ash-Sharif has been chosen as the capital of Islamic tourism, followed by Konya (2016), Madinah Al-Munawwarah (2017) and Tabriz (2018). It is intended to create awareness about attractive tourist destinations among OIC member countries (Kamrudin & Ismail, 2018).

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be said that the global Halal industry has grown exponentially over the past few decades. This can be attributed to the increase in Muslim population, as well as the changing economics of this population. Halal tourism has gained significant ground over the past decade. The current trends involving Halal tourism, such as Halal-friendly tourism, GMTI, capital of

Halal Tourism etc. are likely to grow in the next few decades. Another trend which is visible is the demand for Halal by non-Muslims. With the population of Muslims increasing across the world, and the disposable income with this population increasing alongside, these trends are likely to continue to grow and get more popular. Also, there are chances of more such trends evolving as the demand for all things Halal grows across the world.

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