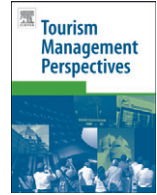




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## Review

# Halal tourism, is it really Halal?



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### ABSTRACT

The study of religion has attracted interest and considerable attention from researchers and practitioners as a result of wanting to know more about religions (such as Islam) and religiosity. However, regardless of the importance of religious studies, religious tourism is still very much under-represented in the literature. In fact, it is distressing to find that little is known about religious tourism in many developed and developing economies. Meanwhile, Islamic tourism (or Halal tourism) is deeply rooted within the Islamic Shari'ah as every Muslim is required to travel for many reasons, some directly related to Islamic Shari'ah itself (e.g. Hajj and Umrah) while many travel for education, medical treatment, and knowledge acquisition, etc. This paper examines the concept of Halal tourism (as a subcategory of religious tourism), its roots, principles and most importantly answers the questions: is Halal tourism really Halal? Is Halal tourism only for Muslim families who abide by Islamic Shari'ah rules? Should it be Halal tourism or Islamic tourism? Is Halal tourism only about Islamic countries or it is also important for other countries? What are the impacts of non-compliance to Halal principles on hotels (and other tourism organisations) performance?

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## 1. Introduction

Religion is one of the most widespread and influential social institutions that have a significant influence on people's attitudes, values and behaviours for both individuals and society (Mokhlis, 2009). Moreover, religiosity is distinct from religion. The latter is conceptualised as a continuum of commitment that represents a particular faith or creed (such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Judaism), whereas the

former portrays the focus of religion in directing a person's life in accordance with religious role expectations (Weaver & Agle, 2002). Religiosity defines ideas about ways of living that are reflected in the values and attitudes of societies and individuals (Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2004). Such values and attitudes shape the behaviour and practises of both institutions and people.

The clear relationship between tourism and religion has been addressed in the literature on tourism in many different ways (e.g. Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015a, 2015b, 2014; El-Gohary & Eid, 2014; Henderson, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2014).

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Nevertheless, previous research on the different perspectives of religious tourism is limited as religion is a relatively under-researched and an under-represented topic in tourism. Religion has long been a strong motivating factor in people's travel (Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Meanwhile, given that tourism and hospitality is a social and cultural industry, it should then closely represent the dimensions of ethnicity and religion (Stephenson, Russell, & Edgar, 2010). In responding to these developments, the tourism industry is progressively moving away from mass marketing and is instead pursuing more sophisticated approaches to segmenting tourist markets in order to address the distinct consumer psychology of a particular target market.

Although some aspects of religious tourism (e.g. Islamic tourism) seem to be a new concept for many researchers and practitioners in the field of tourism, its essential concepts are very old, and Islamic tourism is well rooted in Islamic Shari'ah and can be traced to the early days of the Islamic civilisation. Since the times of early Islamic history, all Muslims are required to perform tourism activities as an obligation of Islamic Shari'ah. Furthermore, in the early days of the Islamic civilisation, when the Islamic empire covered enormous geographical areas of Asia, Africa and even some parts of Europe, Muslims (and non-Muslims) got the chance of travel across these three continents safely and without any constraints or limitations such as passports, borders or even security investigations. In addition, these early days of Islamic history witnessed the existence of many famous Muslim travellers such as: Ibn Battuta who was, and still is, one of the most famous travellers in history, Abdellatif El Baghdadi, Ibn Wahb Al-Qorashi, Osama Bin Monqid, El Harawi As-Sa'ih, and others (Taher, 2008).

Islamic tourism (or Halal tourism) is deeply rooted within the Islamic Shari'ah as every Muslim is required to visit the holy cities of Meccah and El-Madana (in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – KSA) to conduct Hajj (if he/she can afford to do that financially and physically). Accordingly, any Muslim that does not actually live in these two holy cities (Meccah and/or El-Madana), needs to conduct tourism activities to fulfil his religion and Shari'ah requirements. Furthermore, millions of Muslims travel to the holy cities of Meccah and El-Madana every year to perform Umrah. As a result, according to the latest information provided by the National Statistical Office of Saudi Arabia, during the year 2014, 21.66 million tourists visited the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia out of which 2,085,238 performed Hajj (National Statistical Office of Saudi Arabia, 2015). A great percentage of these millions visited the KSA for conducting Islamic tourism (Hajj and Umrah).

Moreover, Islamic Shari'ah has a great impact on travelling and encouraging tourism. When looking at Shari'ah and Islamic religious principles generated from the Quran and Sunnah (teachings, guidance and practises of Prophet Mohammad) it is found that travellers are considered to be closer to God and their Doaa (asking God for something) and prayers are more responded to while travelling. Furthermore, the religious responsibilities for travellers are less as traveller can pray shorter prayers, can postpone prayers and can postpone his/her fasting during the holy month of Ramadan.

Meanwhile, tourism and tourism organisations do play a major role in the world economy, and are considered as one of the main contributors to employment growth and economic development. As a result, tourism can be viewed as one of the most important sources for any country national GDP (Gross Domestic Production) and is considered as a very important part of the economic and social existence of many countries. They play a significant role in today's business world and a strong tourism sector supports and provides a main contribution to the economic growth of any country. Tourism organisations are socially and economically important since they have constantly and significantly contributed in providing potential for employment, self-fulfilment and economic growth. As such, it is very important to provide such organisations with a complete and good understanding about emerging aspects of tourism such as Halal tourism which can help such organisations in achieving its objectives.

## 2. Halal tourism, towards a definition

### 2.1. Religious tourism

Although, tourism to religious sites is growing worldwide, our understanding of the motives, interests and needs of tourists at these sites is yet limited (Hughes, Bond, & Ballantyne, 2013). Meanwhile, religious tourism is still an under-studied area in tourism research (Kartal, Tepeci, & Atlı, 2015) and scholarly research has barely touched upon the interrelationship between religion and tourism (Collins-Kreiner & Wall, 2015). Moreover, religious tourism has not been fully exploited due to the high sensitivity of the subject, the lack of scientific data and its overwhelming domestic nature in most countries (World Tourism Organization – UNWTO, 2011).

Religious tourism (or as some researchers might refer to it as: faith tourism) can be defined as: “travel with the core motive of experiencing religious forms, or the products they induce, like art, culture, traditions and architecture” (FICCI Religious Tourism Report, 2012, p: 2). It can be divided into many different categories, and the FICCI Religious Tourism Report (2012) classified religious tourism into the following major categories:

- o Pilgrimages.
- o Missionary travel.
- o Leisure (fellowship) vacations.
- o Faith-based cruising.
- o Crusades, conventions and rallies.
- o Retreats.
- o Monastery visits and guest-stays.
- o Faith-based camps.
- o Religious tourist attractions (FICCI, 2012, p: 3).

Examples of religious tourism activities include: Christian visitors to the Holy Land in Palestine, Hajj to Meccah in KSA, Jewish Pilgrims to holy graves in Israel, and Baha'i Pilgrimage Sites (Baha'ı Gardens in Haifa, Israel) and Shia pilgrimage in Iran.

Collins-Kreiner and Wall (2015) argue that the study of the relationship between religion and tourism focuses often separately on either religion or tourism and pays little attention to the actual interaction and/or linkage between the two. A review of the related literature confirms Collins-Kreiner and Wall (2015) point of view. However, a good understanding of tourism cannot be established and/or developed without a good understanding about religion, its practises, and its impact of tourism activities and tourists (Collins-Kreiner & Wall, 2015). Hence, there is a great need to conduct much more research studies that can examine and investigate the interaction and/or linkage between tourism and different aspects of religion.

### 2.2. Islamic tourism

Although Muslims make up one of the largest tourist markets in the world, knowledge related to the different Islamic perspective on tourism (regardless of the very powerful link between the two) is still less represented in the related literature (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015a). Although there are still some definitional ambiguities with regard to Islamic tourism concept (Henderson, 2010), there were some attempts to define it. The following Table 1 provides some of these definitions:

As such, it is noticed that Islamic tourism focuses on many different issues such as: participation and engagement (by Muslims), tourism places and destinations (Islamic destinations), product(s) (residential places, food, entertainment, beverage, etc.), dimensions (social, economic, cultural, religious, etc.), and managing the offered service processes (marketing, ethical considerations, etc.) (Duman, 2011; Tajzadeh, 2013).

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