Beyond the Plate: Muslim Female Solo Travel, Sanctuary, and Spiritual Sovereignty in Contemporary Halal Tourism

Kittiya Keadplang[1*]

[1*]**Faculty of Liberal Arts, Panyapiwat Institute of Management, Thailand**

Corresponding Author; E-Mail: kitkoko27@gmail.com[1*]

Received: 2 March 2026 *Revised: 29 April 2026* *Accepted: 29 April 2026*

Abstract

The global tourism landscape is undergoing a significant transformation as Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs) emerge as a rapidly growing segment shaping contemporary travel demand. Despite their increasing economic and socio-cultural influence, dominant halal tourism models remain largely consumption-oriented, focusing primarily on dietary compliance and ritual provision. This study addresses this limitation by reconceptualizing Muslim female solo travel as a pursuit of sanctuary and spiritual sovereignty. Adopting a conceptual and interdisciplinary approach, this paper draws on literature from halal tourism, gender studies, feminist geography, and hospitality management. It proposes the Halal-Authenticity Framework, which positions halal tourism as an integrated value system based on four key dimensions: spiritual safety, gender-sensitive spatial design, faith-integrated autonomy, and emotional and psychological well-being. The analysis highlights the importance of privacy-oriented and gender-sensitive hospitality environments in enhancing perceived safety, trust, and overall travel experience. These elements are shown to influence destination preference and long-term loyalty among MFSTs. The study contributes to halal tourism scholarship by shifting the analytical focus from compliance-based services to experiential and value-based dimensions. It also provides strategic implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders, suggesting that halal authenticity can serve as a competitive advantage in developing inclusive, trust-based, and sustainable tourism systems.

Keywords: Muslim Female Solo Travel (MFST), Halal-Authenticity Framework, Sanctuary and Spiritual Sovereignty, Faith-Integrated Autonomy, Gender-Segregated Hospitality

Introduction

The global travel industry is undergoing a significant transformation that challenges conventional market segmentations and long-standing orientalist assumptions. According to the Mastercard–HalalTrip Muslim Women Traveller Report, Muslim women represent one of the fastest-growing segments in global tourism, with over 63 million travelers contributing more than USD 80 billion annually (Randeree, 2020; Tavakoli & Mura, 2021). Within this expanding market, a distinct group has emerged: Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs). Characterized by high levels of education, digital connectivity, and economic independence, these travelers are redefining the meaning of autonomy and mobility in contemporary tourism. Despite this shift, dominant halal tourism models remain constrained by what has been described as "Halal Myopia"—a reduction of halal to functional compliance, such as food and prayer facilities (Gan & Trupp, 2025). While such provisions remain essential, they are no longer sufficient to meet the evolving expectations of contemporary Muslim travelers. In parallel, global tourism trends increasingly emphasize privacy-centric experiences, emotional well-being, and personalized travel, reflecting a broader movement away from standardized mass tourism models toward value-driven and experience-oriented consumption. However, existing scholarship has largely failed to account for how these transformations intersect with the lived experiences of Muslim women traveling alone. In particular, the concept of *spiritual sovereignty*—understood as the ability to maintain and negotiate religious identity, autonomy, and personal boundaries within travel environments—remains under-theorized in tourism studies. Current frameworks tend to focus on risk, constraint, or cultural accommodation, offering limited insight into how faith functions as an enabling structure for independent mobility. To address this gap, this study introduces the concept of "Sanctuary Assets" as a form of strategic infrastructure that supports privacy, dignity, and faith-consistent autonomy. For MFSTs, gender-sensitive spaces—such as female-only facilities or privacy-oriented environments—are not optional amenities but essential conditions for safe and meaningful travel experiences. These spaces enable a transition from public visibility to private comfort, reducing the need for continuous self-regulation in mixed-gender environments. By situating MFSTs within broader

transformations in global tourism, this study advances the concept of Faith-Integrated Autonomy and positions Muslim female solo travel as a significant socio-cultural shift rather than a marginal phenomenon. In doing so, it establishes a foundation for rethinking halal tourism beyond compliance-based models toward a more holistic, privacy-centric, and value-driven framework.

Literature Review

The scholarship on Muslim tourism has undergone a gradual yet significant transition from a narrow focus on consumption-based halal compliance toward broader considerations of experience, ethics, and identity. Early studies predominantly framed halal tourism through functional requirements—such as halal food provision, prayer facilities, and alcohol-free environments—contributing to destination readiness but simultaneously limiting the conceptual scope of the field. Recent critical perspectives have begun to challenge this reductionist orientation, calling for more nuanced understandings of Muslim travelers as complex social actors whose motivations extend beyond ritual observance to encompass safety, dignity, emotional well-being, and self-determination (Oktadiana et al., 2016; Said et al., 2022). Within this evolving discourse, the experiences of Muslim women—particularly Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs)—remain strikingly under-theorized. Existing literature often situates Muslim women within family-centric or mobility-constrained frameworks, offering limited engagement with autonomy, faith-based agency, and gender-sensitive spatial needs. Moreover, dominant models of autonomy in tourism continue to privilege secular individualism, rendering invisible alternative forms of independence grounded in religious commitment.

To address these gaps, this literature review synthesizes interdisciplinary scholarship across halal tourism, gender studies, feminist geography, and hospitality research to reconceptualize Muslim female solo travel as a quest for sanctuary and spiritual sovereignty. By examining MFSTs through the lenses of faith-integrated autonomy, gender-segregated hospitality, and experiential authenticity, the review establishes the intellectual foundation

for advancing a Halal-Authenticity Framework—one that redefines halal tourism as a value-laden ecosystem centered on spiritual safety, ethical design, and empowered mobility.

Reframing Muslim Travel Studies: Beyond Consumption-Based Halal Tourism

The scholarly discourse on halal tourism has shifted increasingly from operational readiness to strategic economic positioning. Early studies primarily approached halal tourism as a service adaptation mechanism designed to accommodate religious compliance, emphasizing infrastructural adjustments such as halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and alcohol-free environments. While these measures facilitated market entry, they positioned halal tourism largely as a reactive operational response rather than a proactive driver of economic value creation. Recent literature, however, highlights the growing inadequacy of this compliance-based approach in addressing the evolving expectations of contemporary Muslim travelers. As Muslim tourism markets mature, scholars argue that halal tourism must be reconceptualized as a strategic economic asset capable of generating long-term destination competitiveness rather than short-term transactional gains. Battour and Ismail (2016) note that destinations offering culturally and ethically aligned experiences tend to benefit from higher satisfaction levels and repeat visitation, suggesting that value congruence increasingly outweighs price sensitivity in Muslim travel decision-making. This strategic reframing is particularly evident in studies examining high-value Muslim traveler segments, where trust, emotional security, and ethical respect emerge as critical determinants of destination loyalty. Rather than competing through volume-based tourism models, destinations that embed halal authenticity into their broader tourism governance structures are better positioned to cultivate trust-based differentiation. Such differentiation allows halal-authentic services to be positioned as premium offerings, thereby increasing per-capita expenditure and mitigating the volatility associated with mass tourism. From an economic perspective, the literature increasingly recognizes halal tourism as a contributor to destination resilience. Carbone (2017) argue that ethically grounded tourism models foster deeper relational ties between travelers and destinations, translating into extended length of stay, diversified spending patterns, and higher tolerance for premium pricing. These outcomes align with emerging research on experience-based economies, which emphasizes

emotional engagement and symbolic value as central drivers of sustainable tourism revenue. Within this evolving framework, Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs) occupy a critical yet underexplored position. Industry-oriented studies suggest that MFSTs demonstrate above-average expenditure patterns and higher demand for quality, privacy, and safety-oriented services. Their travel behavior reflects a shift toward value-driven consumption, where destinations that respect spiritual and personal boundaries are rewarded with repeat visitation and long-term brand loyalty (Osman et al., 2024). However, academic literature has yet to fully integrate MFSTs into economic analyses of halal tourism, often treating them as a cultural subset rather than as strategic market leaders.

This gap underscores the need to reposition halal tourism not merely as a niche market response, but as a nation-level economic strategy. By integrating halal authenticity—defined by emotional security, gender-sensitive design, and ethical hospitality—into destination planning and policy frameworks, governments can align tourism development with broader objectives of inclusive growth, international competitiveness, and sustainable economic diversification. In this context, halal tourism evolves from an operational checklist into a strategic platform for economic value creation, where trust, dignity, and cultural intelligence function as intangible assets driving long-term prosperity. This reconceptualization provides the intellectual foundation for positioning MFSTs as catalysts of next-generation tourism economies rather than peripheral consumers within existing market structures.

Muslim Female Travel (MFST) and the Absence of Autonomy-Centered Analysis

Scholarship on Muslim women in tourism has long been shaped by family-centric, collectivist, and mobility-constrained frameworks, frequently reinforcing orientalist assumptions that position Muslim women as dependent, risk-averse, or culturally restricted travelers (Al Riyami, 2021). Within this body of literature, women's travel decisions are often interpreted through household dynamics, patriarchal norms, or religious obligations, leaving limited analytical space for individual agency, self-determination, and autonomous mobility. As a result, Muslim women are predominantly framed as *accompanied travelers* rather than

as independent actors navigating global travel systems on their own terms. While more recent studies acknowledge the increasing visibility of Muslim women in international tourism, analytical approaches remain largely instrumental and derivative. Women are frequently examined as contributors to family decision-making units or as modifiers of male-led travel choices, rather than as primary decision-makers in their own right (Al-Hamarneh & Steiner, 2004). Even when independence is recognized, it is often framed through the lenses of *constraint negotiation*, *risk avoidance*, or *safety management*, implicitly positioning autonomy as conditional or incomplete. Parallel to academic discourse, industry-based research paints a markedly different picture. Reports such as the *Mastercard–HalalTrip Muslim Women Traveller Report* document the rapid emergence of Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs) as a distinct and influential segment. These women are characterized as highly educated, digitally literate, economically independent, and globally connected. Their travel motivations extend beyond leisure toward self-development, spiritual reflection, and experiential authenticity. Despite this evidence, academic engagement with MFSTs remains fragmented and under-theorized, often treating solo travel as an exception rather than as a meaningful socio-cultural phenomenon. A critical limitation of existing research lies in its reliance on secular-liberal models of autonomy, which implicitly equate independence with detachment from religious or cultural frameworks. Within such paradigms, religious observance is frequently interpreted as a constraint on women's mobility rather than as a potential source of confidence, moral clarity, and self-regulation. This analytical bias obscures alternative forms of autonomy grounded in faith, ethical coherence, and spiritual intentionality. Consequently, the decision of Muslim women to travel solo is often misread as either resistance to tradition or deviation from normative religious practice.

This conceptual gap points to a deeper theoretical absence: the lack of an autonomy-centered framework capable of explaining why Muslim women choose solo travel and how faith operates not as a barrier, but as an enabling structure for agency. Emerging feminist and postcolonial scholarship suggest that autonomy should be understood as contextual, relational, and culturally embedded, rather than universally secular or individualistic. Applying such perspectives to MFSTs reveals solo travel as an act

of *self-authorship*—a deliberate negotiation of mobility, belief, and identity within global tourism spaces. Addressing this absence requires a shift from viewing MFSTs through lenses of vulnerability or constraint toward recognizing them as agents of epistemic and behavioral change. By centering autonomy as faith-integrated rather than faith-opposed, the literature can move beyond reductive narratives and better capture the lived realities of Muslim women who redefine independence through spiritually grounded mobility. This reconceptualization is essential for advancing theoretical clarity and for positioning MFSTs as key actors shaping the future of halal tourism and global travel governance.

Sanctuary and Spiritual Sovereignty: Travel as a Faith-Based Safe Space

The notion of sanctuary within tourism studies has traditionally been examined through the lenses of wellness tourism, retreat tourism, and psychological escape, where emphasis is placed on relaxation, mental restoration, and temporary detachment from everyday stressors (Smith et al., 2009). While these perspectives contribute valuable insights into the therapeutic functions of travel, they largely assume secular subjectivities, treating sanctuary as an emotionally neutral or universally accessible space. Such assumptions limit the applicability of existing frameworks for travelers whose experiences of safety, comfort, and restoration are deeply intertwined with religious identity and moral practice. For Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs), sanctuary extends far beyond leisure or self-indulgence. Drawing on feminist geography and religious sociology, sanctuary can be reconceptualized as a faith-based spatial condition that enables spiritual sovereignty—the capacity of individuals to practice, preserve, and negotiate religious identity on their own terms within unfamiliar or culturally diverse environments (Hopkins, 2009). In this context, sanctuary is not merely a physical location but a relational space where autonomy, belief, and embodied experience intersect. Within Western-dominated tourism discourse, gender-segregated spaces—including female-only spas, women-only hotel floors, or private wellness facilities—are frequently mischaracterized as restrictive or regressive. However, feminist scholars challenge this interpretation by emphasizing that such spaces function as liberatory infrastructures, particularly in contexts where privacy and bodily autonomy are prerequisites for psychological safety and emotional well-being (Valentine, 2007). For

women navigating public spaces marked by surveillance, cultural negotiation, or the male gaze, gender-sensitive environments provide the conditions necessary for relaxation, self-care, and self-expression.

In the lived experiences of MFSTs, sanctuary spaces operate as Safe Space Catalysts, facilitating a temporary withdrawal from external expectations and continuous identity management. These spaces allow women to transition from a public posture of cultural vigilance to a private state of spiritual and emotional ease, thereby reclaiming agency over both body and belief. Sanctuary, in this sense, becomes a mechanism through which MFSTs assert control over their mobility and religious practice without compromise. By reframing sanctuary as a faith-based safe space rather than a secular retreat, this body of literature highlights the central role of spiritual sovereignty in shaping MFST travel experiences. This reconceptualization provides a critical foundation for understanding how sanctuary-oriented design and gender-sensitive hospitality practices contribute not only to individual well-being but also to broader transformations in halal tourism and ethical travel governance.

Faith-Integrated Autonomy and the Reconfiguration of Female Independence

Conventional tourism scholarship has predominantly conceptualized autonomy through the lens of secular individualism, defining freedom as the absence of religious, cultural, or social constraints (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Within this paradigm, autonomy is often equated with detachment from tradition and the prioritization of personal choice over collective or moral obligations. While such interpretations reflect dominant Western epistemologies, they inadequately capture the lived realities of travelers whose identities and decision-making processes are deeply embedded in faith-based value systems. For Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs), autonomy is not achieved by distancing oneself from religious commitments, but rather through the integration of faith into mobility practices. The concept of Faith-Integrated Autonomy challenges the binary opposition between tradition and modernity by recognizing religious observance as a source of confidence, moral clarity, and emotional security. In this framework, faith functions not as

a restrictive force but as an enabling structure that guides decision-making, reduces uncertainty, and provides a coherent ethical compass during solo travel. This reconceptualization aligns with postcolonial feminist scholarship that critiques Western universalist models of empowerment for their tendency to impose singular definitions of freedom and agency (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Such critiques emphasize that autonomy is contextual, relational, and culturally grounded, shaped by local meanings and spiritual commitments rather than by abstract ideals of individualism. Applying this perspective to MFSTs reveals solo travel as a form of self-authorship, where women actively negotiate mobility, belief, and identity without perceiving these elements as mutually exclusive. Importantly, Faith-Integrated Autonomy reframes independence as a value-consistent practice rather than a symbolic rejection of tradition. MFSTs craft travel experiences that align movement with moral coherence, selecting destinations, services, and spatial arrangements that respect their spiritual priorities. This approach enables them to exercise agency while maintaining continuity with their religious identities, thereby redefining independence on their own epistemic terms. Within tourism studies, this perspective calls for a fundamental shift away from deficit-based interpretations that view religious commitment as a barrier to female mobility. Instead, MFSTs should be understood as trendsetters who model alternative pathways to independence—pathways that integrate faith, autonomy, and global engagement (Kaufer & Al-Malki, 2009). Recognizing Faith-Integrated Autonomy as a legitimate and influential form of independence is essential for advancing theoretical clarity and for informing hospitality and tourism practices that genuinely support empowered, diverse, and ethically grounded travel experiences.

Gender-Segregated Hospitality as Ethical and Strategic Innovation

Hospitality scholarship has increasingly recognized the strategic importance of privacy-centric and inclusive design, particularly within luxury, wellness, and experience-based tourism sectors. Such studies emphasize personalization, emotional comfort, and experiential differentiation as key drivers of customer satisfaction and competitive advantage. However, despite this growing attention to inclusivity, gender-segregated

hospitality remains marginal within mainstream tourism research, often framed as a culturally specific or niche accommodation rather than as a scalable and strategic innovation. This marginalization reflects broader normative assumptions within global hospitality discourse, where mixed-gender spaces are treated as the default indicator of openness and modernity. As a result, gender-segregated services are frequently misunderstood as restrictive or exclusionary, rather than as intentional design choices grounded in ethical sensitivity and user-centered thinking. This framing obscures the strategic value of gender-sensitive spatial arrangements for travelers whose sense of safety, dignity, and comfort is closely tied to privacy and bodily autonomy. For Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs), gender-segregated hospitality is neither peripheral nor symbolic. It represents a core service innovation that integrates physical safety, emotional security, and respect for religious and personal boundaries (Nisha & Cheung, 2025). Facilities such as female-only hotel floors, women-only wellness spaces, or gender-segregated recreational areas enable MFSTs to engage fully with destination offerings without continuous self-monitoring or identity negotiation (Nisha, F. N. 2023). In this context, gender-segregated hospitality functions as an enabling infrastructure, facilitating confident mobility rather than limiting access. From an ethical perspective, accommodating gender-sensitive spatial needs moves hospitality practice beyond surface-level inclusivity toward ethical hospitality, where respect for belief systems and individual dignity becomes central to service design. Scholars increasingly argue that ethical hospitality is not merely a moral imperative but a source of strategic advantage, fostering trust, emotional attachment, and long-term customer loyalty. By offering environments where consent, privacy, and psychological well-being are prioritized, hospitality providers strengthen relational bonds with travelers who value integrity and authenticity in their travel experiences (Keadplang, K. 2025).

This repositioning highlights MFSTs as primary catalysts for the evolution of hospitality standards. Their preferences challenge conventional design norms and encourage the industry to rethink inclusivity through the lenses of trust, consent, and emotional safety. Rather than constraining market reach, gender-segregated hospitality expands the scope of service innovation by addressing unmet needs within high-value and

growing traveler segments. Recognizing gender-sensitive hospitality as both an ethical commitment and a strategic asset is therefore essential for advancing inclusive, competitive, and future-oriented tourism ecosystems.

Toward a Halal-Authenticity Framework

Synthesizing the preceding strands of scholarship reveals the fundamental inadequacy of existing halal tourism models in explaining the motivations, expectations, and lived experiences of Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs) (Adeimi, J. 2023). While prior studies have progressively expanded the scope of halal tourism beyond basic religious compliance, the literature remains fragmented across operational, cultural, and experiential dimensions. As a result, current frameworks struggle to account for the interdependence of faith, autonomy, emotional safety, and spatial design that increasingly defines contemporary Muslim female travel. In response to this conceptual gap, this study advances the Halal-Authenticity Framework, which reconceptualizes halal tourism as an integrated value system rather than a set of discrete services. The framework is grounded in four interrelated pillars: spiritual safety, gender-sensitive spatial design, faith-integrated autonomy, and emotional and psychological well-being. Together, these dimensions move halal tourism analysis beyond physical compliance toward a more holistic understanding of spiritual legitimacy and experiential trust (Ali & Jungudo, n.d.). First, spiritual safety captures the extent to which destinations provide environments where MFSTs can maintain religious practices without anxiety, surveillance, or moral compromise. Second, gender-sensitive spatial design emphasizes the role of privacy-centric and gender-segregated spaces as enabling infrastructures that support dignity, comfort, and bodily autonomy. Third, faith-integrated autonomy reframes independence as a culturally and spiritually grounded form of agency, challenging secular-centric assumptions that position religion as antithetical to freedom. Finally, emotional and psychological well-being highlights sanctuary-oriented experiences as central to travel satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of trust and affective security in destination choice and loyalty. By integrating these pillars, the Halal-Authenticity Framework positions MFSTs not as niche consumers requiring accommodation, but as architects of a new tourism paradigm that prioritizes ethical sensitivity, relational trust, and value

congruence. This reconceptualization shifts analytical attention from what destinations provide to *how travelers experience legitimacy, safety, and respect* within tourism systems (Rahman et al., 2017).

Theoretically, the framework contributes to halal tourism literature by offering a unifying lens that bridges gender studies, religious sociology, and hospitality management. Strategically, it provides a foundation for future empirical research examining traveler behavior, destination competitiveness, and service innovation. At the policy level, the framework supports the development of tourism governance models that align economic growth with ethical responsibility and inclusive mobility. In this sense, halal authenticity emerges not as a static label, but as a dynamic and future-oriented standard shaping the next generation of global tourism development.

Discussion

This study advances the Halal-Authenticity Framework as a conceptual response to the evolving expectations of Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs), positioning this segment as a significant driver of transformation in contemporary tourism and service economies. Moving beyond compliance-based halal models, the findings indicate that MFSTs prioritize spiritual safety, gender-sensitive spatial design, and faith-integrated autonomy as key determinants of destination trust and loyalty. These dimensions suggest that halal tourism should be understood not only as cultural accommodation but as a value-based system with strategic economic implications.

1. Reframing Halal Tourism as a Strategic Economic Asset

The findings suggest that halal tourism requires reconceptualization from an operational checklist to a strategic economic asset at the national level. Destinations that integrate halal authenticity—defined by privacy, emotional security, and ethical sensitivity—are more likely to attract high-value and repeat visitors. Existing industry practices, such as Muslim-friendly hotel certification programs and privacy-oriented service design in

destinations like Malaysia and the UAE, demonstrate how faith-sensitive services can enhance visitor trust and satisfaction.

This shift reflects a broader movement away from standardized mass tourism models toward experience-driven and value-oriented tourism. Rather than competing on price or volume, destinations can differentiate themselves through trust-based positioning, increasing per-capita expenditure and long-term loyalty.

2. Sanctuary-Oriented Design as a Catalyst for Destination Competitiveness

The study highlights the strategic importance of sanctuary-oriented design in shaping MFST travel experiences. Gender-sensitive facilities—including women-only spa services, female-designated accommodation floors, and privacy-oriented wellness spaces—function as infrastructures that support psychological safety and comfort. For example, selected resorts in the Middle East and Southeast Asia have introduced women-only wellness zones and gender-segregated recreational spaces, allowing Muslim women to participate fully in leisure activities without compromising personal or religious boundaries. Such practices illustrate how sanctuary-oriented design can be operationalized in real-world contexts. From a management perspective, these interventions are scalable. Hotels and tourism providers can implement gender-sensitive solutions through spatial zoning, time-based access, or service customization without requiring extensive structural changes. This adaptability is particularly relevant for emerging destinations seeking to enhance competitiveness in the halal tourism market.

3. Faith-Integrated Autonomy and the Redefinition of Travel Independence

The findings challenge conventional assumptions that associate autonomy with secular individualism. For MFSTs, autonomy is closely linked to the ability to maintain religious practices while engaging in independent travel. This perspective reframes independence as a value-consistent form of agency rather than a departure from tradition. Recognizing faith-integrated autonomy has implications for tourism governance and destination branding. Policy frameworks that incorporate principles of dignity, consent, and

cultural sensitivity can better support diverse forms of mobility. This shift enables Muslim women to be positioned as active decision-makers within global tourism systems rather than as passive or constrained travelers.

4. Strategic Roadmap for Policymakers and Industry Stakeholders

To operationalize the Halal-Authenticity Framework, this study proposes a three-tier strategic approach:

- **Policy Level:** Integrate halal-authentic indicators—such as privacy, safety, and gender-sensitive design—into national tourism standards and development strategies.
- **Industry Level:** Encourage the adoption of faith-sensitive service models through certification systems, staff training, and public–private partnerships.
- **Destination Level:** Develop branding strategies that emphasize trust, emotional comfort, and ethical hospitality, moving beyond food-based representations of halal tourism.

This multi-level alignment enables halal authenticity to function as a coordinated ecosystem rather than isolated initiatives.

5. Implications for Sustainable Tourism and Inclusive Growth

By centering MFSTs as agents of change, the Halal-Authenticity Framework contributes to broader discussions on sustainable and inclusive tourism. Sanctuary-oriented and faith-sensitive practices promote longer stays, diversified spending across local economies, and stronger community engagement. Moreover, they align with global sustainability agendas by fostering respectful cultural exchange and socially responsible service design. Importantly, this framework supports women-led mobility as a form of economic participation, reinforcing gender equity within the tourism sector while generating tangible economic benefits. As MFSTs continue to influence travel trends, destinations that embrace halal authenticity are likely to emerge as leaders in ethical, resilient, and future-oriented tourism development.

6. Strategic Contribution and Forward Outlook

The findings contribute to broader discussions on sustainable and inclusive tourism by highlighting how faith-sensitive and privacy-oriented practices can support longer stays, diversified spending, and stronger engagement with local communities. These outcomes align with global sustainability priorities, including responsible tourism development and social inclusion. In addition, the framework underscores the role of women's mobility in economic participation. By supporting environments that enable safe and independent travel, destinations can contribute to gender-inclusive growth while strengthening their tourism value proposition.

Conclusion

This study set out to challenge the prevailing consumption-centric paradigm of halal tourism by foregrounding the lived experiences and agency of Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs). Through an integrative review of interdisciplinary scholarship, the paper demonstrates that MFSTs are not merely an emerging niche market, but trendsetters redefining the future of global travel through their demand for sanctuary, dignity, and spiritual sovereignty. By advancing the Halal-Authenticity Framework, this research reconceptualizes halal tourism as a value-laden ecosystem rather than a checklist of religious compliance. The findings reveal that spiritual safety, gender-sensitive spatial design, faith-integrated autonomy, and emotional well-being are not peripheral preferences but strategic determinants of destination trust, loyalty, and economic sustainability. In this context, gender-segregated hospitality and sanctuary-oriented design emerge not as restrictive practices, but as liberatory infrastructures that enable empowered mobility while preserving religious and personal integrity. From a strategic perspective, the study contributes a practical roadmap for policymakers and industry stakeholders to transform halal authenticity into a competitive economic asset. Destinations that adopt this framework can move beyond volume-driven tourism models toward trust-based differentiation, capturing higher-value, repeat travelers within one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism economy. Moreover, by positioning Muslim women as autonomous decision-

makers rather than protected dependents, the framework aligns halal tourism development with broader goals of inclusive growth, ethical governance, and sustainable development.

In conclusion, this paper argues that the future of halal tourism lies beyond the plate—in the deliberate cultivation of sanctuaries that honor spiritual sovereignty and reimagine autonomy on culturally grounded terms. By doing so, the Halal-Authenticity Framework offers not only a new conceptual lens for academic inquiry, but also a blueprint for next-generation tourism governance, where faith, gender, and economic resilience converge.

Policy–Industry–Practice Matrix

To translate the Halal-Authenticity Framework into actionable outcomes, this study proposes a Policy–Industry–Practice Matrix that aligns conceptual insights with strategic implementation. The matrix illustrates how halal authenticity can function as an integrated ecosystem across governance, service design, and destination-level practice. By positioning Muslim Female Solo Travelers (MFSTs) at the center of strategic planning, the framework highlights pathways through which ethical sensitivity, gender-aware design, and experiential trust can be operationalized to generate sustainable tourism competitiveness and inclusive economic growth.

Level	Strategic Focus	Key Actions	Expected Outcomes
Policy (National / Regional)	Halal Authenticity as Economic Strategy	• Integrate halal-authentic indicators (privacy, gender sensitivity, safety) into national tourism standards • Introduce incentives for women-centered and faith-sensitive facilities	

Level	Strategic Focus	Key Actions	Expected Outcomes
• Embed MFSTs into national destination branding • Stronger international trust • Enhanced destination competitiveness	• Increased high-value tourism revenue		
Industry (Hospitality & Tourism)	Sanctuary-Oriented Service Design	• Develop female-only zones, time-based gender segregation, and privacy-enhancing technologies	
• Train staff in faith-sensitive and gender-aware service protocols • Shift from food-centric halal branding to experience-based narratives • Longer stays and repeat visits • Brand differentiation in global markets	• Higher customer loyalty		
Practice (Destination / Community)	Experiential Trust & Emotional Safety	• Design safe mobility routes and women-friendly attractions	

Level	Strategic Focus	Key Actions	Expected Outcomes
• Partner with local women-led businesses and wellness providers • Offer curated sanctuary experiences (wellness, retreat, self-care) • Community engagement • Sustainable and inclusive tourism growth	• Local economic circulation		

This matrix demonstrates that halal authenticity achieves its greatest impact when policy alignment, industry innovation, and community-based practice operate in synergy. Rather than functioning as isolated initiatives, these interconnected actions enable destinations to transform ethical commitment into measurable economic value. By adopting this integrated approach, policymakers and stakeholders can strengthen trust, enhance destination resilience, and position halal-authentic tourism as a future-oriented driver of sustainable and inclusive development.

New Knowledge

This study contributes new knowledge by reconceptualizing Muslim Female Solo Travel (MFST) as a transformative force in contemporary tourism rather than a niche market segment. Moving beyond consumption-based interpretations of halal tourism, the research introduces the **Halal-Authenticity Strategic Framework**, which reframes halal tourism as a value-laden ecosystem grounded in spiritual safety, emotional well-being, gender-sensitive spatial design, and faith-integrated autonomy.



A key theoretical contribution lies in the articulation of **Sanctuary and Spiritual Sovereignty** as novel constructs in tourism studies. The findings demonstrate that gender-segregated and privacy-centric hospitality spaces function as liberatory infrastructures that enable Muslim women to exercise autonomy, self-care, and religious agency during solo travel. Furthermore, the concept of **Faith-Integrated Autonomy** challenges dominant Western-centric notions of independence by illustrating how religious commitment actively facilitates confidence, mobility, and decision-making. Collectively, these contributions reposition Muslim female solo travelers as trendsetters shaping next-generation tourism governance and provide strategic insights for policymakers and industry stakeholders seeking to foster ethical, inclusive, and economically resilient tourism development.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. *American Anthropologist, 104*(3), 783–790. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2002.104.3.783

Adeimi, J. (2023). Critical femininities on shores: Unveiling gendered realities within ladies-only resorts in Lebanon. *Arab Economic and Business Journal, 15*(2), Article 5. https://doi.org/10.38039/2214-4625.1034

Al Riyami, H. (2021). The perceived risks of Western women towards traveling to Oman. In N. Slak Valek & H. Almuhrzi (Eds.), *Women in tourism in Asian Muslim countries* (pp. 131–151). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4757-1_9

Al-Hamarneh, A., & Steiner, C. (2004). Islamic tourism: Rethinking the strategies of tourism development in the Arab world after September 11, 2001. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, 24*(1), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1215/1089201X-24-1-175

Ali, B., & Jungudo, U. M. (n.d.). *Towards holistic care: Opportunities, challenges, and future prospects of the ibadah-friendly hospital*. Retrieved December 20, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Bello-Ali-2/publication/397642739_Towards_Holistic_Care1/links/691897201bb5f2388c1e9236/Towards-Holistic-Care1.pdf

Battour, M., & Ismail, M. N. (2016). Halal tourism: Concepts, practises, challenges and future. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 19*, 150–154. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2015.12.008

Carbone, F. (2017). International tourism and cultural diplomacy: A new conceptual approach towards global mutual understanding and peace through tourism. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 65*(1), 61–74. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/317742834_International_tourism_and_

cultural_diplomacy_A_new_conceptual_approach_towards_global_mutual_understanding_and_peace_through_tourism

Gan, J.-E., & Trupp, A. (2025). Deciphering Malaysia's tourism self-image: Insights from industry. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1–18. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2025.2487619

Hopkins, P. E. (2009). Women, men, positionalities and emotion: Doing feminist geographies of religion. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 8*(1), 1–17. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/229053405_Women_men_positionalities_and_emotion_Doing_feminist_geographies_of_religion

Kaufer, D., & Al-Malki, A. M. (2009). A first for women in the kingdom: Arab/West representations of female trendsetters in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research, 2*(1–2), 113–133. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354062340_A_'first'_for_women_in_the_kingdom_Arabwest_representations_of_female_trendsetters_in_Saudi_Arabia

Keadplang, K. (2025). Muslim-friendly luxury travel in Thailand: Redefining high-value tourism through cultural sensitivity and service innovation. *Thailand Islamic Journal, 2*(1), 56–72. https://so16.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/TIJ/article/view/1866

Nisha, F., & Cheung, C. (2025). Female Muslim tourism and familial caretaking: Intersection of gender and religion. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research, 49*(6), 1109–1124. https://doi.org/10.1177/10963480241289535

Nisha, F. N. (2023). *Tourism, gender and religion: Female Muslims' perceptions of international tourism—An intersectional perspective* (Publication No. 200/12770) [Doctoral dissertation, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University]. https://theses.lib.polyu.edu.hk/handle/200/12770

Oktadiana, H., Pearce, P. L., & Chon, K. (2016). Muslim travellers' needs: What don't we know? *Tourism Management Perspectives, 20*, 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2016.08.004

Osman, I., Junid, J., Ali, H., Buyong, S. Z., Syed Marzuki, S. Z., & Othman, N. (2024). Consumption values, image and loyalty of Malaysian travellers towards Muslim-friendly accommodation recognition (MFAR). *Journal of Islamic Marketing, 15*(3), 682–719. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-09-2022-0245

Rahman, M. K., Zailani, S., & Musa, G. (2017). What travel motivational factors influence Muslim tourists towards MMITD? *Journal of Islamic Marketing, 8*(1), 48–73. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-05-2015-0030

Randeree, K. (2020). Demography, demand and devotion: Driving the Islamic economy. *Journal of Islamic Marketing, 11*(2), 301–319. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-06-2018-0102

Said, M. F., Adham, K. A., Muhamad, N. S., & Sulaiman, S. (2022). Exploring halal tourism in Muslim-minority countries: Muslim travellers' needs and concerns. *Journal of Islamic Marketing, 13*(4), 824–842. https://doi.org/10.1108/JIMA-07-2020-0202

Smith, M., Puczkó, L., & Rátz, T. (2009). Twenty-three districts in search of a city: Budapest—The capitaless capital? In R. Maitland & B. Ritchie (Eds.), *City tourism: National capital perspectives* (1st ed., pp. 201–213). CABI. https://doi.org/10.1079/9781845935467.0201

Tavakoli, R., & Mura, P. (2021). Muslim women travellers' constraints: A critical review. In N. Slak Valek & H. Almuhrzi (Eds.), *Women in tourism in Asian Muslim countries* (pp. 25–40). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4757-1_3

Valentine, G. (2007). Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography. *The Professional Geographer, 59*(1), 10–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9272.2007.00587.x

Wilson, E., & Harris, C. (2006). Meaningful travel: Women, independent travel and the search for self and meaning. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 54*(2), 161–172.