

# Exploring Trends, Opportunities, and Challenges in the Waqf and Halal Tourism Industry in Malaysia



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**Abstract** Waqf and halal tourism are essential sectors within the global tourism industry and are gaining momentum today. This is prompted by the increasing number of Muslim tourists who require travel destinations that accommodate their religious and cultural requirements. Besides having a rich Islamic cultural heritage, Kelantan has the potential to incorporate Waqf into its framework for Halal tourism as well. Historically, when applied to religious, educational, and social welfare

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projects, Waqf can be mobilized to develop halal tourism infrastructure and preserve Islamic cultural sites and community-based tourism projects to provide a sustainable financing mechanism that conforms with Islamic principles. This article centres on Kelantan, Malaysia, and examines the current trends, opportunities, and challenges in Waqf and halal tourism. This is supported by research that shows the Waqf and halal sectors have to innovate and adopt new technologies. Another describes how cultural and historical elements can shape the setting of halal tourism so that it can meet trends set at a global level. It also made Malaysia one of the best destinations for Muslim tourists by reviewing government programs, setting standards for halal certification, and bringing in a wide range of tourism goods. Thus, the study is located in Malaysia. Subsequently, Kelantan's rich multi-cultural and religious environment, various local initiatives, and favorable location regarding the potential expansion of substantial Halal tourism are examined in this investigation. This research aims to provide a more in-depth understanding and recommendations for developing Halal tourism in Kelantan to the local governments, business players, and legislators. The result of this project would add to more generalized growth for Malaysia's tourism industry.

**Keywords** Waqf · Halal tourism · Muslim travelers · Sustainable tourism · Cultural heritage

## 1 Introduction

The Halal standard guides the operation and trade of services and facilities for Muslim travellers, including halal food, prayer facilities, separate swimming pools and spa services for men and women, and accommodation that provides privacy and modesty. It is relevant because, besides providing comfort and convenience for tourists, it opens up huge economic prospects for the places that can successfully serve this market. Besides having a strong Islamic cultural heritage, Kelantan also possesses the potential to integrate Waqf, or Islamic endowment, into its Halal tourism framework. Traditionally utilised for religious, educational, and social welfare projects, Waqf can be mobilised to develop Halal tourism infrastructure, preserve Islamic cultural sites, and develop community-based tourism projects. This provides a sustainable financing mechanism aligned with Islamic principles. Halal tourism has grown in Muslim-majority nations and is a concern because of the diverse community culture where people are used to accepting one another's differences. Since the rest of Malaysia's tourism industry in halal relies on the annual growth in the number of Muslim tourists, many other nations with lots of Muslims and non-Muslims, work to promote halal tourism. It can also be said that very often, these countries only work to create a Muslim-friendly environment. In this respect, halal tourism's prevailing concept and principles are superior to Malaysia's [10].

As per the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), 2021, growth in the Halal tourism market is anticipated to be significantly influenced by the increase in the

number of travelling Muslims and their travel spending in future years. It saw a strong performance in the industry, as 26.1 million international tourist arrivals a sizeable number of Muslim travellers came to offer 41 billion RM to the national gross domestic product in 2019. Malaysia has been gaining considerable international attention in its halal tourist industry. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index, Malaysia has remained the premier halal tourism destination in the world for the second consecutive year, having been placed first in the category “Muslim-Friendly Destination” in 2021 and 2022. Malaysia retained its top two positions within the Global Muslim Travel Index—GMTI 2023 report following an announcement at the Halal in Travel Awards 2023 of Top Muslim-Friendly Destination of the Year and Muslim Women-Friendly Destination of the Year.

Malaysia is set up to become one of the best places in the world for Halal travel, thanks to its large Muslim population and well-established Halal ecosystem. The fact that the government wants to promote Halal licensing and infrastructure compatible with Halal shows how dedicated the country is to Halal tourism. The Malaysia Tourism Transformation Plan 2020 aims to position Malaysia as a global leader in Islamic tourism by offering distinctive, diversified Halal products and services. This is why GMTI has consecutively positioned Malaysia in the top rankings as a globally Halal-friendly travel destination, signifying the country’s efforts toward offering services and amenities to Muslim travellers. Halal tourism in Malaysia boosts the country’s tourist industry and adds value to local industries like food production and hospitality. This helps the economy grow and creates jobs. Malaysian Halal travel is one of the fastest-growing and most-evolving industries. There are more Muslim-friendly places to stay, and by 2021, the country will have over 2000 Halal-certified hotels. The industry also indicates an upward trend in providing Muslim-friendly tour packages tailored to Muslim travellers’ experiences.

Furthermore, with the growing demand for Halal certification in food and beverages, more restaurants and eating places seek the same accreditation. JAKIM, 2020. Considering its ability to host Islamic-based events, conferences, and festivals, Malaysia has recorded considerate milestones that further cement its position in the rankings as a leading destination within Halal tourism. These developments underscore the significant and expanding role Halal tourism has begun to play in Kelantan and Malaysia as a whole, based on the nation’s strong Islamic heritage, well-developed infrastructure, and strategic marketing aimed at the global Muslim travel market.

### ***1.1 Halal Industry from the Perspective of Kelantan State in Malaysia***

Kelantan in northeast Malaysia is famous for its cultural heritage and Islamic values, hence the area with the most potential to develop Halal tourism. The state prides itself on traditional art, handicrafts, and pulsating markets that offer fresh experiences to

visitors. Since Kelantan stands to preserve the culture and tradition of Islam, it is an attractive destination for Muslim tourists in pursuit of a knowledge-retrieving and memorable experience. With a focus on Halal tourism, Kelantan will gain from the growing number of Muslim visitors to the state and allow tourism development without offending local mores and traditions.

Kelantan actively promoted as an optimal location for Islamic religious festivities, conferences, and pilgrimages through targeted marketing campaigns to lure Muslim tourists from the Middle East, Asia, and other regions. The persistent endeavours of the Malaysian government and tourist boards to cultivate and augment the country's Halal tourism offers demonstrate their dedication to positioning Malaysia as a prominent Halal tourism destination. Last year, Kelantan experienced commendable growth in the Halal tourism industry, attracting over 5.9 million local and foreign tourists. To fully harness the sector's potential, the Kelantan state government has prioritised the growth of Halal tourism by enhancing the supply side by adding more Halal-certified hotels, restaurants, and tourist products.

## 2 Literature Review

Studies on the intersection of Waqf and tourism highlight its potential in financing infrastructure development, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable tourism in Muslim-majority countries [5]. For instance, in Turkey and Egypt, Waqf funds have been used to maintain mosques, schools, and community centres as key tourist attractions. Integrating Waqf into Halal tourism could provide Kelantan with a sustainable financial model to support the long-term development of its Islamic cultural assets. The concept of halal tourism has been extensively discussed in academic literature, highlighting its significance and potential within the global tourism landscape. Battour and Ismail [2] define halal tourism as “tourism objects and services that are compliant with Islamic teachings” (p. 151), emphasising the importance of adherence to Islamic principles in all aspects of the tourism experience. Boğan and Sarıışık [1] have observed that halal tourism term focuses more on the compliance of touristic activities, products, and services with the Islamic rules and principles to develop practices and regulations to avoid the unjust treatment of consumers. Several studies have explored the factors driving the growth of halal tourism. Razali and Arriffin [18] identify critical motivations for Muslim travellers, such as the desire for Sharia-compliant accommodations, halal food options, and the availability of prayer facilities. Similarly, Battour and Ismail [2] emphasise the importance of destination attributes, including the availability of Islamic-friendly amenities and the preservation of local culture and traditions, in shaping the preferences of Muslim tourists.

The literature also examines the challenges and opportunities associated with halal tourism development. Dinar Standard and Crescentrating [4] highlight the need for harmonised standards and regulations across different destinations to deliver halal tourism experiences consistently. Likewise, Mohsin et al. [13] stress the

importance of addressing Muslim travellers' diverse needs and expectations with varying religious observances and preferences. Concerning the focus on Kelantan, Malaysia, existing studies have explored the state's potential as a halal tourism destination. Jamal et al. [11] investigate the impact of Kelantan's unique cultural and religious identity on the development of halal tourism, noting the importance of preserving traditional practices and integrating them into tourism offerings. Additionally, Hashim et al. [7] emphasise the role of government support and community engagement in enhancing the competitiveness of Kelantan as a halal tourism hub.

## ***2.1 Kelantan's Position in Halal Tourism***

Kelantan is an advanced Islamic cultural state that is fast gaining recognition for its determination and adherence to Halal principles in all its dealings. It is also a critical state with a highly enriched culture and religion, inherited in traditional arts, craftsmanship, and varied Islamic festivals. At the heart of the state's attractiveness, they offer a well-rounded and immersive cultural experience for Muslim tourists based on Islamic traditions. The preservation and promotion of Kelantan's special characteristics make it attractive for Muslim tourism in search of rest and significant contact with Islamic culture. Other literature also stated that with the introduction of cultural and religious elements to tourism product offerings, the experiences of Muslim tourists become much more fulfilling, placing Kelantan in a very privileged position within the Halal tourism market. This again finds support in the work of Hashim and Mohd Noor [8].

While Kelantan has a good headstart in Halal tourism, studies have indicated that there is still much to be done in terms of infrastructure and services for the full realisation of the potential. Improvement in transportation links in developing Kelantan as an attractive destination for Muslim tourists should be created, along with upgrading accommodations to Halal standards and providing all-inclusive tourist information services. According to the available literature, investments in these sectors can significantly increase Kelantan's competitiveness within the Halal tourism sector. As a result, the state will be able to secure a larger market share of this substantial segment of the Muslim travel market. Due to its strategic location near the Thai border, it presents a distinctive opportunity for tourism that extends across the border and for its integration with Thailand's Halal tourism initiatives. In addition to facilitating the uncomplicated border crossing for Muslim tourists, the proximity also encourages the development of halal tourism packages that span the border and collaborative marketing initiatives. By capitalising on its location, Kelantan will be able to provide services to a greater variety of Muslim tourists, most of whom will be from Southeast Asia. As a result, the city will take on greater regional relevance in the framework of Halal tourism.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 *Research Design*

The study is based on a qualitative research design; it uses content analysis to investigate the trends, opportunities, and challenges facing Halal tourism in Kelantan, Malaysia. Content analysis is apt for the nature of the study in that it entails a systematic and textual data examination, including published literature, government reports, and tourism brochures accessed through online resources. It seeks to establish the contribution of these recurring themes, patterns, and insights toward the current status and future potential of Halal tourism within Kelantan.

The primary data sources for the study are as follows:

1. **Published Literature:** Academic journals, books, and conference proceedings on Halal travel, with an eye towards works dealing with Kelantan and Malaysia.
2. **Government Reports and Policy Documents:** Halal tourism benefits from official strategies, efforts, and statistics provided by the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), and the government of Kelantan.
3. **Travel Brochures and Marketing Tools:** Different printed and digital resources created and shared by travel agencies and boards to advertise Kelantan as Halal-friendly.
4. **Online Resources:** Regarding Kelantan, websites, blogs, and social media, talking about Halal tourism trends and consumer preferences.

**Data Selection Criteria:** As described here is the set of criteria applied for data:

1. **Relevance:** Sources were chosen when directly connected to Halal travel in Kelantan or Malaysia.
2. **Credibility:** We gave official government publications, peer-reviewed journals, and credible travel studies a priority.
3. **Recency:** Sources published in the past ten years were given preference so that the results reflect the general trend and growth.

#### 3.2 *Data Collection*

The following constitute the primary information sources for the study:

1. **Published Literature:** Based on the problem of Halal tourism, the researcher has mostly targeted academic journals, books, and conference proceedings; nonetheless, it is more precisely related to Kelantan and Malaysia.
2. **Policy documents and government reports:** This official strategy, initiative, and data on Halal travel came from the Kelantan state government, the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), and the Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture.

- Promotional Materials and Tourism Brochures printed and digital resources created by agencies marketing Kelantan as a Halal-friendly travel destination.
3. Online tools, particularly concerning Kelantan, relevant websites, blogs, and social media debating trends and consumer preference for Halal travel, have been alluded to.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The content analysis was carried out in the following stages:

1. Data Familiarisation: The researcher went through all the material collected by reading and re-reading to become familiar with the content.
2. Coding: Themes and categories that emerged regarding Halal tourism in Kelantan were identified and coded, such as cultural heritage, local initiatives, challenges on infrastructure, and strategic opportunities.
3. Thematic Analysis: The coded data were organised as thematic clusters to identify patterns and relationships. For instance, the theme concerning cultural heritage and local initiatives was put together to see how the distinctive cultural assets of Kelantan are tapped into for Halal tourism.
4. Thematic analysis findings were interpreted in light of the existing literature and research objectives by drawing connections among the identified themes concerning broader trends and challenges in global and Kelantan Halal tourism.

## **4 Result and Discussion**

This study's findings offer a comprehensive overview of the trends, opportunities, and challenges in Halal tourism, with a specific focus on Kelantan, Malaysia. The content analysis of various sources, including academic literature, government reports, and promotional materials, reveals several key insights into the development and potential of Halal tourism in the region.

### **4.1 Trends in Halal Tourism in Kelantan**

#### **4.1.1 Growing Demand for Halal Tourism**

Kelantan is increasingly becoming a point of interest in Halal tourism, mainly owing to its immense Islamic culture and strict conformation to the principles of Halal. It has emerged as a destination of choice for Muslim visitors desiring to be in an environment that appeals to their way of life in religion [15]. This is evidenced by the more significant number of Muslim tourists flowing into the State of Kelantan from

within the country and abroad, especially from neighbouring countries that have a majority population of Muslims, like Indonesia and Brunei. Indeed, this fact is further evidenced by the increase in Muslim-friendly accommodation facilities and Halal-certified restaurants, among other tourism-related services that have turned Kelantan into one of the favourite tourist destinations for Muslims.

#### **4.1.2 Innovations and Technology in Halal Tourism**

Technological change is the main factor that shapes the landscape of Halal tourism in Kelantan. The coming of the Halal booking platform, mobile application, and virtual tour have offered more convenience to Muslim tourists in planning their journeys and accessing information on Halal-accredited services. Such innovative ideas will solve the peculiar needs of Muslim tourists by having a range of accommodation, eating, and activity options. Besides, the practice of digital marketing and social media platforms has made it possible to effectively promote the Kelantan Halal tourism offerings to target segments worldwide by increasing its visibility and attractiveness.

#### **4.1.3 Integration of Cultural and Heritage Tourism**

Kelantan's rich cultural and religious heritage, which represents one of its best assets regarding its offerings in terms of Halal tourism, includes the following elements. The traditional arts, crafts, and Islamic festivals of the state include the Maulidur Rasul or Prophet Muhammad's Birthday and Ramadan celebrations as an integrated part of the tourism experience within the state. These aspects of culture would create appeal for Muslim tourists and allow them to interact with the community and learn about Kelantan's unique Islamic traditions. This has just differentiated Kelantan from other destinations because the inclusion of cultural and heritage tourism into the larger concept of Halal tourism offers an authentic and immersive experience to its Muslim visitors.

### ***4.2 Opportunities in Halal Tourism in Kelantan***

#### **4.2.1 Market Potential**

Kelantan's market potential is immense from the point of view of Halal tourism, as the state has a very profound Islamic identity and cultural heritage. With its allegiance to uphold the sanctity of its Islamic value-based culture, this state is bound to be one of the exemplary destinations for Halal tourism. The study showed ample opportunities, particularly regarding Halal certified accommodation, food, beverages, and touristic products, remain. By tapping into the global Muslim travel market, which is expected



to grow in the next few years, Kelantan can substantially increase its tourism dollar revenue and thereby contribute to the state's overall economic development.

#### **4.2.2 Government Initiatives**

The Malaysian and the state governments of Kelantan have designated Halal tourism as a critical area of strategic emphasis and have launched multiple assistance initiatives to align with this objective. These policies encompass measures aimed at augmenting the quantity of Halal-certified enterprises, enhancing infrastructural development, and elevating the quality of tourism services. Moreover, establishing the ITC and its holistic effort toward positioning Malaysia as a premier destination for Halal tourism has been another impetus in growing this segment of its tourism industry. Specific initiatives in Kelantan would promote local community involvement within the tourism value chain by developing community-based projects to create sustainable economic opportunities and conserve the state's cultural heritage.

#### **4.2.3 Community Involvement**

Community involvement is very crucial to Kelantan's Halal Tourism strategy. The local people provide core and basic Islamic traditions and cultural practices that are significant in Halal tourism. This helps Kelantan present authentic offerings and contributes towards regional economic development by involving local artisans, businesses, and cultural practitioners in tourism activities. The paper highlights the success of community-based tourism projects in Kelantan that have given tourists unique personalised experiences and benefits to its population. It has strengthened the connection between tourism and the community's well-being, turning Halal tourism into one of the state's most sustainable and inclusive industries.

### ***4.3 Challenges in Halal Tourism in Kelantan***

#### **4.3.1 Infrastructure and Service Constraints**

Despite its potential and promise, Kelantan has several hurdles in fulfilling its objectives of becoming a true Halal tourist destination. Issues relating to infrastructure and service enhancement have been identified. Tourists will benefit from improved transport links, particularly to other parts of Malaysia and surrounding nations. There is also a need to update current lodgings while increasing the number of Halal-certified hotels and eateries. Increasing tourist information services, multilingual guides, and signs is critical to serving international visitors better. Addressing these infrastructure and service restrictions is essential if Kelantan is to position itself effectively in the Halal tourist industry.

### **4.3.2 Competition and Market Positioning**

Kelantan is also competing with other states in Malaysia and international destinations actively promoting Halal tourism. To fully exploit these possibilities, future research should prioritise the execution of an empirical investigation on the enduring economic consequences of Waqf tourism. The analysis demonstrates that strategic marketing and branding are essential for Kelantan to establish itself as a prominent Halal tourism destination nationally and internationally. This would capitalise on its strategic location near the Thai border to attract cross-border tourists, thereby achieving its unique cultural and religious assets.

### **4.3.3 Balancing Development with Cultural Preservation**

Another obstacle recognised was balancing tourism growth with the imperative to safeguard Kelantan's cultural and religious legacy. With continuing growth, Halal tourism runs the danger of commercialising cultural traditions and ultimately compromising the genuineness of the experience. This study has focused on adopting a sustainable approach to tourism development, whereby the focus should be on preserving the Islamic values and traditions of the state while fostering economic growth. This fact, again, makes it relevant that the participation of the local communities is included in this process to ensure that tourism development is genuinely within a cultural and religious context in Kelantan.

## **5 Conclusion**

This paper has discussed the trends, potentials, and challenges of Halal tourism in Kelantan, Malaysia. From this result, Kelantan has immense potential to become a prime global destination for Halal tourism by having an Islamic cultural heritage and strategic location. While these religious and cultural assets put it in an advantageous position, many areas of development still need to be built upon for the full realisation of its potential. A deeper investigation into the trends, opportunities, and challenges throws light on the road ahead as far as Kelantan is concerned in the context of Halal tourism. Underpinning all of this may be how Kelantan-tan has integrated cultural and heritage tourism into the larger platform of Halal tourism. The intrinsic Islamic festivals, mosques, and traditional crafts that the state possesses ensure a unique experience for Muslim tourists and truly position Kelantan in a class of its own within the Halal tourism market. These trends indicate how Kelantan is well-positioned to attract an increasingly large segment of Muslim travellers who are seeking, in addition to leisure, something more meaningful from the connection to Islamic culture and values. The potential for Halal tourism in Kelantan is enormous, with many opportunities for further growth and expansion. Kelantan's solid Islamic identity and cultural heritage are premier assets that enhance its market potential in attracting

Muslim tourists from domestic and international markets. Indeed, few destinations have been able to offer, like Kelantan State, actual, Halal-certified accommodation, restaurants, and tourism services. Considering all these elements, Kelantan has rich opportunities for further growth in Halal tourism, especially now that the state is capitalising on its cultural base and enhancing its products. Although quite promising in its trend and potential, Kelantan still has various issues to be addressed to realise these well-sounding ideas concerning Halal tourism.

First and foremost, there is an excellent need for infrastructural development with accompanying services. Current transportation links, accommodations, and tourist facilities in Kelantan are less developed than in other more developed destinations. It is thus considerably more difficult to attract large international tourists to Kelantan than other places. These services will need upgrading to meet the expectations of today's modern Muslim traveller but with a commitment to Halal standards.

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