COASTAL TOURISM THROUGH A MUSLIM WOMEN'S GAZE: INSIGHTS FROM MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Tourism is not only a movement of people but also a socially constructed way of seeing shaped by culture, religion, and gender. Coastal tourism is often associated with open bodily display and carefree leisure, which may conflict with Muslim women's expectations of modesty, safety, and family orientation. While Malaysia positions itself as a leading Muslim-friendly destination, limited research has centred Muslim women's voices in beach-based tourism. This study addresses this gap by applying and extending Urry's tourist gaze theory through the development of a Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze Framework (MWTG). Using a qualitative, interpretive single-case design, Port Dickson (PD) was studied through 25 semi-structured interviews with Muslim women tourists and key stakeholders, supported by on-site observations. Thematic analysis revealed that women's coastal experiences are organized around three interlinked logics: (1) ethical-spiritual, viewing nature as a site of gratitude and reflection; (2) family-collective, prioritizing safety, modesty, and kinship roles; and (3) environmental stewardship, valuing cleanliness and preservation. Findings extend the tourist gaze beyond Eurocentric assumptions by embedding faith, family, and ecological care into coastal leisure. Practically, the study highlights the importance of modesty-supportive infrastructure, halal assurance, and sustainability in strengthening Malaysia's coastal tourism appeal.
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Keywords: tourist gaze, Muslim women, Islamic tourism, coastal tourism, Port Dickson, Malaysia

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is commonly described as people moving for leisure or other purposes, but it is also a social process shaped by norms, media images, and local meanings. The idea of the "tourist gaze" explains how visitors are guided to look at places and practices in certain ways, not only by personal interests but also by culture, class, gender, and religion (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). In coastal settings, this gaze often assumes open bodily display and carefree leisure, which may not align with modesty expectations and family-oriented routines found among many Muslim communities. Recent work suggests the need to reconsider the gaze through non-Western perspectives to avoid a one-size-fits-all model and to capture diverse experiences in tourism (Cohen & Cohen, 2019). This article follows that direction by centring Muslim women's perceptions and practices in Malaysian coastal destinations, where everyday devotion, safety concerns, and kin responsibilities interact with beach leisure.

The focus on Muslim women is important for both theory and practice. In Malaysia, Muslims (mostly ethnic Malays) form the majority population, and coastal tourism is a key segment of national tourism development and branding (World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021). At the same time, the halal travel economy is expanding, and women are increasingly visible as decision-makers in travel planning, yet their voices remain limited in studies of beach-based leisure (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2021; Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017). Islamic principles such as modesty and privacy shape how women time visits, choose facilities, and manage visibility in mixed-gender spaces (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Rahman et al., 2019). By examining how these factors influence perceptions, expectations, and on-site experiences, this paper refines the tourist gaze concept beyond Eurocentric assumptions and offers practical implications for inclusive coastal design, marketing, and management in Malaysia. Accordingly, this study develops the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG) framework and evaluates it in Port Dickson (PD). Specifically, this study focuses on understanding the tourist gaze from the perspective of Muslim women, particularly in the context of coastal destinations. The purpose is to explore how these women perceive, expect, and experience coastal tourism, considering their unique cultural and religious backgrounds.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper examines how the tourist gaze framework has developed and how it can be read together with Islamic tourism concepts to understand Muslim women's travel, especially in coastal settings of Malaysia. The tourist gaze, first systematized by Urry (1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011), explains that tourism is not only movement but also a socially organized way of seeing places through signs, media, and cultural expectations. At the same time, Islamic tourism scholarship emphasizes Shariah-aligned practices, halal services, and modesty-related needs

that shape travel choices and on-site conduct (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Henderson, 2016). Bringing these two lenses together helps to describe how Muslim women form preferences, navigate space, and evaluate facilities in beach destinations where dominant leisure scripts can conflict with privacy and religious duty. This section proceeds by outlining the evolution and core elements of the tourist gaze, then turning to Islamic tourism and its applications, before considering gendered implications, and finally synthesizing themes related to Muslim-friendly coastal development in Malaysia.

Theoretical framework: Tourist gaze and Islamic tourism
The gaze is a cultural pattern for looking, guided by anticipation, media imagery, and institutional signposting (Urry, 1990, 2002). It emphasizes semiotics (Culler, 1981), the social organization of leisure, and contrasts with ordinary life. Later work added useful dichotomies: romantic vs collective, historic vs modern, authentic vs staged (Jenkins, 2000). Over time, critiques noted Eurocentric biases and called for broader cultural grounding (Franklin & Crang, 2001; Bianchi, 2009). Empirical studies showed culturally distinct gazes. For example, Chinese relational or reverential forms, and Asian collectivist orientations (Li, 2005; Fountain et al., 2011).

In parallel, Islamic tourism frameworks systematize faith aligned travel: halal food assurance, prayer access, modest dress norms, gender sensitive spaces, and avoidance of haram activities (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Rahman et al., 2019). Institutional models such as Malaysia's Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH) or Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) and the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) operationalize standards for destinations (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2024; Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2024). These frameworks rest on Shariah's objectives (*maqasid*), position travel as permissible/valuable when obligations are met and connect leisure to reflection (*tafakkur*) and remembrance (*tadabbur*) in nature (Kamali, 2003; Nasr, 1996).

Integrating the two frameworks allows us to see how gaze is filtered by modesty, family orientation, and prayer routines, and how destination infrastructures, services, and media images co-produce what women consider feasible, respectful, and enjoyable.

Evolution and applications of the tourist gaze
Early formulations linked gaze to socially organized leisure, spectacle, and the reading of signs (Urry, 1990; 2002). Anticipation is built via film, TV, advertising, and digital media, narrowing visitors to a few "nodes" and familiar viewpoints (Urry, 1995). As the concept was applied in new regions, researchers showed culturally specific gazes that do not map neatly to Western individualism: collectivist travel patterns (Lee, 2001), different human nature relations (Li, 2005), and reverential practices at sacred sites (Urry, 2002). More recently, the

subject of gazing widened from tourists to hosts and co-visitors (mutual, reverse, local, intra-tourist gazes), highlighting how performance and observation are reciprocal in crowded destinations (Lin & Fu, 2020). In coastal contexts, this reciprocity connects to visibility and gendered scripts: the camera phone culture, beachwear expectations, and staged promotional photography all shape what is "worth seeing," while visitors adjust routes, timing, and group composition to manage exposure (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2022).

Two distinctions are useful for this study: collective gaze versus personal perception. The gaze frames shared norms of viewing; perception refers to individual, sensory-cognitive interpretation during the trip (Stepchenkova & Li, 2019). In practice, women arrive with gaze shaped expectations about beaches, then refine or resist those expectations through lived experience such as cleanliness, crowding, safety, staff behaviour).

Islamic tourism: Principles, behaviour, and gendered needs

Islamic tourism literature identifies consistent travel considerations:

- Faith compliance in food and hospitality: halal certification, alcohol-free options, avoidance of prohibited entertainment (Henderson, 2009; Battour et al., 2011; Dinar Standard & CrescentRating, 2020).
- Prayer and ablution access across transport hubs, malls, resorts, and attractions (Henderson, 2010; Wilson, 2014).
- Modesty and privacy: gender-segregated recreation where feasible (e.g., women-only beaches or time slots) and designs that screen facilities and mark Qibla in rooms (Stephenson, 2014).
- Family orientation: large share of family travel, need for integrated facilities that respect intergenerational routines (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2019).

Recent industry frameworks add new layers. The RIDA model (Responsible, Immersive, Digital, Assured) links faith services with sustainability, cultural immersion, and technology-enabled planning and assurance (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2024). In practice, this means clean coastal environments, accessible prayer scheduling, halal discovery tools, multilingual wayfinding, clear dress etiquette, and women focused service features.

Gender focus on the other hand identified Muslim women's mobility blends safety, modesty, and social roles. Evidence shows rising financial independence and planning authority among younger cohorts; however, comfort and trust still depend on visible safety protocols, gender-aware service, and reliable signals of cultural fit (Mastercard & CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2019, 2022). Rather than a homogeneous segment, women vary by age, locale, religiosity, and group composition (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2017).

Intersection: Islamic tourist gaze in coastal settings
When the tourist gaze meets Islamic tourism, beaches become sites of careful negotiation between leisure and piety. For many women, the 'default beach script' (mixed crowds, minimal clothing, pervasive photography) does not fully align with modesty and privacy norms. As a result, women adapt through:

- Timing and routing to avoid peak visibility.
- Layered swimwear choices, with social agreements on photography.
- Group travel that distributes care work and provides a protective buffer.
- Site selection favouring screened facilities, clean changing areas, and clear etiquette guidance.

From a service perspective, the Islamic tourist gaze is not only about facilities but also about representation. Marketing that normalizes modest swimwear, highlights family scenes without objectifying bodies, and shows privacy gradients (quiet coves, screened showers) reduces uncertainty and labour of self-management (Han et al., 2019; Stephenson, 2014;). Scholars caution that mere 'halal signalling' without genuine respect for spiritual intent can feel instrumental (Mohsin & Ryan, 2016). Thus, ethical implementation matters as much as checklists.

Spiritually, travel may invite contemplation of nature as *ayat* (signs), making coastal experiences opportunities for remembrance and reflection, not only for entertainment (Al-Qur'an 3:190–191; 29:20). This spiritual dimension complements the semiotic gaze: the same sunset can be both a visual attraction and a moment of *tafakkur*, shaping what counts as "good leisure" for observant travellers (El-Gohary, 2016; Jafari & Scott, 2014).

Figure 1 outlines the study's theoretical framework, which integrates the Tourist Gaze with Islamic tourism tenets to account for how Muslim women perceive, anticipate, and experience coastal destinations. Building on Urry's idea of socially constructed vision and the interpretation of signs, the framework positions destination engagement within culturally embedded meanings and visual cues (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). It also incorporates Islamic considerations that often guide travel decisions such as the availability of halal food, access to prayer facilities, modesty and privacy requirements, and avoidance of prohibited activities which is highlighted in Islamic tourism scholarship (Battour et al., 2020). Together, these components form the lens that guides the study's research questions and its interview-led analytical approach.
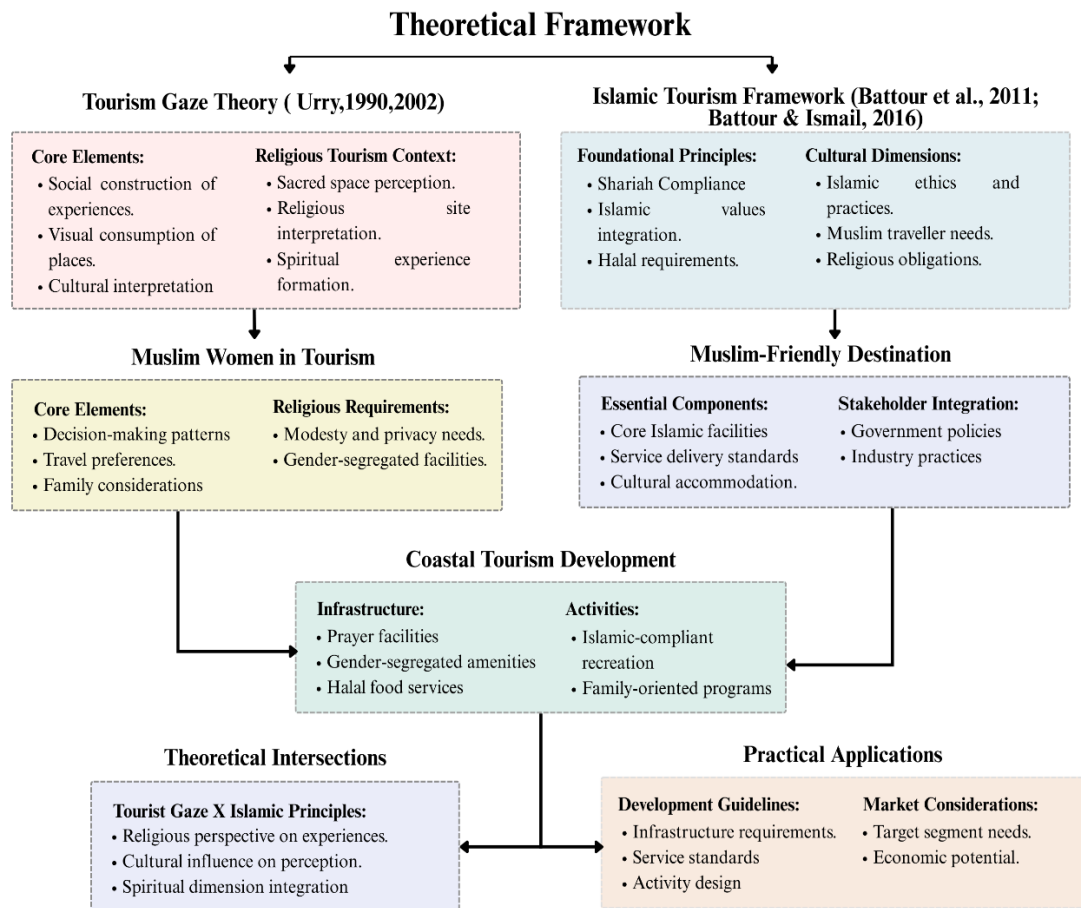
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Theoretical Framework

Tourism Gaze Theory (Urry,1990,2002)

Core Elements:
- Social construction of experiences.
- Visual consumption of places.
- Cultural interpretation

Religious Tourism Context:
- Sacred space perception.
- Religious site interpretation.
- Spiritual experience formation.

Islamic Tourism Framework (Battour et al., 2011; Battour & Ismail, 2016)

Foundational Principles:
- Shariah Compliance
- Islamic values integration.
- Halal requirements.

Cultural Dimensions:
- Islamic ethics and practices.
- Muslim traveller needs.
- Religious obligations.

Muslim Women in Tourism

Core Elements:
- Decision-making patterns
- Travel preferences.
- Family considerations

Religious Requirements:
- Modesty and privacy needs.
- Gender-segregated facilities.

Muslim-Friendly Destination

Essential Components:
- Core Islamic facilities
- Service delivery standards
- Cultural accommodation.

Stakeholder Integration:
- Government policies
- Industry practices

Coastal Tourism Development

Infrastructure:
- Prayer facilities
- Gender-segregated amenities
- Halal food services

Activities:
- Islamic-compliant recreation
- Family-oriented programs

Theoretical Intersections

Tourist Gaze X Islamic Principles:
- Religious perspective on experiences.
- Cultural influence on perception.
- Spiritual dimension integration

Practical Applications

Development Guidelines:
- Infrastructure requirements.
- Service standards
- Activity design

Market Considerations:
- Target segment needs.
- Economic potential.

Figure 1: The Islamic Tourist Gaze Theoretical Framework

Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development

In terms of infrastructure, international practice shows workable patterns: women only beaches in parts of Turkiye (for example, resorts in Alanya, Turkiye, provide secluded women-only beaches (Figure 2 below), prayer access across Indonesian island resorts, and Muslim-friendly amenities in Malaysian coastal destinations (Samori et al., 2016; Battour et al., 2011; El-Gohary, 2016). Key features include:

- Discreet screening and proper circulation around changing/shower areas.
- Separate or time-sliced pools and recreation, with female lifeguards/instructors where possible.
- Halal supply chain integrity, not only restaurant-level certification.

- Multilingual signage, including Qibla indicators and prayer-time information.

Adjustments on recreation part such as family zones, women only hours, and modesty-friendly equipment enable participation in water activities without compromising safety (Henderson, 2010; Stephenson, 2014). Cultural programming can include heritage interpretation, nature learning with conservation ethics, and scheduled prayer breaks during longer excursions.

Figure 2: Women Only Beach Facility with Privacy Screens at Adin Beach Hotel, Alanya, Turkiye.
Source: Imran (2024)

Sustainability conversely is a core expectation and an Islamic ethical duty (*khalifah, amanah, taharah*). Coastal development must protect water quality, habitats, and biodiversity while managing carrying capacity (UNWTO, 2018; Torres-Díaz et al., 2024). Case examples from Malaysia and Indonesia show how resorts partner with NGOs on reef and turtle conservation, creating educational, value-aligned experiences (Mohd Salleh et al., 2024). Certification, monitoring, and local participation help maintain standards and trust (Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), 2016).

Policy often moves faster than enforcement; consistent halal and MFTH standards, staff training, and monitoring are recurrent needs from stakeholders (Razzaq et al., 2016; Hall & Prayag, 2020). Community-based roles are important for authenticity and acceptance, provided residents understand visitor needs and benefit from tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Private sector credibility depends

on transparent standards rather than self-declared "Muslim-friendly" labels (Khan & Callanan, 2017).

Malaysia context and research implications
Malaysia hosts a Muslim majority and positions itself as a leading Muslim-friendly destination, with repeated top rankings in GMTI (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2024). Coastal tourism is central to the national offer; however, environmental quality, facility consistency, and service reliability vary by site, which can affect women's satisfaction (Baloch et al., 2023). Port Dickson and other coastal locales face trade-offs between development and environmental care. Women's reported needs such as cleanliness, privacy, safety, predictable prayer access are good indicators for service quality in these settings (Battour et al., 2018; Hanafiah et al., 2021). This review identifies several gaps: first, a lack of qualitative research on how Muslim women recalibrate the coastal gaze in everyday practice beyond generic "Islamic tourism" categories; second, the under specification of micro infrastructures such as screening, circulation, and signage that could reduce visibility burdens; third, representation issues in marketing materials and the influence of social photography norms on beach discomfort; and fourth, persistent challenges in maintaining consistency of service delivery outside flagship destinations.

These gaps justify focused fieldwork linking representations (media and on-site guidance), infrastructures (facilities and flows), and practices (dress, timing, group choreography) to describe an Islamic coastal gaze that is careful, relational, and situational.

Drawing on the theoretical foundations and the synthesized gaps, Figure 3 sets out the study's research framework, linking the identified problems to the overarching aim, the three research questions, and their corresponding objectives. It also specifies the qualitative approach employed, whereby interviews steer both data collection and analysis. Moreover, the framework outlines the intended contributions: theoretically, it expands the tourist gaze discourse to incorporate Muslim and other non-Western perspectives (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011); practically, it informs Muslim-friendly planning and management for Malaysia's coastal destinations (Battour et al., 2020).
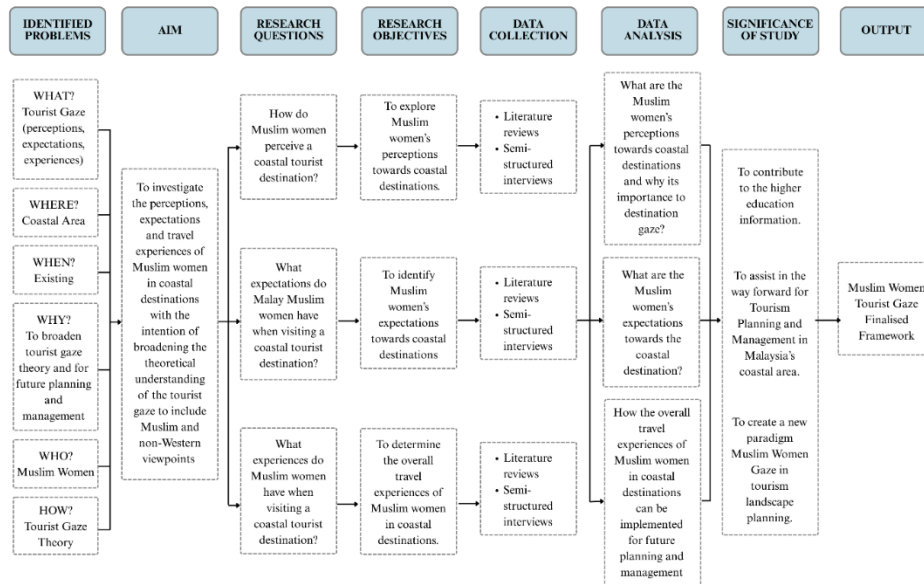
Figure 3: Research Framework - Linking Gaps, Aims, RQs, Methods, and Contributions.

This theoretical synthesis informed a qualitative, interpretivist single-case design in Port Dickson, with semi-structured interviews and on-site observations focusing on modesty or privacy, halal and prayer access, family orientation, and environmental care.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative, interpretive design to understand how Muslim women construct and manage their tourist gaze in coastal settings, with Port Dickson (Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia) as the instrumental case. The approach combined exploratory inquiry with a single-case study to capture culturally embedded meanings that emerge from the intersection of religion, gender, and place. The interpretive paradigm guided the work, assuming multiple socially constructed realities and privileging participants' perspectives in context. Primary data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews over six months (March till August 2024). In total, 25 interviews were completed: 15 with Muslim women tourists and 10 with stakeholders (MOTAC, Islamic Tourism Centre, tourism operators, community leaders).

Interview guides were iteratively developed and refined after four pilot interviews, ensuring clarity, cultural sensitivity, and alignment with the study aims. Questions focused on: (a) Muslim women as a market segment, (b) destination factors, and (c) the Muslim women tourist gaze. Interviews lasted 50 to 90 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, and conducted by female

interviewers for women participants. Participants chose preferred language (Malay or English) and venues. Inclusion criteria for tourists required being Muslim, at least 18 years old, leisure visitation to Port Dickson (minimum one night), and use of at least one Muslim-friendly facility. Stakeholders were purposively selected for direct involvement in policy, management, or service delivery relevant to Muslim-friendly tourism. Sampling followed a purposive snowball hybrid until thematic saturation.

On-site observations served a supporting role to contextualize interview findings such as prayer facilities, halal food access, spatial use, using field notes, mapping, and ethically approved photography. Ethical protocols included informed consent (written or culturally appropriate verbal consent), anonymity via coding, secure data storage, and respect for religious norms (scheduling around prayer, appropriate dress). Cultural sensitivity was maintained throughout.

Data preparation involved verbatim transcription and certified translation of Malay transcripts with back-translation checks. Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase procedure, supported by ATLAS.ti for systematic coding, memoing, code co-occurrence, and thematic mapping. Both inductive and deductive coding were applied to connect emergent patterns to Islamic tourism and tourist gaze frameworks. Figure 4 below showing example of coding process followed a three-stage approach as recommended by Saldana (2021).
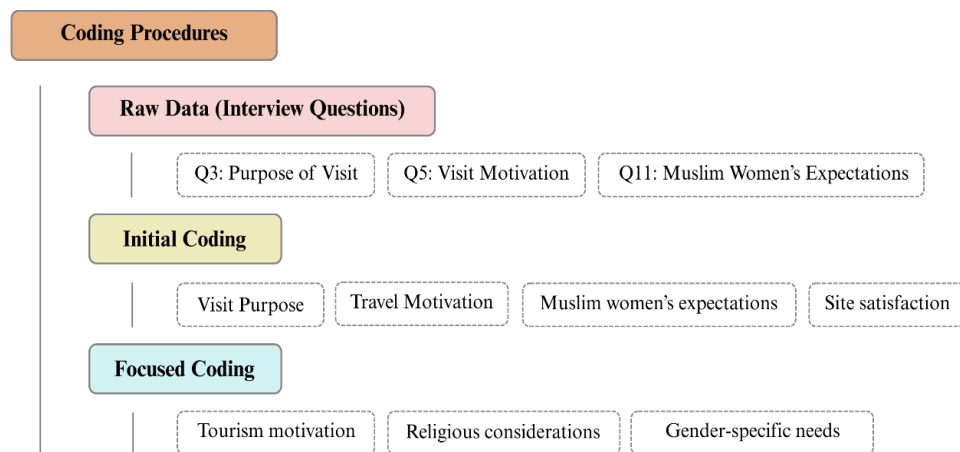

Figure 4: Example of Thematic Coding Procedure (De-identified)

Triangulation across tourists and stakeholders, peer debriefing, and member checks strengthened credibility. While generalizability is limited by

qualitative design and single-site focus, the study provides culturally grounded insights into Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION
Overview and Analytical Framing
Guided by the MWTG framework, this section presents findings aligned with aim and research questions. This discussion explains the main findings in relation to the study objectives and connects them with relevant literature and practical tourism realities. The analysis focuses on Muslim women's coastal travel in Port Dickson (PD) and how their behaviour, on-site experience, and tourist gaze are shaped by religious identity, gender, family roles, and destination supply. The interpretation follows a thematic logic and is guided by the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG) framework developed for this study, together with qualitative rigor through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). While the case is PD, many patterns are recognizable in similar Muslim-friendly coastal sites in Malaysia and the region. Still, some findings are context-specific and should be transferred with caution (Yin, 2018; Hanafiah et al., 2021). Table 1 below summarizes how the research objectives map onto the MWTG dimensions and themes.

Table 1: Alignment of research objectives with MWTG framework

Objective	Tourist Gaze Dimension	Main Themes	Representative Codes
To explore women's perceptions towards coastal destination	Tourist/Self-Oriented	Muslim-friendly environment ;	Privacy, safety, halal availability, Islamic values; family beach time, water play;
To identify Muslim women's expectations towards coastal destination	Tourist/Self-Oriented; Destination/Other-Oriented	Recreational activities; Accessibility ; Facilities; Spiritual experience	Highway connectivity, parking, public transport; Cleanliness, public toilets, changing rooms, prayer spaces; divine connection, gratitude, tranquillity
To determine the overall travel experiences of Muslim women in coastal destination	Destination/Other - Oriented; Social/Interpersonal-Oriented	Environmental concerns; Tourists' perceptions	Clean beach, greenery, preservation; relaxation, safety, moderate expectations, improvements, spiritual contemplation

Behavioral Orientations Toward Coastal Travel
Muslim women's travel orientation to PD is usually pragmatic and value conscious. Safety and privacy come first, followed by halal assurance and family suitability. This means women look for places where modesty is manageable (e.g., not overly revealing atmosphere), halal food is easy, prayer is convenient, and children have safe play options. PD's proximity to Klang Valley, highway access, and established basic infrastructure make it attractive for short breaks and multigenerational groups. In this sense, access and convenience reduce planning effort and perceived risk, which are important triggers for women who coordinate family logistics.

Recreational interests are present, but they are filtered through religious and family norms. Many activities are low risk, and family based such paddling at shore, beach picnics, sunset watching, casual water play but requests for more private or gender-sensitive amenities (such as more enclosed pools, designated women and children time slots) show a consistent preference for modesty supportive environments. These patterns fit literature that Muslim-friendly attributes increase destination choice and reduce travel anxiety, especially for women who carry responsibility for dependents (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2023).

On-site Experiences: Facilities, Meanings, and Environment
At the destination, facilities remain the most tangible element shaping women's overall experience. For many Muslim women, comfort begins with clean toilets, enclosed changing areas (refer Figure 4), prayer spaces (refer Figure 5) and visible halal food options. These are not merely service features but moral assurances that leisure can coexist with religious observance (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Rahman et al., 2019). When such amenities are well-maintained and located close to main activity areas, they reduce stress and enable women to participate in beach activities with ease. The presence of shaded seating, family huts, and ramps for elderly or child strollers further strengthens feelings of inclusivity and safety. In contrast, poor maintenance or missing facilities quickly diminish satisfaction and trust, a pattern consistent with previous findings that basic infrastructure reliability underpins destination quality (UNWTO, 2022; Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023).

Figure 5: Enclosed Changing/Shower Area That Supports Modesty Management for Women and Families.

Figure 6: Prayer Facilities Within Short Walking Distance of Main Activity Zones in PD Reduce Self-Monitoring and Enable Longer Stays.

Beyond functionality, women attach layered meanings to their experiences. The beach is not only a recreational landscape but also a space for *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *shukr* (gratitude). Many participants described moments of peace and reflection while listening to waves or watching the horizon, interpreting these as signs of divine creation. As one of the respondents expressed "*Listening to the sound of the waves at sunset makes me feel grateful and calm, it reminds me of the grandeur of God's creation.*" Such experiences link directly with the ethical-spiritual dimension of the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze, where leisure becomes an act of remembrance rather than escapism (Urry & Larsen, 2011; Stephenson, 2014). The ability to enjoy natural beauty while maintaining modesty reinforces a sense of moral equilibrium, allowing women to experience both joy and spiritual renewal.
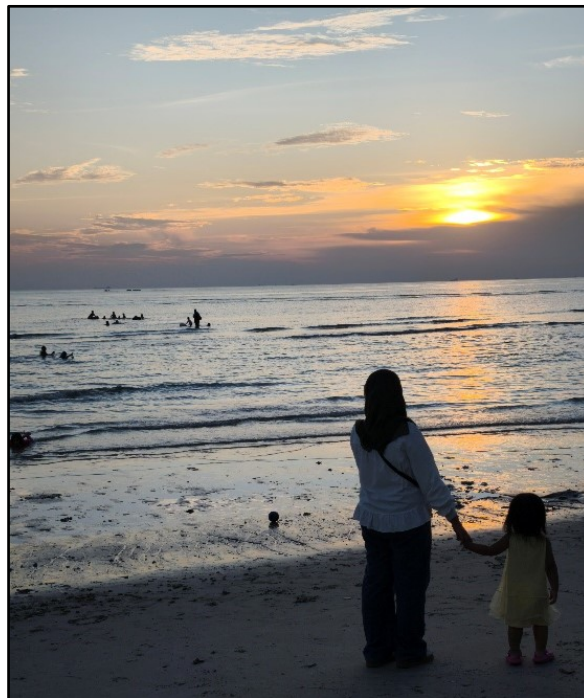

Figure 7: Sunset Scene as a Moment of Quiet Reflection and Gratitude

Environmental conditions complete this trio of experience. Clean beaches, shaded greenery, and clear water contribute to relaxation and a sense of order, while litter and crowding disturb both comfort and reflection. Participants associated environmental cleanliness with moral and spiritual purity, echoing Islamic teachings on stewardship (*khalifah*) and trust (*amanah*). Many appreciated visible conservation efforts and community participation,

interpreting these actions as signs of shared responsibility for creation (Mazlan et al., 2023; UNWTO, 2022).

Taken together, facilities, meanings, and environment illustrate that Muslim women's coastal experience is holistic and value laden. Functional amenities provide the structure for modest leisure; spiritual reflection gives emotional depth; and environmental care sustains tranquillity. When these dimensions align, the beach becomes a restorative, inclusive, and faith-congruent environment a setting where leisure, devotion, and ecological ethics naturally converge.

These results concretely extend the 'socially organised way of seeing' into an Islamic coastal context. What women look for and how they behave at the beach are shaped by signs, images, and crowd norms, but they are also actively adjusted to fit Shariah-aligned practices. Clear halal indicators, accessible prayer spaces, and modesty-friendly design features act as reassurance, turning anticipation into relaxed participation. In contrast, for example when dress expectations are unclear or facilities lack adequate screening, women tend to self-monitor more and adjust where or when they move around the beach. In practice, what feels "right" or "appropriate" is co-produced by the symbolic environment and faith requirements. For example, halal services and modesty needs directly influence destination choices (for instance, which beach or food court tourists select, namely those that clearly offer halal food, prayer facilities, and an atmosphere consistent with modest dress codes) and on-site conduct (such as activity selection, timing, and group coordination). This synthesis operationalises the extension of the tourist gaze in the findings.

The Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze
The gaze here is not one thing; it combines several logics:

1) Ethical spiritual logic: The visitor looks at landscape through religious meanings; signs of creation, gratitude, inner calm, and gentle reminders of life purpose. This logic protects modesty and seeks environments that respect Islamic values.
2) Family collective logic: The gaze is relational. Women often travel with children, spouses, or elders. They judge spaces by child safety, group privacy, easy movement, and shared enjoyment. The suitable beach environment is the one where everyone can relax without moral discomfort.
3) Environmental stewardship logic: The gaze also evaluates ecological care. Cleanliness, preservation, and greenery are not only aesthetic; they relate to responsibility toward nature, which is harmonized with religious duty.

Together, these layers extend the classic tourist gaze by emphasizing modesty, moral comfort, and relational wellbeing, in addition to scenery and leisure. In short, Muslim women's gaze integrates ethics, care, and nature appreciation into everyday relaxation.

Stakeholder Interpretations and Supply-side Readiness
Stakeholders in PD generally recognize that Muslim women are a growing and economically influential segment. They note that women often initiate travel plans, lead group decisions, and influence friends through word of mouth. The supply side response emphasizes three areas:

- Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives: Halal certification, reliable prayer spaces near attractions, women-friendly time slots or zones in aquatic facilities, and family-oriented products. Some stakeholders also mention wellness or "healing" experiences and shopping as important draws.
- PD's positioning as a coastal hub: Easy access, multiple beaches, diverse lodging, and attractions. At the same time, stakeholders acknowledge environmental pressure and the need to manage peak periods, waste, and coastal erosion.
- Service quality and collaboration: The need for maintenance, cleanliness, and clear signage; and more coordination among municipal authorities, operators, and community groups to maintain standards.

Figure 8: Visible Halal Indicators at Restaurant Enhances Trust

Their narrative shows a relatively good market understanding but highlights operational gaps that matter a lot to women visitors, especially cleanliness, predictable halal assurance outside hotels, and privacy-sensitive design.

Practical Implications for Port Dickson

For Port Dickson (PD), the priority is to make the essential services highly dependable and easy to find. Toilets, changing rooms, and prayer spaces should be kept very clean, well illuminated, and placed close to main activity areas so that women and families do not need to walk far or feel unsafe. Clear multilingual signs and simple wayfinding reduce confusion and decision stress, which in turn encourages longer stays and higher comfort. In addition, small design features that support modesty can make a big difference. Pilot women and children time slots for swimming, provide semi-screened edges near family zones, and arrange seating clusters that allow a sense of privacy. These are not expensive interventions, but they can strongly improve perceived suitability for Muslim women visitors.

Product assurance and place ambience also need attention. Outside hotels, halal assurance should be standardized and visible by encouraging certification for popular food courts and beach vendors, and by publishing simple halal maps, with QR codes for quick checks on a smartphone. At the same time, the beach should be maintained as a spiritual and reflective landscape, not only a leisure site. This means moderating noise levels in family sections, preserving shade trees that support comfort and contemplation, and planning loud events away from prayer times and from special vantage points such as sunrise or sunset areas. These actions respect how many Muslim women integrate relaxation with religious mindfulness during coastal visits.

Cleanliness and reputation must be sustained through shared governance. Operator service standards, municipal cleaning schedules, and community participation. For example, monthly family beach clean-ups) should be combined to keep conditions stable even in peak periods. Transparent public reporting via simple notice boards or a basic app on cleanliness and maintenance builds trust and shows accountability. Marketing should communicate with cultural sensitivity, highlighting modesty, family bonding, and wellness rather than only thrill-seeking. Because word-of-mouth among women's networks is very influential, the most effective promotion is reliable, repeatable quality on the ground. These recommendations are consistent with international guidance that emphasises visitor satisfaction, repeat visitation, and sustainability outcomes as core success measures (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2023; UNWTO, 2022;

Theoretical Implications

This study advances theory on the tourist gaze by showing that Muslim women's coastal travel is organized by a layered logic that is not only visual or individual but also normative and relational. The gaze integrates three interlinked elements: an ethical spiritual orientation (modesty, halal assurance, prayer access, gratitude and contemplation), a family collective orientation (safety for children, shared privacy, easy coordination for multigenerational groups), and an environmental stewardship orientation (clean beaches, greenery, preservation). In this way, what women "look for" and "look at" includes moral comfort and relational wellbeing alongside scenery and services. This extends classic tourist gaze arguments by foregrounding how faith practice and care responsibilities shape perception and evaluation in everyday leisure contexts (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

The study also operationalizes the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG) (Figure 5 below) by aligning concrete themes Muslim-friendly environment, recreational activities, accessibility, facilities, environmental concerns, and tourists' perceptions with self, destination, and social or interpersonal oriented gaze dimensions. This structure clarifies mechanisms linking destination cues to subjective states and behaviours. For example, halal food availability and proximate prayer spaces act as an assurance bundle that reduces cognitive load, supports modesty, and opens space for spiritual contemplation; reliable cleanliness further stabilizes comfort, which encourages longer stays and positive word-of-mouth. The framework thus offers a transferable scaffold for examining how faith related values interact with family roles and environmental quality to produce distinctive coastal experiences (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2023).

Finally, by triangulating visitor narratives with stakeholder views, the study contributes a supply and demand synthesis to gaze research. It introduces the idea of 'modesty supportive design' in coastal environments: small spatial and temporal adjustments (women and children swim hours, semi-screened family zones) can meaningfully shift perceived fit for Muslim women, without changing the core beach product. As one participant noted, *"If there are dedicated women and children time slots, I feel more confident to join water activities."* This contributes to service design theory in religiously sensitive destinations by identifying privacy, halal assurance, and cleanliness as foundational hygiene factors rather than mere amenities. Finally, evidence from the Port Dickson case clarifies the boundary conditions for Muslim-friendly coastal tourism, showing that accessibility, routine cleanliness, and visible compliance signalling are required for the MWTG dynamics to function as intended.
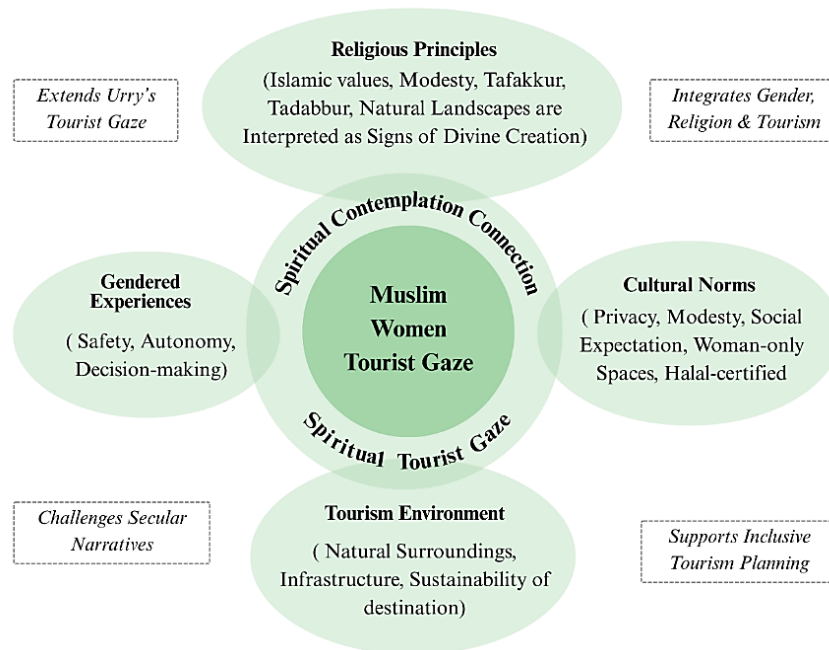
Figure 9: Operational Muslim Women Tourist Gaze Framework (MWTG) - Dimensions, Themes, and Mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Muslim women's coastal leisure in Port Dickson is shaped by religious obligations, family roles, and destination infrastructure. Reliable halal and prayer access, privacy- and safety-supportive spaces, and consistent cleanliness operate as non-negotiable baselines; where present, the tourist gaze shifts from cautious to confident and restorative. Recreational choices favour family-centred, modestly managed activities, with the coast often prompting gratitude and contemplation extending the tourist gaze toward a normative–relational, faith-inflected interpretation.

Port Dickson's value proposition for Muslim women rests on four mutually reinforcing pillars: (1) dependable Muslim-friendly infrastructure (halal, prayer, privacy, safety); (2) gentle product diversification that preserves calm character; (3) inclusive mobility and clear, multilingual information; and (4) visible environmental care. Priority actions include standardizing halal and prayer signage, expanding shade and enclosed changing facilities, piloting women-and-children swimming time windows, improving public transport links and wayfinding, and foregrounding sustainability in operations and marketing.

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