



Book Review: The Routledge Handbook of Halal Hospitality and Islamic Tourism (2020) by Michael Hall and Girish Prayag

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This article discusses the concepts of halal hospitality and Islamic tourism as explained in *The Routledge Handbook of Halal Hospitality and Islamic Tourism* (Hall & Prayag, 2020). This review highlights the dynamic relationship between the spiritual values of Islam and the demands of the modern, market-oriented tourism industry. With a multidisciplinary approach, the book demonstrates how halal hospitality has evolved into a global phenomenon that reflects the interplay of religion, economics, politics, and culture. This paper systematically reviews the conceptual aspects, challenges, and future directions for a sustainable and inclusive halal tourism. Halal hospitality and Islamic tourism not only offer economic opportunities but also carry a spiritual mission to uphold the values of justice, balance, and universal humanity.

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades, the concepts of halal hospitality and Islamic tourism have become one of the most dynamic topics in global tourism studies. This phenomenon not only represents the economic expansion of the Muslim travel market but also a cultural and spiritual transformation in the context of globalization. Travel in Islam has a strong religious dimension—it is not merely a recreational activity but also a part of seeking knowledge, spiritual reflection, and strengthening human brotherhood (*ukhuwah insaniyah*). Therefore, the integration of Islamic values into the tourism industry reflects an effort to reconcile faith with global mobility.

Hall and Prayag (2020) assert that the increasing mobility of Muslims in the modern era demands a new understanding of tourism practices that align with halal principles. On one hand, halal tourism reflects the desire of Muslims to enjoy modern facilities without abandoning Shariah guidelines; on the other hand, it requires the global tourism industry to adapt to a spiritually oriented value system. This means that the concept of halal in the context of tourism is not just a consumption category but also a representation of the religious and moral identity of Muslims in the global public space.

The development of halal tourism cannot be separated from the continuously growing demographics and purchasing power of Muslims. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) and data from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Muslim travel segment is growing faster than the conventional tourism market, with an economic value reaching hundreds of billions of dollars annually. Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam, and the United Arab Emirates are pioneers in integrating economic, cultural, and religious policies within a halal tourism ecosystem framework (Rusydiyana et al., 2021).

However, behind this great potential lie several epistemological and practical issues that require critical examination. First, there is still conceptual ambiguity between the terms halal tourism, Islamic tourism, and Muslim-friendly tourism. Each has different contexts, intentions, and levels of Shariah value application. Second, the challenge of halal standardization at the international level gives rise to differences in practices and perceptions among countries. Third, there is concern about the commodification of religion, where Islamic values are at risk of being reduced to mere

commercial branding strategies without their spiritual essence.

Furthermore, the development of halal hospitality also raises new discourses on global ethics and inclusivity. Halal is not only for Muslims but also creates universal ethical standards—cleanliness, justice, transparency, and social responsibility—that are relevant to all tourists. Thus, the discourse on halal hospitality needs to be placed within the context of the sustainability paradigm, which emphasizes a balance between spiritual, economic, social, and ecological dimensions.

Within an academic framework, The Routledge Handbook of Halal Hospitality and Islamic Tourism (Hall & Prayag, 2020) is present to fill the literature gap concerning the relationship between religion, economics, and tourism. This book not only presents theory and practice but also dissects the tensions between Islamic values and the demands of the neoliberal market. By utilizing case studies from various countries—especially Malaysia, Brunei, Oman, Japan, and Europe—Hall and Prayag show that Islamic tourism is not a monolithic entity but a diverse social phenomenon corresponding to the cultural and political context of each country.

Therefore, research and discussion on halal hospitality are important for understanding the new dynamics in global tourism that are oriented towards ethics and spirituality. It not only highlights economic practices but also opens a space for moral reflection on how humans welcome, respect, and serve one another within the frame of universal Islamic values.

ISLAMIC TOURISM IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

Etymologically, halal means "permissible" according to Islamic law (Laila et al., 2021). In tourism practice, this concept is translated through the provision of Shariah-compliant services and products—ranging from alcohol-free hotels, halal-certified food, and prayer facilities to family-friendly policies.

Hall and Prayag emphasize that halal hospitality creates a dialectical tension between spiritual values (*taqwa*) and commercial orientation (profit-oriented). On one hand, service providers must maintain the authenticity of Islamic values; on the other, they face the demands of a competitive global market. An imbalance between the two often leads to ethical and practical challenges in managing the halal tourism industry.

Islamic tourism encompasses various forms of travel by Muslims—whether religious (hajj, umrah, pilgrimage) or for recreation, business, and education. Countries like Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, the United Arab Emirates, and Turkey have become pioneers in developing Shariah-compliant tourist destinations through the concept of Shariah-compliant hotels and Muslim-friendly destinations marketing strategies.

According to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC, 2017), the global halal travel market value was estimated to reach US\$243 billion by 2021. This figure indicates that Islamic tourism is not only a religious expression but also a significant instrument of economic development.

However, Hall and Prayag assert that this development also involves political and cultural dimensions. In many countries, halal has become a symbol of identity and economic diplomacy, used to strengthen a nation's position in the global market.

Islamic tourism is not merely about religious journeys like hajj and umrah, but also includes recreational, business, and educational travel undertaken by Muslim tourists while considering Shariah values. Countries such as Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and the United Arab Emirates have pioneered the development of halal tourism destinations. They promote the concept of Shariah-compliant hotels, halal-certified restaurants, and environments that are friendly to Muslim families.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Although the halal hospitality and Islamic tourism industries show rapid growth globally, their development is not free from various conceptual, structural, and ideological issues. Hall and Prayag (2020) identify that the sector's progress is accompanied by tension between Islamic spiritual values and modern economic rationality, which often operates within a neoliberal market paradigm. Below are some of the main issues and challenges that require the attention of academics, practitioners, and policymakers.

Fragmentation of International Halal Standards and Certification

One of the fundamental problems is the absence of a uniform global standard regarding the definition, criteria, and process of halal certification (Hakim et al., 2022). Each Muslim-majority country has its own authorities and certification bodies—for example, JAKIM (Malaysia), MUI (Indonesia), MUIS (Singapore),

and ESMA (United Arab Emirates). This lack of standard uniformity results in a fragmented halal market that complicates cross-border integration and hinders international consumer confidence.

Furthermore, halal standards are often influenced by diverse fiqh interpretations, depending on the school of thought (mazhab) and local traditions. For example, in the methods of slaughter, food additives, and the management of Shariah-compliant hotels. These differences in interpretation show that the concept of "halal" is not monolithic but is contextual and dynamic. However, the lack of regulatory harmony can impede business efficiency and create confusion for global Muslim tourists seeking clarity on halal services.

Commodification of Religion and Crisis of Authenticity

Hall and Prayag (2020) critically raise the issue of the commodification of religion, where Islamic values are commercialized through the halal label solely for economic gain. In this context, halal shifts from a spiritual concept to a branding tool and a neoliberal marketing strategy. Hotels, restaurants, and travel agencies use halal certification as a selling point without genuinely internalizing Islamic ethical principles in their business practices.

This phenomenon gives rise to what Hall and Prayag call the tension between the sacred and the profane. Religion, which was originally moral and transcendental, is at risk of being reduced to a market commodity. Consequently, a crisis of authenticity emerges in the halal tourism industry, where Islamic symbols are present on the surface but have lost their spiritual and social substance.

Identity Politics and the Islamization of Economic Space

In some countries, halal hospitality functions not only as a business strategy but also as a tool of politics and identity diplomacy. Governments and industry players often use the halal label to strengthen religious legitimacy and economic nationalism. For example, Malaysia positions itself as a Global Halal Hub to assert its leadership role in the Islamic world; meanwhile, in non-Muslim countries like Japan and South Korea, halal is used as a means of soft power diplomacy to attract Muslim tourists from the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

However, the politicization of halal also carries risks. When halal certification and promotion are made a political agenda, it can create exclusivity and stereotypes, especially towards non-Muslims. In this context, halal is no longer understood as a universal ethical system but as a sectarian identity. Thus, the greatest challenge is how to maintain the spiritual universality of halal amidst narrow identity politics narratives.

Knowledge and Understanding Gaps Among Non-Muslims

The next issue is the lack of halal literacy among non-Muslim industry players. Many tourism service providers in Europe, America, or East Asia understand halal merely as a set of dietary rules, without realizing that the concept encompasses aspects of service ethics, spatial design, and social interaction. This misperception often leads to errors in facility provision, such as the availability of prayer rooms, gender privacy, or serving food contaminated with non-halal elements.

Therefore, [Hall and Prayag \(2020\)](#) emphasize the importance of cross-cultural education and professional training in the tourism sector. An increase in cultural competency is necessary so that industry players can provide services that are sensitive to religious values without sacrificing the principle of inclusivity.

Challenges of Ethics, Sustainability, and Digitalization

The digital era adds a new layer to the challenges of halal tourism. On one hand, the emergence of digital platforms like HalalTrip or MuslimPro Travel helps Muslim tourists find halal services efficiently. On the other hand, digitalization also raises issues of the validity of halal certification data and the risk of online fraud. Additionally, the issue of environmental sustainability is still a matter of debate, as not all halal destinations pay attention to ecological aspects and social responsibility.

Thus, the future development of halal tourism must emphasize the principle of *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (the objectives of Shariah)—protecting religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property—within the framework of global sustainability. This principle can serve as a bridge between spiritual demands, business ethics, and ecological responsibility in the modern tourism industry.

Academic Gaps and the Need for a Multidisciplinary Approach

Academically, research on halal hospitality is still relatively young and fragmented. Many studies are descriptive and have not yet touched on deep theoretical aspects such as the epistemology of Islam in tourism, the psychology of Muslim tourists, or the political-economic analysis of Shariah tourism. This indicates the need for a multidisciplinary approach involving economics, sociology, anthropology, and religious studies to understand the phenomenon of halal tourism comprehensively.

Hall and Prayag propose a futuristic view that the sustainability of halal tourism will heavily depend on the collaboration between spirituality, sustainability, and digital technology. Future trends include:

- a. Digitalization of halal certification through blockchain technology for supply chain transparency.
- b. Halal travel mobile applications that help Muslim tourists find Shariah-compliant facilities.
- c. Integration of the principles of *maqasid al-shariah* (objectives of Shariah) into sustainable tourism policies.
- d. Innovation in hotel and destination design that promotes Islamic ethics while ensuring global inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

Halal tourism is a space of interaction between spirituality and globalization. It not only represents the religious needs of Muslims but also opens a path for cross-cultural dialogue and sustainable development. The Routledge Handbook of Halal Hospitality and Islamic Tourism affirms that the future of this industry lies in its ability to integrate religious values, business ethics, and global innovation into a just and sustainable system.

Halal hospitality and Islamic tourism not only offer economic opportunities but also carry a spiritual mission to uphold the values of justice, balance, and universal humanity. With a holistic and ethical approach, halal tourism can become a model for sustainable development that combines religious, social, and economic dimensions in the era of globalization.

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