

## Research Article

# Recent Development on Halal Tourism: Evidence From Global Muslim Travel Index

M Rasyid<sup>1\*</sup> and F Ayuni Hatta<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Economics, Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Malaysia

**ORCID**

M Rasyid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1233-5356>

**Abstract.**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the development of global religious tourism based on the results of the latest report from the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) in 2024. The GMTI is a strategic index designed to assess the readiness of a tourist destination to attract Muslim tourists, both from Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries. The index reflects the destination's commitment to providing services that align with Muslim needs and values, as well as offering a safe, comfortable, and Islamic principles travel experience. GMTI also plays a role in mapping out new opportunities in the halal tourism sector, which has great potential to continue to grow in the future. The results of the assessment from the GMTI study show that Malaysia has consistently been the main reference in global religious tourism. Recently, Indonesia has also emerged as the first ranking in the GMT qualifiers. Surprisingly, it turns out that Saudi Arabia, which is the main reference for Muslim worship, is still in third place. These results show that the potential for religious tourism in Malaysia and Indonesia is still very high.

**Keywords:** development, halal tourism, religious, GMTI

## 1. Introduction

Halal tourism has grown rapidly over the past few decades, in line with the growing Muslim population in the world as well as the global awareness of the needs and preferences of Muslim tourists. The sector's growth is not only limited to Muslim-majority countries, but is also being adopted by destinations around the world looking to attract this growing segment of tourists. This reflects a fundamental change in the global tourism industry that is increasingly inclusive and pays attention to the diverse needs of tourists (1).

**Large and Growing Muslim Population:** Currently, Muslims make up about 24% of the world's population, with significant growth projected through 2030. The Muslim population is expected to continue to grow until it reaches 2.2 billion people by 2030.

Corresponding Author: M Rasyid;  
email:  
[mohtar.rasyid@trunojoyo.ac.id](mailto:mohtar.rasyid@trunojoyo.ac.id)

**Published:** 19 February 2025

Publishing services provided by  
Knowledge E

© Rasyid, Hatta. This article is distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License](#), which permits unrestricted use and redistribution provided that the original author and source are credited.

Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICESIDE Conference Committee.



With rising per capita income in Muslim-majority countries, Muslim tourists are becoming one of the fastest-growing segments in the tourism industry. Muslim tourists spent around USD 225 billion on travel in 2022, and this figure is projected to increase rapidly in the coming years. This potential has led many countries, both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim, to compete to attract this segment by offering services that meet their specific needs.

Muslim tourists have special preferences that are influenced by their religious and cultural teachings. In the context of tourism, this involves aspects such as the availability of halal food, easily accessible worship facilities, and an environment that supports Islamic values, such as maintaining privacy and civility. One of the most prominent aspects of halal tourism is the provision of halal food. Halal certification is an important factor for Muslim tourists, especially when they travel to non-Muslim countries. In addition, the need for worship facilities such as mosques or prayer rooms that are easily accessible is also an important consideration. Countries that want to attract Muslim tourists have begun to develop infrastructure that meets these needs.

The global tourism industry has evolved towards greater inclusivity, where destinations seek to cater to different segments of tourists with diverse needs (2). Halal tourism reflects an effort to provide services that are not only enjoyable but also allow tourists to continue practicing their religion during the trip. A number of non-Muslim countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore, have begun to integrate Muslim-friendly services as part of their tourism strategies. These countries see great potential in attracting Muslim tourists from different parts of the world, especially from the Middle East and South Asia regions, by adapting their facilities and services to reflect the needs of Muslim tourists.

Technology has played an important role in facilitating halal tourism. Mobile applications that provide information about halal restaurants, mosque locations, prayer times, and travel guides for Muslim tourists are increasingly popping up. The app helps Muslim travelers to plan their trips better, especially when visiting non-Muslim countries. Halal tourist destinations also utilize digital marketing and social media to reach Muslim tourists. Social media has become an effective tool to promote Muslim-friendly tourist attractions and offer reviews and recommendations from other Muslim tourists (3).

Organizations such as CrescentRating and Mastercard play an important role in the development of halal tourism through the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI). They provide comprehensive data on the most Muslim-friendly destinations, as well as identify

trends in Muslim travelers' preferences and behaviors. It helps countries and the tourism industry to develop the right strategy in serving this market. The Organization of the Islamic Conference is also actively promoting halal tourism as part of the economic development agenda in its member countries. Halal tourism is considered a sector that can strengthen local economic growth as well as create jobs in the countries involved.

## 2. Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI)

The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) can be interpreted as a ranking tool that gives scores to various tourist destinations based on their ability to meet the needs of Muslim tourists. The index measures how well a destination can provide Muslim-friendly services, including worship facilities, halal food, and a safe and comfortable environment in accordance with Islamic principles. GMTI serves to:

- To be a guide for Muslim tourists in choosing a destination that suits their needs.
- Encourage destinations to improve Muslim-friendly services and amenities.
- Identify trends and opportunities in the halal tourism industry globally.

GMTI plays an important role in driving the growth of the halal tourism sector. Halal tourism, which was previously limited to Muslim-majority countries, is now increasingly widespread with greater global adoption. The index helps countries, both Muslim and non-Muslim-majority countries, to understand the preferences of Muslim tourists and increase their attractiveness through offering products and services that meet halal standards. GMTI assesses various factors that are relevant to the Muslim tourist experience. Some of the key indicators on which the assessment is based include:

- **Accessibility:** Ease for Muslim tourists to reach and explore destinations, including the availability of transportation, visas, and travel infrastructure.
- **Halal Service:** The existence of halal-certified restaurants and food providers, as well as the convenience for tourists to find halal food options during the trip.
- **Worship Facilities:** The availability of worship facilities, such as mosques or prayer rooms, in tourist attractions, airports, hotels, and shopping centers.
- **Communication:** Easily accessible information and Muslim-friendly language, including signs and tourist guides in languages often spoken by the Muslim community.
- **Environment and Safety:** The perception of a safe and friendly environment, as well as the ease for Muslim tourists to carry out their religious obligations.

As the number of Muslim tourists increases, which is expected to reach 230 million by 2028, GMTI is helping countries to increase their attractiveness in the halal tourism sector. Muslim tourists are generally looking for a travel experience that is not only enjoyable but also allows them to carry out their religious obligations, such as access to halal food and worship facilities. GMTI provides guidance for governments, businesses, and stakeholders in the tourism industry to meet these needs. Countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates often rank high in the GMTI because they have infrastructure and policies that support halal tourism. Meanwhile, non-Muslim countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore have also started to rank better by adopting Muslim-friendly services.

An increase in the ranking in the GMTI can have a significant economic impact on a country. Halal tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global tourism industry, with the potential for billions of dollars in revenue from the Muslim tourist segment. Destinations that successfully meet the GMTI criteria can attract more Muslim tourists, increase revenue from the tourism sector, and expand their market base. The GMTI is a strategic index designed to assess the readiness of a tourist destination to attract Muslim tourists, both from Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries. The index reflects the destination's commitment to providing services that align with Muslim needs and values, as well as offering a safe, comfortable, and Islamic principles travel experience. GMTI also plays a role in mapping out new opportunities in the halal tourism sector, which has great potential to continue to grow in the future. Thus, the GMTI is not only a ranking tool, but also a strategic instrument that can encourage countries to adapt to increasingly diversified global tourism trends.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the global tourism industry, including halal tourism (4). However, post-pandemic, there has been an increase in interest in destinations that offer a safe, clean, and compliant travel experience that complies with strict health protocols. Muslim-friendly destinations are often associated with safety, cleanliness, and health, which is a plus for travelers in the post-pandemic era. Countries that want to remain competitive in the post-pandemic halal tourism sector must adapt by integrating hygiene, sanitation, and safety aspects in their services, while still maintaining halal values in the facilities offered.

Globalization has significantly increased the mobility of tourists, including Muslim tourists. The ease of international travel, increased flight routes, and wider access to information make traveling to various countries easier and more affordable for Muslim tourists. Globalization also opens up opportunities for halal tourist destinations around

the world. Non-Muslim countries, which previously did not focus on halal tourism, are now starting to develop Muslim-friendly services to attract this market segment. This is seen in countries such as New Zealand, Australia, and some European countries that have begun to adjust their services to accommodate Muslim tourists. Despite significant progress in the development of halal tourism, there are still major challenges, especially in countries that do not yet have Muslim-friendly infrastructure. The availability of halal food and worship facilities is still an obstacle in several destinations that should have the potential to attract Muslim tourists. Not all countries have consistent and internationally recognized halal standards. This difference in standards can cause confusion for Muslim tourists, especially when visiting non-Muslim countries.

### 3. Case Studies Indonesia and Malaysia

The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) has become the main guide in assessing the readiness and attractiveness of tourist destinations for Muslim tourists. Several countries consistently rank highest in the GMTI due to their efforts in providing Muslim-friendly services and infrastructure. Among these countries, Indonesia and Malaysia often rank at the top because they have tourism ecosystems that strongly support the needs of Muslim tourists. Here is an in-depth review of how these two countries are developing their halal tourism sectors, the factors that influence their high ranking in the GMTI, as well as their impact on the local tourism industry.

#### 3.1. Indonesia: A Destination with Great Halal Tourism Potential

Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, has a natural advantage in attracting Muslim tourists. Although Indonesia's halal tourism infrastructure continues to grow, the commitment of the government and the private sector to make Indonesia a top destination for global Muslim tourists has yielded significant results (5).

##### 3.1.1. Ranking in GMTI

Indonesia has been one of the countries that dominates the highest ranking in the GMTI over the past few years. In 2022, Indonesia along with Malaysia ranked first in the GMTI, reflecting the significant progress that has been made in halal tourism.

### 3.1.2. Factors Supporting High Rankings

Indonesia offers easy access to halal food in almost all tourist destinations. Restaurants and eateries across the country automatically follow halal standards because the majority of the population is Muslim. This provides a sense of security for Muslim tourists who are worried about halal food during their trip. As a Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has mosques spread throughout its territory, both in big cities and tourist destinations. In major tourist attractions, such as Bali, Lombok, and Yogyakarta, tour managers provide clean and easily accessible prayer rooms for Muslim tourists. Airports, shopping malls, and hotels also provide complete worship facilities.

The Indonesian government is very active in promoting halal tourism. Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism collaborates with various institutions, such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), to ensure halal certification for restaurants, hotels, and other tourism services. In addition, the government continues to develop halal destinations such as Lombok which is known as the "Best Halal Tourism Destination" at several international awards. Indonesia is aggressively promoting halal tourism through various platforms, including international tourism exhibitions and digital marketing campaigns. The "Wonderful Indonesia" program targets the global Muslim market segment by offering a variety of Muslim-friendly tour packages, ranging from family packages to halal honeymoons. Lombok, which is often referred to as the "Island of a Thousand Mosques," is a model for halal tourism in Indonesia. The local government is working with businesses to build a more Muslim-friendly infrastructure, including halal certification for hotels and restaurants, training for tour guides on the needs of Muslim tourists, and the development of spiritual tourism centers.

### 3.1.3. Impact on Tourism and Local Economy

Halal tourism has had a positive impact on the local economy in Indonesia. Destinations such as Lombok and Aceh have seen an increase in Muslim tourist visits from various countries, especially from the Middle East and Southeast Asia. In addition, the increase in halal tourism also encourages related sectors, such as halal culinary, Muslim fashion, and the hospitality industry, to innovate and develop further.

### 3.2. Malaysia: A Leader in Global Halal Tourism

Malaysia, as one of the pioneers in the development of halal tourism, has long held a leading position in GMTI. The country not only relies on cultural and religious factors, but also structured policies and innovative efforts to continuously improve the quality of halal tourism in the country (6).

#### 3.2.1. Ranking in GMTI

Malaysia has consistently ranked first in the GMTI since the index was introduced, sharing the top spot with Indonesia in recent years. Malaysia is praised for its comprehensive approach in supporting the needs of Muslim tourists, both in terms of infrastructure and policy.

#### 3.2.2. Factors Supporting High Rankings

Malaysia has one of the most respected halal certification systems in the world, which is overseen by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia. Malaysia's halal certification is globally recognized, providing Muslim tourists with assurance that they can easily find food that meets halal standards in the country. Malaysia has long prioritized the development of Muslim-friendly infrastructure, including halal-certified hotels, halal restaurants, and shopping malls and tourist attractions that provide worship facilities. Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Langkawi, and other major cities have mosques or musalas that can be easily accessed by tourists (7).

In addition to general tourist destinations such as Kuala Lumpur and Penang, Malaysia has developed special tourist destinations that offer halal tourism experiences. For example, Langkawi and Penang have become favorite destinations for Muslim tourists due to their natural beauty as well as the availability of services that are in line with Islamic principles. Malaysia specifically targets Muslim tourists from the family and couples segment who are looking for a halal honeymoon experience. Many hotels and resorts in Malaysia provide honeymoon packages that prioritize privacy and are equipped with amenities such as halal food and places of worship.

The Malaysian government has made halal tourism one of the top priorities in the country's economic development strategy. In addition, the government continues to

introduce policies that support the development of halal tourism, such as training and certification for tourism industry players.

### **3.2.3. Impact on Tourism and Local Economy**

Malaysia gets significant economic benefits from halal tourism. The country attracts Muslim tourists from different parts of the world, including from the Middle East, South-east Asia, and even Europe. Halal tourism has helped expand the market share of the hospitality, culinary, and transportation services industries in Malaysia. Moreover, with its position as a leader in halal tourism, Malaysia has become a model for other countries looking to develop the sector.

## **3.3. Comparison of Indonesia and Malaysia in Halal Tourism**

The two countries have different but equally successful approaches to promoting halal tourism: Indonesia is leveraging its rich cultural heritage and government support to develop new Muslim-friendly destinations, such as Lombok and Aceh. Malaysia has long been a leader with a more mature infrastructure and a globally recognized halal certification system, which makes it a top destination for Muslim tourists.

Both Indonesia and Malaysia show that the development of halal tourism can have a significant economic impact with the right strategy. Indonesia continues to expand its tourism potential through government support and innovation in halal infrastructure, while Malaysia has solidified its position as a global leader in halal tourism with a reliable certification system and comprehensive tourism services. These two countries are examples of how halal tourism can be an important pillar in the country's economic growth as well as international tourism attraction.

Indonesia and Malaysia are consistently ranked at the top of the GMTI. Indonesia, with the largest Muslim population in the world, has managed to become a leading destination in halal tourism. In 2023, Indonesia and Malaysia share the first position with a score of 73 out of 100, reflecting their excellence in providing friendly facilities for Muslim tourists, such as halal food, access to places of worship, and tourism services that are in accordance with sharia needs. In Indonesia, a significant increase in halal tourism can be seen from the increase in the ranking in GMTI, from 4th place in 2021 to first place in 2023. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf), is actively encouraging the sector by involving



various stakeholders, including the Indonesian Halal Tourism Association (PPHI) and Mastercard CrescentRating. Malaysia, since 2015, has maintained its position as one of the best destinations for Muslim tourists. This success is reinforced by various government initiatives, such as the Muslim Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) program and the Muslim Friendly Assurance Recognition (MFAR) certification, which are designed to increase the attractiveness of the country's halal tourism sector. In 2022, Malaysia managed to attract 2.12 million Muslim tourists who contributed RM5.37 billion in spending. Southeast Asia's role in halal tourism is increasingly dominant, with more than 31% of global Muslim tourists choosing destinations in the region. Muslim tourist trends also show a growing interest in sustainable tourism, wellness, and authentic experiences that align with religious values.

## 4. Recommendation

For countries looking to increase the attractiveness of halal tourism, some strategic recommendations can be drawn from the best practices adopted by leading destinations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and others (8). These countries have managed to build a strong reputation as Muslim-friendly tourism destinations through policy initiatives, service innovations, and halal tourism promotion. Here are some recommendations that can be implemented:

### 4.1. Halal Infrastructure Development

Access to halal food, easy-to-find worship facilities, and accommodation that complies with sharia standards are important elements in increasing the attractiveness for Muslim tourists. Countries that are serious about increasing halal tourism should invest in developing halal infrastructure. This includes, Halal certification for restaurants, hotels, and other services. National or regional halal certification bodies must be well integrated to ensure that Muslim tourists feel safe consuming products and services in the country. Worship facilities, such as prayer rooms or mosques that are easily accessible at major tourist attractions, airports, shopping centers, and other strategic locations. Muslim-friendly accommodation, including services such as Qibla direction information in the hotel room, provision of the Qur'an, and prayer schedules.

## 4.2. Training and Education for Industry Players

The government and tourism operators need to educate and train industry players regarding Muslim-friendly service standards (9). Some of the steps that can be taken include: Training and certification programs for tour guides, hotel staff, and restaurants on the special needs of Muslim tourists, such as the provision of halal food and worship facilities. Increase understanding of service ethics for Muslim tourists so that they feel comfortable and appreciated during their holidays.

For example, Malaysia through its Muslim Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) program has implemented courses and training to tour guides and hotels on how to effectively serve Muslim tourists

## 4.3. Targeted Marketing and Promotion

Effective halal tourism promotion requires a targeted marketing strategy. Destinations must communicate their superiority as Muslim-friendly destinations through various media. Steps that can be taken include: Digital marketing campaigns targeting Muslim tourists, promoting halal services, and cultural attractions that appeal to this market. Cooperation with travel agents in Muslim-majority countries to promote halal tour packages. Participation in international tourism exhibitions focusing on the halal market, such as Halal In Travel and the World Halal Tourism Summit. Indonesia and Malaysia have consistently used platforms such as Halal In Travel to introduce their halal tourism, increasing their competitiveness in the international market

## 4.4. Government and Private Collaboration

The success of halal tourism is greatly influenced by collaboration between the government, business people, and local communities. The government can encourage policies that support the development of halal tourism, while the private sector can execute appropriate services and products. Recommendations to improve this synergy include:

- Incentives from the government, such as tax exemptions or subsidies for businesses that adopt halal standards.
- Encourage private sector participation in expanding halal hotel chains, halal restaurants, and Muslim-friendly tour operators.

- Involve local communities in halal tourism-based economic development programs to create jobs and strengthen the local economy.

#### 4.5. Diversify Tourism Offers

In addition to meeting the basic needs of Muslim tourists, destinations can diversify their tourism offerings by providing unique halal tour packages. This can include: Islamic cultural and historical tourism, such as pilgrimages to historical mosques or religious sites. Health and wellness tourism in accordance with Islamic principles, for example halal spas or separate health care centers for men and women. Family tourism that provides child-friendly activities and a safe and comfortable environment for Muslim tourists. Countries like Turkey have developed a variety of halal tourism products that involve in-depth Islamic cultural and historical experiences, while the United Arab Emirates offers luxury tour packages that remain in line with halal principles

#### 4.6. Research and Development (R&D)

To maintain competitiveness in the halal tourism market, destinations must continue to conduct research and development to understand the preferences and trends of Muslim tourists. Reports such as GMTI can be an important reference, but more detailed local research is also needed to (10):

- Identify the specific needs of Muslim travelers in a particular country.
- Increase innovation in the development of halal services and products that are tailored to the latest trends.

### Acknowledgement

This research has been supported by grants from LPPM Universitas Trunojoyo Madura through National Collaboration Scheme 2024. We are especially indebted to anonymous reviewer of this publication for many valuable comment and suggestions.

### References

- [1] Slamet AI, Abdullah I, Laila NQ. The contestation of the meaning of halal tourism. *Heliyon*. 2022 Mar;8(3):e09098.

- [2] Stone MJ, Sthapit E. Memories are not all positive: conceptualizing negative memorable food, drink, and culinary tourism experiences. *Tour Manag Perspect*. 2024 Nov;54:54.
- [3] Goel G, Dash SR. Household pandemic Internet search intensity and stock returns: A case of tourism industry resiliency. *IIMB Manag Rev*. 2023 Dec;35(4):426–40.
- [4] Pham T, Nugroho A. Tourism-induced poverty impacts of COVID-19 in Indonesia. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights*. 2022 Nov;3(2):100069.
- [5] Rifai H, Lukman KM, Quevedo JM, Francis P, Sjafrie ND, Triyono, et al. Understanding stakeholders' perception on developing seagrass-associated tourism: evidence from marine protected areas of Bintan Island, Indonesia. *Mar Pollut Bull*. 2024 Dec;209 Pt A:117063.
- [6] Hasri NH, Taib MohdZMohd, Ahmad SSh. Relevance of Regulatory Policies in Governing Adherence to Halal Concept in the Design of Food Premises in Malaysia. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2016 Jun;222:306–14.
- [7] Samori Z, Sabtu N. Developing Halal Standard for Malaysian Hotel Industry: An Exploratory Study. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2014 Mar;121:144–57.
- [8] Dincer FI, Dincer MZ, Yilmaz S. The Economic Contribution of Turkish Tourism Entrepreneurship on the Development of Tourism Movements in Islamic Countries. *Procedia Soc Behav Sci*. 2015 Jul;195:413–22.
- [9] Viken A, Heimtun B. Tourism mobilities and climate crisis dilemmas: tourists traveling towards a climate apocalypse? *Ann Tour Res*. 2024 Nov;109:109.
- [10] Zhang P, Wang J, Li R. Tourism-type ontology framework for tourism-type classification, naming, and knowledge organization. *Heliyon*. 2023 Apr;9(4):e15192.