

Determinants of Selection of Halal Tourism Destination: A Case Study of the UAE

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the factors influencing tourists' selection of the UAE as their halal tourism destination. The study focuses on tourists who visited the UAE between January 2019 and February 2020, with special emphasis on tourists from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). A mixed methodology approach is used to achieve the study's objectives: a quantitative survey to collect data from 600 respondents, and in-depth interviews with 10 interviewees to obtain richer and more meaningful information about the respondents' experiences and perceptions about the different halal tourism dimensions. Research findings revealed that cities' security and safety measures, family entertainment activities, halal food diversity and international restaurant chains serving halal food are the most important factors influencing tourists to choose the UAE as one of the best halal tourism destinations. Overall, our respondents were highly satisfied with their halal tourism experience in the UAE. This is the first study that explores the determinants of tourists' selection of the UAE as their next/best halal

tourism destination, taking into consideration that Dubai is among the most visited cities in the world. Moreover, this study provides new theoretical and practical contribution to halal tourism. The findings could help tourism operators in the UAE to further develop halal tourism and to explore the opportunities it offers the country. The findings also have significant contribution to the tourism literature and to the practitioners and policy makers as well, since they provide important insights on the main factors that influence tourists' selection of the UAE as their halal tourism destination. This can in turn help promote the UAE as valuable halal tourism destination regionally and internationally. This study also sheds light on new opportunities for the UAE to become the most attractive halal tourism destination. The findings will help practitioners to better understand halal tourism, in order to develop marketing strategies to attract Muslim tourists and encourage repeat experience.

Keywords: Halal Tourism; UAE; GCC; Hospitality

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Introduction

Whilst the relationship between religion and tourism was largely neglected in the past, attention on the subject has grown in the last decade with the emergence of the concept of *Halal Tourism* (El-Gohary, 2020). Halal tourism can be defined as a segment of the tourism industry that takes into consideration the needs of Muslim tourists and adheres to Islamic values (Battour, Ismail and Battor, 2010).

In the past few years, the halal tourism market has grown considerably. In 2019, halal tourism covered 13% of the value of the global tourism industry (halal Plus). According to a joint report developed by Dubai, the Capital of Islamic Economy, with Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard (2019), halal tourism was valued at US\$177 billion in 2017, and it is forecasted to reach US\$274 billion by 2023.

Previous studies extensively discussed the main factors driving the rapid growth of the halal tourism segment. This includes the growth in the world's Muslim population, the rise in middle-class Muslim countries, and the progress in the availability of Muslim-friendly travel facilities and services (Harper, 2012; Suleaman, 2010; Aji, Muslichah, and Seftyono, 2020; Battour and Ismail, 2016; El-Gohary, 2016).

In the aim to explore the huge potential of halal tourism, many countries and cities have developed strategies and prepared a comprehensive infrastructure to attract tourists seeking halal services, by offering unique customized opportunities in accordance with the Islamic beliefs. Among these countries, the UAE is ranked the first, in a global assessment of travel destinations with the best-developed halal ecosystems,

according to the 2016-2017 Global Islamic Economy Report developed and produced by Thomson Reuters. The country has been deploying significant efforts ever since to be developed as the world's best halal-friendly tourism destination.

Indeed, during the last decade the UAE has attracted a significant share of Muslim tourists looking for Muslim-friendly tourist destinations that cater to their needs and demands of tourism services in line with their religious beliefs. These tourists come mainly from the neighboring countries of Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar and Kuwait, as well as other Muslim countries including Pakistan, Egypt, and Kazakhstan. These Muslim travelers and tourists represent a significant percentage of the international travel market with great potential and possibility to continue growing in size (El-Gohary, 2020). This trend contributes to the country's strategy of sources of income diversification that targets industries other than oil and gas (Arafat, Bing, and Al-Mutawakel, 2018).

While halal tourism can be a significant source of income for the UAE, to the best of the authors' knowledge, only few studies discussed the potential opportunities of halal tourism to the UAE market and most of them are conceptual in nature (Stephenson, Russell, and Edgar, 2010; Nicholas and Prakash, 2017). Besides, it is noteworthy that most of the empirical studies that explored the potential of halal tourism have been conducted mainly in Malaysia, Turkey, Jordan and Indonesia (Battour *et al.*, 2017; Carboni, Perelli and Sistu, 2014; Samori, Salleh and Khalid, 2016; Henderson, 2016; Battour *et al.*, 2018; Harahsheh, Haddad and Alshorman, 2019). Therefore, this paper is an attempt to fill the gap in tourism and hospitality literature by exploring customers' behavior towards halal tourism in the UAE,

and the factors that influence their selection of the country as their halal tourism destination. In addition, this study investigates the tourists' satisfaction with their halal tourism experience in the UAE.

The study findings would have several implications for tourism operators, practitioners and policy makers. The findings could help tourism operators in the UAE to explore the opportunities behind halal tourism and to develop Muslim-friendly tourist tour packages. In addition, the findings will help practitioners to better understand halal tourism, in the purpose to develop marketing strategies to attract Muslim tourists and encourage repeat experience. Moreover, the outcomes of this study shed light on the opportunities behind developing an innovative and comprehensive model for the implementation of halal tourism in the UAE, as well as the factors and dimensions that would contribute to its successful implementation. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first empirical study that explores the potential development of halal tourism in the UAE and the factors that can make it successful.

The remaining part of the paper is organised as follows: Section two discusses the theoretical and empirical studies in the area of halal tourism as well as the common business models within this field. Section three briefly discusses the methodology and the analysis approach applied as well as the respondents' profile. Section four presents the survey results, and section five concludes the study with the discussion of practical and theoretical implications, as well as recommendations for future studies.

Literature Review

Halal Tourism Development in the UAE

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The modern halal tourism sector has emerged since its early stages in the UAE. The Global Islamic Economy Report (2021) ranked the UAE as the second Muslim friendly travel country after Malaysia in the global ranking system. The classification is based on inbound Muslim travel, quality of halal-friendly ecosystems, awareness campaigns, and the sector's contribution to employment. Halal tourism has grown at almost double the rate of the wider industry in recent years, with halal hotels springing-up to cater for an expanding millennial market. As such, many resorts in the UAE are actually trying to become more Muslim friendly by creating women-only pools and welcoming the Muslim full bathing suit (Al Arabiya News, 2014). Recent study documents that 67 % of the respondents argue that the UAE is one of the best international halal destinations that offer Islamic-friendly services (Harahsheh, Haddad and Alshorman, 2019).

Empirical Studies on Halal Tourism.

Halal tourism is an emerging sub-category of tourism that follows the *Shari'ah* (Islamic law) rules and principles. The word "halal" originates from the same Arabic word which means "permissible" or "lawful" according to the Islamic law. The word is also associated with "tayyiban", which means 'good' for human beings. Hence, all the halal components of the halal industries, including halal tourism, provide products and services that are good and of high quality for the end users (Azam, Abdullah, and Razak, 2019). As such, the halal concept, including halal tourism, is not limited to Muslim customers only, but is of interest to non-Muslim customers as well, due to the multiple values promoted by the halal industries, including social welfare, economic justice, ethical behavior, and social responsibility, among others (Azam et al., 2019). Nevertheless, for

a good or service to be halal, it has to be in compliant with the rules and guidelines of the Shari'ah (El-Gohary, 2020).

It is well documented that the tourism sector has a significant positive effect on countries' economic growth and development (Tabash, 2017; Selimi, Sadiku, and Sadiku, 2017). This contribution comes in the form of visitor expenditure on accommodation, food and beverages, local transport, entertainment and shopping (Ali, Mansor, and Harun, 2017). This contribution can even be more significant for halal tourism as Muslim travelers and halal tourists represent a significant percentage of the international travel market with great potential and possibility to continue growing in size (El-Gohary, 2020).

Nevertheless, for countries and government authorities to benefit from halal tourism and maximize their nations' income, they should be capable of attracting customers interested in the halal tourism industry. This requires a comprehensive analysis of the halal tourism dimensions, and the factors that influence tourists' selection of their halal tourism destinations. In this regard, several studies have attempted to identify these factors and dimensions to increase the attractiveness of various halal tourism destinations and their compatibility with the customers' needs.

Putra, Hati, and Daryanti (2016) show that only traditional values significantly and directly influence customers' satisfaction with a halal destination, while Islamic values have no significant influence on customers' satisfaction. Islamic values, specifically non-physical Islamic attributes, significantly influence customers' satisfaction only under the moderation of religiosity. Battour et al. (2010) identified two main aspects that attract Muslim tourists, namely, tangible attributes and intangible attributes. The

tangibles attributes consist of prayer facilities and halal food while intangible attributes consist of Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress codes, general Islamic morality and Islamic call for prayer.

Other studies show that the main determinants to expend halal tourism are the following: availability and easy access to halal food, existence of prayer facilities in the hotel rooms and access to *masjids* (mosques), prohibition of behaviors that violate the general Islamic moral behavior, availability of Muslim-friendly tour packages including festive seasons, existence of religious affiliated sites and religious devotedness towards Islam, availability of Muslim-friendly hotels or at least separated sections in hotels where no prohibited food and beverages are provided, Muslim-friendly airports (with prayer rooms available), washroom facilities, availability of social and cultural activities, and the existence of Muslim-friendly communities (Battour and Ismail, 2016; Hamid et al., 2017; Hassan, 2015).

Several researches studied the performance of halal tourism in different contexts. Dabphet (2021) showed that there are five important Islamic attributes that attract Muslims to visit Thailand, namely, halal-friendly environment, halal hotels, halal food, halal food preparation and washroom facilities. However, Muslim tourists were mainly satisfied with the performance of three Islamic attributes, namely, hotel entertainment and facilities, halal food and halal-oriented recreation and quality of services.

Rahayu (2018) shows that travel motivation and destination image have significant impact on the Indonesian travelers' intention to visit Sunan Ampel religious tourism area

of Surabaya in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Muslim-friendly amenities and quality of service did not affect Indonesians' travel intention to visit the area. In the same context, Rahmiati, Othman and Sunanti (2018) show that destination image, perceived value, and Islamic value have a positive and significant impact on Muslim tourists' satisfaction in Indonesia. Faulina et al. (2020) add that while push and pull factors have a direct positive influence on tourists' travel satisfaction, it is relatively weak indirect effect on tourists' travel satisfaction through the halal destination image. Suhartanto et al. (2021) show that halal experience and attraction experience influence the perceived value, satisfaction, and loyalty of Muslim Millennial tourists visiting Indonesia.

In a different setting, Said et al. (2020) argue that Muslim travelers to South Korea, Japan and Taiwan are mostly concerned with the need to perform daily prayers and the ability to find halal food. Overall, Muslim travelers' experiences in these Muslim-minority countries are generally met with their expectations, although further socialization with the locals is needed to induce greater overall satisfaction with the destinations. For Al Ansi and Han (2019), Muslim tourists anticipated obtaining the basic needs of halal products and services when visiting non-Muslim destinations, whereas for Han et al. (2019), halal-friendly travel motivations are significantly associated with customer return on investment and satisfaction, and that such relationships contribute to improving customer retention.

While many studies have discussed the determinants and consequences of halal tourism in different countries, to the knowledge of the authors few researches explored theoretically this topic in the context of UAE (Stephenson, Russell and

Edgar, 2010; Nicholas and Prakash, 2017). Therefore, this study will attempt to mitigate the gap by exploring the main factors attracting Muslim to visit the UAE. Accordingly, based on the above studies, as well as the preliminary interviews conducted, the following factors were identified as potential determinants of halal tourism destination selection: family entertainments, social and cultural activities, Muslim-friendly communities, diversity of accommodations, comfortable local transportation, availability of halal food, cost of living in the country of destination, personal security and safety, climate/weather in the country of destination, Muslim-friendly holiday packages, prayer facilities, general Islamic morality, and religious affiliated sites.

Methodology

The study population consists of tourists who visited the UAE between January 2019 and February 2020. The sample was limited to the citizens and residents of the neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as they constitute the major target customers of the halal tourism industry in the UAE (Zaidan and Kovacs, 2017).

For data collection purpose, four research assistants were appointed to manage the data collection process. The assistants were trained on the whole process of data collection requirements and expectations, including the respondents' profiles, the meaning of each questionnaire item, the general and specific purpose of data collection, etc. In addition, the researchers liaised with major hotels and resorts in the cities of Dubai, Abdu Dhabi and Sharjah to facilitate data collection process, by granting access to the assistants for collecting data on their sites. This approach was preferred as it

provides more flexibility to the respondents in filling up the questionnaire, which subsequently results in responses that are more meaningful (Tsai, Song, and Wong, 2009).

The study uses a mixed method approach by combining both a quantitative and qualitative dimensions. This approach combines the benefits and strengths of both families of methods, which subsequently results in a holistic and deeper understanding of halal tourism and its defining factors in the case of the UAE (Curry and Nunez-Smith, 2015).

Specifically, a survey questionnaire was used to collect data for a sample of 600 respondents based in various states in the GCC countries. This sample was estimated using the following approach (Bartlett, Kotrlik, and Higgins, 2001):

$$SS = \frac{(Z^2) \times (p) \times (1-p)}{C^2} \quad (1)$$

where SS refers to the sample size, Z is the Z -value (estimated at 1.96 in this case), P is the percentage of the population (estimated at 0.5 in this case), and C is the confidence interval (estimated at 0.04 in this case). However, only 341 questionnaires were properly filled and returned. Hence, a response rate of nearly 57 per cent was achieved.

The structured questionnaire was specifically designed to collect information about the factors that eventually influence tourists' selection of their halal tourism destinations. These factors were derived from extent literature in this area (Hassan, 2015; Seyidov and Adomaitiene, 2016; Hamid *et al.*, 2017; Rahman *et al.*, 2017; Rayahu, 2018; Al-Hammadi *et al.*, 2019). For measuring these dimensions, a 5 points-Likert type scale was used (1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). Specifically, 13 items derived from

the aforementioned studies were listed in this section. The second section of the questionnaire focused on information about respondents' profiles, including age, education level, country of origin, country of residence, etc. It is noteworthy that the questionnaire was developed and distributed in English.

The collected data were subsequently analysed using descriptive analysis, t -tests, MANOVA (Multiple Analysis of Variance), and linear regression analysis. The choice of these techniques was inspired by Hair *et al.* (2014) as well as from similar studies conducted in this area (Rahmiati *et al.*, 2018; Harahsheh *et al.*, 2019; Faulina *et al.*, 2020; Dabphet, 2021).

On the other hand, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 interviewees selected from the same sample, to obtain detailed and comprehensive feedback about their halal tourism experience and the factors they perceive to be significant for their selection. The interviews were conducted online due to the impossibility to opt for the face-to-face interviews mandated by the Corona Virus (COVID-19) surge during the period of the study. The interviewees' profile is presented in the following section.

Results

Profile Analysis

The respondents' profiles in Table 1 below indicate that 56.8 per cent of the respondents were female, while 43.2 per cent of them were male. 32.1 per cent of the respondents were between the ages of 31 and 40 years old, 26.5 per cent between 21 and 30 years old, 23.5 per cent between 41 and 50 years old, 11.2 per cent above 50 years old, and the

remaining 6.8 per cent were less than 20 years old. It is noteworthy that 60.9 per cent

of the respondents were married individuals, while 39.1 per cent of them were single. In terms of occupation, 38.8 per cent of the respondents were private sector employees, 34.1 per cent of them were public sector employees, 15.3 per cent were students, and the remaining 11.8% were self-employed. In this regard, 44 per cent of the respondents had more than \$2,000 in monthly income, 29.3 per cent of the respondents had a monthly

income between \$1,000 and \$2,000, while 26.7 per cent of them had a monthly salary of less than \$1,000.

Regarding the education level, 47.3 per cent of the respondents were holding postgraduate degrees, 30.5 per cent holding bachelor's degree, 18.8 per cent with high school diplomas, while the remaining 3.5 per cent of the respondents only reached secondary school level.

Table 1: Profile Analysis

Items	Categories	Percentage
Gender	Male	43.2
	Female	56.8
Age	Less than 20	6.8
	21-30	26.5
	31-40	32.1
	41-50	23.5
	Above 50	11.2
Marital status	Married	60.9
	Single	39.1
Occupation	Private sector employee	38.8
	Public sector employee	34.1
	Student	15.3
	Self-employed	11.8
Income	Less than \$1,000	26.7
	\$1,000-\$2,000	29.3
	More than \$2,000	44
Education level	Secondary school	3.5
	High school diploma	18.8
	Bachelor's degree	30.5
	Postgraduate degrees	47.3

Table 2 below shows the travelling profile and preferences of the respondents. In this regard, the table shows that 76.8 per cent of

the respondents travel 2 times per year, 12.9 per cent of them travel 3 times per year, while 10.3 per cent of the respondents travel 4 times

or more per year. Out of these respondents, 53.1 per cent travel solely for tourism

purposes, 12.3 per cent travel for work or business purposes, while 34.6 per cent of the respondents travel for both tourism and business purposes. In the same context, 61.9

per cent of the respondents travel with family, 30.5 per cent travel with groups of

friends, while 7.6 per cent of the respondents travel alone.

In terms of accommodation preference, 76.8 per cent of the respondents opt for hotels, 14.1 per cent of the respondents prefer furnished apartments that are also available in a wide variety, while 9.1 per cent of the respondents prefer to stay in family holiday residences.

Table 2: Travelling Preferences

Items	Categories	Percentage
Number of travels per year	1 time maximum	-
	2 times	76.8
	3 times	12.9
	4 times or more	10.3
Travelling purpose	Tourism	53.1
	Work/Business	12.3
	Both	34.6
Travelling preference	Alone	7.6
	With family	61.9
	With friends	30.5
Accommodation preference	Homestay	-
	Hotel	76.8
	Apartment	14.1
	Family holiday residence	9.1

On the other hand, the interviewees' profile is summarized in Table 3 below emphasizing their gender, age, marital status, education level, employment status and income level. The summary shows a mixture of profiles,

which helped in obtaining different perspectives and views as well as richer feedback from the interviewees. It is noteworthy that all the interviewees had experience with halal tourism.

Table 3: Interviewees' Profile

Interviewee	Gender	Age (Years)	Marital Status	Education Level (Degree)	Employment Status	Income Level
1	Male	31-40	Single	Master	Public sector	> \$2,000
2	Female	31-40	Married	Bachelor	Public sector	> \$2,000
3	Male	41-50	Married	Ph.D.	Private sector	> \$2,000

4	Female	41-50	Married	Master	Self-Employed	> \$2,000
5	Female	31-40	Married	Bachelor	Private sector	\$1,000-\$2,000
6	Female	41-50	Married	Master	Public sector	> \$2,000
7	Male	> 50	Married	Bachelor	Private sector	> \$2,000
8	Male	31-40	Married	Bachelor	Private sector	> \$2,000
9	Female	31-40	Single	Bachelor	Private sector	\$1,000-\$2,000
10	Female	31-40	Married	Master	Self-Employed	> \$2,000

Quantitative Findings

In order to analyze the factors that influence tourists' selection of tourism destination, the analysis starts with the one sample *t*-test. The latter shows how significant is the difference between the respondents' ratings of the various selection factors in terms of importance, and a test value, which is usually the neutral value 3, i.e., the midpoint of the 5 points Likert scale (Cicchitelli, 1989).

The *t*-test results in Table 4 below shows that the mean difference is positive and significant for all the selection factors for tourism destinations. This implies that the respondents' rating of these factors is significantly greater than the neutral point 3. As such, all these factors are perceived to be important for the respondents when making a decision regarding their countries of halal tourism destination. Nevertheless, the mean differences in Table 4 and the mean values in Table 5 below indicate the ranking and relative importance of each factor.

Table 4: *t*-Test Summary for Selection Dimensions

	Test Value = 3				
	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Family entertainments	10.249	0.000	0.692	0.56	0.82
Social and cultural activities	9.259	0.000	0.610	0.48	0.74
Muslim-friendly communities	5.689	0.000	0.396	0.26	0.53
Diversity of accommodations	7.350	0.000	0.463	0.34	0.59
Comfortable local transportation	8.933	0.000	0.607	0.47	0.74
Availability of halal food	10.434	0.000	0.768	0.62	0.91

Cost of living in the country of destination	8.432	0.000	0.548	0.42	0.68
Personal security and safety	11.496	0.000	0.842	0.70	0.99
Climate/weather in the country of destination	8.908	0.000	0.613	0.48	0.75
Muslim-friendly holiday packages	5.021	0.000	0.334	0.20	0.47
Prayer facilities	6.713	0.000	0.481	0.34	0.62
General Islamic morality	5.733	0.000	0.384	0.25	0.52
Religious affiliated sites	5.163	0.000	0.331	0.21	0.46

Accordingly, Table 5 indicates that the most important factor for halal tourism destination decision is the personal security and safety, followed by the availability of halal food, then the existence of family entertainment activities. This indicates that even though tourists are aiming for halal tourism, safety and security are still the major concern prior to any travel plan development. This factor was indeed highlighted in both halal tourism as well as other tourism segments, as it is considered a required component of any successful tourism activity (Hassan, 2015; Seyidov and Adomaitiene, 2016; Al-Hammadi *et al.*, 2019).

On the other hand, the availability of halal food remains of paramount importance among the halal-tourism specific selection criteria even though it came in the second rank in terms of importance. This factor has been proven a significant determinant not only for halal tourism, but also for other tourism segments involving Muslim travelers, e.g., medical tourism for Muslim patients. This finding is consistent with Mannaa (2019) who argues that the availability of halal food affects the travelers' intentions to revisit the destination, length of stay and the type of accommodation chosen.

Furthermore, the existence of family entertainment activities is also ranked high

among the selection factors. This is in line with sample composition, which is made of nearly 70 per cent of the respondents that travel with families and around 53 per cent of them that travel solely for tourism purposes. It is noteworthy that these entertainments activities should be in line with the Islamic principles (Rahayu, 2018; El-Gohary, 2020).

These factors were followed by the convenient climate in the country of destination, the availability of comfortable local transportation, the existence of social and cultural activities, and then the cost of living in the country of destination. These are of average importance since they are considered logistical and facilitating conditions that are required for any tourism destination, especially when it comes to the climate, transportation and the cost of living, which is observed by most of the tourists regardless of the tourism segment (Said *et al.*, 2020).

The next factor is the availability of prayer facility, which comes in the sixth position. This is considered relatively less important to the respondents compared to other factors probably because travelers are allowed to shorten their prayers and combine some of them together, under certain conditions (Ishak and Ibrahim, 2020). Hence, they are not tightly restricted in terms of prayer time

and duration. They might decide to pray in their accommodations at their convenience, or identify a proper area to perform their regular prayers.

The last set of factors include Muslim-friendly communities, followed by general Islamic morality, and then the existence of religious affiliated sites. These factors are Islamic-related dimensions. However, they are not directly linked to the performance and fulfillment of the religious duties. As such,

they are considered less important to the respondents compared to the remaining factors.

In addition, the Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to identify possible difference within categorical variables. Firstly, the results revealed that tourists who travel more frequently within the year are more concerned with the discussed factors. These differences are mostly significant for family entertainment facilities, availability of halal food social and

cultural activities, diversity of accommodations, comfortable local

transportation, personal security and safety, climate/weather in the country of destination, and prayer facilities. This is reasonable as these tourists travel more and spend

relatively longer time in the host countries. As such, it is obvious that these tourists are more concerned with adequate conditions in the country of destination.

Secondly, the results indicated that tourists that have higher level of income are more concerned about the discussed factors compared to respondents with relatively lower levels of income. These differences are mostly significant for diversity of accommodations, comfortable local transportation, cost of living in the country of destination, personal security and safety, and availability of halal food. This is an interesting finding and can provide important insights for the government authorities to maximize their income from the halal tourism activities.

Table 5: Mean Values Ranking

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Rank
Family entertainments	341	3.69	1.247	3
Social and cultural activities	341	3.61	1.216	4
Muslim-friendly communities	341	3.40	1.285	8
Diversity of accommodations	341	3.46	1.164	7
Comfortable local transportation	341	3.61	1.255	4
Availability of halal food	341	3.77	1.360	2
Cost of living in the country of destination	341	3.55	1.201	5

Personal security and safety	341	3.84	1.352	1
Climate/weather in the country of destination	341	3.61	1.271	4
Muslim-friendly holiday packages	341	3.33	1.229	10
Prayer facilities	341	3.48	1.323	6
General Islamic morality	341	3.38	1.237	9
Religious affiliated sites	341	3.33	1.185	10

Finally, a step-wise linear regression analysis was performed to identify the factors that are most important for tourists' selection of their halal tourism destinations. The results in Table 6 below indicate that availability of halal food, family entertainments, and personal security and safe are significant determinants of halal tourism destinations. Nevertheless, the other factors do not have a significant influence on the halal tourism

destination selection. It is noteworthy that these factors explain 30 per cent of the variability of halal tourism destination selection. These findings are in line with previous studies (Monoarfa *et al.* 2021; Dabphet, 2021; Battour *et al.*, 2010; Rahayu, 2018; Hamid *et al.*, 2017; hand, Rahayu, 2018; Said, *et al.*, 2020; Battour, Salaheldeen, and Mady, 2021).

Table 6: Linear Regression Summary

	Coefficients	t Stat	P-value
Constant	1.78578	11.14537	0.000
Availability of halal food	0.12770	2.05170	0.040
Diversity of accommodations	0.08936	1.34558	0.179
Cost of living in the country of destination	0.12240	1.89727	0.058
Family entertainments	0.12195	2.14531	0.032
Personal security and safety	0.18673	2.72039	0.006
Prayer facilities	0.11450	1.52974	0.127
Climate/weather in the country of destination	0.15265	1.83354	0.067

Finally, the t-test results for satisfaction shown in Table 7 below indicate that the respondents were highly satisfied with their previous halal tourism experiences. This is illustrated by the positive mean difference and significance level that is less than 0.05.

Hence, findings of the study will be significantly relevant in drawing policy implications and strategies to attract and retain halal tourism customers in the UAE. This finding is in line with Han *et al.* (2019).

Table 7: *t*-Test Summary for Overall Satisfaction

	Test Value = 3				
	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Overall, how satisfied are you with your halal tourism experience?	8.599	0.000	0.466	0.36	0.57

Qualitative Findings

The above quantitative findings were in line and supported by the interviews' output. Particularly, interviewee 7 highlighted that:

Authorities and concerned departments in host countries should speak to Muslim tourists to understand their values and needs, and address them according to their religious beliefs.

Another point that was also highlighted by interviewee 2 is that:

Halal tourism has to be offered in a genuine way, and for this purpose, halal tourism development and monitoring committees and departments have to be established in countries interested in offering halal tourism. This can help in avoiding frauds, deception and exploitation of tourists.

In the same context, interviewee 9 added that:

Government offices specialized in halal tourism should be placed near the main "halal" tourism attractions, and even at the airports to guide tourists and ensure that there is no exploitation of them based on their religious sentiments.

On another note, interviewee 5 mentioned that:

There should be more activities for female only, including beach access and swimming access to ladies only, and also allowing them to wear Muslim swimming suits.

Similarly, interviewee 3 emphasized that:

The hotels and restaurants in countries of destination should avoid serving alcoholic drinks, and the local food should be offered

in a halal way. In addition, this has to be visible to tourists.

It is noteworthy that these quotes are typical responses from the selected interviewees that reflect the trend of responses from all the interviewees. Furthermore, these findings are in line with those of Hassan (2015), Hamid *et al.* (2017), Rahmiati *et al.* (2018), Said *et al.* (2020) and Rachmiati *et al.* (2021).

Discussions and Conclusions

The objective of the study is to explore the factors influencing tourists' selection of the UAE as their halal tourism destination. The study used a mixed methodology approach in the form of qualitative and quantitative dimensions. In this regard, a survey questionnaire was used to collect data from

600 respondents from GCC countries. The collected data was analyzed through descriptive analysis, t-test, MANOVA, and linear regression analyses. In-depth interviews were also conducted with 10 selected interviewees from the survey respondents.

The findings revealed that the factors that have the most influence on tourists' selection of the UAE as halal tourism destination are the personal security and safety measures, the existence of family entertainment activities, and the availability of halal food in the country of destination. Other remaining factors were found to have less influence on halal tourism destination selection. These include, Muslim-friendly communities, general Islamic morality, and the existence of religious affiliated sites in the host country.

These findings contribute significantly in providing insights to the tourism policy makers and practitioners in the UAE on the main dimensions and aspects to be

emphasized to offer halal tourism in a more effective and impactful manner. Particularly, advertising and marketing tourism campaigns should emphasize the high level of safety and security in the country, together with the availability of a wide variety of halal food and cuisines including the local cuisine, as well as the availability of entertainment activities, especially for families.

It is noteworthy that these dimensions are present in the UAE, which makes the country highly adequate for halal tourism, and has a great opportunity to compete in this segment both regionally and internationally. The findings of this study should also help marketers and tourism operators to better understand halal tourism and to develop marketing strategies to attract Muslim

tourists and encourage repeat travel experience. Indeed, the UAE can be selected as the best halal tourism destination by marketing its ability to meet the needs that their potential customers consider important.

On the other hand, these findings enrich the tourism and Islamic tourism literature by providing empirical and theoretical support for the main factors that influence tourists' selection of halal tourism destinations. This will significantly contribute towards the development of a comprehensive model for halal tourism behavior in the future.

Finally, the study has a number of limitations that should be considered by readers and future studies. Firstly, the sample selected is still limited even though it was accurately estimated, and it is comparable to the existing studies in the area. As such, the collected responses may not be sufficient for generalizing the findings. Hence, the future studies are recommended to increase the sample size in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Secondly,

since the study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is possible that the respondents' views were affected by their experiences during the pandemic, which might have subsequently affected the overall findings. Hence, future studies are recommended to take into account major events that have occurred in the latest years and which might have a direct effect on the tourism and hospitality industry, including the COVID-19 pandemic.

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