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Muslim Tourists' Perspectives on Halal and Muslim-Friendly Tourism in South Korea

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Abstract: Identifying the needs of Muslim travelers is crucial for the tourism industry's development, particularly as the demand for Muslim-friendly tourism increases alongside the global Muslim population. This study aims to understand the perspectives and factors influencing the needs of Muslim tourists with halal and Muslim-friendly tourism in South Korea. This study employs a qualitative phenomenological approach, collecting primary data from 18 semi-structured interviews conducted in Seoul, supplemented by secondary and observational data. The data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis software (QDA Miner Lite), and validity testing was conducted using internal and external validity tests. This research outlines the key requirements that South Korea, as a Muslim-minority country, must fulfill to establish a halal-friendly image, such as providing halal food, worship facilities, transportation, accommodation, safety, and destinations. Supported by various studies on the needs of Muslim tourists and the challenges in implementing these facilities, the findings emphasize the crucial roles of standardization, infrastructure, and cultural sensitivity in attracting and satisfying Muslim travelers. South Korea has made progress in developing travel facilities, but additional improvements in halal services and regulations are needed to better meet the needs of Muslim travelers.
Keywords: halal, Muslim-friendly, South Korea, tourism

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1. Introduction

The tourism industry is a development sector that is of great interest to countries around the world today (Ceron & Dubois, 2003; Hosseini et al., 2021). Countries are competing to attract a wide variety of foreign tourists, particularly Muslim tourists. This is because the Muslim population ranks second in the world. According to Schleifer's (2023) research, Islam has 2.19 billion adherents, or 29% of the world's total population. This number represents a market for countries whose major revenue sources come from tourism. According to Thomson Reuters data from 2019, the Muslim-friendly tourism sector is expected to grow to US$250 billion by 2030. The average annual growth rate is 5% and the travel industry average is 4%.

According to the Global Muslim Travel Index, Türkiye, Malaysia, and the United Arab Emirates are the top three Muslim-majority countries with the highest number of destinations. Other results are based on data from the 2023 State of the Global Islamic Economy Report: Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates are the top-ranked countries in the Muslim-friendly travel sector. Based on this success, many countries are striving to improve their Muslim-friendly tourism sectors by offering halal food, prayer facilities, and travel services that explore Islamic history in these destinations.

In addition to Muslim-majority countries, Muslim-minority countries are competing to attract Muslim tourists as an additional revenue source. Developed countries such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea are among them (Said et al., 2022; Wisker & Guler, 2022), and several countries in Europe and America offer Muslim-friendly destinations. These countries also promote Muslim-friendly tourism packages as a new strategy to attract Muslim tourists. The interest from these Muslim-minority countries has become a green light for Muslim tourists to visit. This is because, in Islamic teachings, travel is an act of worship that expresses gratitude for God's blessings and enriches experiences. Many Muslim scholars have also traveled to non-Muslim countries as part of their Islamic missionary endeavors. In the current context, Muslim tourists are also interested in visiting non-Muslim countries because of the attractive destinations they offer.

However, the provision of Muslim-friendly tourism facilities from Muslim-minority countries is a concern for Muslim tourists (Han et al., 2019; Said et al., 2022; Wisker & Guler, 2022). They question whether the services provided are in accordance with Sharia principles, such as halal food standards, comfortable prayer facilities, and security during visits to avoid being perceived as Muslims, synonymous with terrorists, as seen in the global news reports local residents receive. The successful development and marketing of halal tourism destinations must be based on the application of Islamic teachings and principles in all aspects of tourism activities (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Therefore, halal support is needed, accompanied by a clear understanding of the implementation of halal services at these destinations. Indifference from some local communities in destinations with Muslim minorities is also a factor affecting the comfort of Muslim tourists. With awareness, Muslim tourists can obtain accurate information regarding halal requirements and the availability of prayer facilities. Understanding from Muslim-minority countries and concern from the local community will improve interfaith tolerance, which can foster peace between Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

Based on the need to gain more insight from the perspective of Muslim tourists regarding halal and Muslim-friendly tourism, research specifically addressing the needs of Muslim tourists is necessary. To date, numerous studies on halal tourism have been conducted (Battour et al., 2024; Battour & Ismail, 2016; Han et al., 2019; Jumani, 2024; Junaidi, 2020; Mohd Nawawi et al., 2019; Wisker & Guler, 2022). Based on a bibliometric analysis by Ratnasari et al. (2024), halal tourism attracts academics and practitioners, with an annual increase of 39.1%. Research by Liu et al. (2018) states that Muslim-friendly tourism has a positive and significant influence on tourist attitudes, destination image, and travel intentions. This aligns with research by González et al. (2015), who present results on the influence of destination image on holiday goals (formed by stimulus factors and tourist characteristics). Som et al. (2016) found that the number of Muslim tourists visiting Japan has increased in recent years due to its Muslim-friendly approach. They visit the country for its local cultural factors, film imagery, and natural scenery. Given this interest in halal tourism, attention must be paid to meeting halal standards. This was revealed in a study by the University of South Korea, which found difficulties in meeting halal tourism standards. Abukhalifeh et al. (2020) found there was a need for knowledge, limited prospects, and difficulties in starting a halal tourism business. However, as per research by Wilkins et al. (2019), halal marketing can provide promising business opportunities for international restaurants.

According to a study by Mohd Nawawi et al. (2019), Thailand, a predominantly non-Muslim country, has declared itself the country with the highest production of halal food and other certified products among Southeast Asian countries with a non-Muslim majority. Several other studies by

Wilkins et al. (2019) discuss non-Muslim perceptions of halal products. It is known that the majority of non-Muslims have a positive perception of the quality of halal products and services. South Korea is among the countries that support halal facilities for Muslim tourists visiting their country. South Korea is also a Muslim-minority country in Asia that is interested in developing halal-friendly tourism.

Research on Muslim-friendly and halal in South Korea has been widely conducted (Handani & Kim, 2023; Konety et al., 2023; Lee, 2017; Nayeem et al., 2020; Tahira, 2022). Researchers for this study have compiled data from 100 journal articles discussing halal-friendly practices in South Korea. The data show that most studies discuss halal awareness, the halal industry, halal knowledge, halal certification, and their relationship to the halal market in South Korea (Han et al., 2019; Jaihan et al., 2022; Marlinda et al., 2023; Md, 2022; Nayeem et al., 2020). Although numerous studies have been conducted on halal tourism and halal products in South Korea, research on the state's support and the concerns of the local Muslim-majority population remains limited (Ratnasari et al., 2024). Therefore, this study investigates the support of Muslim-minority countries for Muslim-friendly tourism and their concern in developing this tourism potential to boost the country's economy. This halal support includes worship facilities, food, and other support (Said et al., 2022). It also analyzes the perceptions of Muslim tourists and immigrants regarding the challenges and obstacles they face. Although known to be friendly to various tourists, racism still occurs in South Korea (Lee et al., 2024). This is also felt by Muslim tourists, making it a unique challenge to visit South Korea (Yuk & Yi, 2022). Finally, this research is crucial to raise awareness among entrepreneurs in South Korea. They can capitalize on opportunities in the Muslim tourist market and evaluate the needs of Muslim tourists. Furthermore, this research is important for providing recommendations to Muslim tourists planning to visit South Korea.

2. Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative research method within a phenomenological paradigm, drawing on primary, secondary, and observational data sources (Klassen et al., 2012). The primary source comes from semi-structured interviews (n=18) conducted in Seoul in 2024. We also prepared a draft survey with the help of local academics to distribute to informants. We interviewed 10 men and 8 women in different age groups. They were Halal Institute Korea administrators, tourism professionals, restaurant owners, local academics, local non-Muslim residents, local supermarket workers, Muslim workers, Muslim immigrants, Muslim tourists, representatives of non-profit associations, and professionals working in the halal and tourism sectors. The researchers met directly with informants to understand the meaning of each halal-friendly activity in Korea. Recordings and notes were used to collect data. The interviews lasted an average of one hour and were conducted individually in English and Indonesian (Ivankova et al., 2006). The first part of the interview was aimed at gathering current opinions on Muslim tourists in Seoul and on the halal tourism offered. Then, questions focused on the relationship and interactions between local residents and tourists, and when and how the industry developed. In the final section, respondents were asked to comment on their overall evaluation of local residents' cultural tolerance and friendliness of local residents towards Muslim tourists (Dunning et al., 2007).

The collected data were analyzed using the QDA Miner Lite tool, which coded the interview transcripts for dominant halal-friendly indicators (Cuva, 2014). These indicators included prayer facilities, availability of halal food and beverages, accommodation and transportation services, and cultural tolerance and local hospitality (Rusydiana et al., 2021). Validity testing was conducted using internal and external validity tests. Researchers used internal validity to focus on the phenomenon and ensure the validity of observations and documentation (Creswell et al., 2003). External validity was assessed through researchers' generalizations based on informants' perceptions of the findings and situation (Yin, 2018). External validity was also assessed by analyzing other secondary data sources using the VOSviewer tool, which employed halal-friendly indicator data from Muslim-minority countries (Arruda et al., 2022). In this study, we used predetermined interview guidelines based on halal-friendly indicators related to support and indifference to ensure consistency in data collection. The guidelines (Marlinda et al., 2023; Said et al., 2022) are:

Question 1: What is the purpose of your visit to a Muslim-minority country?

Question 2: What are your main concerns when traveling and staying in South Korea?

Question 3: How accessible is halal food information and availability in South Korea?

Question 4: How is halal certification provided in South Korea?

Question 5: How accessible are religious facilities in South Korea?

Question 6: What accommodation and transportation services are provided in South Korea?

Question 7: How tolerant and hospitable are local residents toward Muslim tourists?

Question 8: How supportive is South Korea regarding religious facilities, halal food, accommodation, Qibla direction, and other facilities?

Question 9: How does South Korea care about halal support for Muslim tourists?

Question 10: How accepting is local South Koreans, and how well do they communicate with Muslim tourists?

Interview data were transcribed and analyzed using a grounded theory approach, following the procedures outlined by Creswell et al. (2003). Based on the informants' answers, the researcher collected, coded, and cross-compared all responses. The data analysis process was also supported by direct observation in Muslim minority countries, with attention to objectivity (Ivankova et al., 2006). Other data support in achieving external validity was the documentation of the results of informant satisfaction with Muslim minority countries. The data collection process was completed when the data had reached the point of finding the research objectives (saturation). The informant data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Informants Data

No	Name	Interviewee Code	Gender	Age	Occupation	Country
1	Azman	IFRM 1	M	20-30	Korean shop assistant	Malaysia
2	Mr. Lan	IFRM 2	M	20-30	Restaurant worker	Malaysia
3	Nain	IFRM 3	F	30-40	Local academic	Indonesia
4	Cu	IFRM 4	F	30-40	Korean worker	South Korea
5	Abdullah	IFRM 5	M	40-50	Halal Institute	South Korea
6	Rohmad	IFRM 6	M	30-40	Muslim immigrant	Indonesia
7	Imam	IFRM 7	M	30-40	Muslim immigrant	Indonesia
8	Andi Nayla	IFRM 8	M	20-30	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
9	Nurkhaliesah	IFRM 9	F	20-30	Muslim tourist	Malaysia
10	M. Shadiq	IFRM 10	M	30-40	Muslim tourist	Singapore
11	Nafisa Islam	IFRM 11	F	20-30	Muslim tourist	Bangladesh
12	Amira Mlik	IFRM 12	F	40-50	Muslim tourist	Tunisia
13	Syafii Efendi	IFRM 13	M	30-40	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
14	M. Rafif	IFRM 14	M	20-30	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
15	A. Qalbi	IFRM 15	F	20-30	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
16	Rizkananda	IFRM 16	F	20-30	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
17	Anggy	IFRM 17	F	20-30	Muslim tourist	Indonesia
18	Tristan	IFRM 18	M	20-30	Local academic	Indonesia

3. Results and Discussion

Interview and observation data indicate that the South Korean government has provided facilities to support tourists visiting tourist attractions. Several Android software applications have been developed to support tourists during their travels. These applications include Naver Maps, the most efficient mapping application in Korea, offering detailed maps, directions, real-time traffic information, and additional features such as finding nearby attractions; and Kakao Taxi, a popular taxi service application in South Korea for those who do not want to use a shuttle. Services like Grab and Uber are not available in South Korea and are less popular there. Subway Korea offers metro maps with real-time information on schedules, fares, routes, travel times, and more, covering all areas of the South Korean subway system. Papago Translator is a useful translator when traveling to South Korea. The government also provides accommodation and other public facilities. According to local South Koreans, they support and welcome every tourist who comes, regardless of religious background.

South Korea is a welcoming country to tourists from various religious backgrounds, including Islam. This is due to the large number of Muslim immigrants working in South Korea. These immigrants come from Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Bangladesh, and various Middle Eastern countries. Informants explain the background of the support for halal-friendly tourism in Korea:

"To experience the Muslim friendliness of Korea, you can go to Ansan and Itaewon. Itaewon has many foreign Muslim residents, while Ansan has many Muslim workers from Indonesia. It is like a small Indonesian town because it is easier to find halal food and prayer facilities. There are several

Indonesian Muslim tourists and academics who have families and children in Korea and have lived there for extended periods.” (IFRM 6 & 7)

“Quite a few Muslim tourists from Indonesia visit South Korea. They usually visit Korea in winter or spring because the climate is beautiful, unlike in Indonesia. They often gather at Al-Falah Mosque to meet. However, in the winter, some of them get sick because they have not adjusted to the tropical climate.” (IFRM 6 & 7)

Interview transcript data were processed by researchers using QDA Miner Lite, coding keywords used as references to halal-friendly products. The results are shown in Figure 1.
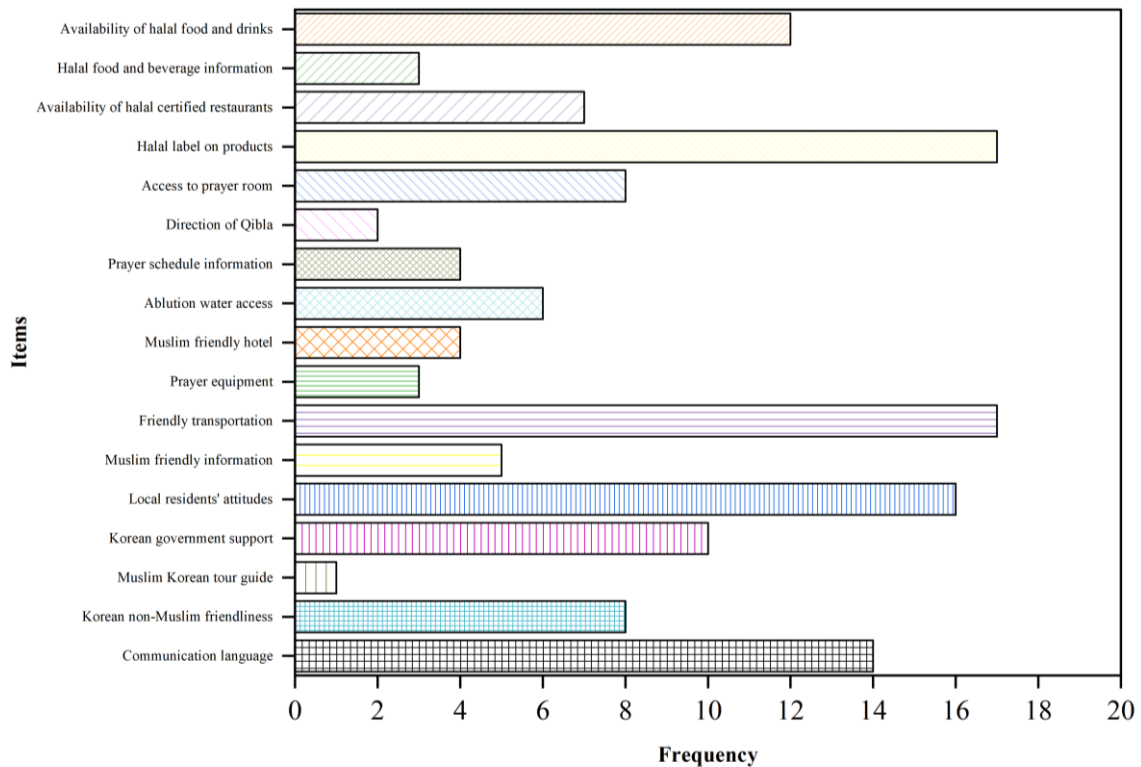

Figure 1. Analysis results of each indicator from the informants' answers

The results of the interview transcript data analysis indicate the five most frequently cited indicators are friendly transportation, halal product labels, local residents' attitudes, communication language, and the availability of halal food and drinks. The indicators most frequently cited by informants were Muslim Korean tour guides, Qibla direction, prayer equipment, halal food and beverage information, and Muslim-friendly hotels.

3.1. Halal Support from the Muslim Minority Country of South Korea
3.1.1. Halal Food and Drinks

Although several restaurants serve halal food in South Korea, these are only available in major cities. Most informants found it difficult to access halal food due to the distance from their accommodation. They overcome this by purchasing ready-made meals from halal stores or buying vegetables and cooking on site. Meanwhile, tourists who have taken tour packages are provided with food by their tour guides through the Indonesian Embassy in South Korea. Informants made statements regarding the availability of halal food from the perspective of Muslim immigrants:

“You have to be careful with snacks at CU, B25, Seven-Eleven, and other convenience stores because they contain pork. Nearly 90% of the products are non-halal. It is better to choose banana milk that does not contain pork fat. Some ice creams also contain pork, which often contains lard and alcohol. Meat is almost always eaten here because it is cheaper than vegetables. Vegetables are quite expensive here.” (IFRM 7)

“Almost all noodle products contain non-halal ingredients. Even though I chose seafood, it contained pork fat. Some products feature facilities that indicate the company also produces products containing

pork. The food uses pork flavoring. They do not know it contains pork fat, but they consume it anyway.” (IFRM 7 & 6)

“Providing food for tourists can be done through the Indonesian Embassy in Korea, which is easier. Some people here prefer chicken and other meats than pork. However, some actually choose them because we know they are in a Muslim-majority country.” (IFRM 3)

These halal food and beverage products are the result of cooperation with Muslim countries. Cooperation between countries is an important indicator in facilitating the availability of halal products and information on the halal standards that must be implemented. Informant statements indicate cooperation in providing halal products:

“This restaurant is a collaboration between Korea and Malaysia. The main dish here is chicken. The ingredients are sourced from Asia Mart. There is also a Korean kitchen downstairs serving authentic halal Korean dishes. These various dishes have been certified and identified as halal. In the summer, it is sometimes busy, sometimes quiet. However, in winter, this restaurant is busy. Most of the employees are from Malaysia, but there are also some from Indonesia.” (IFRM 2)

“We provide halal products from various countries, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey, as well as packaged products from Korea that have halal certification. This shop is open until 9 p.m., and is quite busy from November to December.” (IFRM 1)

To obtain halal certification, businesses can apply to institutions in South Korea, such as the Korea Muslim Federation Halal Committee and Korea Halal Authority. This certification is typically obtained by Muslim businesses to increase customer trust. The halal certification process is simple and readily provided. An informant stated about halal certification facilitation:

“We provide halal certification facilities for businesses applying for halal certification from anywhere, such as Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, and other countries. We facilitate product certification for two months during the verification process according to our specifications.” (IFRM 5)

“We are pleased that someone has applied for halal certification, as it provides a choice of food products to offer Muslim tourists.” (IFRM 5)

According to local residents' perceptions, they are indifferent to and unaware of the halal logo and halal food. They uphold local culture by prioritizing tolerance and refraining from interfering in others' affairs.

A local resident informant mentioned regarding halal information and the halal logo:

“This is the first time in my life I have seen that logo, or the halal logo. I do not know what it is or what it is for. As long as customers do not cause any problems, it does not matter what their religion is. We care about their religion.” (IFRM 4)

This statement indicates that some business owners are unaware of the potential of halal business in South Korea. They are more focused on meeting local demands for their daily needs. However, in some tourist areas, halal information is provided by Muslim immigrants working in Korea and by Muslim immigrants who have established halal businesses in South Korea.

To support access, South Korea has developed an app for ordering halal food. Tourists can easily order halal food through the app in under 1 day. An informant statement demonstrates the ease of access to halal food:

“There is a special app for finding authentic halal food from Korea, called Chopang. We can get it in one day.” (IFRM 6)

3.1.2. Worship Facilities

Worship facilities are an important consideration when planning a visit to a Muslim-minority country. Some regions provide worship facilities, such as mosques and dedicated prayer rooms, but these are only available in a few locations in large cities and are far from small towns. Some worship facilities are shown in Figure 2.
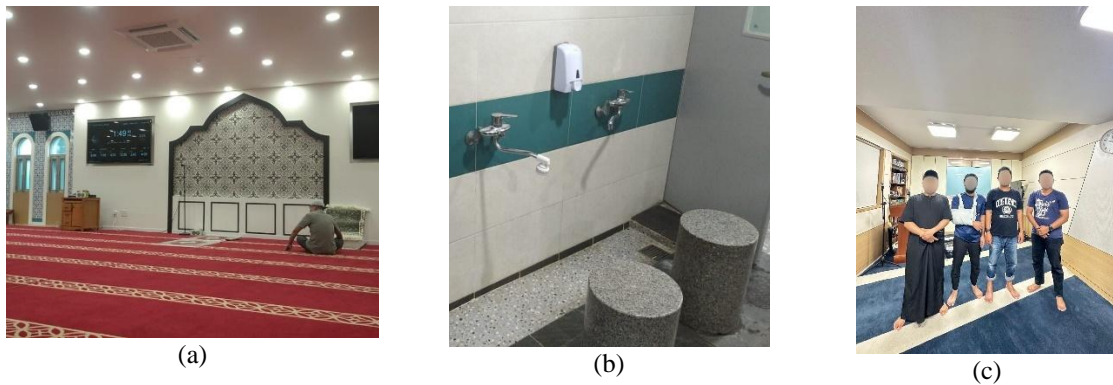
Figure 2. Prayer area at Itaewon Mosque (a); Ablution facilities at Itaewon Mosque (b); Prayer area at Al-Falah Mosque (c)

Statements highlight the availability of worship facilities:

"Here, we need to strengthen our principles of worship due to the limited number of places of worship available here. We must find spaces and places for worship. Public places in corners or empty spaces can be used for worship, as long as they are not in the way and do not disturb other people walking." (IFRM 7)

"When we first arrive, the important thing is to bring prayer and basic knowledge of Islam so we can perform our prayers and avoid what is forbidden. There are several new things to consider when praying: wearing a khuf (a traditional Islamic foot covering), such as skin-colored socks that can be used for ablution in the winter. Muslims in Korea are individuals, and if we uphold the principle of prayer and worship, they respect us. Another way to do this is by working more than usual. If the target is 500, we work 510, leaving us free time to pray. Al-Falah Mosque rents a building for around 60 million rupiah annually, so it sometimes moves from Youdongpoe to Singil." (IFRM 6 & 7)

Based on this statement, it can be seen that mosque facilities are only available in a few large cities, making it difficult for tourists in smaller towns. Tourists traveling can perform congregational prayers, but this does not apply to tourists staying more than three days, students, and Muslim immigrants. They have difficulty accessing the mosque for Friday prayers. Regarding prayer facilities, an informant stated:

"Here, Friday prayers are difficult; you need to go to a mosque, which is quite far from the university. For daily prayers, you need to find a quiet, uncrowded location, such as a corner of a room, somewhere else." (IFRM 18)

This statement indicates that prayer facilities are an important need for Muslim tourists, students, and workers in South Korea. They must adapt to their visit by finding a quiet, undisturbed place to pray. Prayer times are also a concern for Muslim tourists unfamiliar with South Korea's timetable. Regarding prayer schedules:

"Some workers pray the Dhuhr and Asr prayers in conjunction. However, since I have settled here, I try to pray in the warehouse using cardboard boxes. We must uphold the principles of our worship. If we hold fast to our commitment, native Koreans will respect us. But if we are timid or half-hearted, they will not respect us." (IFRM 6)

"When working in a factory, the prayer time that requires extra attention is the Asr prayer time. Because there is no break, you have to ask permission to go to the restroom and then take a moment to pray. With the difficulty of praying here, we prioritize worship even more, because that is what we can bring and hold on to here." (IFRM 7)

This statement indicates that, for Muslim workers in South Korea, Asr prayer time is a matter of extra concern because it occurs during work hours. They need permission to go to the restroom briefly to pray. If they ask for permission to pray directly, they are not permitted to do so because it is not yet their break time.

3.1.3. Accommodation Services
Accommodation and transportation services are important considerations for tourists before planning a visit to a destination. Countries with friendly transportation and accommodation services are preferred

over those without. Transportation services in South Korea are convenient and integrated, allowing tourists to visit destinations quickly and easily. Regarding transportation facilities:

"The airport has a room that provides Muslim facilities, facilities for Christians, Muslims, etc. The facilities here are sufficient for tourists visiting these areas. There are trains accessible through Naver Maps, buses, and taxis like Kako and Korean taxis." (IFRM 3)

"South Korea, especially Seoul, can be expensive when it comes to housing and dining out. It is important to budget accordingly and be aware of the cost of living in different areas. The city is known for its efficient public transportation, trendy cafes, and rich cultural experiences." (IFRM 12)

As a developed country, South Korea has a range of integrated transportation facilities and accessible guides through various apps. These facilities also accommodate visitors with special needs by providing wheelchairs and disability friendly transportation options. The worship facilities available in several mosques also comply with Sharia standards. Disability friendly transportation and worship facilities are shown in Figure 3.

(a)   (b)   (c)

Figure 3. Disability friendly transportation facilities (a); Elderly friendly transportation (b); Connected transportation (c).

3.1.4. Cultural Tolerance and Local Hospitality

South Korea has become a developed nation that tolerates all visitors regardless of their religious background. Local residents have also demonstrated awareness that the country's progress is driven by the friendliness of its citizens. A statement demonstrates the cultural tolerance and friendliness of local residents:

"South Koreans do not care what we do as long as it does not disturb them. We pray anywhere, No. problem. I usually pray in the train corridor, in an empty space, using a prayer mat I brought. Alternatively, in public places, on the side of a building that is not used for walking." (IFRM 6)

Another statement indicates the acceptance of Muslim tourists by local residents:

"South Koreans have quite a good respect for all tourists. They do not care much about religion because it is a secular state. However, when there are missionaries or those who disturb people by inviting them to convert to Islam, that is prohibited. Christian missionaries, when they wear the hijab, are more likely to be invited to their religion. They are more active in inviting others to their religion. In Daegu, there was resistance to Muslims wanting to build a mosque or the presence of Muslims in South Korea." (IFRM 3)

Local residents' acceptance of immigrants is mentioned by another informant:

"The leaders at work are quite good with their employees; they often take them out to eat. However, they sometimes get angry when certain tasks do not go according to plan. They do use harsh language when communicating, but after a break, the conflict is resolved, and they seem to see the problem as gone. Work time is work, and work is done, and they do not bring it up again. For permission to pray, the leader does not care about the religion practiced, so that prayers can be done during break time. If the afternoon prayer does not coincide with the break, then permission to go to the toilet can be taken and pray in an empty place." (IFRM 6)

These statements demonstrate that South Koreans are friendly toward tourists and immigrants, regardless of their religious background or country of origin. They accept interactions well. This is driven by their spiritual background, which is not concerned with religion. However, at work, they only allow breaks during lunch; there is no specific break time for prayer.

Muslim tourists should be aware of several things regarding clothing culture that is not in accordance with Islamic law. Muslim tourists need to guard their views and avoid being influenced by clothing and sexual relations that are not in accordance with Islamic law. Statements indicate the potential for inappropriate services:

"Inappropriate services such as revealing clothing, prohibited sexual relations, showing cultural insensitivity or disrespect for religious practices, and failing to accommodate prayer and fasting needs." (IFRM 10)

Muslim minority countries have their own cultures and social practices that align with their beliefs. Therefore, Muslim tourists need to understand and respect their beliefs and avoid being influenced by cultural practices that are not in accordance with Islamic law. Based on various interview results, researchers grouped indicators and codes as a form of support from the Muslim-minority state. The details are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Halal-Friendly Support in South Korea

Indicator	Code	Description	Source
Halal food and drinks	a. Availability of halal food b. Halal food and beverage information c. Availability of halal-certified restaurants d. Halal label on products (Fajriyati et al., 2020)	1. The availability of halal food in South Korea is difficult. Muslim tourists need to pay special attention to the halal logo on packaged food and drinks sold in South Korean retail stores. Nearly 90% of packaged foods in retail stores contain pork fat, so care must be taken when choosing them.	IFRM1, IFRM3, IFRM6, IFRM7, IFRM18
Worship facilities	a. Access to the prayer room b. Direction of Qibla c. Prayer schedule information d. Ablution water access (Said et al., 2022)	1. Access to prayer facilities is difficult in large cities like Seoul, Itaewon, and others. This is especially true in some smaller towns outside tourist areas. Tourists must travel considerable distances to reach a mosque for Friday prayers. Prayer facilities at tourist attractions are also inadequate, so Muslim visitors must bring their own prayer equipment and pray independently in unused spaces. 2. Prayers in South Korea are performed according to each traveler's personal schedule. There are no loudspeakers for the call to prayer, so tourists need to set an alarm for prayer times. Companies also do not have a prayer schedule, so workers need permission to take a restroom break while praying.	IFRM3, IFRM6, IFRM7, IFRM8, IFRM9, IFRM10, IFRM11
Accommodation services	a. Muslim friendly hotel b. Friendly transportation c. Muslim friendly information (Marlinda et al., 2023)	1. Accommodation and transportation facilities in South Korea are comprehensive and support visits to various destinations. Accommodation facilities are also clean and tidy. 2. Several apps can guide tourists to tourist areas. These apps are readily available and comprehensive.	IFRM7, IFRM8, IFRM9, IFRM10, IFRM11, IFRM12, IFRM13, IFRM14

Table 2. Halal-Friendly Support in South Korea (continued)

Indicator	Code		Description		Source
Culture tolerance and hospitality	a. b. c. d.	Local residents' attitude Korean government support Korean non-Muslim friendliness Communication language (Han et al., 2019)	1.	South Koreans maintain politeness and are committed to not disturbing other residents or tourists as long as they do not disturb them. If a disturbance occurs, they do not resort to physical contact but report it to the local police immediately.	IFRM7, IFRM8, IFRM9, IFRM10. IFRM16, IFRM17, IFRM18
Destination image	a. b. c.	Muslim Korean tour guide Authenticity and historical integrity Prayer equipment (Han et al., 2019)	1. 2.	Muslim tourists can visit the Seoul Central Mosque to learn about the history of the spread of Islam in South Korea. Prayer equipment, ablution facilities, and halal food are available around the Seoul Central Mosque.	IFRM5, IFRM6, IFRM7

3.2. Challenges for Muslim Tourists Visiting South Korea

There are several challenges to consider when visiting South Korea, especially for Muslim tourists. They must have strong principles and faith. This is because many tourist attractions lack prayer facilities for Muslims. There are only a few mosques in the major cities, and they are far apart. Therefore, tourists need to bring their own prayer equipment to pray in public places. South Koreans do not care about Muslim prayers; the important thing is that their activities do not disturb the surrounding community. Another important thing to consider is the food products they purchase. Muslim tourists need to carefully select the products available, as many contain pork fat or alcohol.

3.2.1. Local Community Awareness and Understanding

Local South Koreans were initially unfamiliar with the customs and practices of visiting foreigners, but with the advancement of information technology, they have come to understand each other's cultures better. However, some Muslim immigrants still struggle to explain their religious beliefs. Informant statements demonstrate the local acceptance of tourists who do not eat pork:

"The best thing is explaining to Koreans that we do not like pork. It is difficult to explain to Koreans that it is a religious teaching." (IFRM 7)

"Here in South Korea, religion is not a problem; they do not care what religion we practice. The important thing is that I inform my friends that I do not eat pork, and that they understand and order other things. Koreans' understanding of halal products is completely unclear about the halal logo or what halal means." (IFRM 18)

Statement about local attitudes: *"Koreans are not vindictive. They might get angry and use harsh words when a machine breaks down. But after the break, they forgive and encourage others."* (IFRM 6)

Demonstrating awareness of interactions using international languages:

"South Korea is generally a safe country; it is always wise to stay informed about local safety issues and follow any travel advice. While English is widely spoken in many places, especially cities, it is less common in rural areas. Learning a few basic Korean phrases or using a translation app can be helpful." (IFRM 12)

3.2.2. Government Policies and Regulations

The South Korean government has encouraged its country to facilitate halal product certification. Furthermore, it facilitates the opening of halal businesses through investors from Muslim countries. Government regulations regarding religious background do not restrict tourists.

A statement from an informant indicates the potential for acts of violence:

"There have been several acts of violence experienced by workers in Korea in the fishing sector. Because in the fishing sector, they are more difficult than in other fields due to the hot climate and the difficult language, which leads to miscommunication, which does not meet the expectations of their superiors." (IFRM 7)

An informant indicated government support for halal certification:

"The government supports halal facilities in South Korea, but not in the form of facilitating regulations on halal products and the provision of worship facilities. The facilitation of halal products comes from the community and the self-declaration of service providers. There are currently no regulations governing the provision of halal facilities in South Korea." (IFRM 9)

Reflecting the importance of halal services as a business:

"In non-Muslim countries, halal products and services are often considered a niche offering. Businesses may only provide halal options in response to specific customer requests or as a special service, not as standard practice." (IFRM 11)

These statements indicate that the South Korean government has implemented mechanisms to support halal. However, halal food standards need to be addressed from the beginning to the end of the process. This is because the halal logo is also seen as a means of enhancing product promotion to attract customers. This is achieved through using food ingredients that are not prohibited by Islamic teachings. Compliance with slaughtering and cooking standards requires further investigation.

3.2.3. Politics, Social and Culture

Political challenges are a concern for Muslim tourists visiting South Korea. The country's long history of conflict between South and North Korea is a concern for tourists. Security and a friendly environment can be achieved if the country is free from conflict with other countries. An informant's statement illustrates the political challenges:

"There's some vigilance in Korea, including with North Korea, about whether there will be an attack from North Korea while we're staying there. There are some actions taken by North Korea, such as sending balloons filled with trash and excrement. South Korea also retaliates with loud noises directed at North Korea. Indeed, there has been propaganda from childhood among North Koreans that there are misconceptions about South Korea. Some North Koreans, accustomed to slow, rural North Korea, experience culture shock when they travel to South Korea at a faster pace." (IFRM 6)

An informant demonstrates Islamic da'wah in a Muslim-minority country:

"Regarding da'wah development, it is only for Indonesia. In that small mosque, it is mostly focused on Indonesians living in South Korea. We cannot da'wah and invite native South Koreans because that is not permitted by the government. However, some Christian missionaries in South Korea invite people to their religion through communities and workers. They are native South Koreans." (IFRM 7)

Regarding local culture:

"Many South Koreans are increasingly curious about different cultures and religions, leading to a greater understanding and acceptance of halal practices. Locals in tourist areas are often willing to help with directions, recommendations, and information about halal facilities." (IFRM 9)

These statements suggest caution when visiting locations close to North Korea. This is due to the ongoing conflict between the two countries. However, the tourist sites are usually in large cities and therefore not affected by the conflict. South Korea is safe to visit, and locals are friendly towards visitors. Based on the interview results, the researcher formulated and grouped the informants' statements about challenges in non-Muslim countries using the indicators shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Challenges of Travel to Muslim Minority Destinations

Indicator	Code	Description	Source
Local community awareness and understanding	a. Language communication b. Knowledge c. Local community attitudes d. Stereotype issues (Fajriyati et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2024)	1. Most local South Koreans have limited English proficiency, so tourists need to understand Korean to communicate. 2. Local residents are sensitive when there are religious outreach activities aimed at local residents or when there is opposition to the establishment of a mosque, as in the incident in Daegu, South Korea. 3. Several activities are prohibited under Islamic law, such as hugging in public, kissing in public, and wearing clothing that exposes one's private parts in public.	IFRM1, IFRM6, IFRM7, IFRM9

Table 3. Challenges of Travel to Muslim Minority Destinations (continued)

Indicator	Code	Description	Source
Government policies and regulations	a. Government support for halal certification b. Bureaucratic simplification for halal businesses c. Immigration policies (Abbasian et al., 2024; Kayal, 2023; Noor, 2025)	1. Halal policies have been supported by the government through the NGO Korea Halal Institute, but the government has not yet actively issued regulations. 2. The government applies the same policy to all visitors. However, there are no clear regulations regarding halal facilities for Muslims.	IFRM1, IFRM2, IFRM3, IFRM4, IFRM5
Politics, society and culture	a. Lifestyle b. Muslim identity c. Political conditions (Han et al., 2019; Lim & Song, 2021)	1. The safe and conducive situation and conditions in South Korea are a driving factor for visiting the country. However, there are some concerns when traveling in border areas with North Korea due to ongoing soft conflicts involving the sending of feces and the loud blaring of K-Pop music. 2. There have been several incidents of racism experienced by Muslim visitors in South Korea due to their wearing headscarves and covered clothing.	IFRM5, IFRM6, IFRM7, IFRM8, IFRM18

3.3. Challenges for Muslim Tourists Visiting South Korea

Based on the data and analysis, researchers formulated a hierarchy of halal-friendly needs in Muslim-minority countries. There are five levels of needs, ranging from urgent and important to advanced. The findings of the hierarchy are presented in Figure 4.
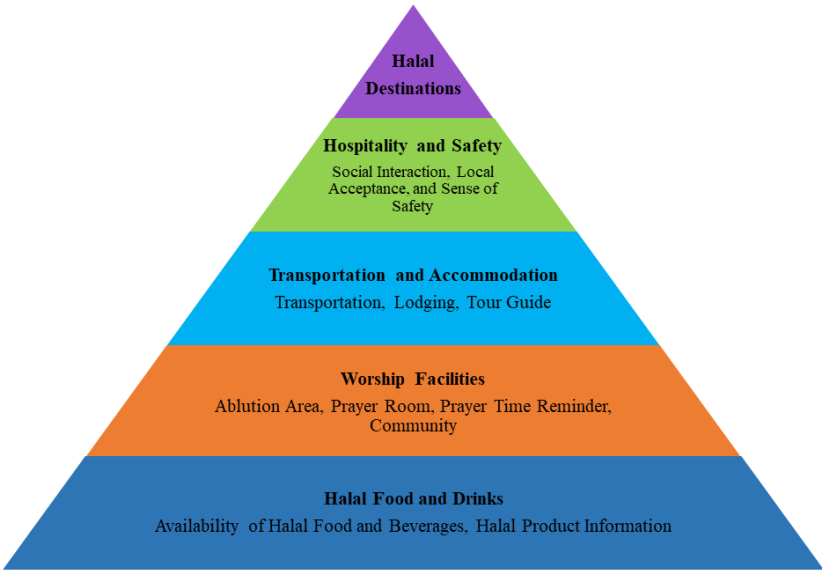
Figure 4. Hierarchy of halal-friendly needs

Figure 4 shows that Muslim-minority countries must meet several levels of requirements to achieve a halal-friendly image. The first level is the need for halal food and beverages. This is a basic need that must be met in Muslim-minority countries. Difficulty accessing halal products should be a concern for the government. Research by Said et al. (2022) shows that Muslim tourists visiting Muslim minority countries considered access to halal food before their visit. Takeshita (2020) revealed that Muslim tourists in Japan want halal certification and disclosure of food ingredients. Other research by Mohd Nawawi et al. (2019) shows that halal standardization in Thailand is a determining factor in becoming one of Southeast Asia's halal food exporters. A study by Amer (2025) shows that halal implementation and certification have a positive impact on increasing company marketing. However, this finding is not in line with research by Rahmawati et al. (2025), which found that halal restaurants had no significant impact on tourism demand. Bashir et al. (2018) study shows that South Korea still

holds a small market share for halal food in the global market. There is a need for strategies to increase the competitiveness of seafood and improve halal authentication and certification standards.

The second level is worship facilities. The needs of Muslims, who are obligated to pray five times a day, must be met by providing ablution and prayer facilities. Furthermore, different timetables can lead to different prayer times, necessitating reminders. This aligns with research by Rahmawati et al. (2025), which shows that the availability of mosques or prayer rooms influences the influx of Muslim tourists to Japan. In line with research by Soonsan and Jumani (2024), halal-friendly facilities and services have a positive influence on the intention of Muslim tourists to visit Thailand. Other research by Said et al. (2022) shows that among Muslim tourists visiting Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, most are concerned about the need to perform obligatory prayers. This research finding is also in line with Eum (2018) findings. In South Korea, the domestic tourism industry has responded to the needs of Muslim tourists by developing Muslim-friendly tourism in Seoul, but outside Seoul, there are challenges, such as a lack of infrastructure and anti-Islamic sentiment.

The third level is transportation and accommodation. Access to transportation services to various destinations is crucial. Furthermore, accommodation free of alcohol and unclean materials is crucial. The progress of the halal industry is driven by the quality of service provided (Noor, 2025). Muslim-friendly airports are a starting point for promoting halal tourism destinations (Henderson, 2016). Based on research by Muharam and Asutay (2022), hotels that classify themselves as halal-friendly provide information on prayer facilities, supply halal food, are alcohol-free, and have Islamic symbols. In Indonesia, Hanafi et al. (2024) show that hotels and travel agencies must comply with the guidelines of the Indonesian Ulema Council to be declared halal tourism. However, this contradicts research by Abbasian et al. (2024), which found that respondents in Sweden are skeptical of the concept of halal and Muslim-friendly hotels due to the financial and cultural challenges they face.

The fourth level is hospitality and safety. The friendliness of the local people when interacting is a consideration for Muslims to travel to that country (Adham et al., 2025). Travel safety and political tensions are also concerns for Muslim tourists visiting Muslim-minority countries. However, this differs from research by Dabamona et al. (2025) , which states that in Thailand, tourists need to understand and adapt to the cultural and community attributes of the country they visit.

The fifth level is halal destinations. Tourist attractions that have a long history in the spread and development of Islam are a special attraction for Muslim tourists to visit a country. Dini et al.'s (2023) study shows that a sense of belonging to a tourist destination positively influences satisfaction and environmentally friendly behavior. Halal destination information, based on research by Cuesta-Valiño et al. (2020), is crucial to demonstrate true Muslim-friendliness. ChatGPT can be used in the future to provide useful information on halal destinations to attract tourists (Battour et al., 2024). Research by Aminah and Bhakti (2022) shows that, as a Muslim minority country, Japan has demonstrated its halal destination image by providing halal facilities while still showcasing its cultural characteristics. Furthermore, the hierarchy of halal needs in a Muslim minority country was validated by 200 previous studies published in reputable international journals, via Scopus, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Network visualization of halal-friendly needs in a Muslim minority country

The analysis shows that research on the need for halal-friendly tourism is related to halal food, halal businesses, Islamic attributes, hospitality, and halal destinations. Halal food is a frequently researched need, as food and drink are primary human needs. This need presents a challenge in countries with a Muslim minority population (Yasar, 2021). After obtaining information about halal food, tourists need to perform their obligatory prayers with adequate facilities. Transportation during the trip is also a consideration when planning a visit. Furthermore, the need for local hospitality and halal destinations is crucial (Han et al., 2019).

This research aligns with Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1994; Griffin & Hauser, 1996; Key, 1999; Polonsky, 1995), which holds that every policy and service is influenced by stakeholder support. Muslim immigrants working in South Korea play a crucial role in supporting halal facilities. Meanwhile, the government and business actors have an interest in boosting economic income through visits from Muslim tourists. These findings are also consistent with Institutional Theory (Peters, 2022; Suddaby, 2010), which examines how business actors adapt to the needs of Muslim tourists. However, social pressure from the local community poses a challenge in the development of mosque worship facilities (Yuk & Yi, 2022). The South Korean government has also not issued regulations regarding halal-friendly services (Lee et al., 2024). This contrasts with research by Abbasian et al. (2024), where their findings challenge the Social Exchange Theory and argue that economic incentives cannot always be the primary motivator behind all types of tourism development, and non-financial secular and cultural values outweigh the benefits of promoting halal tourism. However, these findings only apply to countries that do not prioritize halal-friendly tourism.

These findings complement previous research in South Korea by Han et al. (2019), which demonstrates five halal-friendly attributes, including social environment, facilities, food and beverages, locals and staff, and services. It also expands on previous research by Park and Jamaludin (2018) on the Halal Industry Support System Sequence Map in South Korea. Research by Marlinda et al. (2023) also divides the groups involved in halal tourism development in South Korea into those supporting the policy, those opposing, and those indifferent to it. According to Almond (1966) political theory, political policies can have a negative or supportive impact as long as they provide benefits. Political policies pose a challenge to the development of Muslim-friendly tourism in South Korea. Finally, this research specifically demonstrates a hierarchy of needs prioritized in fulfilling halal-friendly tourism.

4. Conclusion

The findings from this research outline a hierarchical framework of halal-friendly needs in Muslim-minority countries, identifying five key levels: availability of halal food and beverages, worship facilities, transportation and accommodation, hospitality and security, and halal destinations. This structure emphasizes that providing necessities, such as halal food and dedicated worship spaces, forms the foundation of a Muslim-friendly tourism environment. Beyond these, aspects like transportation, safe and welcoming hospitality, and accessible halal destinations enhance the overall travel experience for Muslim tourists. The study reveals that, although South Korea has made significant strides in developing transportation infrastructure, there remains a notable gap in the provision of halal food options, which are essential for the comfort and satisfaction of Muslim visitors.

The research is primarily based on data collected from prominent urban areas such as Seoul, Itaewon, and Ansan, which are known for their diverse multicultural communities and popularity among Muslim tourists. This limited geographic scope means that rural or less-developed areas of South Korea have yet to be assessed in terms of their halal-friendliness and tourism infrastructure. Nonetheless, these urban centers serve as significant representation points for South Korea's overall acceptance and readiness to cater to Muslim travelers. The results underscore the need for policymakers and tourism industry stakeholders to address existing gaps, particularly in halal food availability and security, to strengthen South Korea's position as an attractive and inclusive halal-friendly destination. Additionally, future research should broaden its scope to encompass remote areas, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the country's halal tourism landscape and identifying opportunities for sustainable, culturally sensitive tourism development that benefits local communities and international visitors alike.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Muhamad Mustaqim: Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Funding Acquisition, Writing – Review & Editing. **Kharis Fadlullah Hana:** Conceptualization, Resources, Writing – Original Draft, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Review & Editing, Formal Analysis, Data Curation. **Masnaini Alimin:** Review & Editing, Formal Analysis, Data Curation

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