



## The capacity of New Zealand to accommodate the halal tourism market – Or not



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### ABSTRACT

Halal tourism and hospitality, also referred to as Islamic or sharia tourism, has implications for both the consumption and production of tourism and hospitality products. A number of potential attributes of halal accommodation are identified and applied to an analysis of accommodation provider websites in Auckland and Rotorua, two major tourist destinations in New Zealand, a country that is increasingly seeking to position itself as a halal friendly destination in Asia and the Middle East. The analysis of 367 accommodation websites found only three sites that specifically mentioned halal and also identified a number of attributes that may deter more conservative halal tourists. The findings raise significant questions with respect to the capacity of the New Zealand accommodation sector to both convey appropriate accommodation information to the Islamic market as well as provide satisfying experiences to those who do stay. Substantial improvements in training, education and communication strategies are recommended.

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As the Muslim consumer market expands in many Western countries as a result of migration, international education and tourism so the hospitality and tourism sectors have become increasingly interested in catering to its needs. These are usually described under the rubric of Islamic or halal tourism and/or hospitality (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010; Din, 1989; Henderson, 2002; Scott & Jafari, 2010; Syed Marzuki, Hall, & Ballantine, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Tourism research has long been interested in religious tourism in the guise of pilgrimage and religious attractions (Haq & Jackson, 2009; Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2003; Rinschede, 1992). However, given its role in identity and personal behaviour religion clearly has major implications for the consumption and provision of tourism and hospitality products outside of a specified religious activity as part of, for example, the 'everyday' consumption of leisure tourism and hospitality as part of the emergence of an Islamic middle class (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011, 2012; Delener, 1994; Prayag & Hosany, 2014; Wan Hassan & Hall, 2003; Wong, 2007).

This paper provides an examination of the extent to which the New Zealand accommodation sector promotes attributes that fulfils the notion of halal tourism. Using a template that has been developed from

relevant literature an analysis is conducted of accommodation websites in Auckland and Rotorua, two of New Zealand's leading urban tourism destinations. Importantly, the paper emphasises that halal tourism and hospitality is not just about the provision of halal food but a range of product attributes that would be relevant to Muslim customers and which New Zealand accommodation operators fails to promote and provide.

### 1. Halal

The idea of halal is often thought by non-Muslims to relate only to food and what is allowed to be consumed under Islam (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008; Regenstein, Chaudry, & Regenstein, 2003; Riaz & Chaudry, 2004). However, although important, the notion of halal is much wider than just food (Chaudry, 1992; Wilson & Liu, 2011). The source of what constitutes halal and *haram* is derived from the *Quran*, The prophet's *Hadith* (the Prophet Mohammed's teachings), and what Islamic jurists have deemed as *haram* (forbidden), such as animals with long pointed tusks or fangs, birds of prey, and animals that are strictly forbidden from being killed in Islam such as the hoopoe (a type of bird that is also forbidden in the Old Testament and Torah) and the honeybee (Bon & Hussain, 2010).

The main source of a Muslim's dietary requirements come from the *Quran* which states what foods are considered permissible and what is strictly forbidden, such as the *Ayat* (verses) mentioned in *Surat Al*

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*Maaidah* (5:4) that outlines that apart from the foods that were forbidden in other verses all foods are considered halal, as well as the catch from birds of prey trained for hunting. The *Quran* further mentions that the foods of *Ahlul-Kitab* (translated as People of the scripture, e.g. Jews and Christians) are also considered as halal as well as the food of Muslims are considered as permissible for them (*Surat Al Maaidah*, 5:5). The *Quran* also sets out what is strictly forbidden for Muslims to consume: “Only carrion, blood, flesh of swine and that which is consecrated for anything other than God is prohibited for you. Even, in these things, whoever is driven by necessity, intending neither sin nor transgression, there shall be no sin upon him. Indeed God is extremely Forgiving, Eternal in mercy” (*Surat Al-Baqarah*, 2:173).

The issue of halal and haram food has long been debated by Muslims scholars and jurists. A number of lists have been created based on the *Quran* and the teachings of the prophet Muhammad [SAW] of what is permissible and what is forbidden (Regenstein et al., 2003). However, while there are clearly a number of common elements some differences in interpretation exist between different Islamic traditions and the socio-cultural practices that affect consumption.

However, as noted above, the concept of halal and haram is not reserved only for food. Some verses from the *Quran* also mention other things that are considered haram. The *Quran* mentions that gambling and the consumption of alcohol are also considered haram, as mentioned in *Surat Al-Maaidah* (5:90) “O ye who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), gambling, Al-Ansab, and Al-Azlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaitan's (Satan) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be Successful”. Thus, a Muslim must be watchful of their consumption in a wider context than just food with respect to fulfilling the teachings of the Prophet [SAW] (Syed Marzuki et al., 2013). This means not only paying attention to what is consumed or produced but where it comes from and the processes and, arguably, intentions behind consumption and production. Halal must therefore be understood within the context of what is in Islam *fard* (compulsory), *mustahabb* (recommended), *makruh* (disliked), and *haram* (forbidden) that, together with halal defines the morality of all human action.

The framing of consumption and production by adherence to Islamic teachings and traditions is therefore critical to understanding and meeting the needs of a market identified by their religious adherence. Within Muslim countries the provision of halal products tends to be taken as a given. However, increased international trade together with the growth of Islamic populations in and visitors to countries that are predominantly non-Muslim has led to the perception of the existence of new market opportunities, including with respect to tourism and hospitality.

## 2. Halal tourism

The phenomenon of the rise in demand for commercial tourism and hospitality services that adhere to the laws of Islam has been described as ‘Halal tourism’, ‘halal hospitality’, ‘sharia tourism’ or ‘Islamic tourism’ (Carboni, Perelli, & Sistu, 2014; Henderson, 2010). Halal or Islamic tourism is defined here as tourism and hospitality that is co-created by consumer and producer in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Many nations in the Islamic world are capitalising on the rise in demand for Muslim-friendly tourist services (Pavlova, 2011). Henderson (2010) argues that the concept of Islamic tourism is a recent one, and one that has been gathering pace in some countries in south East Asia such as Malaysia and Singapore. Although, in some ways, such a perspective is surprising given the significance attached to travel in Islam both with respect to the duties of a Muslim with respect to pilgrimage as well as the importance that the *Quran* attaches to travel and knowledge of the world. Malaysia has been trying to brand itself as a global halal hub (Bon & Hussain, 2010; Syed Marzuki et al., 2012a, 2012b), and is capitalising on catering to Muslim tourists’ needs especially the ones from Middle Eastern countries by offering halal tourism products. Similarly, Singapore has also begun to promote itself as a Muslim-friendly

country to the Islamic world, both of those countries have seen a significant rise in Muslim tourists arriving at their shores (Henderson, 2010).

New Zealand has been increasingly trying to position itself as a destination for Muslim tourists since the late 1990s. This is a result of several influences. First, New Zealand is a major exporter of halal meat supplies. Second, the country has a small though growing Muslim population which is complimented by a significant international student market from Muslim countries. Finally, Tourism New Zealand, in conjunction with other tourism actors has increasingly been seeking to promote New Zealand in major Muslim markets in the Middle East, India, Indonesia and Malaysia (Sulaiman, 2001; Tourism New Zealand, 2014; Wan Hassan & Hall, 2003). In order to help attract Islamic visitors Tourism New Zealand and Christchurch International Airport supported the production of an halal food guide entitled *New Zealand A Culinary Haven for Muslims* that stated that the country “boasts a present and growing halal industry and offers an array of halal eateries, restaurants and grocers for Muslim travellers” (KasehDia Sdn Bhd, 2012, p. 3).

However, although there is official interest in promoting New Zealand to Islamic tourists substantial uncertainties remain over the capacity to provide appropriate services to Muslim visitors. For example, at the time of writing the above mentioned halal culinary guide is no longer available from the Tourism New Zealand web site. The next section discusses some of the attributes of accommodation that may prove attractive to Islamic tourists.

## 3. Islam and accommodation attributes

Battour et al. (2011) found that during the destination decision-making process, a Muslim tourist would often consider Sharia (Islamic law) to guide their choice of travel destination and accommodation. They listed six attributes an accommodation provider should have to appeal to the Muslim traveller (see also Henderson, 2010, on sharia compliant hotels which have similar attributes to those identified by Battour et al., 2011; see also Stephenson, 2014). These include

- Hotels meeting the religious needs of patrons, e.g. the provision of prayer mats in rooms along with an indication of where the *Qibla* (prayer direction) is. It may also be appropriate to remove bibles from rooms occupied by Muslim guests;
- Information about places of worship is provided to guests e.g., the accommodation's proximity to a mosque or the dedication of a space in the hotel for the congregation of Muslims to perform prayers or Friday prayers;
- Availability of halal food, e.g. the provision of halal meal choices by the accommodation provider in restaurants and in-room dining. Provision of halal food may also be accompanied by appropriate certification;
- The banning of alcohol consumption and gambling, e.g. the removal of alcoholic beverages from the room in which a tourist is staying;
- Removal of any pornographic material and any sexually suggestive programming options from being broadcasted in the room. The proximity of the hotel to the local red light district may also be an issue. Concerns over sexual promiscuity may also include the provision of separate swimming quarters for men and women; and
- An appropriate dress code, e.g. the use of conservative dress by hotel staff.

Cleanliness is another important accommodation provider attribute. Battour et al. (2011) note that the cleanliness of a hotel room and its bathroom are essential for Muslims, as Muslims require clean bathrooms to perform ablutions and prepare for prayer, and a clean room would be suitable for praying and reading the *Quran*. Another dimension that is also significant is the need to ensure that hotel supplied toiletries, such as soaps, are also halal. In other countries that cater to an Islamic tourist market, such as Mauritius, this information is often clearly indicated on hotel supplies.

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