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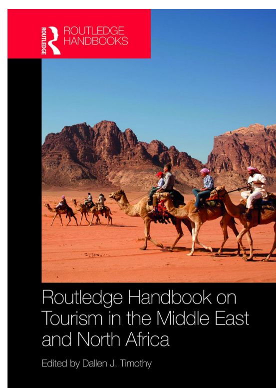

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Much ado about halal tourism

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MUCH ADO ABOUT HALAL TOURISM

Religion, religiosity or none of the above?

Omar Moufakkir, Yvette Reisinger and Dhoha AlSaleh

Introduction

Much of the literature on Arab/Muslim tourism revolves around the importance of religion in this group's tourist behaviour. Subsequently, the contemporary literature in the field has gravitated around halal tourism. Halal tourism is a recent phenomenon that has attracted the attention of tourism and hospitality academics and the industry. This form of tourism is defined in relation to activities and behaviours that are Islamic and Sharia-compliant. It identifies numerous rules and principles that guide the behaviour and activities of Muslims. Consequently, Muslims are expected to participate in that which is *halal* (allowed) and dissociate from that which is *haram* (forbidden) (Battour & Ismail 2015). All Muslims are to be guided by those principles.

However, the heart of the matter is that there is Islam (religion) and there are Muslims (individuals), which means that not all that Muslims do is religious. There are religious Muslims, but there are Muslim people who are not religious; some are part-time religious. This being said, there has been much ado about halal tourism in the tourism industry and in academic research. Like Battour and Ismail (2015: 3), we are of the opinion that the term 'Muslim-friendly holidays' and Muslim-friendly destinations are more appropriate to be used instead of 'halal holidays' and halal destinations. The word halal in halal destinations is catchy and trendy, yet it is inappropriate, deceptive and misleading. Not only is halal tourism confused with Islamic tourism (Battour & Ismail 2015; Smith & Hindley 2017), it is also, mistakenly associated with, for example, 'Travellers who wish to maintain Muslim principles (i.e. prayer, food, cultural norms) while travelling' (a definition of halal travellers proposed by Context Consulting (2016)). Nonetheless, not all Muslim tourists are halal tourists.

For halal tourism to exist there must be halal tourists. Indeed, reports indicate that the demand for halal tourism has been growing. For example, according to the Amadeus report,

> The Halal Tourism sector was estimated to be valued at $145 billion in 2014 … Halal travel is one of the fastest growing travel sectors in the world, with an estimated growth rate of 4.8% against the 3.8% industry average.
>
> *(Context Consulting 2016: 8)*

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However, while more is known about the supply side of halal tourism, little is known about its demand side. In reality, little is known about halal tourists' behaviours. Much of what is known about halal tourists is that they prefer to patronise halal establishments. Indeed, a few hotel accommodations and eating-places have been 'halalised' to attract this market. However, there is more to tourism and to what is halal and what halal tourists do than selecting accommodations and restaurants based on some halal principles. This chapter offers a light critique of halal tourism with the purpose of dissipating certain confusion about the relationship between Muslims, Islam, halal tourism and halal tourists, and advance an understanding about this tourism phenomenon (also see Battour & Ismail 2015).

Halal tourism and religiosity

Halal tourists represent a segment of the Muslim tourism market. Associating Arab and Muslim tourists with religion or, for that matter, with what is haram and what is halal is misleading. This association disregards between and within group differences in motivation, preference, experience, constraints and expectations. Furthermore, automatically associating halal tourism with Islam and halal tourists with religion is myopic and deceptive.

Studying the travel behaviour of Arab/Muslim people in light of religion alone is a thorny and challenging academic exercise for many reasons. First, the complexity lies in failing to realise the differences within the Arab world, between Arab and Muslim, religious and secular, fundamentalist and atheist, believer and agnostic, young and old, female and male, married and single or divorced, married with children or empty nester, or educated or otherwise. It is a reality that the religiosity of a Muslim individual can be measured on a scale from -10 to 10, where -10 represents not religious at all and 10 represents very religious. If we look closely into this proposition, only then does it become necessary to (re)consider the tourism motivations of Arab/Muslim tourists and to consider their complex tourism behaviours, outside of what is halal and what is haram. Hence, what is halal tourism becomes secondary to the travel behaviour of Muslim and Arab tourists. Second, not all Arabs are Muslims, and neither are all Muslims religious.

Failure to acknowledge such differences may result in a misunderstanding of not only Muslim tourists but also Arab and Muslim people in general. Prayag and Hosany (2014) are right in saying that Arab and Muslim tourists *tend* to travel to friendly/halal-oriented destinations, but that surely there are also Arab/Muslim tourists who prefer to visit destinations regardless of their halal orientation. Many Muslim and Arab travellers seek novelty in their tourism experiences. For example, in a study about recreational travel motivations of Kuwaiti citizens, Moufakkir and AlSaleh (2017) identified 105 motivational items. This plethora of items emphasises the complexity of Arab tourists' motivation and is a clear indication that treating Arab and Muslim tourists as one homogeneous market and disregarding intra-group differences can automatically lead to fallacious reasoning.

The Arab and Muslim tourism market is under-studied and hence misunderstood. The reasons why little is known about this market can be summarised as follows. First, there is a lack of interest in the Arab and Muslim tourism market by international and domestic academics. Second, there is a lack of funding for this type of research. Third, the exploratory nature of the research, although needed, can be perceived as descriptive and hence simplistic. Fourth, descriptive research is not easily accepted by mainstream academic journals, and finally, academics are pressured to publish in high-ranked journals. In addition, non-English speaking academics encounter language difficulties in publishing in English academic journals, and funding for proofreading and editing is not always available (Reisinger & Moufakkir 2015). This creates a

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dearth of literature authored by Arab and Muslim researchers on this topic. This neglect not only affects the whole field of tourism, hospitality and leisure studies, but also contributes to perpetrating stereotypical images of the Arab/Muslim tourist and his or her world.

Arabs and Muslims

Sometimes, scholars experience confusion in differentiating between the Arab World, the Islamic World (Jafari & Scott 2014), the Middle East (Feghali 1997), and North Africa. Arab is an ethnic term, Arabic is a language, Islam is a religion, and the Middle East and North Africa refer to geographical areas. Darity (2008) explained that the term 'Arab' is an ethno-national term. Geographically, Arab states stand on two continents: Asia and Africa. In 2010, there were 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, representing 23.2 per cent of an estimated population of 6.9 billion (Reisinger & Moufakkir 2015). More than 61 per cent of Muslims live in the Asia-Pacific region and about 20 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa (Pew Resource Center 2011). In 2010, five of the ten countries with the largest Muslim populations were in Asia: Indonesia (209 million), India (176 million), Pakistan (167 million), Bangladesh (133 million) and Iran (74 million). Of the remaining five, three were in North Africa (Egypt, Algeria and Morocco), one in Europe (Turkey) and one in Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria). Russia, China and the US also have sizeable Muslim populations. The world's Muslim population is projected to grow by about 35 per cent between 2010 and 2030 to 2.2 billion (Pew Resource Center 2011).

It is obvious that considering Muslims and Arabs as one homogeneous consumer market presents research and reasoning fallacies, subsequently leading to policies based on misleading recommendations. Therefore, future tourism research about Arab and Muslim consumers needs to be dismantled into specific units of analysis with considerations for respective countries and between and within group differences. Nassar, Mostafa and Reisinger (2015) rightly argued that there is little understanding of how destinations can best market themselves and cater for Muslim/Arab guests. There are many challenges to overcome in order to respond to the needs and desires of this complex and fast-growing visitor market.

Islam, Muslims and travel

Muslims are required to observe Islamic commitments when travelling (Timothy & Iverson 2006; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson 2010). The Islamic sets of codes strictly determine Muslims' destination choice, purpose of travel, hotel selection, preferences for amenities, food consumption, participation in activities, and service expectations that need to follow Islamic-friendly criteria (Stephenson 2014). Muslims are commanded to travel to Mecca to perform Hajj (pilgrimage) and Umrah (minor Hajj), and visiting the three mosques: al-masjid al-Haram, the Mosque of the Messenger, and the Mosque of al-Aqsa in Palestine (Alsawafi 2017). Muslims are not allowed to travel to places where sins are committed. They are not allowed to travel to non-Muslim countries, except for medical treatment, for business purposes that require travel, or to learn knowledge that cannot be obtained in a Muslim country, and to call people to Islam and spread the faith (Islam Q&A 2010). Likewise, Muslim women are not allowed to travel without a Mahram (i.e. a companion from amongst their relatives) (Hashim, Murphy, & Hashim 2007; Islam Q&A 2010). It is extremely important to consider these propositions cautiously.

Muslims are commanded to travel for religious purposes. However, in the Arab world, there is a mishmash and, to a certain extent, confusion between religion and tradition. To what extent each one is impregnated by the other and to what degree is a huge debate. This is why discussing Islam in tourism and tourism in Islam is a thorny intellectual issue (Reisinger & Moufakkir

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2015). The teachings of Islam emanate from the interpretation of the holy book, the Qur'an, and from the Sunna or the exemplary life of Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his teachings. There are things that are clearly and strictly haram (forbidden) in Islam and which have a strong bearing on travel, including drinking alcohol, eating pork, gambling, nudity, fornication and adultery. The concepts of haram (unlawful) and halal (lawful) strongly affect the way of life of the Muslims, including their travel behaviour, to a certain extent. Al Jallad (2008: 77) explains:

> These concepts [Haram and Halal] are deeply rooted in the Arab-Muslim tradition and history, affecting the Arabs' way of thinking and acting. Therefore, accurate definitions of these concepts may help to understand the Arab-Muslim identity that is vaguely or poorly understood by non-speakers of Arabic. Furthermore, to non-speakers of Arabic, these notions are often misunderstood, inadequately explained, and inaccurately translated into other languages.

Muslim travel motivations originate from Islamic motivations. Islam connects travel motivation to worship, conveying the message of God to people, enabling one to appreciate the wonders of God's creation and enjoy the beauty of his great universe (Henderson 2003; Islam Q&A 2010; Stodolska & Livengood 2006). Several authors noted that Islamic travel has important religious and social functions (Al-Hamarneh 2008; Henderson 2003, 2009; Timothy & Iverson 2006; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson 2010). For example, Laderlah, Rahman, Awang and Mann (2011) noted that Islam motivates its followers to visit and immerse themselves in places that strengthen their appreciation of creation and faith in Allah (Battour, Ismail, & Battor 2011; Sanad, Kassem, & Scott 2010; Yusof & Muhammad 2013; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson 2010). Bhardwaj (1998) stressed the importance of visiting shrines that relate to the cultural traditions of Islamic populations. Eickelman and Piscatori (1990) argued that Muslims travel to appreciate the beauty of God's world, and foster unity amongst the Muslim community. Laderlah et al. (2011) emphasised the role of travel in Islamic teachings. Din (1989) reported that Muslims travel to Islamic historical places as a way to learn about the history of Islam. In order to attract more Muslim tourists Jordan promotes visitation to the shrines of the pre-Islamic prophets and the companions of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) (Neveu 2010). Certainly, there are a few Muslim tourists who belong to this type of spiritual tourism. These tourists seek spirituality in nature and at natural and religious sites. The quest for spirituality, however, does not necessarily make a spiritual tourist a religious person, or all Muslims religious people.

Perhaps, according to some commentators' observations, a Muslim person should not travel at all to Western destinations, and even visiting an Arab/Islamic destination becomes problematic as many, if not all of them, are speedily 'Westernising'. Surely, if it were the case that Muslims should not travel, the word travel and its significance would be omitted from the holy Qur'an or limited to Islamic pilgrimage. Travel, however, is well covered in the Holy Book. For example, in Surah (verse) Al-Imran, God says: 'Many were the Ways of Life that have passed away before you: travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth' (Surah Al-Imran 137) (Quran Index 2017e). Travel in the Qur'an is about observation, discovery, learning, and amazement about God's works; travel shows the right path to God. In Surah Al-Hajj, God says:

> Do they not travel through the land, so that their hearts (and minds) may thus learn wisdom and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not their eyes that are blind, but their hearts, which are in their breasts.
>
> *(Surah Al-Hajj 46) (Quran Index 2017d)*

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And, 'Travel through the earth and see how Allah did originate creation; so will Allah produce a later creation: for Allah has power over all things' (Surah Al-'Ankabut 20) (Quran Index 2017a). Clearly, Muslims are encouraged to travel and wander the earth in wonder of God's work and his creation to learn about and from the peoples of the world, regardless of their religion. Thus, religion is not a travel motivation *per se.* Certainly, travel to Mecca *is* a religious duty for those who can afford it, and it is a religious motivation in itself.

Halal tourism, on the other hand, only offers certain conditions that contribute to the experience of the tourist. Tourism motivation is multifaceted and tourists' motives can overlap, depending on the type of experience sought and the destination selected (Sirakaya, Uysal, & Yoshioka 2003). Muslim tourists do not travel to London for spiritual fulfilment or for a religious duty. They visit London for different reasons and for different experiences, including shopping and culture (Moufakkir & AlSaleh 2017).

The Arab tourist market, influence of religion and halal tourism

The literature indicates that Arab travellers are characterised by longer stays (between two and eight weeks), larger travel party size, higher spending and a preference for cooking their food themselves (e.g. Michael & Beeton 2007; Michael, Armstrong, Badran, & King 2011; Sulaiman 2008). Arab travellers have the highest average travel expenditure (Wells 2012). The average spending per capita for Arab travellers is around US$250 and higher than the world average of US$134 (ETC & UNWTO 2012). Citizens of Arabian Gulf countries spend around US$3000–4000 per day when travelling internationally. Gulf travellers spend four times more than others on accommodation and almost three times more on airfares, and business class seats preference is higher amongst Arabs (Wells 2012).

Arabs tend to travel with their families, stay longer, and spend more money than the average tourist. This being acknowledged, not much is known about the other trip characteristics of Arabs. For example, the travel behaviour of an Algerian tourist compared to that of the Emirati tourist is very different. Most Algerians' international tourism is VFR-oriented (visiting friends and relatives), as many have family members and friends living in European countries. Research about the GCC tourists is progressing, but our understanding about other Arabs and Muslims is lagging behind (Stephenson & Al-Hamarneh 2017).

According to Almuhrzi, Scott and Alriyami (2017), more than 60 per cent of the population in the Arab world is represented by young people who are familiar with new technology and are more exposed to new online media. Their behaviour, like any other youth segment, is dynamic and needs to be monitored for a better understanding and to cater better to their tourism needs. Certainly, their travel preferences and consumption patterns are affected by many factors in addition to religion, including universal, societal and individual values, gender roles, country politics, family relationships, lifestyles, traditions, modernity, education, history, language, media use and entertainment, and exposure to the world. Therefore, it is important not to neglect understanding the travel behaviour of non-religious Arabs, non-religious Muslims, and Christian Arabs. Religion should not be uncritically accepted as a determining variable affecting their tourism behaviour and destination choice. Religiosity, rather than religion, might be an important indicator of customer attitudes, behaviours, and satisfaction. Moreover, businesses need to understand the different ways in which other values, lifestyles and practices influence their consumers. For example, Muhamed and Mizerski (2013) suggested that labelling religious affiliation, such as Muslim, does not consider commitment to a religion. Religiosity is better captured in the lifestyles, values, attitudes and practices that are influenced by religion (Eid & El-Gohary 2015).

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Commentators have argued that Islam as a religion cannot easily be separated from everyday life practices (e.g. Eid & El-Gohary 2015). This statement can be misleading for the above-mentioned reasons. Thus, millions of Muslims travel to non-Muslim destinations and to non-Islamic destinations for leisure purposes. Of these, some observe religious practices at the destination, while some do not. Muslims can pray in a space that is clean, and as such they do not need to be in a mosque to engage in prayers. Muslim tourists also have the choice not to eat meat and to eat fruits and vegetarian meals. From this perspective, it is nonsensical to suggest that Muslim tourists who travel to non-halal-oriented destinations are not Muslim, or is it? Certainly, halal tourism is a choice, but it is not the choice of all Muslim tourists. Dean (2014) argued that catering to Muslim guests is not the same as dealing with 'preferences'. According to him, dealing with Muslim guests is dealing with religious 'values'. This statement is simplistic and misleading: Muslim tourists have different preferences—their preferences can be based either on religious values, personal values, universal values, or on all of the above.

As already noted, the global Muslim population is estimated to be around 1.6 billion and is expected to increase to 2.2 billion by 2030 (Healey 2015). An increase in the Muslim population does not necessarily mean an increase in the level of demand for Halal-oriented tourism destinations or Islamic-oriented tourism. Again, *true* Islamic tourism can be found only in relation to the pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj). In Mecca, Muslim pilgrims perform the religious rituals of Hajj. In other Muslim destinations, Muslim tourists visit religious sites and shrines, in combination with many other non-religious tourist activities (Timothy & Iverson 2006). Therefore, homogenising the Arabs and Muslims into one tourism market tends to fall into the false stereotyping of tourist behaviour—that is, that all Arabs are Muslims, that all Muslims are religious, and therefore that halal tourism is Islamic and that all Muslims adhere to halal tourism practices and are all likely to buy halal tourism products.

Islam is the main religion in many Arab and non-Arab societies (i.e. Sub-Saharan, Asian, Persian, Turkish and Kurdish societies). These societies have different cultures (Hassan 1991; Hourani 1992) and many cultural differences exist between Arab-Islamic and non-Arab-Islamic societies in their way of living and societal traditions (Hassan 1991; Hourani 1992). Jafari and Scott (2014: 2) explained, 'there is diversity of religion, culture, politics and historical influences within the global Muslim community'. As such, there is no single label or categorisation one can use to characterise the Muslim world (Almuhrzi, Scott, & Alriyami, 2017). For these and similar reasons, the travel behaviours and experiences of Muslim and Arab tourists need to be interpreted cautiously, and with sensitivity.

The main challenge for destinations wishing to attract tourists from the Arab and Muslim worlds is to understand the differences that exist between the needs, wants, and desires of Muslims and non-Muslim tourists amongst the broader Arab/Muslim tourist market. Most tourism destinations are targeting tourists with a different culture, religion, and with distinct needs and wants. Destinations that show in their promotional ads their attractions and the hospitality and friendliness of the locals are the winning destinations in the long run. Perhaps, halal-oriented tourism is only a contemporary and trendy fad. In this case, it is interesting to know more about the tourism behaviour and preferences of halal tourists, especially outside the halal environs or outside the 'environmental bubble' of halal-oriented tourism.

Halal tourism and its 'environmental bubble'

Despite the growing interest in halal tourism, it has not been subject to criticism in the social sciences. The more one knows about halal tourism the more questions should be raised. For

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example, considering Cohen's (1972) typology of tourists, a legitimate question to ask might be: are halal tourists really tourists? What other halal-oriented activities do they participate in during their halal vacations? Is all of their vacation 'halalised'? What becomes of tourism if and when tourists live their tourism activities in a tourism bubble? Cohen (1972: 162) believes that

> tourism as a cultural phenomenon becomes possible only when man develops a *generalised* interest in things beyond his particular habitat, when contact with and appreciation and enjoyment of strangeness and novelty are valued for their *own* sake.

Cohen sees novelty and strangeness as essential elements in the tourist experience. Analogically, the halal tourist is a tourist who lives his tourism experience in an 'environmental bubble' (Cohen 1972: 166). Halal hotels are institutionalised establishments that sell the illusion of halal to the tourist. They sell an experience enrobed in an 'ecological bubble' (Cohen 1972: 169), wherein decorations and activities are 'halal-washed'. Both the halal tourists and the halal tourism establishments are compartmentalising religion in a halal make-belief of places and things—the lavatories are halal, the swimming pools are halal, the hotel rooms are halal, the foods and drinks are halal, and hotel personnel are halal. Halal is guaranteed indoors, and surely we have no control of whether or not the outdoors is halal. Hotel entrances and lobbies are not halalised yet, but the management is likely working on it.

The ecological bubble of halal tourism may not only lead to distorted views of the Arab/Muslim market, but it may also portray a negative image of Islam and convey a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslims. Religion is not for sale, neither can a Muslim be Islamic in one place because it is a halal place and not in another place because it is not a halal place. Halal in Islam is not only a state of being but also a state of mind. God says in the Holy Qur'an: 'Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: And Allah is well acquainted with all that they do' (Surah An-Nur 30) (Quran Index 2017b). God also says: 'And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof' (Surah An-Nur 31) (Quran Index 2017c). Lowering the gaze is clearly an important behavioural principle in Islam, a mental capability of human beings, an encouraging commandment of God for humans to be in the crowd, and a social code on how to behave in that crowd.

The paradox of halal tourism, using Cohen's (1972: 172) explanation of institutionalised and standardised tourism facilities, is that 'though the desire for variety, novelty, and strangeness are the primary motives of tourism, these qualities have decreased as tourism has become institutionalised'. He further explains, 'the sad irony of modern institutionalised tourism is that, instead of destroying myths between countries, it perpetrates them' (Cohen 1972: 174) in that the tourists learn nothing about the native culture and the natives learn nothing about the tourists' culture. Ironically, the halal tourist remains isolated from the host society, the very same society he or she has selected to visit and encounter. Do all halal tourists live in a halal environmental bubble? Can halal tourists be clustered based on their indoor and outdoor activities? Can they be segmented based on their religiosity, familiarity or novelty? These are all crucial questions that remain unanswered.

From another angle, giving too much academic and industry importance to halal tourism, an importance even greater than how the majority of Muslims see it, is to blindly support the 'clash of civilisations' thesis, which presents Western and Islamic religions and social traditions as incompatible. To put it simply, halal tourism exaggerates the difference between Islam and the West. Yet, many Muslims live in the West and many Westerners live in Muslim countries,

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respecting each other's values and sharing the same universal values. That most people in the Western and Muslim worlds have similar needs and wants is undeniable, and the same can be said about their travel motivations.

Muslim tourists travel to Western destinations for many reasons, most of which are not motivated by religion but by curiosity and discovery. Furthermore, the Westerners who sojourn in Arab and Muslim countries dress in Western cloths and do not cover their heads with a scarf (*hijab*) or wear an abaya or burka. Even Muslim women in the majority of Muslim countries do not cover their heads. There are also Muslim women who half-cover their heads and wear American jeans. Furthermore, the majority of businesses, services and entertainment venues in the Arab and Muslim worlds are not gender segregated. Several Muslim countries have casinos and serve alcohol to the public in local bars, restaurants and franchised hotels. Hence, the important questions to delve into in this regard are: how did halal tourism start and how will it further develop in an increasingly globalised world? Is it more religion-driven, politics-driven, or economy-driven? What external factors, and socio-cultural, and religious variables discriminate the most between halal tourists, Muslim tourists, and Western tourists? Such questions can advance our understanding of halal tourism, halal tourists and the relationship between religion and tourism in the global village.

Conclusion

In general, knowledge about the Arabs and Muslims is limited in so many domains, including travel and tourism. There has been, however, an increasing demand for halal amenities, which has encouraged research about halal tourism and halal tourists. Nevertheless, there is now too much focus on this form of tourism in the tourism literature. This chapter discussed halal tourism, in relation to religion and travel motivations, from a critical perspective. The purpose was to offer a positive criticism of halal tourism to disentangle our understanding about the relationship between Islam and tourism.

The Arab and Muslim tourist market is a heterogeneous market with differences between and also within consumer groups. Their travel motivations are multifaceted and depend on several factors other than religion or in relation to religiosity. That is, not all Muslims are Islamic and neither are all Arabs similar in behaviour, attitudes and expectations. The focused concentration in the past few years on halal tourism has confused the understanding about what Islam is and what Muslims should do. A discussion of halal tourism is complicated and complex because it *should* deal with what is allowed (halal) and what is forbidden (haram) in Islam. At the heart of the matter is that Muslims do negotiate what is haram and what is halal in their lives. This negotiation should be taken into consideration when discussing halal tourism.

Religion is not a motivation per se, except with regard to pilgrimages or visits to religious sites. Muslim tourists select certain destinations because they are perceived as Muslim-friendly. They also select certain tourism accommodations because they see them as compliant with *specific* religious beliefs. Muslim people thus do not travel to London for religious purposes in the same manner they travel to Mecca or to visit the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Their motivation to visit Mecca is pilgrimage. Their motivation to visit London is to see the city's famous historical sites, museums, to shop and to enjoy city life.

Halal establishments, in London or in Sydney, offer halal tourists a certain (yet pseudo) familiarity. Unlike pilgrimage sites, halal establishments do not embody spirituality or lead to spiritual fulfilment. Thus, one should not simplistically confuse halal tourism with religion, spirituality, Muslims or Islam. Indeed, certain halal establishments have become the choice of many

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non-Muslim families. Halal establishments have become a matter of lifestyle and not a matter of religion.

To conclude, halal tourism has been overly emphasised in contemporary tourism literature. Yet, our understanding of this phenomenon remains descriptive and simplistic, and it lacks clarification and contextualisation. For example, we do not know how halal tourists negotiate between their international tourism destination selection and their religious convictions or practices, or how they manage to 'lower their gazes' when they are outside their religious environmental bubble. It is also important to understand the religiosity of halal tourists and the extent to which they patronise halal-friendly establishments in their own Muslim countries.

There are, therefore, many unanswered, yet critical, research questions. Is halal tourism a fad that results from religious convictions or political orientations? What is the recreation and leisure behaviour of halal tourists at home? How do they respond to the Westernisation of their respective countries? What do they think about the non-Muslim people they encounter during their international trips and those who are residents of their own countries? How do they define Islam and what do they think about Muslim people and non-Muslims? How do they reconcile the Islamic and the non-Islamic in their lives and in their trips? What is Islamic about halal tourism when halal tourists venture outside their hotels, if they venture outside at all? What are their experiences, attitudes and behaviours when they stroll around the city? Which social practices could be perceived as the antithesis to all that is perceived as Islamic by halal tourists? Can halal tourism exist in other destinations other than Mecca? Or, what does halal mean in international halal tourism? Is halal preserved only in hotels and hotel rooms? What is halal about the hotel lobbies, restaurants and service employees? Does halal tourism correspond to how travel is outlined in the Qur'an? Is there room to talk about 'halal-washing' in the social sciences? It is our hope that this discussion and critique will serve as a background for further studies, and will generate positive reactions to further our understanding about the intricacies of halal tourism and so many other factors that have contributed to its development.

Halal tourism has received much attention from tourism academics and practitioners in the past few years, while relatively little is known about the tourism behaviour of Arab and Muslim tourists. Halal tourism has been defined in relation to Islamic Sharia law, which prescribes rules and codes of conduct for Muslims. A few tourism destinations have implemented some Sharia-compliant activities in their tourist establishments to accommodate the wants of the halal tourism market. The discourse on halal tourism, however, conflates this phenomenon with religion, Muslims, Arabs, Islam, Sharia and the tourism behaviour of Arabs and Muslims. This confusion not only leads to a myopic understanding of Muslim tourists, but also perpetuates stereotypical images of Islam and Muslims. This chapter constitutes the first critical review of halal tourism. The travel motivation of this market segment is multifaceted, and religion plays only a small, if not a subsidiary role in their destination choice and tourist activities.

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