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Local 'Urf & ASEAN Madhahib Perspectives on Halal Gastronomy Exotic Foods

Review Article

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Abstract: Given the rising demand for *halal* tourism and gastronomy in ASEAN, a diverse culinary heritage, yet the consumption of exotic foods such as civet (*luwak*) coffee, dancing shrimp, *balut*, and bee larvae presents challenges for *shariah* compliance. Comparative analysis of the four Sunni *madhahib* (Islamic juristic school) shows broad agreement in prohibiting predatory animals, birds of prey, frogs, snakes, most insects, and domesticated donkeys, while allowing locusts, horses, and most sea creatures with some nuanced differences. However, variations remain in classifying amphibians such as crocodiles and certain regional delicacies, where local *'urf* (customary practices) and *madhahib* interpretations influence permissibility. These differences contribute to *shubhah* (doubtful) classifications, inconsistent certification, and consumer uncertainty. Using a qualitative approach, the study draws on classical *fiqh* sources, contemporary fatwas, and cultural practices to map exotic food types and rulings across ASEAN. Findings highlight both areas of consensus and zones of divergence, underscoring the need for harmonized yet culturally sensitive *halal* governance. By bridging juristic knowledge with cultural realities, this study strengthens the integrity of *halal* gastronomy, promotes consumer trust, and supports responsible engagement with ASEAN's diverse food heritage.

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1. Introduction

Gastronomy has traditionally been known as the art and science of preparation and consumption of food, involving multidisciplinary strategies including culinary arts, food science, culture, history, and nutrition (Doğan, 2024). Gastronomy extends beyond culinary practice. It encompasses the preparation, enjoyment, and cultural experience of food, supported by multiple disciplines such as culinary arts, food science, history, and nutrition (Saffinee *et al.*, 2025). Current research in gastronomy is both scientific and nutritional analysis of ingredients and methods of cooking with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of the impact of food on human existence and health.

Exotic foods, which are defined by their typical and culturally unique sources, reflect the diversity of food culture worldwide. Exotic products ranging from fruits and fish to unusual items such as sago worms, *umai*, *balut*, fried grasshoppers, cow brain, and chicken feet highlight the richness and variation of global gastronomy. In Malaysia, for example, turtle eggs were once a cultural delicacy before being legally prohibited, while crocodile eggs and even snail caviar are marketed in other regions as luxury food items. Despite their cultural significance, there remains persistent doubt regarding their *halal* status, particularly when animals belong to amphibious categories such as crabs, turtles, and horseshoe crabs, which lack explicit rulings in the Quran and Sunnah. This ambiguity is compounded by crosscutting religious interpretations: some Shafi'i jurists' base rulings on Arab cultural indicators of good (*al-tayyibat*) and bad (*al-khabaith*), whereas Malay scholars have historically adapted rulings to reflect local *'urf* and ecological realities. Such inconsistencies have induced Muslims to unwittingly consume non-*halal* meals or unjustly bar lawful foods. The lack of a unified educational framework that links local *'urf* with Islamic legal principles increases public confusion. This gap contributes to misconceptions and inconsistent *halal* consumption practices.

Existing literature on *halal* gastronomy predominantly addresses *halal* certification systems, food safety, or the marketing dimensions of *halal* tourism. However, limited scholarship integrates comparative *fiqh* analysis across the four Sunni *madhahib* in the context of ASEAN's unique culinary diversity. Prior research often treats *halal* gastronomy from either a regulatory or cultural angle, without systematically linking classical juristic reasoning (*turath*) to the realities of regional *'urf* (customary practice). This study contributes originality by proposing an ASEAN-centric analytical framework that bridges *fiqh al-turath* and local *'urf* to evaluate the *halal* status of exotic foods. It offers a structured comparison of classical rulings from the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools, contextualized through ASEAN's cultural and ecological realities. By merging *shariah*

jurisprudence with empirical understanding of food heritage, this study enhances the discourse on *halal* gastronomy governance and contributes to the development of harmonized yet culturally sensitive *halal* policies in Southeast Asia.

In recent years, *halal* gastronomy has become a significant component of ASEAN's growing culinary tourism and cross-border food trade. Member countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand are positioning *halal* food experiences as part of their tourism branding, while regional integration efforts through the ASEAN Halal Food Guidelines aim to harmonize certification and market access. These developments highlight the urgent need to align *halal* gastronomy practices with *shariah* principles while remaining responsive to the region's cultural and economic diversity. The main aim of this article is to analyze the permissibility of exotic foods in ASEAN from the perspectives of local *ʿurf* and the four Sunni *madhahib,* thereby proposing a culturally grounded framework for *halal* gastronomy governance that strengthens regional understanding and harmonization of *halal* principles.

2. Importance of *Halal* Compliance

Halal compliance in the ASEAN market, particularly regarding exotic food, is of paramount importance due to the interrelated factors of religious requirements, consumer confidence, economic development, and regional integration.

2.1. Maintaining Religious Requirements and Consumer Confidence

Halal compliance is a fundamental religious requirement as well as a culinary factor in Muslim nations such as Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Making exotic foods *halal* enhances compliance with Islamic teachings in the society. In addition, open and credible *halal* certification assures consumers that the food purchased is in accordance with their religious conviction. The assurance is critical, especially after past incidents destroyed trust in *halal* certification. An instance is the 2020 Malaysian fake *halal* meat scandal, which significantly impacted consumer confidence. The case involved a prohibited meat cartel bringing in and re-packing not *shariah* compliant meat valued at RM30 million and then dishonestly stamped with *halal* logos before being sold in the local market without JAKIM's permission as the Malaysian agency for *halal* certification (Md Ariffin *et al.,* 2023).

2.2. Harmonization of Halal Standards Across ASEAN

Among the most significant obstacles to intra-regional trade is the disparity in *halal* certification requirements among ASEAN member nations. Although Malaysia has developed strong *halal* standards, they are not region-wide uniformly accepted, thereby

hindering trade. Harmonization of *halal* standards has been emphasized in the ASEAN Halal Markets Analysis, and adherence to standardized *halal* regulations was emphasized. Harmonization is the key motivator to facilitating commerce within ASEAN and allowing identical product quality across borders.

2.3. Promoting Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity

The rich cultural diversity in the ASEAN region inextricably entwines food consumption habits with locals and customs. Exotic foods such as insects, frogs, and reptiles have roles in various culinary practices. However, their Islamic legality can become complex and vary according to different *madhahib*. To respect and preserve traditional food habits, it is necessary to incorporate local *ʿurf* within *halal* compliance systems. This supports cultural sensitivity by valuing regional food culture and maintaining adherence to Islamic instructions. Furthermore, culturally sensitive *halal* standards enhance tolerance and mutual acceptance among different societies. By considering the traditions and demands of diverse populations, the concept of *halal* compliance can be employed to enhance social harmony and integration in multicultural societies (Saffinee *et al.*, 2025). In the context of foreign foods, this entails engaging with local communities for the purpose of adopting their food cultures and jointly determining the *halal* or non-*halal* nature of such foods. This approach not only eschews alienation or exclusion but also helps communities maintain their cultural identities within Islamic dietary laws.

3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative design using document analysis and comparative jurisprudence to examine how local *ʿurf* and the four Sunni *madhahib* inform the understanding of *halal* gastronomy in the ASEAN context, particularly in relation to exotic foods. Data were obtained from primary sources such as fatwas, national *halal* certification frameworks (e.g., MPPHM 2020 and MS1500), ASEAN General Guidelines on *Halal* Food, and publications from *halal* authorities, as well as secondary literature including scholarly works on Southeast Asian food culture and *fiqh turath* references. Content analysis was applied to identify key themes such as permissibility (*halal*), *shubhah* (doubtful status), contamination risks, and regulatory practices, while a comparative jurisprudence framework was used to interpret similarities and differences in *madhahib* rulings and their application to ASEAN *halal* governance. The approach is exploratory in nature, seeking to highlight documented patterns and tensions rather than to provide exhaustive empirical coverage, thereby offering insights into the interaction of juristic principles, regulatory standards, and local cultural practices in shaping *halal* gastronomy across the region.

4. Results

4.1. Halal Gastronomy Issues: Exotic Animal and Food Consumption in ASEAN Countries

The diverse cuisines of ASEAN countries reflect the region's cultural richness and biodiversity. However, the growing popularity of exotic animal dishes-such as frog legs, snakes, turtles, and other wild-caught game meats-raises significant concerns among Muslim consumers. Many of these foods fall into *haram* or *shubhah* (doubtful) categories, as they are not explicitly permitted in Islamic dietary law. This situation challenges the maintenance of *halal* integrity, particularly in multi-ethnic and multi-religious contexts such as Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines, where risks of cross-contamination and improper slaughtering practices remain prevalent. Also, the lack of public consciousness and clear regulatory policies regarding exotic animal consumption contribute to intricacy. Therefore, stronger *halal* governance, proper certification, and consumer education across ASEAN are desperately needed to protect Muslim consumers and uphold the ethics of *halal* gastronomy.

Demand for exotic food is often driven by prestige, health ideology, or curiosity. In Thailand and Vietnam, exotic animals are widely accepted and incorporated into indigenous cuisine. In contrast, in highly populated Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Brunei, and Malaysia, stronger adherence to *halal* regulations create tension with these culinary practices. This tension generates challenges in maintaining *halal* integrity, avoiding cross-contamination, and protecting consumers from the accidental ingestion of prohibited (*haram*) products. Moreover, the lack of clear regulatory policies and limited public awareness regarding the permissibility and *halal* value of exotic foods are common concerns across most ASEAN nations. The issue is further complicated by cultural differences and local perceptions of what constitutes "exotic food." A systematic examination of the phenomenon of exotic food in relation to the culinary practices and cultural orientations of each ASEAN member country is therefore crucial. Such an approach allows for a deeper understanding of *halal*-related risks and supports the development of more effective strategies to safeguard Muslim consumers in the region. Table 1 outlines the various interpretations of exotic food across ASEAN countries, emphasizing both cultural and religious perspectives.

Table 1. Exotic Food Across ASEAN Countries

ASEAN Countries	Exotic Food / Animal	Explanation	Sources/ *Halal*-related risks
Myanmar	*Laphet Toke* (Tea Leaf Salad) 	A traditional Burmese salad made with fermented tea leaves, mixed with roasted peanuts, sesame seeds, fried garlic, cabbage, tomatoes, and sometimes dried shrimp. The tea leaves give a slightly bitter and tangy taste, while the nuts and garlic add crunch and richness. Widely served as a national dish and during special occasions.	Plant - low risk
	Mohinga 	Considered Myanmar's national dish. A rice noodle soup with a fish-based broth (usually catfish), flavored with lemongrass, banana stem, garlic, ginger, and onions. Common toppings include boiled eggs, crispy fritters, coriander, and lime.	Plant, Animal (Fish) - low risk
Singapore	Ostrich Satay 	A variant of the Malay satay, replacing chicken or beef with lean and tender ostrich meat. Marinated in spices such as turmeric, coriander, and lemongrass, then grilled over charcoal and served with sweet peanut sauce. Considered exotic in Singapore.	Animal-critical

	Ayam Buah Keluak 	A Peranakan dish of chicken cooked with *buah keluak* nuts from the kepayang tree. The nuts are fermented to remove toxins, creating an earthy and slightly bitter flavor. The chicken is stewed with tamarind, chili, turmeric, and stuffed keluak paste, producing a rich and aromatic gravy.	Animal-critical
Malaysia	Beef Tripe Soup (*Sup Perut*) 	A hearty soup made from cow stomach (tripe) cooked in a spiced broth with ginger, black pepper, star anise, cloves, and lemongrass. Often eaten with rice or as comfort food during rainy days or festive occasions.	Animal-critical
	Durian 	Known as the "King of Fruits." Famous for its strong odor and creamy, custard-like flesh. Enjoyed fresh, in desserts, or cooked into savory dishes. Considered exotic due to its unique aroma and flavor.	Plant - low risk
Brunei	*Ambuyat* 	The national dish made from sago palm starch. Sticky and glue-like in texture with little taste on its own, usually eaten with spicy sambal for flavor.	Plant - low risk

	Hati Buyah 	A stir-fried dish of marinated beef lungs prepared with spices, onions, vegetables, and seeds, giving it a distinct spicy flavor.	Animal - critical
Vietnam	*Cá Kho Tộ* 	Vietnamese braised catfish cooked in a clay pot with caramelized fish sauce, garlic, and spices. Represents traditional home cooking and is known for its rich flavor.	Animal (Fish) - low risk
	Cha ca 	Hanoi's famous fried fish dish seasoned with turmeric and dill, served with rice noodles, peanuts, fresh herbs, sesame crackers, and fermented shrimp sauce. Despite its name (*chả* means paste, *cá* means fish), it is made with fish chunks, not paste.	Animal (Fish) - low risk
Indonesia	*Gudeg* 	A Javanese specialty from Yogyakarta, made of young jackfruit stewed in palm sugar and coconut milk, spiced with garlic, shallot, coriander, galangal, and bay leaves. Teak leaves add its signature reddish-brown color.	Plant - low risk

	Botok tawon 	A traditional East Javanese dish made from non-honeybees (*tawon*) mixed with spices and coconut milk, wrapped in banana leaves. Considered extreme by tourists, but like regular *botok*. Found in Banyuwangi and Kediri.	Plant - low risk

**Halal*-related risk: low risk (Vegetables, fruits, fish/marine, product, mineral, plant based, chemical based (pure inorganic), high risk (Plant derived material, chemical derived material, fish/marine derived material, processing aid, food additive and flavor) and critical (Animal based, animal derived, microbe based, enzyme based, alcohol based, dairy based product, gelatin based)

5. Discussions

5.1. Shariah Analysis and Practical Implementation

A comprehensive discussion of *halal* gastronomy in the ASEAN context requires a multifaceted approach that aligns *shariah* principles, regional cultural norms (*ʿurf)*, and contemporary industry standards. Such an approach highlights the importance of the Qur'anic concept of *halalan tayyiban* (permissible and wholesome), which demands not only compliance with religious rulings but also the assurance of safety, quality, and ethical integrity in food consumption. Considering diverse local practices and *madhahib* perspectives across ASEAN, the discourse on *halal* gastronomy must therefore engage with both theological interpretations and cultural realities to ensure relevance, inclusivity, and consumer confidence. In Surah al Baqarah (2:168), it is stated that:

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلنَّاسُ كُلُواْ مِمَّا فِي ٱلۡأَرۡضِ حَلَٰلٗا طَيِّبٗا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ خُطُوَٰتِ ٱلشَّيۡطَٰنِۚ إِنَّهُۥ لَكُمۡ عَدُوّٞ مُّبِينٌ

Meaning: "O humanity! Eat from what is lawful and good on the earth and do not follow Satan's footsteps. He is truly your sworn enemy."

In Tafsir Ibn Kathir (2013), this verse clarifies that Allah has allowed them to eat any of the pure lawful things on the earth that do not cause harm to the body or the mind. He also forbade them from following in the footsteps of evil (*shaytan*), meaning his ways and methods with which he misguided his followers. Furthermore, in the same *surah* (2:172):

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُلُواْ مِن طَيِّبَٰتِ مَا رَزَقۡنَٰكُمۡ وَٱشۡكُرُواْ لِلَّهِ إِن كُنتُمۡ إِيَّاهُ تَعۡبُدُونَ

Meaning: "O believers! Eat from the good things We have provided for you. And give thanks to Allah if you truly worship Him alone."

According to Ibn Kathir, Allah commands His believing servants to eat from the pure things that He has created for them and to thank Him for it, if they are truly His servants. Eating from pure sources is a cause for the acceptance of supplications and acts of worship, just as eating from impure sources prevents the acceptance of supplications and acts of worship.

Exotic foods, such as reptiles, insects, and uncommon meats, require detailed *shariah* assessment to determine permissibility. This involves clarifying the rulings on *haram* animals, applying *dhabihah* (*halal* slaughtering) regulations, and addressing juristic differences across the Sunni *madhahib*. Within ASEAN, such variations are especially relevant, as Malaysia follows the Shafi'i school while Indonesia applies multi-*madhahib* traditions. To harmonize these perspectives, regional frameworks like the 2019 ASEAN General Guidelines on *Halal* Food provide guiding principles.

As reflected in *Al-Hidayah* (Hanafi), *Al-Mudawwanah* (Maliki), *Al-Umm* (Shafi'i), and *Al-Mughni* (Hanbali), the four *madhahib* concur on the prohibition of predatory and amphibious creatures but differ on certain amphibians like crocodiles. This comparative synthesis highlights how classical juristic interpretations continue to shape modern *halal* gastronomy in ASEAN. Table 2 below outlines the key rulings of the four major Sunni *madhahib* concerning exotic animals.

Table 2. Juristic Rulings on Exotic Animals Across the Four Sunni *Madhahib*

Category / Animal	Hanafi	Maliki	Shafi'i	Hanbali	Key References
Predatory animals with fangs (lion, tiger, wolf, dog, cat)	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Al-Hidayah* (2/375); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/542); *Al-Umm* (2/249); *Al-Mughni* (13/319)
Birds of prey (eagle, falcon, hawk, owl)	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Al-Mabsut* (11/221); *Al-Mudawwanah* (2/112); *Al-Majmu'* (9/17); *Al-Mughni* (13/323)

Frogs	*Haram*	*Haram* (explicit prohibition)	*Haram*	*Haram*	Ḥadīth: "Do not kill frogs" (Abu Dawud, 5269); *Bada'i al-Sana'i* (5/35); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/543); *Al-Majmu'* (9/17); *Al-Mughni* (13/326)
Snakes	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Al-Hidayah* (2/376); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/545); *Al-Majmu'* (9/18); *Al-Mughni* (13/327)
Land insects (rats, cockroaches, scorpions, ants, bees)	*Haram* (except locusts)	Mostly *haram*, minor exceptions in custom	*Haram* (except locusts)	*Haram* (except locusts)	*Bada'i al-Sana'i* (5/36); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/548); *Al-Majmu'* (9/19); *Al-Mughni* (13/328)
Locusts	*Halal*	*Halal*	*Halal*	*Halal*	Ḥadīth: "Two dead animals are made lawful for us: fish and locusts" (Ibn Majah); mentioned in all *madhahib*
Horse	*Halal* but disliked (*makruh tanzih*)	*Halal* (commendable if needed)	*Halal* but disliked (due to honor in jihad)	*Halal*	*Al-Hidayah* (2/381); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/546); *Al-Umm* (2/250); *Al-Mughni* (13/330)
Domesticated donkey	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	*Haram*	Ḥadīth: "The Messenger ﷺ forbade the meat of domesticated donkeys at Khaybar" (Bukhari 5520); agreed by all *madhahib*
Crocodile	*Haram* (amphibian, not a pure sea animal)	*Halal* (considered a sea animal)	*Haram* (amphibian, not classified as fish)	Two views: majority *haram*	*Al-Mabsut* (11/222); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/550); *Al-Majmu'* (9/20); *Al-Mughni* (13/332)
Other sea animals (fish, shrimp, crab)	*Halal* (fish only); other sea animals such as shrimp and crab are *haram*.	*Halal* (all sea creatures)	*Halal* (except amphibians)	*Halal* (all sea creatures)	*Bada'i al-Sana'i* (5/38); *Al-Mudawwanah* (1/555); *Al-Umm* (2/251); *Al-Mughni* (13/335)

Overall, the four *madhahib* share consensus on many prohibitions, such as predatory animals, frogs, snakes, and domesticated donkeys. However, notable differences exist, particularly regarding crocodiles and horses, where Maliki and Hanbali jurists allow broader permissibility. Locusts represent the clearest area of agreement, with all schools declaring them *halal*. These variations demonstrate the importance of recognizing both shared principles and diverse juristic opinions when assessing the *halal* status of exotic foods.

5.2. Addressing Shubhah and Contamination Risks

When it comes to maintaining the integrity of *halal* food, risks of contamination, *shubhah* (dubious status), and inappropriate practice are major problems, particularly when overseeing unusual or uncommon components. Doubt about *halal* status often arises from ingredient ambiguity. For instance, plant-derived lecithin is *halal*, whereas animal-derived lecithin becomes *haram* if the source animal is not slaughtered according to *shariah*. Such uncertainty places the product in a *shubhah* (doubtful) category (MUIS, 2025). This ambiguity can also occur if food labeling is inaccurate or if *halal* certification is dubious or fraudulent, leading consumers to unknowingly consume products that may not meet *halal* requirements (Johan *et al.*, 2023). This ambiguity may also arise from faulty food labeling or questionable or fraudulent *halal* certification, which could cause customers to unintentionally eat goods that do not adhere to *halal* regulations. Cross-contamination, which happens when *halal* foods come into touch with non-*halal* materials while being stored, prepared, or processed, is another serious threat. Even a small amount of contamination can jeopardize the *halal* status of food since it can occur from sharing utensils, equipment, or through inadequate cleaning between handling *halal* and non-*halal* products. Improper procedures that increase these hazards include using suppliers lacking *halal* certification and neglecting to separate *halal* and non-*halal* commodities in logistics and warehousing.

The subject of *shubhah*, contamination, and incorrect behaviors develops layers of cultural and legal depth when local *'urf* (customary practices) and *madhahib* (Islamic law schools of thought) perspectives are incorporated into *halal* gastronomy. Since *'urf* varies widely across regions, it is essential to acknowledge how local customs might influence the perception and management of *halal* risks. For instance, certain communities might have specific traditional methods for food preparation that, while culturally significant, may not align strictly with standardized *halal* practices. Documenting these customs in the module allows for a balanced discussion, identifying potential conflicts and proposing culturally sensitive solutions that uphold both local traditions and *halal* integrity. Similarly, different *madhahib* may have varying interpretations regarding permissible ingredients and processes. The module can feature sections that explain these differences, illustrating how each *madhahib* approaches

shubhah, contamination, and other issues. For example, one *madhahib* may be more lenient on the use of certain additives, while another may impose stricter requirements. By addressing these differences, the module becomes a valuable resource for users from diverse backgrounds, enabling them to understand and respect different viewpoints while adhering to their own *madhahib*'s guidelines.

Strengthening *halal* gastronomy practices and awareness plays a vital role in mitigating these risks. By enhancing public knowledge and understanding of industry, stakeholders are better equipped to make informed decisions, reduce *shubhah* (doubtful matters), prevent cross-contamination, and uphold proper *halal* practices across the supply chain. Ultimately, this approach reinforces the integrity and reliability of *halal* cuisine by addressing both the practical challenges and the knowledge gap in *halal* food management.

5.3. Adherence to MPPHM2020 and MS1500

To guarantee the *halal* integrity of exotic foods under Malaysia's *halal* certification framework, adherence to the Manual Procedure for Malaysian Halal Certification 2020 or in Bahasa Melayu namely as Manual Prosedur Pensijilan Halal Malaysia 2020 (MPPHM 2020) and Malaysian Standard MS1500 is essential. When working with exotic foods that frequently carry higher risks of contamination and *shubhah* (doubtful status), MPPHM 2020 acts as a thorough procedural guide that requires *halal* certification applicants to adhere to strict requirements, including the sourcing, processing, handling, and storage of *halal* products. Strict adherence to these guidelines guarantees that all raw materials are *halal*-certified, suppliers are screened, and processing facilities maintain physical segregation to prevent contamination from non-*halal* sources for exotic foods, which may include unusual meats or ingredients not typical of standard *halal* supply chains. MPPHM 2020 and MS1500 offer a uniform baseline to balance these variations and maintain *halal* purity, which is especially important for exotic dishes where local *'urf* and differing *madhahib* interpretations may affect acceptability. Following MPPHM 2020 and MS1500 guarantees that exotic goods satisfy both legal and religious *halal* requirements, boosting customer confidence and bolstering Malaysia's standing as a global *halal* leader.

5.4 Real World Industry Application

The real-world industry application of a *halal* gastronomy module that incorporates local *'urf* and ASEAN *madhahib* perspectives is evident in its transformative impact on the *halal* food sector, hospitality, and regional trade. As the *halal* market continues to expand, valued at over USD 2.3 trillion globally and projected to grow further, the demand for qualified professionals, robust certification systems, and harmonized standards has

intensified, especially in Southeast Asia (Anshori *et al.,* 2025). This module serves as a practical training resource for chefs, auditors, food technologists, and business operators, equipping them with the knowledge to navigate complex *halal* requirements, managing exotic ingredients, and implementing best practices in line with recognized standards such as MS1500 and ASEAN guidelines.

In the hospitality and tourism industries, the module helps hotels and restaurants prepare and serve unique *halal* cuisine while adhering to certification standards, making them more appealing to Muslim tourists and boosting regional travel economies. To satisfy regulatory requirements and preserve customer confidence, it also promotes traceability, cross-contamination prevention, and visible labelling, all of which help to overcome the operational difficulties of *halal* supply chains. Furthermore, through programs like the ASEAN Halal Council and international agreements, the module promotes regional collaboration, optimizes business, lowers regulatory barriers and promotes the mutual acceptance of *halal* certificates across ASEAN nations (Deviana *et al.*, 2023). In addition to promoting moral and legal food production, the module establishes ASEAN as a leader in the global *halal* market by connecting *shariah* principles, cultural diversity, and industrial demands.

5.5. Challenges in Shariah-Related Difficulties

The *halal* gastronomy industry faces persistent challenges related to certification inconsistencies, traceability, and limited *shariah* literacy among culinary professionals. These issues are especially pronounced in the ASEAN region, where diverse cultural practices and ecological variations shape local food traditions. Differences in national *halal* standards and fatwa interpretations often lead to conflicting rulings on exotic food categories such as frogs, snakes, and insects. Moreover, limited cross-border coordination on *halal* certification complicates trade and weakens consumer confidence. In addition, many culinary practitioners across ASEAN lack formal training in *halal* handling and *madhhab*-based jurisprudence, resulting in unintentional violations of *halal* protocols during the preparation of unconventional or culturally specific dishes.

Addressing these challenges within the ASEAN *halal* gastronomy landscape requires a multi-faceted and context-sensitive approach. Regional regulatory standardization is crucial to harmonize *halal* certification procedures among member states, where differences in national *fatwas* and food laws often complicate the classification of exotic foods. Mohd Noor *et al.* (2021) highlight that conflicting *halal* standards, fraudulent certifications, and difficulties in tracing ingredients, especially in processed foods, pose significant challenges. Technological advancements in traceability including blockchain and digital *halal* tracking

can improve transparency and ensure that unconventional ingredients sourced from diverse ecosystems are verified according to *shariah* standards. Rahman *et al.* (2021) argue that cross-contamination is an underestimated risk in the foodservice industry, even in *halal*-certified establishments. Shared equipment, improper segregation, and inadequate cleaning protocols can compromise *halal* integrity, rendering food *najs* (impure or filth) and unsuitable for consumption. Meanwhile, Shafie *et al.* (2022) found that many chefs and food handlers have limited understanding of *halal* food handling rules, particularly regarding alcohol-based flavorings, animal-derived enzymes, and *shariah* slaughtering standards. This ignorance leads to the use of doubtful ingredients, mishandling of *halal*-certified items, and an inability to distinguish between *halal* compliant and non-*halal* compliant suppliers. Therefore, a comprehensive *halal* education for culinary professionals is essential to cultivate awareness of juristic diversity (*ikhtilāf al-madhāhib*) and local *ʿurf* that influence exotic food preparation and consumption.

By implementing these ASEAN-focused strategies, the *halal* gastronomy sector can enhance compliance, strengthen consumer trust, and promote ethical culinary practices that respect both Islamic law and regional cultural identities.

6. Conclusions

This study highlights the integration of *shariah* principles, local *ʿurf*, and ASEAN cultural practices in defining *halal* gastronomy. By analyzing exotic food permissibility through the four Sunni *madhhabs*, it reveals how juristic diversity and regional customs intersect to shape *halal* dietary interpretation. The findings emphasize that aligning classical *fiqh* with local realities strengthens *halal* integrity, promotes cultural inclusivity, and supports harmonized certification across ASEAN. Practically, the framework offers guidance for policymakers, educators, and *halal* certification bodies to enhance governance and consumer trust. Culturally, it affirms that Islamic law remains adaptable to diverse culinary and ecological contexts. Future studies should examine how these principles can be operationalized through *halal* education, digital traceability, and gastronomy tourism. By bridging jurisprudence and culture, this paper contributes to a more coherent, inclusive, and sustainable *halal* ecosystem that reflects both traditional authenticity and contemporary ASEAN realities.

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