

HALAL STANDARDS: A NEW DIRECTION FOR TOURISM IN VIETNAM?

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ABSTRACT

Halal standards are known as some of the most stringent regulations in the daily lives of Muslims, particularly in the areas of food and services. Halal tourism refers to a form of tourism that provides services, facilities, dining, accommodation, and other amenities in accordance with the ethical and religious principles of Islam. Using a literature review approach, this study aims to establish and strengthen the theoretical foundation of Halal tourism, while also analyzing its current development status in Vietnam. Based on the findings, the study proposes feasible solutions for the sustainable development of this highly promising tourism segment, contributing to the diversification of tourism products and attracting Muslim travelers, a potential market segment.

Keywords: Halal-friendly tourism, Halal standards, Muslim travelers, Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of deep international integration, Muslim tourists, adhering to Halal standards, are becoming an increasingly important market segment. Muslims accounted for approximately 23% of the world's population in 2010 and are projected to account for 30% by 2050; in 2010, 62% of the world's Muslims lived in Asia and the Pacific [1]. Beyond demographic factors, rising incomes and an expanding middle class are also increasing travel demand. The 2025 Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) reports that international Muslim arrivals reached 176 million in 2024 and projects 245 million arrivals by 2030, when total travel spending is expected to reach USD 230 billion [2]. These trends reflect the considerable potential of Halal tourism and present both opportunities and challenges for countries seeking to serve this market.

As Vietnam integrates more deeply into the global tourism market and maintains strong diplomatic relations with Muslim-majority countries, the country stands at a crucial juncture to capitalize on this emerging segment. Vietnamese research identifies state management, standardization, and service development as central issues in expanding the domestic Halal market [3]. Although Vietnam does not have a large Muslim population, its location in Southeast Asia—near Muslim-majority countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei—creates an opportunity to attract regional travelers [4]. Nevertheless, Halal tourism in Vietnam remains at an early stage. Only a limited number of hotels and restaurants in major cities offer Halal-certified food or suitable prayer facilities, and specialized travel services remain underdeveloped [5]. In this context, a Halal-friendly (Muslim-friendly) approach is more feasible for Vietnam than full Halal compliance across all tourism services, given the country's non-Muslim-majority context and current level of institutional development.

A review of the literature shows that previous studies have established important theoretical foundations and identified factors influencing Halal tourism development, including its advantages and challenges [6], [7]. Many studies clarify the concept of Halal tourism, service standards, and the behavior and preferences of Muslim travelers. Other research examines leading destinations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand [8]–[10]. However, research conducted in the Vietnamese context remains limited. Most studies focus on countries with large Muslim communities, while research on Halal tourism in non-OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) countries remains scarce.

To answer the question, “Can Halal standards become a new direction for tourism in Vietnam?”, this study combines a literature review with an analysis of the current situation. First, it reviews theoretical studies and prior research on Halal tourism, focusing on concepts and development factors. It then examines the opportunities and challenges for Halal tourism in Vietnam by assessing existing infrastructure, services, and policy support. Finally, the study proposes strategic directions, including raising business awareness, improving service systems, and developing supportive policies and marketing strategies. This approach clarifies Vietnam’s potential and provides practical directions for sustainably serving this promising market.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Halal tourism concept

Scholars and international organizations have proposed various definitions of Halal tourism. The term "Halal" originates from Arabic and means "permissible" according to Islamic beliefs. From the Muslim perspective, Halal is not limited to food standards but extends to other aspects of life, including communication, entertainment, and tourism [6].

Some researchers have defined this concept by considering Islamic laws, target customers, geographic scope, available products and services, and the purpose of travel. However, these definitions often fail to comprehensively address all of these aspects.

Jafari and Scott [11] define Islamic tourism as the encouragement of tourists whose activities meet the requirements of Sharia law. This definition views Islamic tourism principally through Sharia requirements and travelers’ expectations. However, it gives less attention to the religious beliefs of the tourists themselves.

Carboni et al. [12] describe Islamic tourism as travel that aligns with Islamic principles and caters to Muslim travelers who wish to maintain their religious practices while away from home. This definition recognizes adherence to Islamic law, the primary target audience, and the geographical context of tourism activities, but it does not explicitly specify the products and services provided, such as food and facilities. The authors also emphasize that Islamic tourism is neither limited to religious activities nor confined to Muslim-majority countries.

Zamani-Farahani and Henderson [13] treat Islamic tourism and Halal tourism as closely related, describing travel predominantly undertaken by Muslims who prefer to remain within their cultural boundaries. Their formulation focuses on Muslim travelers and Muslim-majority destinations but does not fully specify Sharia requirements for tourism activities. The study also recognizes that Islamic tourism may serve non-Muslim travelers. Al-Hamarneh and Steiner [14] similarly note that non-Muslim tourists visiting the Muslim world may benefit from Islamic tourism.

Recent scholarship treats Halal tourism as a broader service system rather than a food-only concept. Its core attributes include Halal-certified dining, prayer facilities, appropriate sanitation, ethical service delivery, and—in fully Sharia-compliant settings—gender-sensitive

leisure facilities [6], [8]. These provisions allow Muslim travelers to maintain religious practices while also creating a safe and welcoming travel environment.

Table 1. Differences between conventional, religious, and shariah tourism

No	Aspects	Conventional tourism	Religious tourism	Shariah/Halal tourism
1	Object	Nature, culture, heritage, cuisine	Places of worship, cultural heritage	All tourism objects aligned with Islamic principles
2	Aim	Entertainment and leisure	Enhancement of spirituality	Enhancement of spirituality through leisure activities
3	Target	Satisfaction and pleasure for tourists	Spiritual fulfillment and inner peace	Satisfaction, enjoyment, and increased religious awareness
4	Guide	Provide general information to attract tourists	Explain historical and religious significance of sites	Explain the role of Shariah in shaping meaningful and value-based experiences
5	Facilities of worship	Complementary	Complementary	Fully integrated as part of the tourism experience
6	Culinary	General food services	General food services	Halal-certified food and beverages
7	Relation of society and environment	Complementary and profit-oriented	Complementary and profit-oriented	Integrated and guided by Shariah principles
8	Schedule of travel	Flexible (any time)	Time-specific (religious occasions)	Scheduled in accordance with religious practices

Source: Adapted from [9].

Despite the diversity of definitions, a common limitation in the existing literature is the lack of an integrated perspective that captures the multidimensional nature of Halal tourism. Most definitions tend to focus on individual aspects such as Sharia compliance, target markets, or geographical context, but rarely combine these elements into a unified conceptual framework.

To address this limitation, this study adopts a synthesized definition of Halal tourism as a form of tourism that provides products, services, and experiences in accordance with Islamic principles, while accommodating the religious, cultural, and lifestyle needs of Muslim travelers across different contexts.

This definition emphasizes three core dimensions: (1) compliance with Islamic law (Sharia), (2) adaptation of tourism services and infrastructure, and (3) the overall travel experience beyond purely religious purposes. This integrated conceptualization serves as the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis of Halal tourism development in Vietnam.

In addition to fully Halal-compliant tourism, the literature distinguishes Halal-friendly or Muslim-friendly tourism [6]. While Halal-compliant tourism requires strict adherence to Islamic law across services, the Halal-friendly approach is more flexible and accommodates essential needs such as Halal food and prayer facilities without requiring full compliance. This distinction is especially relevant to non-OIC countries whose tourism systems are still adapting to Muslim travelers' needs.

This distinction provides an important conceptual basis for analyzing the feasibility of Halal tourism development in the Vietnamese context.

2.2. Halal tourism principles

Muslim travelers may have specific requirements concerning food, clothing, religious observance, gender interaction, and service design. A synthesis of the literature identifies the core principles shown in Table 2 [6], [15]–[20].

Table 2. Halal tourism principles

No	Halal Tourism Requirement	Source
1	No alcohol to be served	[6], [15]–[20]
2	No nightclubs	
3	Halal food only to be served	
4	No ham or pork or similar products	
5	Male staff for single male floors	
6	Female staff for women and families	
7	Female staff for single female floors	
8	In-house religious figures	
9	Conservative TV channels	
10	Prayer rooms	
11	Muslim staff members	
12	Islamic dressing code for staff uniforms	
13	Copies of Quran in each room	
14	Prayer mats in each room	
15	Markers indicating direction of Mecca	
16	Separate facilities (e.g., gyms, pools)	
17	Gender-segregated prayer rooms	
18	Art should not depict human form	
19	Beds/toilets not facing direction of Mecca	
20	Bidets in the bathrooms	
21	Guest suitable dressing code	
22	Islamic funding	
23	Hotel should follow Zakat principles	

Source: Synthesized by the author from [6], [15]–[20].

Table 2 provides an overview of the principal requirements that tourism services should consider when serving Muslim travelers. These requirements extend beyond food to facilities, services, personnel, and operating practices aligned with Sharia principles.

First, food-related requirements are the most crucial aspect of Halal tourism. Tourism services must ensure that no alcoholic beverages are served and only Halal food is provided, meaning no pork or products from animals that are not slaughtered according to Islamic law. This reflects the need for Muslim tourists to adhere to dietary principles in line with their faith.

Additionally, facilities such as prayer rooms and prayer mats are essential requirements to facilitate religious practices during the trip. Providing appropriate television channels, free from programs or images that contradict Islamic values, also contributes to creating a welcoming environment that respects the religious beliefs of the customers.

In terms of personnel, Halal tourism requires the employment of Muslim staff, especially for areas such as male- or female-only floors. Furthermore, tourism services must follow guidelines regarding staff uniforms, ensuring that they are modest and aligned with Islamic values.

Finally, maintaining certain rules such as avoiding positioning beds or toilets facing the direction of Mecca, providing bidets in bathrooms, and ensuring that facilities like swimming pools or gyms are gender-segregated are all important to ensure that Muslim tourists feel comfortable and are able to follow religious practices while using tourism services. All these requirements combine to create a Halal tourism environment that meets the religious and cultural needs of Muslim tourists.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on a structured literature review combined with contextual analysis.

First, relevant studies on Halal tourism were systematically collected from academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar using keywords including "Halal tourism," "Islamic tourism," and "Muslim travel." Peer-reviewed studies were retained on the basis of their relevance to definitions, principles, and the main factors influencing Halal tourism development.

Second, the study analyzes the current situation of Halal tourism in Vietnam using verifiable secondary sources, including industry reports, policy documents, tourism publications, and reports from organizations such as Mastercard-CrescentRating and Pew Research Center.

Third, the collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, whereby key themes such as opportunities, challenges, and development factors were identified and categorized. This approach allows for a systematic interpretation of both theoretical insights and contextual evidence.

Finally, the findings from the literature and contextual analysis are synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of Halal tourism development and to propose strategic recommendations for Vietnam.

This methodological approach is appropriate as it enables the study to integrate theoretical perspectives with real-world context, particularly in a non-OIC country setting where empirical data remains limited.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Opportunities for Halal tourism in Vietnam

4.1.1. Geographical Advantages

Vietnam holds a strategic geographical position in Southeast Asia, a region that includes several countries with large Muslim populations. Proximity and air links to Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei create favorable conditions for attracting regional visitors. In the first ten months of 2024, Da Nang received more than 27,000 visitors from Indonesia—the highest figure in four years—while Malaysian arrivals reached nearly 145,000 in 2023 [21]. Vietnam

also has a coastline of more than 3,260 km and well-known destinations such as Ha Long, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and Phu Quoc, creating opportunities for leisure, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and Muslim-friendly services [22].

Beyond its natural geographical advantages, Vietnam is also well-positioned within the Halal product supply chain. Collaborating with neighboring countries in Halal food production and services will enable Vietnam to establish a comprehensive system of Halal-certified restaurants, hotels, and other amenities, enhancing its competitiveness in the regional Halal tourism market.

4.1.2. Growth in Muslim Tourist Expenditure

The increasing spending power of Muslim travelers presents a clear opportunity for Vietnam’s tourism sector. GMTI 2025 reports 176 million international Muslim arrivals in 2024 and projects 245 million arrivals and USD 230 billion in total travel spending by 2030 [2]. This growth reflects increasing demand for services and products that meet Muslim travelers’ needs. For Vietnam, the trend creates opportunities to expand market share through Halal-certified accommodation and dining, suitable shopping and leisure services, and well-designed Muslim-friendly tourism products.

Strategic investment in Halal-compliant services could enable Vietnam not only to attract more Muslim tourists but also to increase the average spending per visitor, thereby promoting sustainable growth for the entire tourism industry.

4.1.3. Growth of the Muslim Community

The global Muslim population is projected to grow by approximately 73% between 2010 and 2050 [1], while the Muslim travel market is also expanding [2]. In Vietnam, established Cham Muslim communities and expatriate communities in major cities support demand for mosques, Halal dining, and prayer facilities [3], [21], [22]. The presence of these communities and stronger commercial ties with Muslim-majority countries can support a more comprehensive Halal tourism ecosystem.

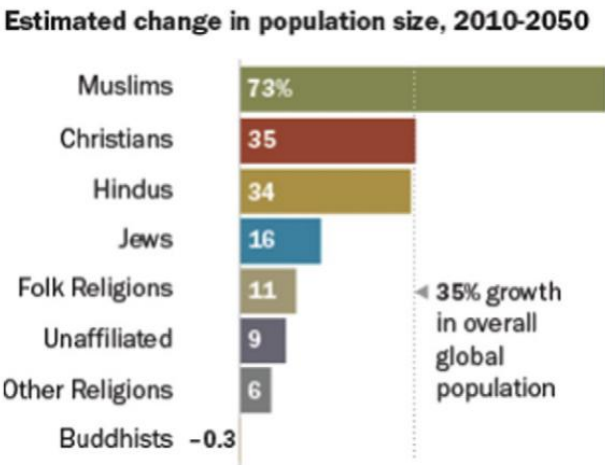


Figure 1. Projected change in population size by religious group, 2010–2050

Source: Pew Research Center [1].

4.1.4. Diverse Tourism Resources

Vietnam has diverse cultural and natural tourism resources that may appeal to Muslim travelers [22]. Ha Long Bay, the beaches of Da Nang and Nha Trang, and national parks such

as Phong Nha-Ke Bang and Ba Be support leisure, nature-based, and adventure tourism. Hanoi, Hoi An, and Ho Chi Minh City also offer cultural and urban experiences, while Cham heritage sites in Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, and An Giang provide a direct connection to the country's Muslim cultural history. These resources can be combined into Muslim-friendly itineraries that accommodate dietary and religious needs.

A particularly distinctive tourism asset in Vietnam is the presence of the Cham Muslim community, especially in provinces such as An Giang and Ninh Thuan. These communities represent a form of “living heritage”, where Islamic traditions, religious practices, and daily life are actively preserved. In An Giang, the Cham Muslim population forms one of the largest Muslim communities in Vietnam, with mosques, traditional villages, and Halal culinary practices that offer authentic cultural experiences for visitors. Similarly, in Ninh Thuan, Cham communities maintain unique religious festivals and cultural traditions that reflect long-standing Islamic influences.

This living cultural presence differentiates Vietnam from other regional destinations such as Thailand, where Halal tourism is primarily service-based rather than rooted in indigenous Muslim communities. Therefore, the Cham Muslim community can be considered a unique competitive advantage for developing Halal-friendly tourism in Vietnam.

4.2. Challenges for Halal tourism in Vietnam

4.2.1. Limited Awareness of Halal Tourism

One of the major challenges in developing Halal tourism in Vietnam is limited awareness and understanding of Halal principles among tourism businesses and the general public [5]. Because Vietnam is not a Muslim-majority country, Halal tourism remains a relatively new concept for many hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies. This contributes to a shortage of certified services and makes it harder for Muslim travelers to identify suitable accommodation, food, and prayer facilities. Misconceptions—such as treating Halal tourism as solely religious tourism—also hinder market development.

4.2.2. Lack of a Trained Workforce

A second challenge is the shortage of tourism personnel who understand Halal standards and Muslim travelers' expectations [21], [22]. Without suitable training, hotel staff, tour guides, and restaurant workers may overlook requirements relating to food preparation, prayer facilities, privacy, or cultural sensitivity. This can lead to miscommunication and inconsistent service quality. Industry-oriented training and the integration of Muslim-friendly service principles into hospitality education are therefore important for improving visitor experience and destination credibility.

4.2.3. Competition from Neighboring Countries

Vietnam also faces strong competition from neighboring destinations with established Muslim-friendly tourism systems. Malaysia, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia ranked among the leading OIC destinations in GMTI 2025 [2]. Among non-OIC destinations, Singapore ranked first and Thailand ranked fifth [2]. Thailand's competitive position is supported by expanded Halal food and prayer facilities and a five-year plan aimed at developing the country as a Southeast Asian Halal hub by 2027 [23]. By contrast, Vietnam remains at an early stage and has lower international recognition and fewer Muslim-friendly facilities. Table 3 summarizes the leading destinations and illustrates the competitive benchmark facing Vietnam.

Table 3. Leading Halal Tourism Destinations (GMTI 2025 – Summary)

Group	Destination	Category
Leading OIC destinations	Malaysia; Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and UAE (joint 2nd); Indonesia	OIC
Leading non-OIC destinations	Singapore; United Kingdom; Hong Kong; Taiwan; Thailand	Non-OIC

Source: Adapted from [2].

Table 3 summarizes the leading Halal tourism destinations in GMTI 2025 [2]. OIC destinations remain dominant, but the performance of Singapore, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Thailand shows that non-OIC destinations can compete through service quality, infrastructure, and Muslim-friendly adaptations. This pattern supports a gradual Halal-friendly approach for emerging destinations such as Vietnam.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The development of Halal tourism in Vietnam presents both significant opportunities and complex challenges. Halal tourism is widely recognized as an expanding segment of the global tourism industry and as a potential driver of economic diversification [6], [7]. Vietnam possesses substantial potential because of its strategic location in Southeast Asia and its cultural and natural tourism resources, which position the country as a possible emerging destination in the global Halal tourism market.

However, Vietnam’s Halal tourism development remains constrained by structural and institutional limitations. Limited awareness of Halal standards and Muslim traveler expectations can hinder service development, particularly in non-Muslim-majority countries [6], [8]. Unlike Malaysia and Indonesia, where Halal tourism is integrated more systematically into tourism strategies, Vietnam lacks a comprehensive implementation framework. Awareness-raising, staff training, and collaboration with credible Halal certification bodies are therefore essential to improve service quality.

Vietnam also faces strong competition from destinations that have established positions in the Halal tourism market. Malaysia benefits from developed certification systems, infrastructure, and supportive policies [8], [9], while Indonesia has used its Muslim population and cultural identity to promote Halal tourism internationally [7]. Vietnam remains at an earlier stage, with fewer certified services and less institutional support. Differentiation should therefore emphasize its cultural heritage, eco-tourism assets, and experiential products while meeting essential Muslim-friendly service requirements.

In this regard, one of the most distinctive advantages identified in this study is the presence of the Cham Muslim community, particularly in An Giang and Ninh Thuan provinces. These communities represent a form of “living heritage”, where Islamic traditions, religious practices, and daily life are actively maintained. Unlike destinations such as Thailand, where Halal tourism is primarily based on service adaptation, Vietnam benefits from indigenous Muslim communities that provide authentic cultural experiences for visitors.

This unique characteristic enhances Vietnam’s attractiveness for Muslim travelers by offering not only Halal-compliant services but also culturally immersive experiences. Therefore, the Cham Muslim community can be considered a core competitive advantage in developing Halal-friendly tourism in Vietnam.

Another critical challenge is the lack of a trained workforce capable of meeting Muslim travelers’ specific needs. Prior studies emphasize human-resource readiness, cultural awareness, and service adaptation in delivering Sharia-compliant tourism experiences [18],

[19]. Without adequate training, tourism personnel may overlook dietary restrictions, prayer requirements, privacy, and cultural sensitivities, thereby affecting tourist satisfaction and destination image. Specialized training and the integration of Halal tourism knowledge into hospitality education are therefore essential.

From a broader perspective, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by extending the discussion of Halal tourism beyond traditional Muslim-majority contexts. While previous research has predominantly focused on countries within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), this study highlights the unique challenges and opportunities faced by non-OIC countries such as Vietnam. In particular, it emphasizes the role of institutional readiness, service adaptation, and market awareness in shaping the development trajectory of Halal tourism in emerging destinations. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Halal tourism as a global phenomenon rather than a region-specific practice.

From a practical standpoint, the study suggests that the successful development of Halal tourism in Vietnam requires a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach. Government agencies, tourism businesses, and supporting institutions must work together to establish clear standards, improve infrastructure, and enhance service quality. In addition, collaboration with international Halal certification organizations and learning from best practices in leading destinations can help Vietnam accelerate its development process. Such efforts will not only improve competitiveness but also create a more inclusive and welcoming tourism environment for Muslim travelers.

Vietnam should initially prioritize a Halal-friendly (Muslim-friendly) approach rather than full Halal compliance. Given the country's non-Muslim-majority context, limited institutional experience, and resource constraints, a gradual and flexible strategy is more realistic. Research suggests that non-OIC countries can attract Muslim travelers by focusing on essential adaptations, including Halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally sensitive service [6], [8]. A Halal-friendly model can therefore serve as a transitional pathway toward more comprehensive development.

Overall, while the Halal tourism market presents considerable growth opportunities for Vietnam, addressing the identified challenges requires strategic, long-term, and systematic efforts. By strengthening institutional support, enhancing human resource capacity, and leveraging its unique tourism assets, Vietnam can position itself as a competitive and sustainable Halal tourism destination in the global market.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Halal tourism presents a promising opportunity for the growth and diversification of Vietnam's tourism industry. The country's rich cultural heritage, diverse natural landscapes, and strategic location in Southeast Asia provide a strong foundation for the development of this sector. With a growing Muslim population in the region and increasing awareness of Halal travel, Vietnam has the potential to attract a significant number of Muslim tourists.

However, to fully capitalize on this opportunity, Vietnam must address several key challenges. These include improving awareness of Halal tourism among local businesses, developing Halal-friendly services and infrastructure, and providing training for tourism personnel to ensure they understand and meet the unique needs of Muslim travelers. Additionally, while Vietnam faces competition from well-established Halal tourism destinations in neighboring countries, it can differentiate itself by highlighting its unique offerings and ensuring that these services are aligned with Halal standards.

By investing in Halal tourism infrastructure, fostering collaboration with international Halal certification bodies, and promoting education and training in the tourism sector, Vietnam can position itself as a competitive and attractive destination for Muslim travelers. In doing so, the country will not only diversify its tourism offerings but also contribute to the broader economic development by tapping into the growing Halal tourism market in Southeast Asia and beyond.

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