Marketing Halal Tourism in a non-Muslim majority country: Friend or foe?

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Abstract

Halal tourism has become an area of interest among academics and practitioners. It is because Muslims worldwide represent the second-largest religion, and the opportunity to tap into this market is enormous. This conceptual article provides a general understanding regarding marketing halal tourism in a non-Muslim majority host country. It also aims to help non-Muslim tourist providers to understand the crux of halal tourism. This article first discusses Islam and halal tourism and then reviews past studies on the critical cultural and religious needs of Muslim tourists. The three consistent halal elements needed by Muslim tourists include halal dietary requirements, halal accommodation, and the availability of worship places. To attract Muslim tourists, the host must provide some core halal products and services to complement the country's brand image.

Introduction

The demand for the halal tourism market has increased worldwide. In 2016, Muslims represented the second-largest religion in the world with over 1.8 billion believers (approximately 24 % of the world population), which is expected to reach 50% in 2050 (Pew Research Centre, 2017). By 2026, Muslim travellers are expected to be worth more than US$450 billion to the world economy (Pew Research Centre, 2015). This exponential growth is likely to lead to an increased demand for halal products and services (Kadirov et al., 2020). Muslims are the most conservatives among other religious groups, such as the Christians, in terms of demand for products and services aligned with the Islamic cultural needs (Wisker et al., 2019). Given the expected growth in Muslim travellers, can non-Muslim majority countries such as New Zealand afford to ignore this lucrative market? Halal tourism can positively impact the economy, socio-cultural milieu, and the environment (Rasul, 2019; Winarti, 2017).

Marketing systems must become sustainable in the long-run (Kadirov, 2010). New Zealand's tourism industry is the second largest of its total exports, employing over five per cent of the entire population (Tourism New Zealand, 2018). Before the COVID-19 global epidemic arose in 2019, tourism was New Zealand's largest export industry and delivered $40.9 billion to the country's economy (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). Muslim tourists' expenditure rose by 13% in 2019 from the previous year. Tourists from Malaysia, Indonesia, India and other Middle East countries are the major players contributing to the increasing demand for halal services and products (Tourism New Zealand, 2019). Muslim tourists are attracted to New Zealand because the national brand is associated with diverse landscapes, people, and cultures, as well as tourist activities that are related to nature, which reinforce New Zealand's 100% pure global branding (Morgan et al., 2002). Morgan et al. (2002) argued that critical to the New Zealand brand's success is the extent to which the destination's brand personality interacts with the target market. New Zealand is also known as the filming location of several blockbuster films such as the Lord of the Rings, the Chronicles of Narnia, King Kong, and the Last Samurai. The outdoor adventures and marine life (such as whale watching in Kaikoura) are other attractions that also appeal to the Muslim tourists. If the New Zealand tourist industry wished to attract more Muslim tourists then it needs to provide halal tourism opportunities. In addition, the needs of Muslim migrants and interregional travellers need to be taken into consideration (Kadirov and Triveni, 2010; Krisjanous and Kadirov, 2018; Kadirov et al., 2018).

This study aims to help a non-Muslim majority country host like New Zealand to understand what Muslim travellers require. More specifically, the study's objectives are to (1) understand the core requirements of halal tourism and (2), understand the perceived values and satisfaction levels of Muslim tourists. This study adds to the body of literature on halal tourism in three ways. Firstly, most past studies on halal tourism have been undertaken in Muslim countries such as in the Middle East, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey (Battour et al., 2011; Bogan and Sarusik, 2019; El-Gohary, 2016). This article partially fills this gap by studying halal tourism in New Zealand, a non-Muslim majority country. Secondly, it enhances understandings of the critical halal products and services demanded by Muslim tourists. The offering of halal tourism in a Muslim majority country spanning from banning of alcohol consumptions and gambling onsite, removal of pornographic materials and sexual suggestive programming options, having a separate swimming pool and beach for men and women, and the removal of religious literature such as the Bible from all rooms. The challenge for a non-Muslim host country like New Zealand is to find a balance between supplying the demand of Muslim and non-Muslim tourists. It is critical therefore, to understand the core aspects necessary for halal tourism and, at the same time, not disadvantaging the demand of other tourist groups. Finally, although

Muslim tourists may be considered a niche target market, we explore whether their consumption of tourism products and services is the same as other tourist groups. This article also attempts to identify what other tourism attributes would be wanted by this group.

Literature Review

Islam and Sharia Law

The root of Islamic belief is that there is only one God, Allah (SAW) and that Muhammad (PBUH) is his messenger (prophet). Islam's teachings stem from two sources, the *Quran* and the *Hadith* (the recorded sayings and deeds of Muhammad (PBUH). Muslims believe that Islam is not just a religion; instead, it is a holistic entity and a whole way of life (Ashraf, 2019; Wisker et al., 2019). Islam provides guidelines to spiritual, mental, physical, and its follower's daily life (Rice, 1999). Islam presupposes two fundamental beliefs: belief in Allah and belief in the existence of another life. Muslims also believe that their behaviours and deeds in this life will affect their treatment in the hereafter (Tsalikis & Lassar, 2009). The followers of Islam are accountable to Allah (SAW) and believe that their behaviour and deeds in this life will affect their treatment in the afterlife (Tsalikis and Lassar, 2009). The holy book, the *Quran*, and the *Sunnah* provide the guidelines and teachings of Islamic law or *Sharia*-compliant (Rice, 1999). Islam is not presented merely as a religion but as a way of life (Ferrar, 2009; Rice, 1999; Simbar, 2008). Islam is a holistic entity, a whole way of life; it is not just a set of rituals unrelated to other aspects of life, nor does it cover only the spiritual aspects of life (Ferrar, 2009). Simbar (2008) summarises Islam is distinct from secularism:

> Thus, Islam as a way of life differs from secularism. Secularism segregates religion from matters of society and state, limiting it only to the personal sphere and to places of worship. In contrast, Islam has guidelines for all aspects of life and demands its believers' commitment to all of its teachings. (p. 57).

Islam possesses a law called *Sharia,* which guides Muslims towards being obedient to God (AlSerhan, 2011). Sharia laws cover all aspects of life, including the practical socio-economic guidelines for business participation, including detailed coverage of specific economic variables such as interest, taxation, circulation of wealth, fair trade, and consumption (Rice, 1999; Wisker et al., 2019). Adhering to *Sharia*-compliant products and services is obligatory for all Muslims. The *Sharia*-compliant products and services designated by the term halal are an object or an action permissible by the law (Temporal, 2011). However, in practice, the commitment to Islamic laws, values and principles varies according to circumstances, personal differences, subjective norms, attitudes, and behaviours (Wisker et al., 2019). To quote Darhim Dali Hashim, the CEO of International Halal Integrity Alliance, Malaysia,

> "…… Muslim consumers can be divided into four categories; 1. Very compliant – willing to travel….to find halal food, 2. Compliant – prefers convenience while adhering to halal practice, 3. Apparent compliant – no pork but will generally consume beef and lamb even in a non-halal restaurant, 4. Non-compliant" (Wilson, 2012).

Halal Tourism

Halal in the Arabic world is defined as permitted or permissible and the concept is built around Islamic or Sharia law. Given this definition halal tourism would mean tourism built around permissible Sharia law. Nevertheless, several concepts and definitions of halal tourism are

listed in the literature. Winarti (2017, p. 234) defines halal tourism as 'a tourism product and service that covers the needs of Muslim travellers concerning dietary and praying requirement'. Another study defines halal tourism 'as tourism and hospitality that is co-created by consumer and producer in accordance with the teachings of Islam' (Razzaq, 2016, p. 93). These scholars suggested that halal tourism is about offering halal food and places for worshipping but have extended this definition to include the offering of halal services and activities. The accommodation attributes have included banning alcohol consumption and gambling onsite, removing pornographic material and any sexual suggestive programming options from television and so on, prayer mats in rooms, and indications of where Qibla is, the removal of Bibles from all rooms and the segregation of male and female swimming pools and beaches. Other scholars such as Battour and Ismail (2016) define halal tourism as 'any tourism object or action which is permissible according to Islamic teachings to use or engage by Muslims in tourism industry' (p. 2). Accordingly, Battour and Ismail (2016) argued that halal tourism offers halal food, halal accommodation, and halal leisure facilities.

There is a variance in literature regarding what is required by Muslim tourists. A non-Muslim host destination country's challenge is therefore finding a balance between targeting Muslim and non-Muslim tourists, while at the same time, avoiding conflict within their cultural values. An Islamic-friendly destination marketing is not easy, due to the variance between Muslim and non-Muslim tourists' demands. To make matters worse, halal tourism requirements within Muslim tourists vary because Muslim tourists are not homogenous (Wisker et al., 2020). Wilson (2013) observed that Muslim consumers could be divided into four groups, very compliant, compliant, apparent compliant, and non-compliant. The very compliant group is the type of tourist who is willing to travel far to find halal food, whereas the complaint would be the one who prefers convenience while adhering to halal practice. Another group that is apparent compliant is the group who generally consume food with no pork, such as beef and lamb in a non-halal restaurant. Bogan and Sarusik (2018) synthesised the various requirements of halal tourism. They concluded that the Islamic market is not homogenous, as different Muslims understand and adapt their lives to Islam quite differently. Table 1 presents halal tourism features documented in the literature from 2011 to 2020. Nonetheless, the most consistent elements in offering halal tourism are dietary requirements such as the availability of halal restaurants food, accessibility to places for worship, and Muslim- or family-friendly events and accommodation (Battour and Ismail, 2016; Im et al., 2012).

Table 1: Halal Tourism Attributes

Authors	Attributes
Wisker et al. (2020)	A wide choice of halal restaurants and foods, convenient location of mosques, family-friendly and cleaned accommodation, familiarity with Islamic culture
Jeaheng et al. (2019)	Availability of halal food and beverages, room facilities, prayers facilities, Muslim privacy, Muslim friendly entertainment and recreation, halal service quality
Bogan and Sarusik (2019)	Availability of halal food and halal hotels
Winarti (2017)	Availability of halal restaurants food, halal-friendly hotels, halal activities such as gender segregation in spas, halal tour guide, and easy access to places of worshipping
El-Gohary (2016)	Availability of halal food, halal accommodation – female staff serving female floors, banning of alcohol and night

	clubs, Islamic dressing code (conservative) for a staff uniform, halal facilities – gender segregation for swimming pools and beaches, prayers mat and direction of Qibla in the room, bed and toilet positioned not to face the direction of Mecca.
Razzaq et al. (2016)	Offers halal food, can provide prayers time, prayers mat, can provide a copy of al-Quran, certified halal items, gender segregation activities and floors in accommodation, have a qibla marker, banning of alcohol, removal of pornographic material, dress code
Mohsin et al. (2015)	Availability of dietary requirement (halal food) and places for worship facilities
Battour et al. (2011)	Availability of halal food, banning of alcohol, removal of pornographic, information about places of worship, hotel meeting religious needs, clean and has prayer mat in rooms, Islamic calls for prayers, general Islamic morality such as modest dress code, Islamic entertainment, gender segregation driver transport, airport Muslim friendly.

Availability of Halal Food

The halal tourism literature is almost unanimous in documenting that halal food and beverages are required by Muslim tourists and therefore, non-Muslim hosting countries should make the availability of halal restaurants, food and beverages easy for Muslim tourists. Regardless of their religiosity level, Muslims are very particular that halal food is the only food they consume (Wisker, 2020). Halal food is often associated with pork-free and alcohol-free and is processed according to *Sharia* law (Alzeer et al., 2018; Wisker, 2020b). The concept of halal food is also driven by integrity, values, and trust (Vanany et al., 2019) and many Muslims, are concerned over whether the food is genuinely halal (Battour et al., 2011). The simple remedy for this is for food providers to label the exact ingredients that make up a food item. Catering to Muslim tourists needs and providing halal food would increase Muslim's level of satisfaction, which increases their levels of loyalty (Battour et al., 2011; Wisker et al., 2020). Other studies have observed how halal food availability forms a critical role in choosing a travel destination among Muslim tourists (Al Ansi et al., 2018; Jeaheng et al., 2019). Managing the health consequences of expanded food choice is also part of the holistic food management (Mandlik et al, 2021).

Availability of Halal Accommodation

The availability of hotels that cater to halal accommodation worldwide in Muslim and non-Muslim majority host countries has increased (Bogan and Sarusik, 2018; Razzaq et al., 2016). This is a result of tourism providers acknowledging the needs of Muslim tourists. So, what constitutes halal accommodation? Interestingly, the concept of halal accommodation varies in the literature. Razzaq et al. (2016) suggested the value for halal accommodation included providing Islamic artefacts in a room such as praying mats, (al-Quran and the direction of Qibla), catering for halal dietary requirements, supporting Islamic financial principles and gender-segregated floors. Others like Saad et al. (2014, p. 1), define halal hotel as 'the business which offers Islamic services to customers compliance with Sharia rules'. They categorise halal hotel into three; (1) 'Dry hotel' that provides accommodation with alcohol-free, (2) Partially halal hotel that provides halal food, praying places, al-Quran and praying mat in the rooms, and gender segregation services, and (3) Strictly halal hotel that provides everything halal

ranging from the design to finance, food, activities, and infrastructure (e.g. segregated pools, floors and, beaches). However, the third category would be a challenge to implement in non-Muslim majority host countries as it is positioned for a narrow niche target market. Some big hotel brands in Thailand (non-Muslim majority country) have attempted to offer halal accommodation to Muslim tourists and had been successful (Yeaheng et al., 2019). Given the challenge to change the infrastructure and design, these hotels have provided halal accommodation by getting halal certification for their restaurants, by offering Muslim-friendly amenities including Qibla indicators, Al-Quran and praying mats in the room, providing alcohol-free rooms and washroom fitted with a hand shower, and some halal facilities offer segregation services for spas (Yeaheng et al., 2019). In sum, halal accommodation is about providing some or partial products and services that met the halal definition, such as family-friendly hotel rooms that are clean, restaurants that cater to halal food, alcohol and pornographic material free rooms, and not having casinos and gambling avenues in the building. This would suffice for an initial attempt in offering halal accommodation to Muslim tourists.

Places of Worship

The other consistent theme documented in the halal tourism literature is the availability of places of worship (Battour et al., 2011; Bogan and Sarusik, 2018; Wisker et al., 2020). Muslims must pray five times a day and therefore, the accessibility to places of worship or Mosques is critical for Muslim tourists (Ferra, 2009; Mohsin, 2005; Syed, 2001; Weidenfeld, 2006). In his study, Weidenfeld (2006) observed how Muslim tourists preferred to stay in accommodation that was close to a mosque. Mohsin (2005) surveyed Malaysian Muslim tourists travelling to Australia and had found that these tourists were concerned about the availability of mosques in the country. The availability of places of worship has also been extended to airports and train stations. Several international airports worldwide that belong to non-Muslim majority countries (such as Auckland, Melbourne, Tokyo, and Changi in Singapore) have made a praying room available for Muslim travellers. The availability of worship places like mosques can also be a tourist attraction as the building may be unique (Henderson, 2003; Battour et al., 2011). Middle Eastern countries and others in Asia (for instance, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia) have many unique and aesthetically appealing mosques that have become an attraction for both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists.

Muslim Tourists Perceived Value and Satisfaction

The concept of perceived value is defined as 'consumer's overall assessment of a product's utility (or service) based on perceptions of what is received and what is given' (Zeithmal, 1988, p. 14). Zeithmal's definition of a perceived value is based on the low price, while others perceive value when there is a balance between price and quality, therefore a customer would perceive value quite differently from another (Sweeney & Soutar, 2011; Wisker et al., 2019b). On the other hand, customer satisfaction is defined as 'an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with goods and services overtime' (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p. 390). Customers are satisfied when they have had a good experience with previous purchases, which motivates them to repurchase, subsequently spreading the experience through positive word-of-mouth and increasing brand loyalty (Wisker, 2020a). Muslim tourism behaviour literature has documented the positive relationship between perceived values and tourist satisfaction (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Im et al., 2012; Wisker et al., 2020).

Apart from halalness products and services, some studies have suggested other tourism attributes that are necessary for Muslim tourist satisfaction and perceived value. For instance, a study conducted on Malaysian Muslim tourists in Korea found in addition to the halalness of services on offer, the host country's brand image (such as advanced technology, availability of outdoor recreation and shopping places), plays an essential role in customer satisfaction. Similarly, a study examining Muslim tourists in New Zealand observed that attributes like the country's host tourism facilities and attractions, high-quality infrastructure, natural scenery, hospitality and amusement, feeling safe in a secure environment, and less communication/language barriers have had a direct relationship with satisfaction and brand loyalty (Wisker et al. 2020). Another study that investigated the cognitive, affective and behavioural intention of Muslim tourists in Thailand found that essential elements such as accessibility to basic room facilities, airlines, tourism sight-seeing, entertainment and recreation influenced Muslim tourists' intentions and willingness to pay for services provided (Jeaheng et al., 2019). In the context of tourism consumption, the host country's culture, nature, heritage, leisure activities, and sports are considered as the essential antecedents for tourist satisfaction and perceived value.

Conclusion

This article provides a definition of halal tourism for non-Muslim tourism providers and countries where Muslims are a minority. The notion of halal tourism varies and is dependent on the level of halalness when it comes to offering products and services that are Sharia-compliant. Moreover, Muslims are not a homogenous group and how and what they consume is therefore variable. Nonetheless, three consistent features of halal tourism documented in the halal tourism literature are the demand for halal dietary foods, family-friendly halal accommodation, and accessibility to places for worship. Additionally, the host country's brand image matters. Digital marketing, SEO, and AI tools must also be used to highlight the value of Islamic tourism services (Krisjanous et al., 2021). To conclude, for a non-Muslim majority host country to succeed in marketing destination to Muslim tourists is a function of the availability of partial halal tourism and the host country's brand image.

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