Halal tourism: An integrative review of concepts, challenges, and future directions

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ABSTRACT

This study emphasizes the imperative of global standards in halal tourism as practice differs widely due to varying interpretations and applications. This study explores the possibility and limitation of creating standardized procedures in addressing the growing Muslim travel market and enticing non-Muslim tourists with moral and sustainable experiences. Literature points to notable developments, particularly in providing halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and culturally acceptable accommodations. Disparities in definition and usage of "halal" remain a real barrier to standardisation. Following industry data and case studies, the research establishes that countries having sound halal standards and well-established global networks are more adept at bringing crowds of tourists as well as pushing sustainable development. It is proposed that one universal system needs to be put in place to enhance credibility, service quality, and cross-cultural appeal. The study focuses on Islamic-non-Islamic cooperation, investment-friendly infrastructure for halal, and ethical and sustainable values promotion for halal tourism. Future studies would build on these themes by examining the effect of technological innovation and halal certification on tourist preference and destination competitiveness. Stakeholders and policymakers would be informed by the analysis while crafting a harmonious, inclusive halal tourism model integrating economic and cultural aims.

1. Introduction

The growing global demand for halal tourism reflects an increase in Muslim travelers and a greater awareness of their specific needs within the tourism industry. Halal tourism integrates Islamic values through halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and Shariah-compliant services, establishing itself as a

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significant market segment. Serving a diverse audience, this sector aligns with religious and cultural values, offering experiences that emphasize ethics, modesty, and respect for religious beliefs, making it appealing to both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers (Boğan & Sarıışık, 2018). As the industry evolves, halal tourism is positioned to foster inclusive and diverse travel options globally, enhancing its role in future tourism development (Chantarungsri et al., 2024).

This review aims to thoroughly explore halal tourism by integrating core concepts, discussing current challenges, and proposing directions for growth. It synthesizes academic views on the definitions and scope of halal tourism, demonstrating how Islamic principles are incorporated into tourism practices to meet Muslim travelers' needs. Key challenges include standardizing halal certification and accommodating cultural differences across regions, with identified gaps suggesting the need for innovative technologies and sustainable practices (Boğan & Sarıışık, 2018). The review highlights how halal tourism can progress as a more inclusive and dynamic part of the global tourism landscape by addressing these issues.

Additionally, this review provides both academic and practical insights into halal tourism across various regions. Countries like Malaysia and the UAE have become central hubs, offering models that weave Islamic principles into their tourism infrastructure. Malaysia's focus on halal certification and hospitality standards has made it a leader in this sector, while the UAE appeals to Muslim and non-Muslim tourists by promoting culturally inclusive experiences (Echchabi et al., 2024; Poernomo et al., 2022). Meanwhile, nations with smaller Muslim populations, such as Singapore, are adapting halal-certified food and inclusive practices to cater to Muslim travelers (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Using a structured, integrative approach, this review combines scoping and systematic reviews to identify gaps in existing halal tourism research. Searches in academic databases such as Scopus provided comprehensive coverage, and keywords like "Islamic tourism," "halal certification," and "Muslim-friendly destinations" captured diverse perspectives. This integrative approach allowed for a holistic understanding by synthesizing both qualitative and quantitative insights.

This review identifies a major research gap: limited integration of regional and sectoral perspectives. While many studies focus on specific areas, such as halal certification or Muslim-friendly services, comprehensive research covering both established and emerging markets is lacking. Furthermore, limited studies address the rising interest in halal tourism among non-Muslim-majority destinations.

The review has three key objectives: to consolidate halal tourism concepts across various regions, examine stakeholder challenges, and propose future research and industry practices. In doing so, it aims to support the academic and practical discourse on halal tourism's sustainable growth. The paper is organized to cover: a literature review of fundamental concepts and definitions of halal tourism, a discussion on operational, regulatory, and cultural challenges, and an exploration of future directions, including technological innovations and market trends. The final section provides a summary of key findings.

But with growing scholarship on halal tourism, scant integrative conceptual work is consolidating its multifaceted aspects (e.g., ethical, operational, cultural, technological) into a unified explanatory framework and disentangles variation among strongly related terms such as halal tourism and Islamic tourism. On top of this, few of them are systematic or cross-country studies and contain little systematic information on issues which cross-cut them. This review bridges this gap by providing several viewpoints and emphasizing important conceptual and practical matters, with implications for future practice and research directions.

2.   Literature review

2.1   Review strategy

Though not using a systematic review protocol such as PRISMA in this paper, the narrative, integrative approach adopted is according to conceptual review practices. Researchers are aware of selection bias and, in that process, did the following: Peer-reviewed journals between 2015 and 2024 were screened from reputable scholarly databases, i.e., Scopus, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis. Research was selected based on thematic relevance to halal tourism, such as those concerning ethical tourism, consumer behavior, religious compliance, and post-pandemic consumer trends. The aim was to be geographically representative in regards to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and non-Muslim nation literature. Research specifically concerning pilgrimage or Islamic religious tourism with no broader application to halal tourism was excluded.

2.2   Concepts of halal tourism

Halal tourism represents a unique and growing segment within the tourism industry, tailored to meet the specific needs and preferences of Muslim travelers. It emphasizes offering services and facilities that adhere to Islamic laws (Shariah), ensuring that Muslim travelers can enjoy their trips while maintaining their religious values. A key feature of halal tourism is access to halal-certified food, where restaurants and food providers adhere to strict Islamic dietary guidelines, such as avoiding pork and alcohol and ensuring proper preparation methods (Nik Abdul Rashid et al., 2020).

In addition to halal-certified food, halal tourism prioritizes the availability of prayer facilities. Many accommodations and tourist sites provide designated prayer rooms or are situated near mosques, making it convenient for Muslim travelers to fulfill their religious obligations. Beyond food and prayer, halal tourism includes services that align with Islamic principles, such as modest dress codes, gender-segregated spaces, and activities designed to uphold Islamic values (Fazil et al., 2023).

Ethical and responsible practices are at the heart of halal tourism, reflecting Islamic principles of justice, inclusivity, and mutual respect. This focus on ethical tourism fosters an inviting environment not only for Muslim travelers but also for tourists from diverse backgrounds (Chantarungsri et al., 2024). By creating a welcoming atmosphere that respects cultural and religious diversity, halal tourism meets the varied needs of its audience while staying true to Islamic values. The structure of halal tourism ensures an inclusive and respectful experience. For example, halal-certified food remains a foundational element, offering dining options that comply with Islamic dietary laws, which prohibit pork and alcohol and require specific preparation methods (Henderson, 2016). This commitment allows tourism providers to cater to Muslim travelers' dietary needs, significantly enhancing their travel experience.

Similarly, prayer facilities are a critical component. The availability of prayer rooms or nearby mosques enables Muslim travelers to practice their faith conveniently while traveling. Hotels and attractions offering such facilities demonstrate a strong commitment to accommodating the spiritual needs of their guests, fostering a sense of comfort and inclusivity. The ethical framework of halal tourism further highlights practices that reflect Islamic values, including modesty, gender segregation in designated areas, and respect for cultural diversity (Diker et al., 2018). These practices enrich the experiences of Muslim travelers while upholding values of justice and mutual respect, making halal tourism appealing to non-Muslim travelers as well.

Within the broader tourism industry, there is often confusion between halal tourism and Islamic tourism, even though both cater to Muslim travelers in distinct ways. Islamic tourism focuses primarily on religious and spiritual experiences, such as visiting significant Islamic sites, and pilgrimage destinations, or participating in events that deepen religious engagement (Muslim & Harun, 2022). In contrast, halal tourism

encompasses a wider range of travel experiences that adhere to Islamic principles, including halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally respectful services.

While both types of tourism share the goal of serving Muslim travelers, their differences lie in focus: halal tourism offers an inclusive, leisure-oriented experience rooted in ethical practices, while Islamic tourism centers on spiritual fulfillment. As the industry evolves, distinguishing between these categories will enable more precise service offerings and marketing strategies to address the diverse needs of Muslim travelers effectively. Table 1 provides a concise summary of recent studies on halal tourism, highlighting the progression of research from 2019 to 2023. The table outlines authors (year),underpinning theory, outcome, method and samples and main findings from the literature.

The synthesis of recent research on halal tourism (2019–2023) offers significant insights into its sustainability, development, challenges, and future directions. Managing tourist satisfaction is essential for the sustainability of halal tourism destinations, as identified by Prawira et al. (2023), who highlighted the role of product quality, institutional support, and destination image in achieving this goal. Conceptually, halal tourism remains an underexplored niche segment, with its definition and sustainable development requiring further research, as emphasized by Ekka (2023). Supardin et al. (2023) also underscored the need for more studies in non-Muslim majority countries, identifying gaps in understanding Muslim traveler needs in such regions.

Challenges like the absence of international sharia standards and low literacy in Muslim communities persist. Zakaria et al. (2023) provided a systematic review, categorizing halal tourism development into themes such as marketing, products, customer behavior, and industry support services, and proposed a structured framework to advance its implementation.

The regional potential is evident in studies like Syufa'at and Zayyadi (2023), who examined sharia tourism in Baturraden Banyumas, Indonesia, highlighting the need for public awareness and infrastructure development. Similarly, Ningsih et al. (2022) stressed the importance of government and stakeholder collaboration in the West Aceh Regency to improve branding, promotion, and infrastructure for halal tourism. Experiential aspects were addressed by Sthapit et al. (2022), who found that memorable experiences involving hedonism, novelty, and local culture enhance place attachment among travelers.

1   Table 1. Summary of past studies in halal tourism

Authors (Year)	Underpining Theory	Outcomes	Method and Samples	Main Findings
Prawira,et al. (2023)	No particular theory was stated. However, the study emphasizes the key drivers of sustainability such as product quality, social and institutional support, and destination image. These drivers relate to broad service quality and destination image theories in tourism literature.	It concludes that improved product quality, social and institutional support, and destination image make the tourist more satisfied and promote the sustainability of destinations for halal tourism.	Systematic Literature Review using the PRISMA framework 11 selected research papers from the Scopus database, published between 2014 and 2023, focusing on tourist perspectives of halal tourism destinations	Halal tourism destinations can be sustainable by managing tourist satisfaction through product quality, institutional and social support, and image
Ekka (2023)	The study does not take a particular theoretical approach but summarizes common theories used in existing halal tourism literature	The paper acknowledges that, although it has grown, halal tourism remains in its early stages of development in business research. It identifies the primary concerns relating to halal tourism, prevailing theories within the literature, key authors, journals, and dominating research gaps. The article also proposes potential future research avenues in the field.	Systematic review of literature was conducted, considering 47 articles of the Scopus and Web of Science databases, published between January 2020 and January 2023 The sample is made up of 47 scholarly articles on halal tourism, selected from Scopus and Web of Science databases, between January 2020 and January 2023	Halal tourism is a growing niche segment in tourism, but its definition and sustainable development require further research
Supardin et al. (2023)	No particular theoretical framework is mentioned in the study, yet the study aims to show a general image of halal tourism studies through bibliometric analysis	The research indicates that the halal tourism research is very limited, particularly in non-Muslim nations. It suggests that more research should be carried out in such regions to enhance the knowledge and development of halal tourism globally	Systematic literature review with bibliometric analysis employing VOSviewer software 258 studies on the issue of halal tourism, available in the Scopus database, from 1997 to 2023	Halal tourism research is still relatively rare, especially in countries with a majority non-Muslim population, highlighting the need for future studies in these areas
Zakaria et al. (2023)	The study doesn't identify any particular theoretical background but aims at systematically examining the development of halal tourism conceptualized by stakeholder	The research lists four prominent themes in the development of halal tourism as follows: (1) marketing development, (2) products and services, (3) customer behavior, and (4) industry support services. The aforementioned themes are divided into 10 sub-themes, providing a wide range of awareness regarding	Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following ROSES (Reporting Standards for Systematic Evidence Syntheses) guidelines. The review process entailed five methodological steps: (1) development of a review protocol following ROSES guidelines, (2) development of a research question, (3) systematic search strategy based on identification, screening, and	Halal tourism development focuses on marketing, products, customer behavior, and industry support services, with four main themes and 10 sub-themes

Authors (Year)	Underpining Theory	Outcomes	Method and Samples	Main Findings
		stakeholder activities in promoting halal tourism.	eligibility, (4) quality appraisal, and (5) data extraction and analysis. The study critically examined 21 selected research papers on halal tourism, drawn from databases such as Scopus, Science Direct, and Google Scholar	
Syufa'at and Zayyadi (2023)	The study is grounded on DSN-MUI Fatwa Number 108/DSN-MUI/X/2016, which provides the initial idea concerning halal tourism in Indonesia.	The research discovers Baturraden Banyumas to have such potential to be developed in sharia tourism.	The study applies a constructivist framework to observe and interpret the conduct of communities in relation to tourist attractions. The research focuses on the community around and in Baturraden Banyumas tourist areas, their attitudes and behavior toward sharia tourism.	Sharia tourism potential exists in Baturraden Banyumas, Indonesia, with public understanding, adequate protection from immoral activities, and facilities for places of worship, restaurants, and souvenir shops
Sthapit et al. (2022)	The study relies on Memorable Tourism Experiences (MTEs) theory and explores dimensions of hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge, and how they influence place attachment in Halal tourism.	The results of the study support all eight hypotheses, indicating that the aforementioned factors are a key contributor to making Halal tourism experiences memorable. In addition, a positive relationship between memorable Halal tourism experiences and place attachment was discovered, and it is proposed that enhancing these factors can enhance the emotional relationships between Muslim tourists and destinations.	Quantitative research with a survey questionnaire to obtain data from Muslim tourists who had ever tried Halal tourism within the previous 48 months prior to the data collection period (April 2018–March 2022) The study sampled 312 Muslim tourists who had engaged in Halal tourism activities during the prescribed period.	A memorable Halal tourism experience is positively related to place attachment, with hedonism, novelty, local culture, refreshment, meaningfulness, involvement, and knowledge being key factors
Ismanto and Rofiq (2022)	The study does not explicitly mention a specific theoretical framework but focuses on the role of religious tourism in the development of halal tourism, emphasizing how religious sites and activities can attract Muslim tourists seeking experiences aligned with their faith.	Religious tourism plays a vital role in developing halal tourism by offering destinations that fulfil the spiritual and cultural requirements of Muslim tourists, thus making these destinations attractive to the halal tourism industry.	The study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing descriptive analysis to explore the relationship between religious tourism and halal tourism development. Specific sample details are not provided	Religious tourism in Pekalongan City, including Islamic traditions, festivals, and local wisdom, can contribute to the development of halal tourism but requires further exploration and packaging into regional tourist products.

Authors (Year)	Underpining Theory	Outcomes	Method and Samples	Main Findings
Ningsih et al. (2022)	The study does not explicitly mention a specific theoretical framework but focuses on the concept of halal tourism, which aims to provide tourism services based on Islamic law.	The research finds that West Aceh Regency is prospective to be developed in terms of halal tourism based on its cultural and natural potential. There is a challenge in the form of a requirement of intensive cooperation from the central government, local governments, and business players. There is emphasis given to promotion, branding, developing supporting facilities and infrastructure, and the attempt to change the mentality of the society and business actors in valuing the development of halal tourism	The study employs a descriptive qualitative research method, where literature reviews are employed to acquire and analyze relevant information. The research does not specify a particular sample population but focuses on analyzing existing literature and data related to halal tourism development in West Aceh Regency.	Halal tourism in West Aceh Regency has potential but requires strong collaboration between government, industry, and stakeholders for promotion, branding, and infrastructure improvements.
Hidayat et al. (2021)	The study does not establish a certain theoretical foundation but attempts to provide a general overview of the evolution and the current state of halal tourism research through bibliometric analysis.	The research identifies significant trends in halal tourism literature, referencing major authors, journals, institutions, and countries contributing to the study. It emphasizes further studies in non-Muslim countries to enhance knowledge and implementation of halal tourism globally.	The study employs bibliometric analysis techniques, including citation, co-citation, and co-occurrence of author keywords, to systematically review 77 articles retrieved from the Scopus database from publications in 2004 to September 2020. The research focuses on 77 scholarly articles on halal tourism, which are sourced from the Scopus database for the specified duration.	Halal tourism research has expanded over the past decade, with dominant authors, journals, institutions, and countries, providing insights for strategic initiatives to encourage Muslim traveler loyalty and satisfaction.
Ainin et al. (2020)	The paper lacks a definite theoretical framework but instead focuses on the analysis of social media data for trends and sentiments of halal tourism.	The research found that Japan has been the most tweeted halal tourist destination, followed by Malaysia and Indonesia. The research also showed the world-wide engagement in a Twitter discussion regarding halal tourism as an indicator for stakeholders to prepare for the promotion of halal tourism	The study employed sentiment analysis on multilingual tweets related to halal tourism. 85,259 tweets were collected based on 19 English and Bahasa Malaysia keywords and were analyzed in order to identify the source of tweets, determine major populations tweeting on halal tourism, analyze sentiment valence, and identify most frequently mentioned popular destinations. The population consisted of 85,259 tweets regarding halal tourism, collected over the period between October 2008 and October 2018.	Japan is the most-tweeted-about halal tourist destination, followed by Malaysia and Indonesia, with positive sentiments influencing future halal tourism strategies

Authors (Year)	Underpining Theory	Outcomes	Method and Samples	Main Findings
Rehman(2020)	The research does not take the name of any specific theory but is actually focused on the issue of halal tourism catering to the touristic needs of Muslim tourists for a family atmosphere.	The report highlights that Oman possesses all the ingredients to become one of the top destinations for halal tourism. But it is losing its spot in the top list. The report suggests that through proper guidelines and strategies, Oman can raise its attractiveness to Muslim travelers and improve its position in the halal tourism market.	The study takes a qualitative comparative stance in sampling two of the foremost halal tourism destinations in Indonesia, Lombok and another unidentified destination, to draw conclusions as well as make recommendations applicable to Oman. The study highlights case studies of Lombok and another top halal tourism destination in Indonesia to draw out best practices and recommendations for Oman's halal tourism growth.	Oman's halal tourism industry needs improvement to compete with Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey, and to attract more Muslim tourists.
Mohsin et al. (2020)	The study does not explicitly mention a specific theoretical framework but focuses on understanding community perceptions regarding halal tourism and its implications for sustainable development.	The research identifies that halal tourism has enormous potential to support sustainable development goals. It emphasizes the importance of public perception in the proper implementation of halal tourism schemes and suggests that tourism practices being harmonized with local community values and expectations can enhance the effectiveness and acceptability of halal tourism.	The study is based on a qualitative research approach, utilizing interviews and focus group discussions to gain insights on perception of halal tourism among communities. The study features 100 members including tourism and hospitality practitioners, government officials, community leaders, ethnic community members, business entrepreneurs, and Muslim leaders.	Halal tourism offers opportunities and challenges for tourism stakeholders, but enhancing its image can help it become a preferred destination for religious and social travelers
Rasul(2019)	The study does not mention any particular theoretical framework but attempts to conceptualize aspects of halal tourism like its concepts, definitions, principles, scope, and impacts.	The research outlines the perception, definition, and concepts of halal tourism. It provides economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts, and trends, opportunities, and challenges of halal tourism.	The study employs systematic literature review technique, with a specified methodology such as PRISMA, applied thematic analysis, and bibliographic documentary review in a hermeneutic-interpretative method. Analysis of a total of 27 articles on halal tourism has been considered	Halal tourism offers a distinct segment of the tourism industry for Muslims, with potential economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits
Vargas-Sánchez& Moral-Moral,(2019)	The study references the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) of Ajzen (1991) as significant in describing Muslim tourists' attitudes and behaviors, particularly concerning	The research presents a critical study of halal tourism, its main areas, gaps, and areas of contentious issues. Issues in ensuring authentication of halal tourism products are highlighted, e.g., the use of rising technology and digital	The study employs a systematic review of the literature approach, reviewing existing studies to consolidate known information and establish areas that require further research.	Halal tourism research is in its early stages. Still, the number of halal products and services is increasing worldwide, with challenges in authentication and the role of new technologies and the digital economy

Authors (Year)	Underpining Theory	Outcomes	Method and Samples	Main Findings
	matters like availability of halal food, religious places, and prohibition of immoral acts.	economy. A research agenda to address these concerns is proposed.	Since it is a literature review, it does not involve the collection of primary data from respondents but reviews various scholarly available literature and articles on halal tourism.	
Jia & Chaozhi(2020)	The study does not specify a particular theoretical framework but focuses on exploring the applicability of halal tourism attributes developed in Islamic countries to non-Islamic destinations.	The research suggests that halal tourism attributes developed in Islamic countries cannot be directly applied to non-Islamic countries. It emphasizes that while Muslim tourists have specific religious-related needs—such as halal food, water-friendly toilets, and prayer facilities—non-Islamic destinations may not fully meet these needs, often providing only halal food.	The study employs a qualitative research approach, conducting 32 interviews to gather insights into Muslim tourists' needs and tourism practitioners' responses in China. The research includes 32 interviewees, comprising Muslim tourists and Chinese tourism practitioners, to explore the dynamics of halal tourism in a non-Islamic destination.	Halal tourism attributes developed in Islamic countries cannot be applied to non-Islamic countries, as Muslim tourists' needs differ from those of Chinese tourism practitioners
Boğan and Sarıışık (2019)	The study does not present a specific theoretical framework but seeks to clarify the meanings of halal tourism and Islamic tourism by examining through literature and juxtaposing it with the Quran in an attempt to address conceptual and practical problems in the halal tourism industry.	The research differentiates 'halal tourism' and 'Islamic tourism,' suggesting that 'intention' and 'Islamic motivation' are key determinants that distinguish the two. It draws attention to definitional complexities and emphasizes the value of clear conceptualizations to avoid confusion in academia and business.	The study builds upon a critical assessment of existing literature, exploring definitions and perceptions of Islamic and halal tourism, and drawing upon Islamic sources to propose clearer distinctions between the concepts. As a literature review, the study does not gather primary data from the participants but examines data from available scholarly articles and religious books related to Islamic and halal tourism.	Halal tourism, a niche market for Muslim tourists, faces challenges like inconsistent terminology, lack of halal standards, and the need for halal certifications in hotels.

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The findings collectively highlight the importance of sustainability, clear conceptual frameworks, regional collaboration, and experiential factors in advancing halal tourism. With growing interest and demand, addressing these key themes will be critical to fostering its development and achieving its potential as a significant segment of the global tourism industry. Table 2 provides a critical synthesis of halal tourism literature. The table outlines the theme, consensus/key findings, disagreements/consistencies and gap in literature.

Table 2. Critical synthesis of halal tourism literature

Theme	Consensus/Key Findings	Disagreements/Inconsistencies	Gaps in Literature
Definition & Scope	Halal tourism involves services adhering to Islamic principles (e.g., food, prayer, modesty) (Nik Abdul Rashid et al., 2020).	Confusion persists between halal and Islamic tourism, causing ambiguity in service provision and research focus (Muslim & Harun, 2022).	Lack of a unified, operational definition across regions and studies; conceptual boundaries remain blurry.
Food & Beverage Services	Halal-certified food is foundational to halal tourism (Henderson, 2016).	Debate over standardization of certification procedures and whether local practices align with global expectations.	Insufficient research on how tourists perceive local vs international halal standards.
Prayer Facilities	Most scholars agree on the importance of prayer spaces in accommodations (Fazil et al., 2023).	Varying emphasis on whether prayer spaces are a minimum expectation or value-added service.	Little evaluation on accessibility and satisfaction levels with provided religious facilities.
Gender & Modesty Practices	Gender segregation and modesty codes are key principles (Diker et al., 2018).	Cultural variance in interpretation; some argue these requirements alienate non-Muslim travelers	Lacks user-centered studies on how travelers (Muslim/non-Muslim) perceive gender-based arrangements
Ethical/ Inclusive Tourism	Halal tourism is rooted in Islamic ethics of justice, respect, and inclusivity (Chantarungsri et al., 2024)	Tension between inclusivity and strict religious compliance — how to balance ethical openness with conservative norms.	Limited evidence on how inclusive halal tourism feels to non-Muslim travelers.
Technology & Innovation	Emerging tech (e.g., blockchain, digital platforms) supports halal tourism post-COVID (Sim, 2023; Harsanto et al., 2024).	Disparities in digital readiness across halal destinations.	More empirical work is needed to test the effectiveness and adoption of these technologies.
Halal vs Islamic Tourism	Halal tourism is broader and more lifestyle-oriented; Islamic tourism is more spiritual (Muslim & Harun, 2022).	Overlap creates confusion for marketers and policy makers.	Few studies explore traveler segmentation or motivations for choosing one over the other.
Post-COVID Recovery	Digitalization and ethical travel are emphasized for resilience (Abbas et al., 2021; Lubis et al., 2023).	Disagreement on whether halal tourism recovery strategies should be localized or standardized globally.	Lack of comparative data on post-pandemic recovery strategies in Muslim-majority vs. non-Muslim-majority regions.

3. Challenges in halal tourism

Halal tourism faces several key operational challenges, with inconsistent certification standards, lack of standardized regulations, and difficulties in service delivery topping the list. A major issue is the complexity and variation of halal certification requirements across countries. While halal food certification is fundamental to halal tourism, the absence of a global standard leads to confusion, making it difficult for service providers to consistently meet the expectations of Muslim travelers. This inconsistency undermines confidence in halal-certified services and products, impacting the trustworthiness of these offerings (Henderson, 2016).

In addition to certification issues, the lack of standard regulations governing halal tourism creates further obstacles. Different countries apply varying levels of strictness to halal practices, complicating the goal of providing a uniform experience for tourists. Some countries offer comprehensive halal frameworks, while others provide limited guidelines, complicating travel for Muslims seeking reliable halal options. Service

delivery also poses a significant challenge, particularly in training staff to meet the cultural and religious needs of Muslim travelers. Offering prayer facilities, gender-segregated areas, and other services aligned with Islamic values requires specialized knowledge and infrastructure. Many businesses lack the necessary training, leading to unmet expectations within this market segment.

The interpretation of "halal" itself varies widely across regions due to cultural, legal, and religious differences, directly affecting tourism strategies. For example, in Southeast Asia, especially in Malaysia and Indonesia, halal tourism is closely tied to local cultural practices and Islamic principles. This means halal tourism here encompasses a broad range of services, from food and accommodations to entertainment and features like gender segregation and prayer facilities (Henderson, 2016). In contrast, Middle Eastern regions often focus primarily on food compliance, with variability in other hospitality aspects such as dress codes and ethical tourism practices. Countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, for instance, emphasize luxury services that are halal-compliant, blending Islamic values with modern hospitality standards.

These regional differences in halal interpretation have significant implications for tourism strategies. Providers must tailor their offerings to meet the diverse expectations of Muslim travelers. In Southeast Asia, where halal is more comprehensively defined, businesses might offer a full range of services, while in parts of the Middle East or Europe, the emphasis may lie on providing halal food, with more flexible approaches to other aspects of Islamic practices. These differences impact marketing, customer service, and infrastructure, requiring careful adaptation to create successful halal tourism initiatives.

Economic and market constraints also restrict the growth of halal tourism. A significant challenge is financial limitations, especially in developing countries that may lack the funds to establish halal infrastructure like certified restaurants, prayer facilities, and Sharia-compliant hotels. Without substantial investment, these destinations struggle to meet halal tourists' expectations, affecting their competitiveness globally. Marketing challenges further complicate matters. Although demand for halal tourism is rising, many regions still lack effective marketing strategies targeting Muslim travelers. Halal tourism calls for niche marketing approaches to promote halal-friendly services and facilities, yet some destinations either under-promote or miscommunicate their offerings, missing opportunities to attract this growing market.

Finally, infrastructure challenges compound these economic and marketing barriers. The absence of reliable halal certification bodies and consistent regulations creates confusion for both providers and travelers. This lack of standardization can lead to service inconsistencies, where what is deemed halal in one country may not meet expectations in another. To overcome these barriers, investing in robust infrastructure, clear marketing strategies, and standardized certification processes is essential for the sustainable development of halal tourism. Table 3 provides regional perspectives and challenges in halal tourism. The table outlines the region, interpretation of halal tourism, key driver, main chellenges and example.

Table 3. Regional perspectives and challenges in halal tourism

Region	Interpretation of Halal Tourism	Key Drivers	Main Challenges	Examples
Southeast Asia	Viewed as both a religious and economic opportunity; promotes inclusive Muslim-friendly environments	Government support (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia), rising Muslim middle class, intra-regional tourism	Inconsistent certification standards, fragmented infrastructure, limited destination branding	Malaysia's halal tourism strategy; Indonesia's Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives
Middle East	Embedded in everyday lifestyle and infrastructure; strongly linked to Islamic heritage and spiritual tourism	Religious centrality, pilgrimage (Hajj, Umrah), cultural preservation	Overdependence on religious tourism, lack of leisure-based halal offerings, limited diversification	Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 shift from religious to leisure tourism

Western Countries	Framed more as a niche or cultural accommodation strategy to attract Muslim travelers	Market expansion, multiculturalism, growing Muslim diaspora	Limited awareness, cultural misunderstandings, lack of halal-certified services, Islamophobia-related barriers	UK, Germany, and Japan offering halal food and prayer rooms at major airports and hotels

4.   Current trends and opportunities

Halal tourism has experienced considerable growth over recent years, with regions like Southeast Asia and the Middle East emerging as leaders. Southeast Asia has seen countries like Malaysia and Indonesia actively position themselves within this market. Malaysia has long promoted its reputation as a Muslim-friendly destination by offering a comprehensive range of halal-certified services, from food to accommodations and prayer facilities. Similarly, Indonesia, which boasts the world's largest Muslim population, is advancing its halal tourism sector by enhancing infrastructure, encouraging Shariah-compliant services, and refining its halal certification processes. These initiatives have succeeded in drawing Muslim travelers from around the world, especially those from neighboring regions.

In the Middle East, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries are also key players in halal tourism. Countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are increasingly catering to Muslim tourists, offering a wide array of halal-friendly amenities, including luxury hotels and halal dining. Saudi Arabia, with its annual pilgrimage influx for Umrah and Hajj, has also significantly contributed to growth, spurring investment in hospitality and transportation services to meet these demands. Both Southeast Asia and the Middle East leverage their cultural alignment with Islamic values and their proactive approach to developing halal tourism infrastructure, gaining a competitive edge in the global market.

Technology has been transformative in this growth, especially through mobile apps and digital platforms that streamline Muslim travelers' access to essential services and information. Apps designed for halal tourism offer features like finding halal-certified restaurants, prayer times, nearby mosques, and Shariah-compliant accommodations, making trip planning easier and more comfortable (Azam et al., 2024). Additionally, digital platforms simplify the halal certification process for businesses, enhancing transparency for travelers (Nusran et al., 2023). Online booking services now include filters for halal-friendly accommodations, allowing travelers to select options aligned with their beliefs. Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) are also being introduced to offer immersive previews of destinations, helping potential visitors explore halal-friendly features before booking (Susilawati et al., 2023).

This integration of technology not only boosts convenience but also fosters inclusivity by making halal services accessible to a broader audience. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted global tourism, with halal tourism facing specific challenges due to travel restrictions, health concerns, and shifting consumer behaviors. Lockdowns and border closures sharply reduced international arrivals in Muslim-majority destinations such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where halal tourism plays an essential role in the economy (Lenggogeni & Syafrizal, 2023). However, the sector has shown resilience through innovative recovery strategies. Many operators now utilize digital platforms for booking, marketing, and customer engagement, and there has been a noticeable shift toward domestic and road-based tourism, as travelers prioritize safer, more controlled environments post-pandemic (Abbas et al., 2021). Additionally, Islamic-aligned safety measures, like private prayer spaces and contactless services, have become critical to rebuilding traveler confidence (Lubis et al., 2023). As halal tourism recovers, focusing on adaptable, resilient strategies will be essential for sustained growth in the post-pandemic landscape.

5.   Suggestions for future research

As halal tourism expands globally, not just is demand for reliable certification schemes on the rise, but also for consistent theoretical frameworks to understand how emerging technologies like AI and blockchain reshape trust, compliance, and user mindset (Sim, 2023). Such technologies can render certification more efficient and transparent, yet their deeper impacts—especially on stakeholder trust—are more poorly understood. Research next steps could include applying institutional theory to assess legitimacy or technology acceptance models to examine adoption by industries.

AI, for instance, streamlines certification processes and manages large compliance data, but its impact on perceived credibility and whether human oversight is required is unclear. Blockchain immutability can increase perceived religious authenticity, demanding mixed-methods research combining survey data with ethnographic observation. Novel metrics—"tech-enabled trust in halal systems," for instance—are required to measure user experience and attitude towards digital compliance tools.

Ethical and sustainable dimensions of halal tourism also deserve more attention. Conceptualizations like "green halal tourism" integrate Islamic values with global sustainability pressures but require more theoretical grounding. With theoretical frameworks like grounded theory or policy transfer theory, scholars can, for instance, examine how Islamic ethics shape environmental behavior and how standardization attempts (e.g., through Standards and Metrology Institute for Islamic Countries - SMIIC) support cooperation across countries. Such paths chart a future for more consolidated and empirically rich halal tourism research.

6.   Conclusion

The new research in halal tourism makes several key observations. Halal tourism is now an emerging sector, providing personalized travel experiences that are suitable for Muslim travelers with halal-authorized food, prayer rooms, and modest accommodation. It is a significant sector in countries with high Muslim populations and also welcomes non-Muslim visitors as it is ethical and sustainable. Recent studies have explored how halal tourism is to be aligned with global sustainability goals, and proposed models where religious principles are integrated with nature and culture preservation.

However, there are still problems, such as a divergence of standards and various interpretations of "halal" across regions. With increasing demand and Islamic tourism's global significance, halal tourism is considered an industry brimming with innovation potential and opportunities to expand beyond existing limitations in order to bypass existing hardships and capitalize upon new ones, there are several strategic actions proposed. The implementation of global standards and certification processes could ease regional differences and increase tourist trust. This can be achieved through collaboration between Islamic and non-Islamic countries. Investment in halal-friendly infrastructure—e.g., prayer spaces, halal restaurants, and accommodations—is also important to ensure Muslim tourists feel at home. Halal tourism can widen its consumer base among Muslim consumers and non-Muslim consumers with targeted marketing that emphasizes the ethical and green issue of halal tourism. In addition, tourism stakeholders need to be trained on halal and customer relationship to counter the particular requirements of Muslim tourists. Finally, public-private sector cooperation within and between regions can help sustain halal tourism by offering a chance to exchange best practice and means.

The future studies must address some of the gaps identified in the literature. There are additional studies to be conducted in non-Muslim majority countries where the potential of halal tourism remains under researched. Scholars must also examine the overlap between halal and heritage tourism and how these areas can complement each other to increase the experience of the tourists. More studies can examine the impact of halal certification on tourist spending and destination competitiveness, which has been inadequately

researched. Finally, studying the function of technology and digital media in aiding and promoting halal tourism is very important because the tools carry gigantic potential for growth for the industry.

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Conflict of interest statement

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Authors' contributions

Fatihah Norazami Abdullah led the research effort and authored the sections on the introduction and discussion. Yong Azrina Ali Akbar and Rosliza Md Zani contributed by developing the literature review and writing the conclusion. Azyyati Anuar provided critical revisions, conducted a comprehensive review of the manuscript, and approved it for final submission.

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