

# Managing Modern Muslim Travellers: Emerging Trends and Issues for Islamic Tourism Destinations

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**Abstract:** This research paper explores perspectives on the post-pandemic Islamic tourism market, policies, and challenges associated with sustainable growth. This paper also shares thoughts on emerging trends in the global Islamic tourism industry. The methodology used was descriptive qualitative research via in-depth interviews with twelve Muslim-friendly destination managers from Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Taiwan, and Korea. The transcribed data were coded and then tabulated in cross-checked themes to confirm the reliability of the collected data. This study highlights two types of distinct Islamic markets whose needs and wants are unique from each other: the rigidly obedient Muslim and the modern, young, liberal Muslim. Next, this study highlights improper governance, inconsistency in Islamic tourism branding, and the lack of Muslim-based products and services as emerging issues within the modern Islamic tourism industry. This research also offers a set of future research questions on (i) the role of technology in forming the Muslim traveller experience; (ii) the importance of taking an innovative approach to form a memorable Muslim travel experience; and (iii) the dynamic nature of the modern Muslim traveller. This research paper offers fresh perspectives on understanding modern Muslim travellers which can inspire future research and advance theoretical and managerial practices among Muslim and non-Muslim tourism destinations.



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## 1. Introduction

The intersections between Islam and tourism have greatly interested destination managers and tourism scholars. To understand Islamic tourism, one must understand the religious view of tourism in Islam. Perhaps it is essential to note that the terms “religion”, “religious”, and “spirituality” have been used interchangeably. They are not diametric opposites, and neither are they the same. The relationship between religion and tourism is linked through the institution of pilgrimage activities, a religiously motivated journey to a sacred place with spiritual elements according to specific religious beliefs [1]. However, there are blurred lines in this context, as some Muslims consider themselves spiritual but not religious. Conversely, there can be Muslims who are devoutly religious but are not what most would consider deeply spiritual.

The researchers propose a distinction between Islamic tourism and pilgrimage purposes. The first refers to recreational, leisure, and social reasons while the latter refers to travel for religious purposes and is associated with acts of faith [2]. Mainly, Islamic tourism is unique, as it incorporates the concepts of religion and religiousness, reflecting the uniqueness of Muslim leisure travellers' preferences and behaviours. On the other hand, Muslims travel to perform Hajj, Umrah, Rihla, and Ziyara to enrich their spirituality while participating in leisure travel religiously. Hence, most research highlights the relevance of religiosity in dictating such an attitude. However, the travel consumption of Muslims differed from non-Muslims [3–5], as they are sensitive and conscious of halal obligations, especially when travelling to non-Muslim countries [6]. Nonetheless, it is essential to

note that although Islam mandates strict laws regarding Muslim consumption behaviours, the extent to which followers oblige these rulings is likely to vary based on the level of religiosity [7].

Given that the Islamic tourism industry is co-dependent with mainstream tourism businesses, conflict among stakeholders continuously arises [3]. There seem to be variations in business practices, perhaps due to the complexity of market needs. Even before the pandemic, linkages between Islam and tourism varied with numerous implications for Muslim and non-Muslim tourism sites, visitors, and locals [8–10]. Hence, preparing and recharging the Islamic tourism industry is a critical and pertinent issue to be explored as we look forward to meeting the expanded post-pandemic demand and supply of Islamic tourism products and services. In addition, concurrent with the sudden growth in supply and newly developed demand sources, there is a need to realise how Islamic religious principles and practices manifest within the context of Islamic tourism's current and future offerings [11–13].

Islamic tourism has shown significant growth potential and opportunities for many touristic countries. However, tourism operators face various significant challenges in serving Muslim tourists [6,14]. Most scholars argue that the tourism industry must strive to satisfy Muslim travellers from numerous levels of conservatism and, at the same time, respect the needs of non-Muslims who share the same amenities and public spaces. In addition, things have changed because of emerging, young Muslim consumers who are more liberal as compared to older, more conservative tourists. Islamic tourism providers looking to tap into this segment must understand their unique expectations while catering to their faith-based needs and requirements [13,15,16].

Muslims currently constitute one-quarter of the world's population with one-half of Muslims today being under 25, indicating that most are millennials. In terms of statistics, it appears to be advantageous [17]. To take full advantage of Muslim tourism in a non-Islamic country, a clear understanding of the needs and behaviours of Muslim travellers is required. However, it has been a challenge that has proved difficult for tourism destinations to entertain this specific market, especially among non-Muslim destinations. By 2024, the value of the Muslim tourist market is expected to reach USD 208 billion, portraying the opportunities available for tourism industry players [18]. Despite its potential, Islamic tourism, compared to other mainstream tourism concepts, is still under-researched [5,19] and un-comprehended by vital stakeholders [3]. According to [5,19] there is a limited understanding of its terminology, scope, and boundaries. In addition, there is a need for further insight into the new norm of travel preferences post-COVID-19 [20] while it shows early signs of rebounding [21,22].

Based on the above conjures, identifying knowledge gaps is this study's main agenda. The underpinning rationale for this paper is to demonstrate that the perception and expectations of Islamic tourism stakeholders have differed and varied. This paper's findings allow a better understanding of the Islamic tourism market's complexity and how to enhance Islamic tourism brand affinity, which is critical to the future of Islamic tourism business competitiveness and long-term performance. This study contributes explicitly to comprehending the perception of Islamic tourism stakeholders, exploring modern Muslim tourists' needs, and broadening knowledge about Islamic tourism performance and its future implications. In addition, the study findings offer a better understanding to tourism policymakers about Islamic tourism issues, competitiveness, and potential. Moreover, the study propositions would also be helpful for tourism marketers to develop future-proof Islamic tourism strategies that integrate sustainable destination offerings that align with modern travellers' expectations to adhere to Islamic teachings while travelling.

This research paper discusses the input from twelve Islamic tourism stakeholders interviewed during the Second World Islamic Tourism Conference (WITC) organised by the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) Malaysia in 2021. This paper explores their perspectives on the most salient market trends and challenges of Islamic tourism. The article then discusses how Islamic tourism is represented and reinforced within the post-pandemic provision,

acknowledging the challenges and potential developments within the Islamic tourism and hospitality realms. This paper's discussion finally highlights broader concerns that threaten the constructive advancement of the Islamic tourism industry.

## 2. Methods

The qualitative method opted to conduct informal interviews and present the results through a descriptive approach [23]. First, the researcher performed a prior literature review via desk research. Next, the primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with purposively selected informants. The number of participants was decided based on the nature of the research questions and to reach the saturation point [24]. A set of semi-structured interviews was designed to elicit thorough information on the characteristics that reflect the trends, challenges, and future development of Islamic tourism-related business. Tourism professionals, administrators, academics, and representatives were interviewed during the Second World Islamic Tourism Conference (WITC) organised by the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) Malaysia in 2021. Twelve Islamic tourism experts, industry players, and academia participated in this research. The study informants include five females and seven males in their mid-forties to late fifties. The respondents' demographic profile is depicted in Table 1:

**Table 1.** Informants profiles.

Code	Gender	Affiliation	Origin
Informant 1	Male	Government	Uzbekistan
Informant 2	Female	Business	Malaysia
Informant 3	Female	Government	Saudi Arabia
Informant 4	Male	Business	Malaysia
Informant 5	Male	Government	Korea
Informant 6	Male	NGOs	Malaysia
Informant 7	Female	Business	United Kingdom
Informant 8	Male	Business	UAE
Informant 9	Female	NGOs	Singapore
Informant 10	Female	Business	UAE
Informant 11	Male	Government	Indonesia
Informant 12	Male	Academia	Malaysia

The objective of the interview was to explore their perception of the key trends, issues, and future undertakings of the global Islamic tourism industry. The first section of the interview was aimed at collecting the informants' opinions about the evolution and current trends of Islamic tourism. Then, the informants were asked to comment on Islamic tourism challenges irrespective of their nations. Specific questions were asked about the informant's knowledge and opinion on future expectations of Islamic tourism. Hence, open-ended interviews were chosen to prevent bias and discover rather than prescribe.

Before proceeding with the interview, informed and written consent was obtained from all participants upon the agreement to reflect personal data confidentiality. The interview began with a brief introduction to the team and the study's objective. In order to achieve this, notes were taken, and their responses were recorded verbatim to keep the replies accurate. Plus, credibility and rapport were established based on [25] proposition. Effective questioning techniques were used, such as funnelling or asking open-ended questions at the beginning, using unbiased questions, clarifying issues, and helping the respondents think through problems.

The interviews lasted, on average, 45 min each and were individually conducted by the authors. The saturation point for this research was achieved [26] after interviewing twelve experts. We interviewed four additional participants further and determined that they did not add any new information. All recorded data were transcribed immediately after the in-depth interviews were conducted in line with [27] suggestions. The input was analysed descriptively based on thematic analysis [28]. The transcribed data were

coded and then tabulated in matrices where the themes were cross-checked to confirm the reliability of the data. The data analysis involved two sequential and interdependent moments. First, we analysed each data individually and later. We analysed the patterns or similarities within the collected data [29]. Informant verification and well-documented processes and documentation were ensured to enhance the validity of this study [30].

We identified a total of 78 initial codes that summarised the data. This data analysis process led to axial coding of the data to describe the informants' views of the Islamic tourism context more extensively. Three sub-themes were identified (trends and emerging issues), and these were subsequently categorised into two sub-themes: (i) inconsistency of Islamic tourism branding; (ii) lack of Muslim-based products and services; (iii) governance issues, and; (iv) lack of innovation. Interpretive codes were created, and wherever possible, verbatim quotes were used to elaborate the input from the participants.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Islamic Tourism Trends

Based on the interview, we found vague agreement on the characteristics of Islamic tourism destinations and how they appeal to Muslims spiritually, paying heed to their faith, ethics, and values. Below are the verbatim inputs from the informants:

*..... there is a need for policy unification that synergises Islamic tourism brands globally. Halal certification is only a start. .... like a gate—you may open it, but that does not mean they will come. You must address this by offering what resonates with Muslim's wants and needs. (Informant 1)*

*The industry needs more players fulfilling the needs of Muslim travellers. .... The liberal vs the obedient Muslims. So, we need to offer a more diverse product across various segments. (Informant 2)*

*They have to trust your brand is halal. .... without that, it may diminish your current brand value. As far as I know, Muslim consumers' loyalty to Halal supersedes any brand in the world. (Informant 5)*

*It is important to ensure Islamic tourism's role as a force in sustaining the Muslim culture by preserving Muslim people's authenticity and sense of identity while travelling to other destinations. Muslims just want Halal, and it does not matter where it comes from. (Informant 8)*

*The young ones are our target market. They may be Muslims, but they are sophisticated in their choices. Based on my understanding, they are looking for new experiences, are willing to try new things, and expanding their travel interests to food, fashion, lifestyle products, and more. (Informant 11)*

The informants' responses highlighted the most peculiar aspect of Islamic tourism: two distinct primary markets for Muslim-friendly tourism. The first is the rigidly obedient Muslim while the second is the modern, young, liberal Muslim who has a variety of "liberalised" needs and desires. Similarly, ref. [31] proposed that the key megatrend of Islamic tourism in the next ten years is the young consumer with high technology adoption. This growing young, middle-class generation is stocked with increased buying power, and their needs and wants will be unique—raising questions about how tourism destinations can genuinely connect with them. They are poised to spend more on experiences, reconnect with their Islamic heritage, or learn about local community lifestyles during their travels.

Unlike older generations, a lack of Muslim-friendly facilities does not deter young travellers, as they quickly adapt their needs based on their surroundings, such as by turning to vegetarian meals or instant meals when halal food options are lacking. This could be advantageous to non-Muslim destinations targeting the Muslim market [32]. With such understanding, non-Muslim destinations could open their doors to these young Muslim travellers, creating a new revenue stream or income generation from a potentially lucrative niche market.

The future of Islamic tourism destinations depends on how marketers understand and prepare for such demand. While Islamic tourism occupies a niche market, it will eventually become a mainstream tourism product, as it was forecasted pre-pandemic that by 2050, Islam would be the world's largest religion [33]. As a result, researchers and policymakers have attempted to understand the Muslim market's demand and supply sides for many years [5]. Most literature includes Muslim social environments, Muslim facilities, halal food and beverages, service offerings, and the hospitality community [34,35] as fundamental Islamic tourism products and services.

### 3.2. Emerging Issues

#### 3.2.1. Inconsistency of Islamic Tourism Branding

The varied terminology used to describe this niche market is undoubtedly apparent within the informants' input. The informants agreed that Islamic tourism terms are vague and utilised equivalently. They agreed that different types of Islamic tourism branding are used among destinations. Recent informants' observations claimed most Islamic tourism destinations emphasise different Islamic tourism brands and values, such as Muslim-friendly destinations in Malaysia, Korea, and Singapore and halal tourism in Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan, and Turkey while Thailand opts for the halal-friendly tourism concept. Lately, numerous tourism destinations have coined the concept of "Muslim-friendly tourism" (MFT), which offers touristic activities that abide only by fundamental Islamic values but with relaxed utilisation of Sharia laws and practices [35,36]. However, as suggested by informants, this branding's disorientation creates confusion among tourism suppliers and visiting tourists, especially among non-Muslims. As a result, significant gaps persist in the availability and comparability of globally accepted Islamic tourism attributes among Muslim and non-Muslim destinations.

The term "Muslim-friendly" is arguably viewed by the informants in a more favourable marketing context and creates a friendlier image of an Islamic tourism destination. The informants agree that Muslim and non-Muslim consumers of Islamic tourism destinations are much more relaxed with Muslim-friendly terms. They argue that the concept of MFT is not contrary to the values and ethics of Islam and is closely related to the concepts of halal and haram. Muslim-friendly hospitality services, such as airlines, hotels, and food services, are the new, fast-developing tourism products in the Muslim-friendly tourist industry. Nonetheless, such inconsistencies in the usage of terminology reflect tourism destinations' reluctance to standardise their promotional campaigns, as these terminologies' usage carries differentiated competitive advantages to them personally. The verbatim inputs from the informants support such conjectures:

*Halal means permissible, but you've got to make the permissible unmissable. Both essentially mean that Halal, Islamic Tourism, or Muslim-Friendly, is all about portraying the Muslim identity and the values of Islam in a way that resonates with, and is meaningful to, our audience. (Informant 1)*

*There is no problem with using different terms. The most important thing is we should start showing that Halal is "love," "care," "respect," "energetic," and that Halal is good, fun, and exciting. (Informant 5)*

*I prefer the Muslim-friendly tourism' concept. I saw many Muslim-friendly hospitality providers such as airlines, hotels and food services using the MFT term in promoting their services. (Informant 6)*

*..... the biggest problem with Islamic tourism is we have numerous terms, such as MFT, Islamic tourism, Sharia tourism and others terms. They used it interchangeably without being interpreted according to Sharia principles. (Informant 7)*

*I am quite surprised that most governments do not use the term 'Islamic tourism'; rather, 'Muslim-friendly tourism' is preferred. Why we need to have different terms for selling the same thing baffled me... (Informant 10)*

As of today, there is a global understanding that Islamic tourism includes the consideration of Islamic law (Sharia), the target markets (Muslims or non-Muslims), destinations (Muslim or non-Muslim countries), and the products and services offered (halal food or facilities). However, it is essential to note that the terminology of Islamic tourism still does not have clear boundaries. The terms “Islamic tourism”, “Sharia tourism”, “halal tourism”, and “Muslim-friendly tourism” were used interchangeably and loosely. Looking at the term used, Sharia tourism is defined as any activity, event, or experience conducted in a Sharia-compliant travel destination, which many deem too rigid for non-Muslim destinations. As a result, Sharia principles are not consistently interpreted and applied in the design and delivery of Islamic tourism experiences across Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Next is halal tourism, which focuses more on the basic agreement on what is halal (permitted) and what constitutes haram (forbidden) when offering halal tourism experiences [4].

Unfortunately, these inconsistencies in Islamic tourism branding led to product manipulation and disengagement, especially among uninformed tourism providers [4,5,37]. Such inconsistencies may happen as Muslim tourists have distinctive levels of religiosity, resulting in various requirements and attitudes of Muslims towards halal destinations [38]. Notably, serving non-Muslim tourists while meeting Muslim tourists’ demands is a challenge for Muslim and even non-Muslim destinations. As a result, tourism providers are hesitant to market Islamic tourism considering the different needs between Muslim and non-Muslim tourists [39,40]. This restriction represents a crucial and significant challenge for tourism planning and destination developers but also allows innovation and openness practices among the tourism players to meet the different demands of Muslims and non-Muslims [41].

### 3.2.2. Lack of Muslim-Based Products and Services

The informants highlighted that even using different terms, Islamic tourism’s role is quite similar—a force in sustaining Muslim culture by preserving Muslim people’s authenticity and sense of identity while travelling to other destinations. Nonetheless, it raises concern about how to bring the wisdom, heritage, and legacy of Islamic virtues to be enjoyed by all as unique, Muslim-friendly tourism experiences. They also highlight that despite the common ground on a faith level, the Muslim community’s lifestyle differs based on their cultural background. Likewise, their religious belief affects their consumption habits in one way or another. In addition, the informants argued that there is a need to equip Islamic-related tourism industry players and providers with training, upskilling, and knowledge-seeking to inculcate better skills to supply modern Islamic tourism demand. Below are the verbatim inputs from the informants:

*It is crucial to ensure Islamic tourism’s role as a force in sustaining the Muslim culture by preserving Muslim people’s authenticity and sense of identity while travelling to other destinations. Muslims just want Halal. . . . it does not matter where it comes from.*  
(Informant 3)

*. . . . . tourism destinations need to understand that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for Muslim consumers and tourists. The Muslim community’s lifestyle differs based on their cultural background and influences their consumption habits in one way or another.*  
(Informant 6)

*We should equip our industry players and providers with training, upskilling, and knowledge-seeking to inculcate better skills and knowledge for the new Islamic tourism demand.* (Informant 12)

It is well proven that incorporating a globally accepted halal certification process would allow for supply chain resilience in the Islamic tourism market. Notably, the migrant Muslim population in a non-Muslim nation could be utilised to offer halal hospitality and Islamic tourism complementary products. Ref. [36] highlighted that most non-Muslim tourism destinations seeking to attract Muslim tourists failed to be attentive to their com-

mitments to fulfil the supply of products that adhere to Islamic core values. This relates to awareness and falls back on the government's responsibility to educate stakeholders about Muslim-friendly tourism and their responsibilities and actions to offer appropriate tourism products. Previous studies on halal tourism found various significant challenges for tourism operators to commit themselves to providing Islamic-based tourism products and services, including a lack of government support [6]. As Muslims speak different languages, consume distinct food, and have unique traditions, tourism businesses must attend to their differences to genuinely serve them [6,40,42].

### 3.2.3. Governance Issues

The informants claimed that most of the Muslim world's governance style is highly centralised, and thus the developmental approach is more top-down. Hence, it is always a government initiative backed by industry players that backfires without a sustainable, strategic relationship between the industry's stakeholders. With such challenges, they believe consolidated multi-national stakeholder collaborations must be engaged to ensure a specific Islamic tourism standard is followed. This means that the government must solicit public input to ensure that whatever the government plans is beneficial and meets the local populace's needs. Similar to those proposed by [34] organic measures should be utilised to assess Islamic tourism's return on investment, indirect economic return, indirect and induced effects, and job sustainability. Below are the verbatim inputs from the informants:

*It is time to have an Islamic tourism plan and a strategic tourism plan focusing on feasibility studies, maintenance, and financial allocations needed to invest in Islamic tourism. (Informant 4)*

*The non-Muslim destinations should acknowledge the importance of standards and certification to provide assurance and confidence to the Muslim tourist market. (Informant 8)*

*Tourism businesses need to act fast. They could respond by collaborating with industry players, governments and embassies. They utilised technology and adapted it to business continuity. (Informant 9)*

*. . . . . Islamic Tourism must be supported by strong leadership, firm policies, decisive thinking, strong attention, and substantial investments to move the agenda forward. . . . . it can only succeed with such efforts, and Islamic Tourism can be positioned as a critical sector that it deserves. (Informant 12)*

It is well acknowledged that Islamic tourism is not highly recognised as a core tourism product, unlike other mainstream tourism products such as ecotourism, rural tourism, and agrotourism. As evident, most countries lack an Islamic tourism master plan to guide the development of Islamic tourism [34,43]. The tourism industry is akin to a paternalistic culture in which the government determines what is best for the industry. Hence, moving forward, it is crucial to instil a greater sense of bottom-up leadership to ensure the success of Islamic tourism. For a tourism provider seeking to invest or attract Muslim-friendly tourists, it is necessary to understand what constitutes a "need to have", "good to have", and "nice to have". In addition, it is high time for Islamic tourism to be recognised as an essential sector that should be included as a core tourism agenda for the future.

### 3.2.4. Lack of Innovation

In addition, the informants argue that innovation has become a prerequisite for a long-term tourism competitive strategy; insufficient innovation may jeopardise the industry's competitiveness and sustainability. To embrace the Islamic tourism concept, innovative tourism products, services, and facilities must be in place that provides enjoyment, ease, comfort, and convenience to the Muslim traveller besides complying with Sharia requirements. Henceforth, they believe tourism providers should start developing digital applications or platforms completely customised for Muslim travellers alone. They also propose that Islamic tourism providers seek out highly user-friendly applications that enable younger customers to obtain necessary information and share their experiences and

testimonials virtually. If not, tourism providers are passing up an opportunity to creatively reach out to the entire young Muslim community. They also predict that there will be more health and wellness preferences and prudent and compassionate travel behaviours. This highlights an opportunity to be grabbed among Muslim and non-Muslim destinations in the near future. Below are the verbatim inputs from the informants:

*There are limited collaborative structures and networks between Islamic tourism stakeholders for knowledge-sharing and data exchange. Others are adopting technology to further their offerings, but Muslim destinations hesitate to innovate. We need to move forward with technological innovation. (Informant 2)*

*..... the Millennials and the Gen Zs will be the crucial segments of the global Muslim market. We must start focusing on them, learning their behaviour and offering products and services they are looking for. (Informant 6)*

*Traveling post-pandemic is unique. Hygiene and technology adoption should be considered the critical criterion in service offerings, highlighting the need for contactless travel innovation. (Informant 8)*

*We need to frame Islamic Tourism as a sustainable, inclusive tourism strategy ..... we must strive for SDG2030 inclusion. (Informant 10)*

*I think there will be a more online dependency, health and wellness preferences, and prudent and compassionate travel behaviours. This would change how the industry should operate in the future. (Informant 8)*

*..... Muslim tourism destination needs to appraise the value of technology and automation in Islamic tourism offering. We should follow the mainstream changes. Digital content can enable Muslim travellers to better plan and experience their trips.... They used social networking apps to stay connected and search for halal food and travel guides. (Informant 11)*

*The playing field is level as destinations emerge from the pandemic and restart tourism.... those who do not plan for Islamic Tourism may be left behind by those strategising to capture this market. (Informant 12)*

Crescent Rating in 2018 proposed that the digital economy is one of the ten key halal travel trends. True enough, digital platforms are critical to providing modern tourism products and services [19,21]. However, the informants argued that innovation activities in Islamic tourism are still in their infancy. It is infrequent to see any innovative effort within the Muslim-friendly tourism industry. Even acknowledging the emerging young Muslim market, limited innovative Muslim-friendly tourism products and services are currently offered among Islamic tourism and hospitality businesses. Nonetheless, the informants believe there is a push to use artificial intelligence for tourism products in the future—thanks to the demand among Millennials.

Aligning with the informants' concern, even though the COVID-19 pandemic led to a disastrous, bearish tourist trend [44] the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) forecasts are still bullish. They forecasted that the Muslim tourism market would recover 80 percent by 2023 [18]. As a strategy for the future, the Muslim world must ensure that the potential target market is continuously explored, particularly the untapped Muslim market in non-Muslim countries [4].

#### 4. Conclusions

Tourism stakeholders cannot deny the emergence of Islamic tourism, the modern Muslim market, and its developmental potential. This study found that the Islamic tourism industry's emerging trends are greatly occupied by two distinct Islamic markets: the rigidly obedient Muslim and the modern, young, liberal Muslim. Notably, their needs and wants are unique, creating challenges for tourism providers, especially among non-Muslim destinations. In terms of the challenges, this study highlights improper governance, inconsistency of Islamic tourism branding, and lack of Muslim-based products and services



as emerging issues within the modern Islamic tourism industry. The study findings also suggest the need for Islamic tourism providers to focus on the role of technology in forming the Muslim traveller experience, creating a memorable Muslim travel experience, and recognising the dynamic nature of the modern Muslim traveller.

This study also answers the call to develop a more robust theoretical and practical basis for the Islamic tourism domain. Notably, the research domain and tourist demand have grown considerably. The differentiated Muslim brands used among tourism destinations appeared to portray substantial values and images in line with their specific marketing strategy. Yet, industry players' and consumers' (tourists') insights into Islamic tourism structures and offerings are still lacking. As a result, it creates confusion and unfavourably affects Muslim tourists' authentic and memorable travel experiences. This call for a much more inclusive marketing strategy among Islamic tourism providers is unique but may complement both Muslim and non-Muslim travellers.

Islamic tourism destination managers need to formulate and execute an all-inclusive strategy to cater to the requirements of Muslim visitors while ensuring they can practice their religious responsibilities while travelling. This includes providing tourism and hospitality products and services, such as accommodations, food, recreation, entertainment experiences, and transportation, that follow Islamic teachings. While it is easy for Muslim destinations, non-Muslim destinations must embrace the Islamic tourism concept and be innovative in offering their current tourism products, services, and facilities. Hence, it is urged that stakeholders' main concern is improving halal-friendly products and services via global certification. This would lead to travellers' confidence. However, the lack of halal services integration throughout the value chain, especially among non-Muslim destinations, is a challenge. Nonetheless, stakeholders' responsibility is to ensure the availability of genuinely halal services despite selling them as either halal, Islamic, or Muslim-friendly tourism.

We proposed that Islamic tourism branding and marketing strategically position themselves to appeal to modern Muslim tourists and broader tourist markets. Perhaps this could be facilitated and made possible by creating awareness, training tourism industry players, implementing standards and certification, undertaking and applying research, and using branding and identity management strategies. This study also confirms technology adoption is the main agenda among Islamic tourism providers and destinations, mainly from the pressure of fulfilling the demand among influential, young Muslims. Perhaps the local government and available stakeholders could create an integrated, online Islamic tourism ecosystem to cater to the modern generation's preferences. Possibly, online services could be all-inclusive so that tourists from other religions, cultures, countries, and continents can enjoy them.

To conclude, this research provides researchers, practitioners, and policymakers with many opportunities for future exploration. In our opinion, these promising trends represent a significant challenge to be faced by tourism players and the scientific community to find innovative solutions and management strategies for the Islamic tourism sector in the upcoming years. This could probably be facilitated and made possible by creating awareness, training tourism industry players, implementing standards and certification, undertaking and applying research, and using superior branding strategies. Perhaps we do not have the answers to these questions, but we believe that future research on this topic will continue to grow in the upcoming years.

We posed the following questions to be explored by future researchers: (i) Is relationship marketing still the way forward for Muslim destinations? How can Muslim and non-Muslim destinations strategically pose meaningful experiences for their Muslim travellers and create must-attend reasons to visit again and again?; (ii) how have the post-pandemic safety and precautionary security requirements impacted Muslim travellers' Islamic practices while travelling?; (iii) if Islamic tourism destinations are moving forward to utilise mobile and online technologies fully, how would the Muslim traveller's experience affect their behaviour?; and (iv) how could DMOs develop a strategic action plan for

Islamic tourism destinations to regain and potentially surpass pre-pandemic tourist arrivals and receipts? Should they go for the untapped Muslim market in non-Muslim countries?

This study is also not without limitations. There were concerns regarding using purposive sampling in the cross-sectional setting, which may constrain the generalisation of the results. Additionally, there is limited knowledge on how knowledge about Islam among non-Muslims affects the acceptance of the Islamic tourism concept. Perhaps religiosity level could be the intervening aspect that affects individual expectations and support towards Islamic tourism. Hence, investigating the concepts of ethics in the context of Islamic tourism offerings among Muslim vs non-Muslim destinations would provide additional opportunities for future research. The fact that this paper is now putting them forward suggests that it is opportune to utilise more informants and explore Islamic tourism by empirically comparing Muslim and non-Muslim perspectives.

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