



MUSLIMS ON THE ROAD

Halal travel in and from Malaysia



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ABSTRACT

This study on Halal travel explores the modern travel lifestyles of the newly emerging Muslim middle classes. Focussing on Malaysia, I will show how Halal travel is constructed by both authorities, such as the state and businesses, and by Muslim travellers themselves. Using the cases of travelling in Malaysia and Japan, this study will touch upon subjects such as Halal certification, Shariah compliant hotels, online Islamic travel networks, and gendered issues and difficulties in the context of travelling.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis about Muslims travelling, came initially from my own desire to travel around the world. However, as a Muslim woman, before I was able to set out on the road I had to make some preparations and considerations relating to my religion and gender, apart from conventional considerations of trip planning, such as budget, location and safety. First of all, I had to check for the availability of food, which in relation to my religion had to be *Halal*¹. I had to check where I could pray and where I would not be shunned because I was a Muslim. Then, I had to make sure the destination was safe enough for a woman to stay and explore on her own, since I was planning to go on my own. In addition, I had to consider whether my family would approve of me going on a trip on my own as a woman. On this last question, I could already think of an answer, since I knew from my last adventure, a four month minor in Istanbul, that many of my family members were not very pleased. My grandmother in particular, reacted disapproving towards my parents, about why they would let me, a girl, go and live (temporarily) alone somewhere else. Similar remarks were made by my eldest brother, who told me that he would have ‘never ever’ allowed me to go there on my own, and that it simply was not right; first, because it was not safe for a woman to be on her own in another country or place, and second because also the religion would not permit this because of the same reasons. Thus, I would end up frustrated, but then remembering I was supported by my father, who was the ‘ultimate decision-maker’ at home, I could sleep in peace again. Sure, I could get permission from my father to travel, but it would not go without a session of interrogation which was most of the time mixed with worry on his behalf and questions about why I was always wanting to go on the road. Which made me think, why indeed do I want to go? What are my motives? What do I aim to achieve? These questions extended themselves when I started this study. Especially after I found a website about ‘Halal travel’ for Muslims. I found the site when I was planning a trip with a friend, and I had to take into account my religion, as mentioned above. This website consisted of some writers and bloggers who provided Muslim travellers with a list of places where one could find Halal food and prayer facilities, accommodation which were Muslim-friendly, destinations with so-called religious heritage and many more Islam related travel tips. So how then, is travelling different for Muslims? What does Halal travel entail? And, what does it mean to travel for a Muslim? These questions became especially apparent since the 1970’s economic development in Malaysia (Rudnyckyj, 2013), but also elsewhere, when Muslims all over the world became

¹ *Halal* means permissible in Arabic and refers to everything which is permissible according to Islam.

richer and travelling among Muslims became more frequent (Rimmari & Ibrahim, 1992). While the concepts of Islam and travelling together might initially make us think of the pilgrimage to Mecca, now Muslims travelled all over the world taking into account their special religious needs. Suddenly in many parts of the (non-Muslim) world, the needs and demands of Muslims were taken seriously. Many Muslim-friendly services were developed in such countries, perhaps the most notable being Halal certified food. I remember the time during a High School trip to London, when my classmates indulged in warm hotdogs from a small food stall in the middle of the street. It was out of question to me to buy one myself, since this was London and the meat would probably not be permissible to eat for a Muslim. Sad, hungry, and a bit jealous, I just watched my classmates enjoying their snacks when the owner of the food stall called me over. I was wearing a hijab, which had probably made it apparent that I was a Muslim and therefore did not join my classmates, and my gloomy gaze had probably made it apparent that I would love to take part in the feast. 'It's Halal!' he exclaimed. I was surprised by this, why would a hotdog stall in the middle of London sell Halal meat? The owner probably saw my distrust where after he ducked in his stall and got back up with the carton of his hotdogs, which had a large visible Halal certification on it. 'See, it's Halal' he said. I was surprised, and truly glad. Having Halal food available in a foreign country where I was not familiar anyone or anyplace, felt reassuring.

I heard many times before, from personal communications and experiences, but also from the courses I took, that Malaysia was renowned for developing and providing Halal services. Earlier I had heard about Shariah² compliant hotels in Turkey. These hotels were supposedly made for Muslims who would want their holidays to be completely Shariah compliant (Figure 1). It was especially popular in Turkey among women wearing the hijab, as these hotels were some of the few hotels offering gender segregated swimming pools and beaches.

² Islamic laws, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Hadith is the often written collection of the prophet Muhammad's sayings and doings.



Figure 1. Advertisement for a Shariah compliant hotel in Turkey. Translated as: ‘The destination for a conservative vacation: Bodrum!’.

At the same time, there was a lot of public critique towards these kinds of Shariah compliant hotels involving issues about the superficiality of the religious components of such services.

Of course, when speaking (or writing) about ‘Muslim travellers’ or Muslims in general, we should not forget that there is a huge diversity within this group. Although there is consensus about the basic concepts such as the unity of God (*Allah*), the acknowledgment of His prophet Muhammad, and the *Five Pillars*³ of Islam, there is diversity about other matter. The biggest difference is among the two branches of Muslims; the *Sunni* and *Shia*, where the majority of Muslims is part of the Sunni branch (Jafari & Scott, 2014). The Sunni branch can further be divided into four *Madhabs*⁴: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’i, Hanbali. These schools are not in dispute, nor do they disapprove of each other’s doctrines. They share the general rules and obligations, but may differ in matter concerned with reasoning and interpretation. Although it is not a specific rule, each madhab dominates a certain region in the world. The Shafi’i madhab dominates Malaysia. Therefore, based on these diversities, opinions and (some) habits may differ among Muslims. Aside from diversity among madhabs, diversity is possible even within madhabs. These may come from various factors such as, upbringing, personal interpretations and opinions.

³ The Five Pillars are five obligations for Muslims: 1. The *Shadah*: declaring ones faith by acknowledging Allah as being the only God, and Muhammad to be His prophet and messenger; 2. *Salah*: performing prayers five times per day; 3. *Zakat*: donating a particular percentage of one’s income as charity; 4. *Sawm*: the obligatory fasting during the month of Ramadan; and 5. *Hajj*: making a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in one’s life (Jafari & Scott, 2014).

⁴ Schools of Islam

Research question

With this information and my questions in mind, I decided to go on fieldwork to do an explorative study on Halal travel. With the main, overarching question being **What does Halal travel currently entail with Muslim tourists travelling in and from Malaysia?** I am interested in how travelling is being kept Halal, what measures are being taken, how preparation is done by Muslim travellers. With ‘being kept Halal’ I mean how religious practices and requirements that are being performed normally, are being continued during travels. This continued performance could be through individual efforts, or through external efforts in the form of Islamic services provided by the state or private businesses.

Also, in case of Malaysia, but to some extent also in other countries, what is being offered in terms of Halal (tourism) services? And what is expected or demanded by Muslim travellers in terms of Halal services? Also, how do these travellers look at the current Halal services that are being offered in Malaysia and in other (non-Muslim) countries? Another interesting question is what motivates Muslims to travel anyway, and which factors are shaping these motivations. Apart from these questions, from my own personal experience and curiosity arises the question what gendered difficulties and constraints Muslim women experience while travelling? Solo travelling for women can be a challenge overall, but with the intersection between being a Muslim and being a woman, this challenge can be doubled.

Methods

During my fieldwork I did both online and ‘offline’ research, that is, using the conventional fieldwork methods. Doing online research is a fairly new and efficient way of collecting data. I thought about collecting data from the internet, when I saw the travel websites and social media accounts, and read forums and blogs where people engaged in discussions and shared their thoughts and opinions which I regarded as valuable information for myself. I could derive a lot of information and gain an understanding of the current ideas and popular trends, by searching through the Internet. Besides, the online space is becoming a very important space for social interactions. And although using online methods for data collection, will not allow one to be present and engage with the interlocutors physically, following online patterns of activity can still provide vast amount of information (Hine, 2015). Similarly, questions about whether interlocutors will display their ‘true self’, were raised during group discussions with my classmates. Do interlocutors behave and react in the same way online as they would offline? However, Hine (2015) explains that the Internet is not a different space of social

interaction. Offline and online identity do have recognizable continuity. Furthermore, even though one would present a ‘different’ online self than the ‘offline’ self, an online identity should not be considered a ‘false’ identity, since this identity is still produced by an individual. Another interesting note is that the Internet, especially social media, is an important sphere for young Muslims to (re)style and solidify their Muslim identity (Slama & Barendregt, 2018), which is all the more reason to carefully study it.

I used the Internet to gain data from websites, blogs, forums, and social media accounts, where individuals shared and discussed their opinions and thoughts. Such online platforms are very useful to gather data from, because there is access to information from all over the world. Especially because it was difficult to catch travellers and talk to them physically, the Internet has been a useful tool for me to talk to travellers. Many travellers were ‘on the road’, thus aside from initial, casual talk, I did not have enough time to ask for and receive more in depth information. Therefore, I asked some of them for their e-mail addresses and social media accounts, to send them questionnaires through the mail and chat with them through social media. These were Muslims (most of them being women), who were travelling or had travelled some time during their life. And although, not many responded to my ‘online requests’ (which could be a disadvantage of using online methods for interrogation), I still received some interesting answers. I also visited websites for Muslim travellers⁵ where posts are submitted about, for example, where to find Halal food or prayer facilities, or about mosques and other Islamic sites in given countries. I also read and participated in discussions on forums, where I sometimes participated in discussions or asked questions. I also looked through different social media accounts of travellers and travel accounts, or other accounts with Islamic content.

An interesting phenomenon on the Internet is the meme-culture on social media platforms. Studies on memes and their implications on audiences are gaining popularity, as it is suggested that memes represent ‘collective identities and shared experiences’ and may display ‘ongoing debates in mainstream public’ (Ask & Abidin, 2018). Under the guise of mere jokes and entertainment, creating, ‘liking’, and sharing memes is an effective and fun way to express distress or problems. The humour is derived from identifying and relating with the depicted issues, although most of the time memes are exaggerations of the reality. In fact, this exaggeration is the reason why memes are found to be hilarious and thus the reason for their popularity (Ask & Abidin, 2018). With this in mind, I have looked up some memes on

⁵ Havehalalwilltravel.com

Muslim social media accounts to gain more insight in ongoing issues and/or debates among Muslims. The majority of the social media users involved in such pages, are members of the young Muslim middle classes, which allowed me to zoom in on their current issues and debates, as the comment section of memes is usually a ‘battleground’ for dispute.

In the field, which was the travel destinations in Malaysia and Japan, I mainly collected data by participatory observation. I participated a lot in travelling myself, usually with other Muslim travellers, which allowed me to observe how they acted during, and experienced travelling. I travelled with both male and female companions, all of them being Muslims. Information was derived mainly from casual talk. Occasionally, I used informal interviews to directly ask questions about my subject matter.

The field and interlocutors

I started my fieldwork at the National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, UKM). Thanks to my supervisor and his connections at this university, from the UKM I was able to sort out where I could stay and what I should do. I made my first connections here, who would help me to move in to my room in Kuala Lumpur, where I would stay for the next three months. I chose an apartment in Kuala Lumpur, because it would allow me to get in touch with tourists and would be an easier spot to travel from to other destinations. My roommates were all girls: a Mauritanian Muslim student of 19 years old (hijab veiled); a Malaysian Muslim girl in her twenties working at the bank, and another Indian Malaysian girl, also working. My landlord was a Syrian refugee, who came to Malaysia where he further studied in Islamic studies and worked. My friend from the UKM, was a student and research assistant at the KITA (Institute of Ethnic Studies) from the UKM, Malaysian and roughly my age. We met when a professor assigned him to help me around with practical stuff I still had to arrange (e.g. accommodation). He ended up helping with more than practical stuff, providing a lot of in-depth information about my subject and also accompanied me during many of my travels, including my trip to Japan. In my neighbourhood, many Arab immigrants were residing, which allowed me to see and compare differences between them and Malaysian Muslims, in how they interpreted and practiced the religion. Other interlocutors I met during my travels or while randomly strolling around town or when eating at (Halal restaurants).

Because of my limited time, and tight schedule, I have not been able to contact more ‘authoritative’ figures, such as Halal branding organizations and businesses. Although, I have been able to speak to some owners of travel agencies, larger businesses were mostly out of

reach. Furthermore, while I e-mailed some Halal certification organizations, I have not received any answers from any of them. Similarly, large resorts or hotels in touristic places such as Langkawi, were often surrounded by gates and security guards, who would not welcome anyone other than their own guests. Therefore, in this study I decided to focus only on the perspective of the travellers themselves. However, as a suggestion for future research, including the authoritative side of the story would be fruitful for the study of Halal travel.

In the next chapters I will first provide background information on the Muslim middle classes and the case of Malaysia's Islamization. Then, I will describe how Muslims travel and what Halal travel entails, using the cases of travel in Japan and Malaysia. Here, I will touch upon Halal certification, Shariah compliant hotels, and the ways in which travelling becomes a pious act. Finally, I will address some of the gendered issues and difficulties of Muslim women in the context of travelling. I will finish up by providing the main conclusions of this thesis in the last section.

MIDDLE CLASSES, CONSUMPTION, AND ISLAM

Before heading over to Halal travel and Muslim travellers, I would first like to focus on the target group of my study; Muslim travellers. These travellers are mainly part of the new Muslim middle classes that have emerged since the 1970's in developing Asian countries (King, 2008). These new (both Muslim and non-Muslim) modern middle classes have obtained a particular interest among anthropologists. We are talking about a huge diversity and variation among these middle classes, which construct their identities and cultural meanings mainly through consumption (King, 2008; Isaacs, 2009). Isaacs (2009) explains in his article about consumption patterns in hypermarkets in Thailand, how consumers identify shopping at supermarkets and hypermarkets as an activity belonging to and defining the middle class. Indeed, consumption is an important feature of the middle classes, not only in identity formation but also in politics; while consumption is needed for economic development, it is also a consequence of becoming rich. Various authors have described how development- and modernization projects have been 'state-led' processes wherein consumption plays an important role to achieve these goals (King, 2008; Isaacs, 2009; Rappa, 2002; Rudnycky, 2013). New lifestyles are constructed through the consumption of fashion and luxury goods, livelihood products, cars, and education (King, 2008). While doing this, old traditions and beliefs are being made compatible with capitalism and vice versa, creating the sheer new varieties of the middle classes (Rudnycky, 2013).

The focus in this thesis will be on the (travelling) Muslim middle classes. Having done fieldwork in Malaysia, I have focused on the Muslim middle classes there, and their ways of 'religious' consumerism as travellers, although many of my interlocutors were non-Malaysian Muslims. Some authors prefer to use the plural form 'middle classes' to emphasize the diversity and 'internal differentiation' of the new middle classes (King, 2008). It is interesting to zoom in on the case of Malaysia and especially the state's emphasis on modern Islam. Malaysia has the reputation of having one of the best representation of the convergence of Islam and modernity in the world (Peletz, 2013). Malaysia today has become an important manufacturer of Islamic services (Rudnycky, 2013; Fischer, 2012; Bideau & Kilani, 2011). A short description of Malaysia's efforts as developing country is useful to clarify the context. Islam in Malaysia is a key marker of Malay identity. This was the case even before colonial history. During the colonial period, which led to the facilitation of transnational movement of labour, Malaysia became a 'plural society', consisting of three main groups: Malays, Chinese and the Indians. Economic advantages for the Chinese population led to resentment from the

Malay population, Who consider themselves the original habitants of the country. After independence of colonial powers, this resentment among Malays gave rise to serious dispute and riots. The government interfered in 1970, by introducing a ‘New Economic Policy’ (NEP) which eventually was created to shift the advantage from Chinese Malaysians to the ethnic Malays. They were provided privileged access to resources from the state, with the aim to create a class of ‘New Malays’ who were an educated, urban, entrepreneurial Malay middle class. At this point, again, Islam played a crucial role as an identity marker and a central criterion for being Malay. The state actively sought ways to develop new industries and services suitable for Muslims. To be able to do this, first Islam had to be brought in line with capitalism (Peletz, 2013; Rudnycky, 2013). This way the state could foster economic growth through its own ethnic, Muslim, Malay citizens. Later, Malaysia used its Islamic image to gain reputation among other countries in the Islamic world. Great effort was put in developing Islamic services and outlets such as Islamic finance (Rudnycky, 2013), Halal certification (Fischer, 2012), and Islamic heritage (Bideau & Kilani, 2011). Apart from this, one can see Islamic themes everywhere in Malaysia. From architecture to fashion, from Quranic verses on cars and buildings to advertisements involving women wearing the Islamic headscarf (hijab), from Islamic books to Islamic music and so forth. This effort of becoming the Islamic country on the globe, can still be seen in Malaysia in the propaganda from the former government coalition Barisan Nasional as a promise for becoming the world’s leader in the Halal industry : ‘ingin jadi peneraju industri halal dunia’ (Figure 2).

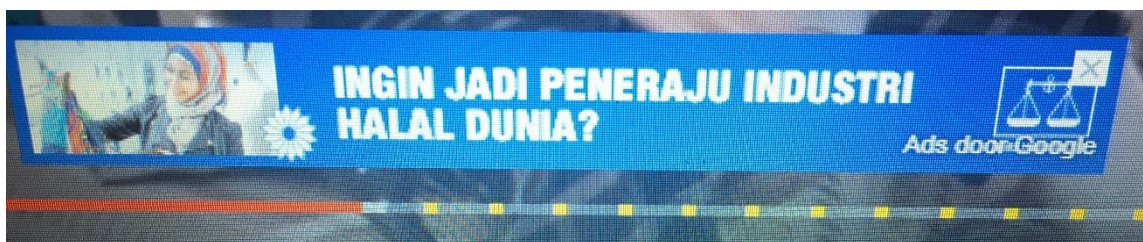


Figure 2. Election propaganda ‘Ingin jadi peneraju industri halal dunia’

This mixture of the pious, consuming, Muslim middle class with its neoliberal consumption pattern that has emerged from these developments is an interesting phenomenon. It clashes with archaic ideas of modern versus traditional, where religion was seen as backwards and the contrary of being modern. Modernity was constructed and used by Europeans to distinguish themselves from the ‘others’ who were seen as less, backwards, uncivilised and savage (Wade, 2015).

We see now, in these new Muslim middle classes, the fusion of religion and modernity, and also the commodification of religion. Feelings of backwardness and inferiority are not really prominent, if at all present (Barendregt, 2017). Religious commodities could be items which have a direct association with the usage of the item for worship, such as prayer mats, prayer beads, and hijabs (Starrett, 1995). However, recently, focus has been set on items without a direct link to ‘acts of worship’. Religious consumption is frequently seen as a display of a Muslim identity. Also, religious consumption is not restricted to objects only (Maqsood, 2014). Ramadan make-up looks (figure 3), special *Terawih*⁶ rides (figure 4), and Islamic posts on social media are but examples. While capitalism and consumption are conventionally seen as part of Western modernity, consumption of Islamic products and services are used to help create an alternative Muslim identity different than the ‘Western way’ of consumption. On the other side of the coin, in order to appear modern, Muslims tend to buy items that would show them as ‘rational and forward thinking’.

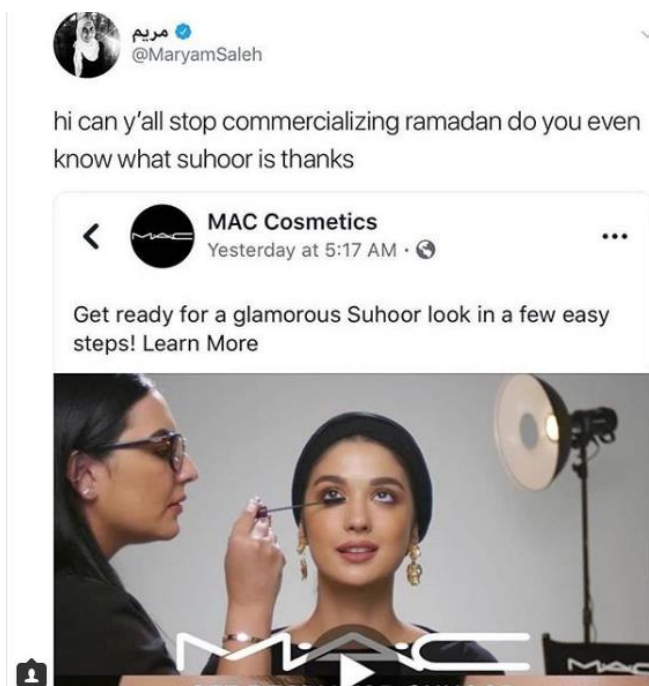


Figure 3. Instagram post of a Twitter post: commercializing Islam. Suhoor is the time



Figure 4. Instagram post about the Terawih app in Malaysia

However, because this idea of modernity is closely linked to the West and its aspects not entirely accepted, Muslims tend to counteract this with ‘religious consumption’ (Maqsood, 2014). Although there is a growing number of Muslims engaging in such activities, some of

⁶ Terawih is the special prayer during the month of Ramadan. It is performed at night after breaking the fast, and is typically done in mosques.

which even believe that they can be pious through business (Nisa, 2017; Slama & Barendregt, 2018), still some Muslims argue that engaging in such ‘modern, capitalist’ activities is a contradiction between ‘worldly desires and religion’. Some Muslims also point out that the commercializing of Islam has led to superficial devotion, which in turn leads to the weakening of sentiments, of what ‘truly matters’ (Starrett, 1995). Similarly, many of my interlocutors would complain about everything religious becoming rather superficial: ‘They use the name of



Figure 5. Instagram post of a Twitter post: Notion of Ikhlas as in Sincerity

Islam to make profit these days, it has nothing to do with Islam'.⁷ Some would also complain about how on the outside Muslims would look very pious, while ‘on the inside there is no integrity, no morals’. Similarly, like Starrett’s (1995) interlocutors, many of my interlocutors stated that having or using Islamic products only make you pious if you truly internalize what you are doing. For example, in figure 5, which I took from an Instagram post, a similar message is given. Growing a beard is believed to be *Sunnah*⁸ and wearing the Hijab is considered *Fard*.⁹ In the post it is noted that unless these activities are performed with *Imaan* and *Ikhlās*.¹⁰ These sorts of critiques have been given especially with the trend of growing a beard which emerged since a couple of years in the West. Also, the rise of ‘Hijab fashion’ has been another point of critique.

Nevertheless, consumption for the purpose of identity making is visible in many areas of the Muslim middle classes. I argue, however, that not all Islamic services and products are consumed with the intention to be more pious or to express a Muslim identity, but rather that they are consumed for necessity and convenience. Examples of these are visible among travelling Muslims who, a lot of times, make use of such services and goods because of necessity for the religious practice and because they are convenient to make use of.

⁷ Personal communication

⁸ *Sunnah* is the way the prophet Muhammad lived and acted: his habits and his behaviour is taken as example. A Muslim should follow in his footsteps. These are recorded in Hadith.

⁹ *Fard* is a duty commanded by Allah in the holy Qur’an.

¹⁰ *Imaan* means having faith, and *Ikhlās* is used to refer to believing with and having purity or sincerity.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that such Halal services (i.e. Halal certifications, Islamic banking, Hijab fashion, Islamic music bands) all contribute to the new environment of public Islam created by the Muslim middle classes (Slama & Barendregt, 2018). Although content wise consuming such services does not always contribute to ‘being’ pious, it definitely contributes to the emerging new religious lifestyle and a certain form of peer pressure among fellow believers to express one’s faith publicly.

I use the term ‘Halal’ services and ‘Halal’ goods, because a lot of times these services and goods are advertised using the word Halal (figure 6). Halal is an Arabic word, meaning that which is permissible for Muslims. Opposed to this is the notion of *Haram*, which means that which is not permissible (Roof & Juergensmeyer, 2012, pp. 500). What is Halal and Haram are stated in the holy book of Muslims, the Qur’an and in *Hadith*, which are the sayings and actions of the prophet Muhammad. Before technological developments in food processing, in the Middle East, Halal and Haram mainly referred to food and drinks (Fischer, 2012); consumption of pork and alcohol is Haram, and meat is considered only Halal if the animal is slaughtered in Islamic ways. This was also the case among Muslim immigrants in Europe. However, the notions also refer to choices in daily life; they have to be permissible and one



Figure 6. Instagram post of a Twitter post: Advertisement of Muslim dating site.

should avoid the Haram (Roof & Juergensmeyer, 2012).

However, what Halal and Haram entails is open for dispute among Muslims of all ages and affiliation. Although an ideal of a unified *Ummah*, the worldwide Muslim community, prevails, this seems in practice to be hard to realise (Ong, 1990).

Difference in opinions and practice is seen not only between regions and different schools of Islam, but also within communities and even within families. When

Muslims criticize or defend some activities, they often use their own interpretations of notions of Halal and Haram backing it up with Islamic teachings.

One problem that could arise by using the notion of Halal in Halal travel, is that it can be confused with being the same as Islamic. While Halal simply means permissible, Islamic is specifically referring to being religious. However, in my usage of Halal in Halal travel, Halal food, or Halal services could also refer to non-Islamic goods and services. As long as Haram, the impermissible, can be avoided, everything is permissible and, thus, Halal.

Since I have followed the activities of Muslim travellers I will be looking mainly at their usage of Halal certified foods and other products, Shariah compliant hotels, and prayer facilities. In the next chapters I will argue how the consumption of such services and goods by travellers are not necessarily practiced to be more pious or for identity formation. Even without such services and products offered, Muslim travellers can keep their travels ‘Halal’ using their own means. There are, however, other ways in which the act of travelling is being turned into a pious act. I will clarify these statements drawing on cases of travelling within a Muslim country (Malaysia), and travelling within a non-Muslim country (Japan).

Tourism

When it comes to travelling in the Islamic context, the first thing that comes to mind is the religious travel of *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. The sole purpose of this kind of travel for Muslims is religious obligation. The Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam; the main five obligations for Muslims. However, conventional travelling is becoming more and more a part of the Muslim middle classes. And although conventional travel is not necessarily a religious act, Islam influences everyday activities, hence also during travel. This makes the concept of Halal travel interesting, because for many Muslim travellers this means ‘keeping’ their travels consciously Halal, that is finding ways to practice the religious obligations such as praying, eating Halal food, staying at gendered segregated places and so forth. Of course, the degree of practicing of one’s religion may vary between individuals.

The consumption of travel is another important way of constructing new ‘modern’ lifestyles by the new, and especially the young Muslim middle classes (King, 2008). With this emergence of the new Muslim middle classes, and the linked concept of ‘modernization’, traveling has become an act of being modern and has become more widespread (Rimmawi & Ibrahim, 1992). Travel can be considered as being part of ‘Islamic chic’, which Barendregt (2017) also describes in his article about a Muslim female singer and the general search of the

young Muslim middle classes for a modern yet religiously appropriate lifestyle. Indeed, travelling is becoming a lifestyle for many young people throughout the world. Muslim travelers have made this travel lifestyle compatible with their religion, by arranging their travels in such a matter that the trip is rendered ‘Halal’. In addition, many Muslim travellers refer to Qur’anic verses about travelling when they talk about their motivations to travel.¹¹ The Internet and the online sphere have been of major influence in the sharing and thus spreading of this trend. There are many travel websites, blogs, social media accounts, and forums where Muslim travelers share their stories, ask questions, and receive recommendations and tips. These include information about, for example, where to find Halal food, prayer facilities, proper accommodation, Muslim friendly places, and Islamic sites to visit. Aside from practical tips and information about trips, also religious and motivational texts are being shared by members, separating them from conventional, non-religious travel blogs.

¹¹ Say: “Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth” (Surat Al-An’am, 6/11).

“Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them?” (Surat Mohammed, 47/10).

HALAL TRAVEL

In this section, using my experiences in both Malaysia and Japan, I will try to portray what Halal travel entails and looks like in a Muslim country and a non-Muslim country from the perspective of my interlocutors and me. I will touch upon the ‘Halal’ services Halal certification and Shariah compliant hotels. I will also try to explain, how travelling becomes a pious act for Muslim travellers and what contributes to this pious feeling during travels.

Halal travel in Japan

By the time I decided to travel to a non-Muslim country, I had already been travelling to and fro several places in Malaysia. Almost all of the times I was accompanied by other Muslim travellers, including both women and men. I had gained somewhat of an insight about what made travelling Halal in this Muslim country. I will go deeper into this in the next section. The reason why I first want to share my trip to a non-Muslim country, Japan, is that being a Muslim and travelling Halal really stands out in a country which is non-Muslim and where Haram phenomena can be easily encountered, and thus should be avoided. This is also the reason why I decided to go on a trip to a non-Muslim country. Travelling through Malaysia, I found out that keeping the travel Halal, was not a problem for Muslim travellers within Malaysia, as here almost everything already was Halal. In Malaysia, Halal products and services are literally everywhere, one simply cannot escape it. Even in the non-Muslim Chinese or Indian areas, one can still find a lot of Halal restaurants and other Muslim facilities. Whereas in the Netherlands, where I live, in some supermarkets there are Halal sections, in Malaysia the majority of supermarkets have small non-Halal sections. Therefore, it is simply easy to keep everyday life in accordance with Halal. Travelling for Muslim becomes more interesting, or at least more interesting for me, when these travellers struggle to keep things Halal in a non-Muslim country. Of course, like stated above, not every Muslim carries out his or her religion, nor do they so in the same way. Some travellers argue that when travelling, duties cannot always be followed. For example, while meat (aside from pork) which is not slaughtered in the Islamic way is impermissible and not eaten in a Muslim country, some Muslims argue that when in a non-Muslim country, where Halal meat is scarce, they are allowed to eat meat from ‘Ahlul Kitaab’ (literally meaning People of the Book). This argument states that in some Islamic teachings, meat coming from ‘Ahlul Kitaab’, which are the people from the other two monotheistic religions Christianity and Judaism, is permissible. They make the distinction between Halal, which includes meat from the Ahlul Kitaab aside from pork, and Dhabaha, which is meat that is only slaughtered in the name of Allah.

Although this is a far less popular view, one that I have only heard from a Youtuber.¹² What I aim to get at is that the way of practicing the religion and opinions on this matter can vary a lot. I will describe what I have experienced, based on what my interlocutors did during our travels. This does not exclude other ways in which Muslim travellers engage with their religion during their travels.

Before starting my fieldwork in Malaysia, I thought taking a trip with Muslim travellers to a non-Muslim country would be ideal for my study. That is mainly because Muslims have to fulfil some practical duties, such as praying five times a day, eating Halal and so forth. It would be interesting to see how they take these considerations into account when they plan their travel. However, I did not think that it would be feasible, given the limited amount of time and money I had. Besides, I would have to find company to derive some data from. I wrote in Muslim traveller forums, such as havehalalwilltravel.com, asking whether someone would be interested in going to some nearby countries. But alas, it did not work out, either because of the time or destination of travel. So, after two months of fieldwork and travelling within Malaysia, I checked the website of a local, low-budget airlines. This airplane company had given an event at the UKM, where I had initially stayed upon my arrival in Malaysia. They were promoting their airlines, offering a wide range of destination and low fares. I used this airline to travel to destination within Malaysia. When I checked it again for Japan, I was surprised to find a very cheap ticket. Having lost hope of finding a Muslim traveller companion, I thought about going for a week and hoping to find a Muslim traveller there in a stroke of serendipity. My wish came out in Malaysia, when my Malaysian friend was, as much as me, excited about the budget plane ticket. We took at least two weeks to prepare an itinerary and accommodation which offered segregated dorms. We checked Muslim travel forums to check for Halal food options nearby our visiting spots, and for possible prayer facilities and prayer tips (figure 7). Especially prayer facilities are very scarce in Japan, except from a few mosques we could not find any other facilities. For this reason, we packed some travel prayer mats, which are very thin, foldable pieces of cloth used to pray on. Prayer matts (*Sejadah*) are necessary. Because the prayer involves kneeling and prostration, the ground where one does this has to be physically clean. All of this concluded our prior planning. And from what I have read in Muslim travel forums, posts listing Halal options and questions

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49i2xDrjKUI> ;for more on this matter see <https://central-mosque.com/index.php/General-Fiqh/meat-of-ahlul-kitaab-people-of-the-book.html>

about such options, it seems that a lot of Muslim travellers plan their trip in similar ways.

Another useful tool was the smartphone with its endless offer of applications (apps). There are apps that show prayer times in every city in the world. The only thing you have to do is choose the city from which you would like to know the prayer times from. The app even plays the Adhan,¹³ with different recitation versions. Other apps provide a compass that points to the Kabaa in Mecca, showing the *Qibla*,¹⁴ the Qur'an verses or the whole Qur'an, *Dhikr*¹⁵ counter, and so forth. Most of the time, there is one app that contains them all. Such apps are used frequently by Muslim travellers, or Muslims (immigrant) living in non-Muslim countries, where such information is not provided.



Figure 7. Instagram post of a Twitter post: Prayer tips for Muslim travellers.

Halal food

After a long flight of six and a half ours we arrived early morning in Osaka. Because any Halal restaurants were out of reach, we had to do breakfast and lunch with a vegetarian snack from a convenience store. Accommodation was reserved beforehand, a low budget hostel with gender segregated rooms and bathrooms. For dinner, we checked a Muslim travel website and found two restaurants that served Halal food. Although They did not bear the Halal trustmark,

¹³ The melodiously recited call for prayer, traditionally performed from the Minaret (the tower rising above the mosque).

¹⁴ The direction of the Kabaa. Muslims have to face this direction during their prayers.

¹⁵ Form of meditation where a word or phrase is repeated.

we still assumed they offered Halal food because of the reviews and posts of the Halal travel websites. Most of the time these posts include details about the certainty of the Halal restaurants. However, my friend was a little sceptical about this. A visible Halal certification would be good to eliminate scepticism and to make visible for Muslims their Halal options, where everything else is most likely Haram.

The next few days, we either took fish (fish does not require to be Halal, because it is not slaughtered), or vegetarian food and dishes. Either way, we were desperately hoping for Halal restaurants.

Prayer facilities

When travelling for at least some certain miles/kilometres from your home, some technical changes can be applied to the prayer ritual to deem prayer more convenient for the traveller. These adjustments are made under the traveller (*Seferi*) preconditions, which involve the individual to have travelled at least a certain distance. Under normal conditions, each prayer has a certain length and a designated time during the day. For a traveller, the prayer can be shortened (*Qasr*) and combined (*Jam'*). That is, two prayers can be performed together at the same time, so that the traveller does not have to perform the prayer at five different times. This rule does not apply when one settles down at the new destination, or when one stays longer than 15 days at the same place.

The best and most convenient way to pray is to find a mosque, if one is present in the destination country. In Tokyo, we visited the Tokyo Mosque, a Turkish mosque, the largest one in Japan (figure 8). I found out about this mosque when I searched for mosques in Tokyo, to pray there during our trip. We specifically made time free to visit this mosque and pray there, and even had put it in our itinerary. The mosque was first built by Turkish immigrants in 1938, and later renewed by the Turkish Republic Religious Affairs Presidency in 2000.¹⁶ The mosque is combined with a Turkish culture centre, making it a frequent visiting centre for the Turkish community in Tokyo, but also for Japanese people which

*'... would contribute to the centenary relations between the Turkish and Japanese people.'*¹⁷

¹⁶ <https://tokyocamii.org/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

Aside from my friend and me, there were two other travellers, one Arab and one Syrian. They visited the mosque to perform their daily prayer, but also mentioned to have visited the mosque as part of their itinerary.

During our time in Osaka and Kyoto, we could not find any prayer facilities. When there are no mosques around and no prayer facilities, it is time to improvise. In Osaka and Kyoto, prayer was done in nooks and crannies, using the small, foldable prayer matt. We used a small compass (on the smartphone), to show us the direction in which we had to pray, the direction towards the Kabaa in Mecca. To check for the prayer times, we used another smartphone application, which we adjusted in each city for the correct prayer times per city. The *fajr*¹⁸ prayer we had to perform in our dorms, using our foldable prayer matts, sometimes accompanied by surprised looks from other guests who happened to be awake.

Other popular methods of praying when there are no prayer facilities at hand, are praying in fitting rooms of clothing shops. Both for immigrants in non-Muslim countries as for Muslim travellers, this is a very popular option to perform prayer when being outside. Get in a fitting room, calculate the Qibla, roll out the prayer matt and pray. Another commonly used option is to ask in shops of Muslim owners, if there are prayer rooms available. Usually, the Muslim owners or employee pray in such establishment, and will allow customers to make use of it as well.

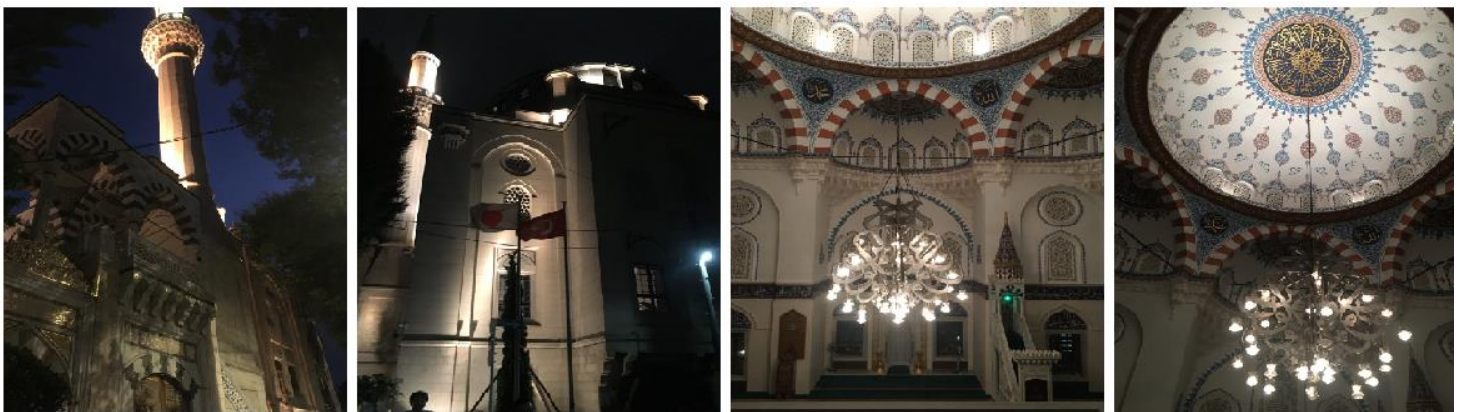


Figure 8. Tokyo mosque

¹⁸ *Fajr* is one of the five daily prayers, performed early in the morning, before dawn. The other ones being *zuhr*, right after midday; *asr*, in the afternoon; *maghrib*, after sunset; and *Isha*, late in the night. Exact times change according to the seasonal daytime changes.

Halal travel in Malaysia

Unlike Japan and any other non-Muslim country, Malaysia is abundant in Halal services. With the economic growth and the emergence of the new Muslim middle classes, the state has been actively emphasizing the development of Islamic services and businesses. For example, Malaysia has aimed to be the leading power in Islamic banking (Rudnyckyj, 2013), and the Halal certification business (Fischer, 2012). Mainly, such businesses have a mix of political, economic, religious, and national significance (Fischer, 2012). The same applies to travel and tourism: it is used as a niche for nation building and identity creation (Jafari & Scott, 2014). To attract the new travelling Muslim middle classes, Malaysia has developed their tourism industry in a way to fulfil the needs of Muslim travellers (ibid.). This way, not only will tourism contribute to the economy, but Malaysia will also be able to portray itself as a successful Muslim country.

During my time in Malaysia I was enveloped in an abundance of Islamic services: certified Halal food, mosques and *Adhan*, prayer rooms, Islamic banking, Hijab fashion, Shariah compliant hotels and much more. Halal certification and other services were impossible to evade. An ‘Islamic theme’ was applied to everything and everywhere in Malaysia. Upon entering the airport, the first thing that struck me was the many hijab veiled women working at the airport. Indeed, as an interlocutors in Nabi’s (2018) study notes, seeing a lot of women with the hijab gave me a sense of relief and comfort. As I travelled to UKM, where I was about to stay for the moment, again I was welcomed with the familiar sight of the beautiful university mosque. This was something I had not seen in most universities in Turkey, a country that is often considered Muslim. The next few days I took strolls around the campus and saw a lot of women with hijab partaking in many sport activities with their hijab on. The hijab is by no means restraining Malaysian women to partake in any kind of activity or be in any kind of position. On every bus in the campus and on most food tents and stalls the *Basmala*¹⁹ was written. In the grocery shops almost every product is Halal certified. While in Europe in some supermarkets there is a small Halal section, in Malaysia there are small, literally ‘non-Halal’ sections. With the exception of some Chinese Malaysian areas, mosques and Halal food are everywhere. For these reasons, Malaysia has been considered one of the best Muslim friendly travel destinations (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Not only does this help to

¹⁹ The name of the Arabic phrase that is written in English alphabet as *bismillahirrahmanirrahim*, and translates as “In the name of God, most Gracious, most Compassionate”. It is generally used before starting an activity, e.g. eating, sitting, carrying, driving etcetera. It is also written on many buildings, rooms, and books with its own calligraphy.

attract Muslim travellers, Islamic touristic sites and heritage sites also aid in nation building and identity creation (ibid.).

Travelling to or in Malaysia is very convenient for Muslim travellers. Because it is an Islamic country, with the majority of the population being Muslim, everything is designed compatible to the needs of the Muslim citizens. In the case of prayer facilities, aside from large, beautiful mosques, one can find a prayer room (surau) almost everywhere (figure 9). They are in every shopping mall, in the majority of train/ metro stations and in most other buildings. There are a few exceptions to this, as for example in the parts of the peninsular Penang where there is a Chinese majority. Still, Halal restaurants can be found on a walking distance. Also on the island of Langkawi, which is a popular (foreign) tourist destination, prayer facilities were less than in the rest of Malaysia. However, many hostels offered gender segregated areas and *Qibla* directions. In Langkawi, we booked trips from local travel agencies, many of which included meals that were Halal. Although some restaurants did not sell alcoholic drinks, many other in fact did sell alcohol alongside Halal food. One of the restaurant employees told me that alcohol was very much demanded by tourists which is why they offered it. The same was the case with many resorts throughout Malaysia. Although, I did not visit all of them, I searched online for their offers and reviews, and found out that many of them provided Halal food but also served alcohol. These resorts and hotels do not qualify as Sharia Compliant hotels however.



Figure 9. Surau (prayer room) at the KL-sentral station. Prayer rooms are segregated.

Cameron Highlands

My first (outside Kuala Lumpur) visit was to the Cameron Highlands, which was recommended to me by a travel agent I had visited somewhere near China town in Kuala

Lumpur. Given the enticing pictures of Cameron Highlands, I decided to make it my first trip in Malaysia. I asked the travel agency for proper Halal food, to which he answered that finding Halal food would not be a problem around Malaysia.

Before the trip, which I would take with my Malaysian friend from, we looked up proper accommodation with separate rooms for males and females. Gender segregated dorms were not only important for me, a woman, but also for my male friend. Finally, without looking for any other tips to account for our religious needs during the trip, my friend and I went to the Cameron Highlands.

After the tiring bus trip, we went to our dorms to rest. Here I met several girls, Muslim and non-Muslim. While the non-Muslims were all foreign tourists, the Muslim girls were Malaysians, travelling together. We briefly talked about our passion for travelling which we shared. Similarly, the receptionist, who was a veiled woman, told me about her many travel adventures within Malaysia, which she had with her (female) friends.

Afterwards, my friend and I went out to enjoy the beautiful landscape. Although, the Cameron Highlands did not especially radiate an Islamic vibe, Halal food was to be found everywhere. I could hear a faint Adhan, from a distant mosque, and although mosques were not many, surau's (prayer room) with a sink for ablution,²⁰ were present almost everywhere (although these are usually in the farthest corner of a building, at the highest or lowest floor). Still, the most prominent features of the Cameron Highlands were not religious ones, but rather the British influences and colonial heritage, the breath-taking view of tea plantations, its unusual chilly weather, the (not-so-appealing) insect farms, and of course, delicious strawberries.

Penang- George Town

George Town's 'Halal-ness' is somewhat different than the rest of Malaysia. George Town's inhabitants are predominantly Chinese Malaysians, mainly non-Muslims. At places where the non-Muslim population is dense, Halal food availability is slightly lesser than usual. Walking through the beautiful Clan Jetties (inhabited by predominantly Chinese people), the temples and the appetizing smell of the mainly Chinese restaurants, my appetite was awakened. I was told by my friend that the food was great, but usually not Halal. This was my first time in Malaysia that I had to avoid a restaurant, because they did not offer Halal food. This does not

²⁰ Ablution, or in Arabic *Wudu*, is the Islamic washing ritual implying both physical and symbolic purification. It involves washing some body parts such as the hands, face, and feet. One cannot perform prayer without first performing Wudu. If not 'nullified' by certain actions (such as bleeding, urinating, stool, vomiting) one can perform more subsequent prayers.

mean however, that there was no Halal food or that it was difficult to find Halal food in George Town. Simply by walking closer to the city centre, one is provided with enough choice of restaurants providing Halal food. Interestingly, Halal restaurants provide Halal versions of otherwise Haram dishes. For example, in one of the restaurants in George Town, which had a Halal trustmark, I ordered ‘pasta Carbonara’ which is typically made of pork. When I inquired about this, the waiter told me ‘*Don’t worry, everything is Halal here*’,²¹ and that this particular pasta was made of Halal beef meat.

However, prayer facilities are far more difficult to find. Unless one knows where to look, public prayer facilities are found less than usual, and although there are a few mosques, Adhan is not heard in the streets. Because in this part, Islamic influences were seen less than usual (although not entirely absent), George Town gave me less of a ‘Muslim Malaysia’ feeling which I did feel in other regions of Malaysia.

Langkawi

My decision to go to Langkawi came from my random encounter with a solo Muslim traveller I met on the rooftop of the Heli Lounge Bar in Kuala Lumpur. This bar, although serving alcohol (but not pork), is visited by many Muslim tourists, because of its breath taking (and free!) 360° view of KL city from a helicopter landing deck. I was walking around when I saw a girl with hijab, sitting alone, sipping her drink and enjoying the view. I sat by her side and we started talking. I learned that she was from Egypt, 25, and travelling solo through some Southeast Asian countries. She had been to Morocco before, on her own, as part of a volunteer exchange project. We had dinner together at an Arab restaurant in Bukit Bintang, the famous shopping district. We talked over dinner and I learned about her own business, her late father, and how her mother was a tad worried about her going solo on a trip so far away from home. We also talked about being a Muslim traveller in the world. She had started her Southeast Asia trip with Thailand, where she said to have difficulty finding prayer facilities, and Halal food. She performed her prayers in her hostel, and aside from a few occasions when she did find Halal food, she mainly ate vegetarian. This is similar to what I had heard from a Muslim girl who I met at an online forum, who went to Thailand for work. She also mentioned the extensive presence of Halal branding in Malaysia in contrast to Egypt, where Halal certification was rare. She also told me about her next destination after Kuala Lumpur, which was the famous touristic island Langkawi. She invited me to join her on this trip, and I was delighted to accept her invitation.

²¹ Personal communication; 12-05-2018

After dinner, we went strolling around Bukit Bintang, where we met several other Arab women who were travelling together, and one travelling solo. *'I love travelling, it really is my passion. We have travelled to many places and we want to travel even more. I really want to go to Turkey, we love Turkish series, so we really want to visit there'*,²² one of them told me.

Two days later we were ready to fly to Langkawi. As usual in Malaysia, the airport provided a prayer room where we could pray before we departed. We arrived late in the afternoon and settled in our dorm in Langkawi. Owned by a non-Muslim Chinese Malaysian, this hostel was not particularly offering 'Halal services' such as the Qibla or a place to pray. However, the rooms were gender segregated and the employees were mainly Muslim (veiled) women. My travel companion had already brought a foldable prayer matt with her, which we would lay in a corner of the room every time we prayed. We found the Qibla direction by using one of the apps on our smartphones. Because it is early in the morning, the *fajr* prayer was always performed in the dorm. Although we stayed with other non-Muslim guest in the dorm, none of them seemed to be puzzled when we were praying in the room, something you encounter a lot in non-Muslim countries. Indeed, tourists in Malaysia are expecting and are already prepared to see Muslims and their religious activities. For example, one Dutch female traveller asked me whether or not she should be cautious about what she was wearing in Langkawi, because this was an Islamic country and she did not *'want to be disrespectful to the customs and religion'*.²³ Similarly, one of the guests staying at our hostel was a non-Muslim Chinese Malaysian guy, who had been in Langkawi many times before, would repeatedly suggest us Halal restaurants around Langkawi and was very cautious in choosing one when we went out.

Aside from the early *fajr* prayer, the other prayers were also performed in our dorms. My friend explained to me the possibility of combining the prayers (*Jam*), since we were considered *'Seferi'*: *'We are Seferi, we can do Qasr and Jam, we have a tight schedule, so it is better to do that'*.²⁴ Although shortening the prayer was also done by other Muslim travellers we had met there, combining the prayers (*jam*) was not done by all. Some of our travel companions performed each prayer at its own time in suraus or, occasionally, in the mosques. However, the males in our travel group all prayed the *Jummah prayer*,²⁵ which is an

²² Personal communication 04-05-2018

²³ Personal communication 11-05-2018

²⁴ Personal communication 06-05-2018

²⁵ *Jummah* prayer, which translates as the Friday prayer, is an additional *salat*, performed in congregation in the mosque, instead of the *zuhr* prayer. It is obligatory for men, but not for women, but women may perform

additional congregational prayer, obligatory only for men, in the mosque. It was interesting to see that, during this prayer, the mosques were overcrowded with men performing the prayer in unison.

The restaurants we visited were all Halal certified and as one of the waiters told us when we asked whether the cocktails in the menu were alcoholic drinks ‘*No, this is a Muslim restaurant, we are not selling alcohol*’.²⁶ There are, however, many restaurants, café’s, and hotels that, even though not selling pork, do serve alcohol. Furthermore, a shisha stall not even 200 meters away from the Halal restaurant, which at the evening laid out its cosy floor tables and carpets on the beach, told us that in order to have a table for ourselves, we either had to order a drink (from which there was no non-alcoholic option) or shisha. Similarly, aside from a few ‘Shariah compliant hotels’, many big resorts or hotels in Langkawi did sell and serve alcohol even though avoiding pork. However, travel agencies, which arrange (touristic) activities on the island, all provided Muslim friendly services, such as Halal food and the possibility to pray during the activities. Employees working at travel agencies were all prepared for questions about Halal services, as they answered immediately when asked for it.

We met a Syrian couple, who stayed at our hostel. They were there for a honeymoon, the newlywed told us. My friend told me that Malaysia was a very popular honeymoon destination for Muslim couples. For Muslim couples, honeymoon vacations in all-inclusive resorts might be more convenient in Muslim countries where all their religious demands will be met.

In another stroke of serendipity, on the eve of the Malaysian general election, the leader of the opposition Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition Mahathir Mohamad, and also an important figure in the economic development and modernization project of Malaysia during the 1980s as former prime minister, had made his appearance in Langkawi, which is also his home constituency. As a Malaysian friend had joined our Langkawi trip, together we went to With a surprising result, one day later, PH won the election, making Mahathir Mohamad once again prime minister. As an important influencer in the (modern) Islamization of Malaysia, it will be interesting to see the further developments in and of Malaysia in the future.

Mosques

Remarkably, in (almost) every city or district in Malaysia, mosques are constructed to imply the permanent place that Islam has taken in the state and nation (figure 10 & 11). These

this prayer at home, while men are obligated to perform it in the mosque where it preceded by the *Khutbah* (sermon).

²⁶ Personal communication: 06-05-2018

mosques are constructed with careful consideration and regard to details. The architectural design often reflects cultural influences, emphasizing ‘the Malay’ and each having its own uniqueness. These mosques are large constructions, usually highlighting the city or district and being an important tourist attraction. They typically are large, magnificent buildings, making them impossible not to see. These mosques are almost always a ‘must see’ on Muslim traveller’s itineraries, as they are considered sacred spaces where one can connect with Allah. For non-Muslim tourists, these mosques are important places to represent Malaysia’s embodiment of Islam. With their beautiful architectures, they are also hotspots for non-Muslim tourists.

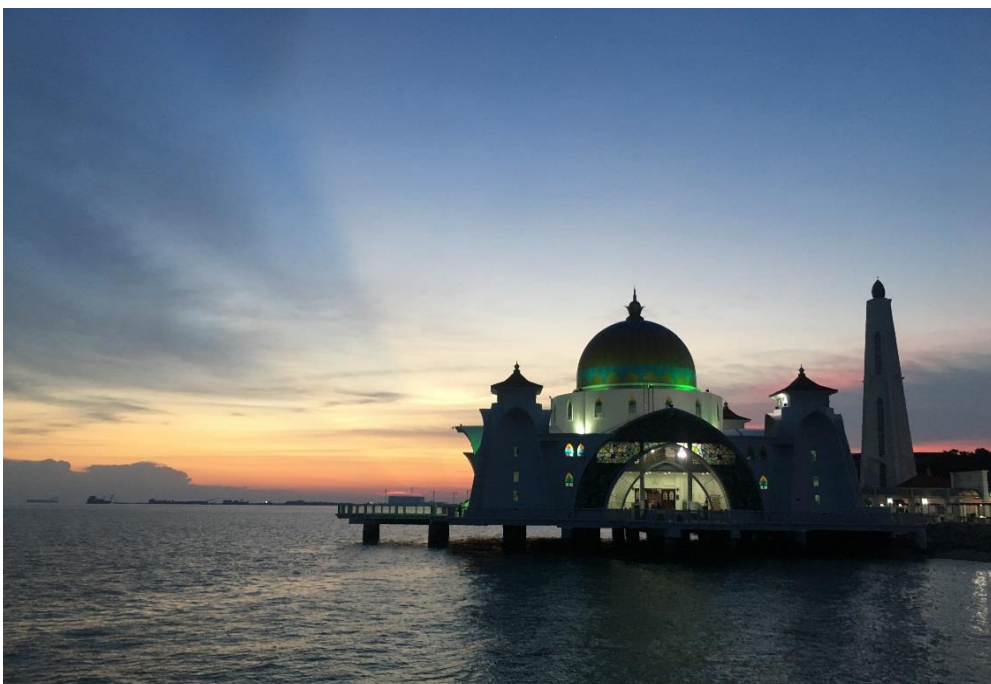


Figure 10. Masjid Selat Melaka -Melaka Straits Mosque, located in Malacca



Figure 11. Masjid Putra - Putra Mosque, located in Putrajaya

Halal certification

As mentioned, Halal certification is impossible to avoid in Malaysia (figure 12). Halal certified food for many Muslims living in the West, was initially required for Muslim immigrants because Halal food was scarce. The notion of Halal food referred mainly to meat and poultry. Because food processing was not that advanced, Halal meat was mainly bought from nearby and often from a seller or butcher who was known and trusted (Fischer, 2012). This idea of trusting the seller is still an important factor to determine reliability in Malaysia. During my fieldwork I frequently noticed that none of my Muslim interlocutors checked for a Halal certification when buying food, unless we were in majority non-Muslim areas. One interesting occasion was when I moved in to my new apartment in Kuala Lumpur. On the sixth floor was a restaurant owned by Arabs. When I moved in, the restaurant was not open yet, and thus did not bear any certification. The owner invited me and my Malaysian friend in



Figure 12. Halal certification on various products in Malaysia.

to advertise his restaurant, which would soon be opened. The owners had visible Arabian physical features, and the menu was made out of Middle Eastern dishes. When I asked whether their food was Halal, my Malaysian friend bursted out into laughter: *‘Of course it is Halal, the owners are Arabs, they are Muslims’*.²⁷ Although the owners mentioned being Arab, they did not mention being Muslim. Either way, there was no visible Halal branding in the restaurant. Later during my fieldwork my Malaysian friend would reminisce about this occasion. He told me that he thought it was very weird to ask for Halal certification when the owners are Muslim. Apparently, the owners act as a trustmark themselves and this seems to be enough to accept the food as Halal. A similar event took place in Turkey, where I asked the McDonald’s employee whether the meat was Halal. The employee asked me to repeat my question several times, as he was not sure what I meant. At last, the manager took it over and told me, with a rather offended tone: *‘Of course it is Halal. You are in Turkey, we are Muslims, whether the meat is Halal is out of question’*. On a similar note, Halal certification in Turkey is nowhere near the enormous scope of Halal certification in Malaysia. Similarly, my Egyptian and Syrian interlocutors told me that this was also the same in their countries.

It is argued that Halal food for immigrants was also a tool to strengthen the sense of identity, and cultural and social ties (Roof & Juergensmeyer, 2012). With the advancing technology and imported products from over the world, a visible Halal trustmark was needed, which would show a valid Halal certification. In Malaysia the *JAKIM*²⁸ and the *MUIS*²⁹ work together with Muslim groups and commercial companies, to set standards for what should be regarded as Halal. It has come to an extent that even the plastic wrapping of food is problematized (Fischer, 2012). That is why in Malaysia, you will find a Halal certification on practically everything, from food and non-alcoholic drinks, to cosmetics to cleaning products. However, my interlocutors seemed not to give a special importance to the Halal certifications in Malaysia. When I asked my interlocutors whether they would check for a Halal certification on a bottle of Coca Cola, neither Malaysian nor non-Malaysian Muslims seemed to be doing so. The general opinion was as one of my interlocutors noted: *‘Coke is just coke, there is no Haram coke, so I don’t look for Halal coke’*.³⁰

After my fieldwork in Malaysia I went to Turkey for almost two months. I

²⁷ Personal communication

²⁸ Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia, translated as the Department of Islamic Advancement of Malaysia. This department is functioning as a National *Fatwa* Council. *Fatwa* is the authoritative legal opinion about an Islamic matter, given by a qualified Muslim scholar.

²⁹ Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura, translated as Islamic Religious Council of Singapore .

³⁰ Personal communication.

automatically compared the two countries in terms of Halal services. As I mentioned above, when it comes to Halal certification, Turkey is by no means close to the certification business in Malaysia. Yet I did not feel less secure when consuming food and other goods. Neither do the striking number of Arab tourists in Turkey. The number of Arab tourists is rising in Turkey since approximately a decade. I visit Turkey every year at least once, yet I have never witnessed an Arab tourist asking for Halal certification or being hesitant about the food or products. In Turkey, I talked with friends and family about my experiences in Malaysia. Naturally, many people asked me to compare things between the two countries, or they compared themselves with whatever information I gave them. I shared my experiences about how everything was branded, even cleaning products. An interesting opinion was given by a Turkish guy, who was rather sceptical about the certification business. His opinion was close to what Starrett's (1995) interlocutors said about the 'weakening of sentiments'. He told me that '*when they use it for everything which is not what Halal is about, it belittles the true importance of Halal*'. Similarly when I told friends about Halal certified water bottles, they were surprised about why water should be Halal certified.

Fischer (2012) explains that Halal certification has to do with political, economic, religious, and national ideas. The trustmark has turned into a commercial business, and is used by companies to attract Muslim customers. According to some authors (i.e. Tayob, 2016; Fischer, 2012; Salleh, Abdul Hamid, Hashim, & Omain, 2014), over the past one decade the awareness of Halal consumption has increased among Muslim consumers. However, in an interesting article, Tayob (2016) explains how certification businesses have created this market, by creating doubts in Muslim consumers by emphasizing the risks of cross-contamination in food production. Although he explains the case of Halal certification in South Africa, similar agendas have been used by certification businesses all over the world. The Halal certification market is not so much created by the Muslim consumer's demand of Halal trustmarks, as it is by the demands of the certification businesses and the state themselves. And once the prevalence of checked and Halal certified goods had increased, this in turn could have led to more awareness among Muslim consumers. This is the opposite of the critique on certified fair-trade movements, which holds that the market of fair-trade goods is dependent on consumer demand and choice. This consumer choice is engineered by the manipulation of massive corporate advertising campaigns (Fridell, 2007). Thus, while in the

case of Malaysia, the demand of Halal certification is state and corporate induced, while in the case of fair-trade, demand is consumer induced.³¹

Shariah compliant hotels

Although there is not a clear description and standard as to what makes a hotel Shariah compliant and the requirements for it (Salleh et al., 2014), there are some hotels which are bearing the 'Shariah Compliant' label. Usually such hotels not only abide to the Islamic requirements such as Halal food, not serving alcohol, gender segregated facilities, Islamic paying systems, they also include Islamic 'theming' such as Islamic interior design, Islamic music and *nasheed* songs, Qur'an, prayer rugs and prayer beads. One of my Malaysian interlocutors explained to me that in Malaysia, Shariah compliant hotels are checked by the JAKIM to check whether everything is truly Shariah compliant. For example, because in Islam unlawful (non-married) relationships are Haram, the JAKIM will check whether the couples staying at the hotel are truly married, therefore couples are obligated to show evidence of their marriage.

However, usually such hotels are expensive and considered luxurious. Many Muslim travellers complain about the expensiveness and superficiality of Shariah compliant hotels. As is stated in one review:

*'Today, the 'syariah ' compliant aspect of the hotel is basically cosmetic and superficial; greeting customers with 'Asalaam Alaikum,' financial processing with Islamic banks, non-married couple cannot check into one room, different swimming and gym pool times, Quran and prayer rug in room and direction of Kibla on ceiling, toilet and feet of bed not facing Mecca, absence of bar and nightclub, alcohol-free mini-bar, and so on.'*³²

It continues to state that the value for money is low; while Muslim travellers can stay at major 'secular' hotels and have a same 'shariah compliant' experience as they would have in Shariah compliant hotels:

'The SC Hotels, much like Islamic finance, touches on the 'Islamicity' of the offering, but it does not satisfy customers who are looking for product, guest experience, services, location and value for money.'

³¹ On a side note, fair-trade markets could take example of the Halal certification policy of Malaysia.

³² <https://halalfocus.net/opinion-shariah-compliant-hotels/>

In Malaysia, regular hotels provide the basic needs for Muslim travellers, such as Halal food, segregated dorms, Qibla direction and usually also prayer space. In addition, they are most of the time far cheaper than full-fledged Shariah compliant hotels. This makes them as attractive, and maybe even more attractive to Muslim travellers:

‘Most hotels serve a standard breakfast menu and Qibla direction. So, if it’s not a Shariah-compliant hotel but the location and the hotel are good; I might choose the standard hotel.’³³

Still many hotels, also big resorts, serve alcohol and can have mixed gender areas. This while these same hotels and resorts prohibit the selling of pork. Although many Muslims do not prefer to stay or eat at places that sell pork and alcohol, places selling alcohol are tolerated more, simply because places not selling alcohol are very scarce. In addition, although pork consumption among Muslims is very rare and considered extremely unlawful, alcohol consumption is typically more frequent (figure 13 & 14).

Vragen en antwoorden Heli Lounge Bar

 1.042 beoordelingen

Bars & clubs

“does the bar offers halal food or does it serve pork we can take non alcoholic drinks but is the bar free from pork as Muslims we avoid restaurants serving pork”

Figure 13. Question about serving pork and alcohol posed on a regular travel website.

³³ Reaction on a question I posed on a Muslim travel forum



norman bates
@marhahah

I offered my muslim friend bacon and she still declined it even tho she was drunk. That's what u call faith.



I nearly drank a drink with gelatine in it, Alhamdulillah I checked the ingredients beforehand and it only had alcohol in it. Be careful out there brothers and sisters.



Figure 14. Instagram posts on a Muslim meme page. All three posts are supposed to be sarcastic funny.

On the question whether they would choose a Shariah compliant hotel over a non-Shariah compliant hotel, one of my travel companions commented *'it is not necessary but it is preferred to feel more like home.'* Sharing a religion and (mostly) the same values, thus gives one a sense of belonging and thus a feeling of familiarity. This sense of belonging is another very important indicator of the choices that many travellers make. The desire for a sense of belonging and familiarity is as much important as the desire of Muslim travellers to consume piously. I could clearly see this desire of familiarity, when one of my interlocutors would run towards any stranger on the streets who would speak her native tongue. And of course, choosing Halal services is simply more convenient, because the religious sentiments are shared and taken into account.

Other very important factors influencing the choice of a Shariah compliant hotel are firstly budget, then location and thirdly, safety. When asked whether they would choose a Shariah Compliant hotel, my interlocutors often told me that it depends on the budget and location, which is something that Shariah-compliant hotel must take into account if they want to attract customers.

Choice of travel destination

Before starting my fieldwork, I thought that the choice of travel destination would be influenced by the availability of Halal food and services in that country. I thought that Muslim

countries and countries offering more Halal services would be preferred more than non-Muslim countries with scarce Muslim friendly services. Surprisingly however, the middle class Muslim travellers that I have met during my fieldwork and I have observed on online forums, were very eager to visit Europe and experience Christmas. The availability of Halal food and services did matter when staying at a destination for extended periods of time, for example for education or work. One Syrian guy I met during my flight to Malaysia, with a transfer in Istanbul, told me that he was heading to Turkey to look for a home there for his daughters who were studying in Serbia. He told me that his daughters wanted to move to Turkey, because in Serbia, Halal meat was scarce, prayer facilities absent, and that the Muslim community was not very large. It was not convenient for them and they felt somewhat ostracized, not necessarily directly but because of an insufficient atmosphere for Muslims. Similarly, in her master thesis about Muslim students at the Leiden University, Nabi (2018) explains how Muslim students can feel ostracized or excluded in social event when the atmosphere is not ‘Muslim friendly’, that is when for example alcohol is served. This could lead to avoiding such events altogether. She also writes about the initial anxiety that many international Muslim students feel about whether they will be able to perform their religious practices in the Netherlands. However, the presence of a number of Muslims, Hijab’s, Mosque’s, and other Muslim friendly services seemed to relieve the Muslim students (Nabi, 2018). This is in line with what my respondents told me when we talked about staying in non-Muslim countries for extended periods of time. The same Syrian guy on my flight, told me



‘The Netherlands is still the best country in Europe to live in for Muslims. The other countries are much worse, especially France’ referring to the negative attitude of the French government towards Muslims. On a similar note, my housemate in Malaysia, who was a Muslim international student from Mauritania, told me that initially she wanted to study in France, but because she knew about this attitude of France towards Muslims she decided not to go there. She told me *‘France is not really Muslim-friendly.’* Her sister studied in

France, but she was not allowed to do her

Figure 15. Instagram post of a Twitter post: Criticizing France

internship with her hijab on (figure 15), giving rise to the idea that France is unwelcoming to Muslims.

All in all, pro Muslim friendliness and the availability of pro Muslim friendly services in a non-Muslim country, such as Halal food, prayer facilities, mosque and so forth, are considered very important for, and are much appreciated by Muslim migrants. In many cases, these factors influence the choice of destination country. However, when such countries are visited for touristic purposes, such services are not an ultimate influencer of choice of destination. That does not mean, however, that such services are not appreciated or not demanded by Muslim travellers. Like I mentioned above, providing Muslim friendly services evokes a sense of affection and tendency towards that country. At the same time, attention to Muslim tourists' needs and demands is growing across the globe (Jafari & Scott, 2014). For example, Japan has introduced a mobile mosque for its Muslim visitors, during major sports events (Astapkovich, 2018). This is a 'mosque', or rather a prayer room, built in a bus-like vehicle, which can travel around to locations where major events will take place. Muslims attending these events can then make use of this mobile mosque. This idea was given by Japanese authorities who wanted to react to their Muslim visitors' needs. Also, some airplane companies, like the Turkish airlines, provide all sorts of Muslim friendly services, such as Halal food and the Qur'an on screen (figure 16). Also, the Royal Dutch Airlines (KLM) offers its passengers Halal food options on selected international flights (n.d.). These are some examples of how the needs of Muslim travellers are being addressed. However, there are other ways in how Muslim travellers are trying to be attracted. I was very surprised to see a

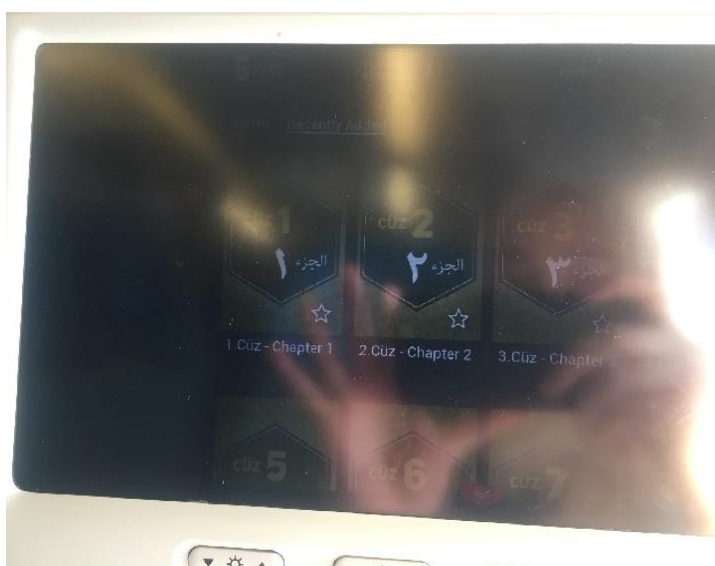


Figure 16. The Qur'an on screen on the Turkish Airlines.



Figure 17. Japanese Kimono style Hijab, sold in Japan.

‘Kimono Hijab’ in several places in Japan (figure 17). Such acts of Muslim-friendliness have positive impact on Muslim tourists affinity towards a country, and this is often shared on travel websites, blogs or social media accounts. Indeed, reviews and opinions on such crowdsourcing sites’ are known to influence hotels sales and tourism overall (Garrigos-Simon, Galdon, & Sanz-Blas, 2017).

Travel as a pious act

Although some authors argue that the consumption of for example Halal food is an act of identity making, in this context. Muslim travellers did not tend to Halal food and Muslim friendly services to affirm their Muslim identity, but rather because it was a necessity required by their religion. It was not a problem to them to opt for alternative choices. For example, many times it occurred that a Muslim (traveller) chose not to consume Halal certified food, but instead a vegetarian dish from a non-Muslim food tent or restaurant. Both were considered Halal, and the meaning of the certification of Halal merely made this visible. It did not become ‘Islamic’ because of the certification, and thus did not necessarily have a ‘pious’ value. However, visiting Halal food tents or restaurants, did seem to create a comfortable, ‘at home’ atmosphere. When we visited a Halal Indian restaurant in Tokyo, my friend mentioned that *‘finally we are safe and can eat everything’*. Also, in many Halal restaurants, we found ourselves talking to the owners, conversing casually about where we came from and what we would do in Japan in the upcoming days. Being Muslim seemed to create a bond and a sense familiarity. Similarly, mosques and any other Islamic sites were places of familiar territory. In fact, many Muslim travellers look for such Islamic sites during their travels. On the travel websites, such sites are listed per country, and they are very popular amongst Muslim tourists. Visiting such sites does contribute to the religious experience. As one of the posts on a Muslim travel website states:

‘Being a Muslimah traveller, it will certainly make your trip a more enriching one if you meet some local sisters and visit the beautiful mosques! You could even get an invite to have a local meal at their homes, or meet a new travel buddy. When you are on the road alone, it is always nice and reassuring to see a fellow hijabi and a smile will go a long way in helping you to get to know the locals!’³⁴

The mosque, does not only have a practical purpose, that is, of allowing a space for performing prayers. It also has a symbolic value, as a religious monument that represents

³⁴ <https://www.havehalalwilltravel.com/blog/solo-europe-muslimah/>

collective ‘imaginaries’ for the Muslim community, the Ummah. In this respect, we can take the ‘imagined communities’ of Anderson (1991) to describe the Muslim community, Ummah. This is also why such religious sites feel ‘familiar’. On the website of the Tokyo mosque the following has been stated:

‘We believe it is performing and will continue to perform its duty as a bridge between the past and the future, and is beautiful in other aspects due to certain unique features. While not departing from the ties of the past with its construction in the classical Ottoman architecture style, it also has an enlightening purpose for the future through various architectural points that attract attention in both construction technology and the multipurpose hall which is a venue for wedding ceremonies, fashion shows, plays, exhibitions and conferences on the first floor.’ (Japan Diyanet Foundation, n.d.)

In this text, it is indicated that the construction of classical Ottoman architecture will create ties with the ‘past’, which is the Islamic Ottoman history. The mosque is, in practical terms, a place of performing prayer, however in a way, the mosque as a building also functions as a monument. As a monument, the mosque is engaged in memory making for the past and the future (Adams, 1997). Similarly, many Muslim travellers visit and perceive mosques as holy sites, with each mosque having its own unique design:

‘However, the importance of mosques is never a doubt. Many are built as a show of Islam’s legacy and glory through its design and architecture.’³⁵

These are parts of the travel that might have religious value for Muslim travellers. However, the whole act of travelling is not always necessarily motivated by religious reasons. Many of my interlocutors, when asked why they travelled, responded with incentives that were similar to non-Muslim travellers. For example, many of them said that they travelled because they wanted to explore the world or because they wanted to gain personal experiences and development. Although for many Muslim travellers this seems to be the primary reason for travelling, when asked specifically whether Islam has anything to do with their travels, many of them said that it had. From their answers and from various blogs and social media accounts, I learned that not only Islam had influenced their motivation for travelling, but also the other way around, that the travel influenced their religiosity.

When it comes to how Islam influences the act of travelling for Muslim travellers, something that almost all Muslim travellers mention is the encouragement for travelling that

³⁵ <https://www.havehalalwilltravel.com/blog/20-breathtaking-mosques-around-the-world/>

the Qur'an gives. These are stated in *Ayat* (verses), which are used as motivation by many traveller blogs of Muslim travellers:

'Say: "Travel through the earth and see what was the end of those who rejected Truth"'
(*Surat Al-An'am, 6/11*).

'Do they not travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those before them?' (*Surat Mohammed, 47/10*).

These verses would indicate that Muslims are actually encouraged by Allah to travel through the world, to learn, to appreciate and to contemplate about life (Tayob, 2016). Many Muslim travellers cited this verse to me when I asked them how their religion influenced their travels. I also read from bloggers that travelling had a positive impact on their piety. Travelling would bring them closer to Allah, making it a unique experience. Through travelling, one should see and contemplate Allah's creation in all its grandness, diversity, and glory. This way, one becomes more aware of the religion and gets to know Allah better. In turn, through this reflection and contemplation one also gets to know oneself better (figure 18).



Figure 18. Instagram post about Qur'anic verses encouraging Muslims to travel

Other ways in which travel becomes an act of piety is when the act of travelling is made part of *Da'wa*³⁶. Muslim travellers claim to be conducting *Da'wa* (proselytizing; share and spreading faith) with their actions; with the recent rise of Islamophobia, especially after

³⁶ *Da'wa* has the primary meaning of call or invitation, a vow. In a religious sense, it is the invitation by God to men and the prophets, to believe in the true religion, Islam (Canard, 2013).

9/11, Muslims all over the world have been affected by a negative image on Islam and being Muslim. Muslim travellers believe, that by travelling and engaging and talking with non-Muslims, they are able to show the world that Islam is a peaceful religion not to be afraid of and thus attract non-believers to the religion. The negative stereotypes about Muslims and their religion often associated with terrorism and violence, are aimed to be scattered and instead replaced with this peaceful representation of the religion. Indeed, many Muslims seem to believe it to be their responsibility, as the representors of Islam, to erase all negative attributions to the religion. By travelling, but also and especially by sharing personal experiences on social media, they believe to be participating in sharing their Islamic presence in the world.

SOLO TRAVEL FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

It happens a lot that one can see Muslim women travelling around the world on their own frequently. They travel, they take pictures, they share their stories online and offline, and they do this with proud demeanour. Often, posts of solo female Muslim travellers, come with a hint of female empowerment. And although a lot of Muslim women take on these journeys, they nevertheless, often are the target of criticism. Mostly criticism includes opinions about how women are not allowed to travel without a *Mahram*, a male custodian who the woman is either married to or who is a blood related male with whom she cannot marry, such as the father, brother, grandfather and blood related uncles. This criticism is often related to the hadith in which the prophet Muhammad (pbuh) stated that a woman should not travel alone for three days.³⁷ This advice is regarded for the protection of women, which is also why many scholars predicate that as long as safety is provided during the journey, travelling alone is permissible (Ratthinan & Selamat, 2018).

However, young women travelling on their own can be seen as an oddity everywhere. When I was travelling from Malaysia to Japan, I had experienced this personally. Getting through the security and passport control routines, I was stopped at every checkpoint by the security officers. Although I travelled with a friend, because he was behind me, I was assumed to be travelling on my own, which apparently evoked worry in officers. Each of them asked me where I was going, why I was going and whether I was going, with a worried look on their faces. One of them even pulled me aside and questioned me. When I told them I was with a friend, they gave out a sigh of relief. The reason for the questioning can vary of course. Was it because I am a Muslim woman traveling alone, which was seen as something out of ordinary for the officers who looked like Malaysian Muslims? Was it because I am so young looking, who would seem too frail to embark on such a journey?³⁸ I thought that this odd situation was very unique, something I had not heard before from anyone else. However, when I shared this story with my friend, she said that she experienced something similar when she travelled from Amsterdam to Istanbul. Dutch security officers asked her why she was alone, whether it was her first time travelling alone and why her family did not accompany her. She also told me that when she arrived back in the Netherlands they commented that she had taken a long trip on her own. However, although the reason of this interrogation might at first sight seem as

³⁷ “A woman must not travel for three days except with a *Mahram*.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 1036 & Sahih Muslim)

³⁸ Something I have heard a lot. People always guess my age to be younger.

coming from the fact that we were women, it could also be as a part of the security measures for terrorism. Still, the fact that such questions are raised more towards women who travel alone, and the fact that this also happens in non-Muslim countries from non-Muslim officers, indicates that women travelling alone is seen as an oddity in many places. Also, women from all over the world, with different backgrounds, upbringings, religious faiths may experience challenges when travelling solo. This has mostly to do with supposed safety issues, which is why many women prefer to travel in duo's or groups. Often, women more than men check for safety of the destination. Therefore, one needs to be careful when drawing conclusions based on religious reasons and influences, as the factors influencing the decision to travel solo might be given in by many and also non-religious factors.

When I would ask my Malaysian interlocutors what they thought about women travelling, in the context of Islam, most of them would reply that it was absolutely no problem and that most of them were in fact travelling. However, in many cases these were women who travelled in duo's or in groups with other women. Still, an Egyptian solo traveller told me that none of her friends approved of her traveling on her own, telling her that this was 'not right'. Neither would they want to travel with her. I asked her whether this was generally so in Egypt, whereupon she told me that in big cities, travelling for women was more acceptable, but in smaller ones it was not. Similarly, my Mauritanian housemate told me that most of her friends and acquaintances in Mauritania would not want to travel alone as a woman. Still these two young women were travellers. My Mauritanian housemate was a 19 years old student. Her father was a diplomat so they had to travel a lot when she was younger. She told me that it was 'normal to go abroad' according to her family, as her sister went to France to study and that her little sister would go to when her time comes. Also, during summer vacations often each goes separately. My Egyptian friend was a 25 years old young woman co-owning a nursery business. Her father had died some years ago and now she lived with her mother, being the more authoritative figure at home. In both cases the authoritative figure plays an important role. The fact that my housemate's father was an ever travelling diplomat, and the father of the Egyptian traveller was absent, could have an influence in the decision making of both women. Also in my case, I was able to travel for my fieldwork with the support of my father. While many of my family members criticised my decision, my father supported my decision. As mentioned before, opinions on religious matters can vary greatly even within a household. When one day my uncle and aunt came to visit us, the topic somehow drifted to me travelling on my own. Although my uncle and my brother had strong

opinions on how it was absolutely not right for me to travel on my own, my father supported me with my decision to do so.

Opinions about Muslim women travelling alone can differ from region to region, household to household, individual to individual. However, almost always a distinction is made between going alone on a trip and going with friends without a mahram. Usually, travelling with friends without a mahram is seen as 'more acceptable' than travelling solo as a woman, both for men and women. As one of the members of a Muslim travelling website answered to my question whether travelling alone was permissible in Islam:

'This is a big question, and I don't want to conclude an answer – since I don't have enough knowledge for this. If you look at the history of Khadija (as) (wife of the Prophet), we will find examples where she did travel alone (for business reasons) and with no mahram. I have asked this question to several shuyukh, for instance Shaykh Yahya Ibrahim, and he said that it is not a problem for a female to travel without a mahram. My personal opinion is that there is a difference between solo traveling and traveling without a mahram. I don't do solo-traveling, but rather travel with my female-friend(s) without a mahram.

This is all I have to contribute to this discussion, and in the end do what you feel is right. For me – solo traveling is not right, but traveling with friends should be fine. And Allah knows best.'

Similarly, one of the writers of a Halal travel website (which in some posts encourages Muslim women to travel solo) wrote:

'There are TWO opinions from scholars with regards to this issue of whether a woman can travel without being accompanied by a mahram (husband or male relative whom she is prohibited to marry).

The scholars differ on the issue but it is my personal opinion that it is better for a woman to be cautious and to put in all efforts to travel with trustworthy company who can look out for her safety, and that may include a mahram. In Islam, women are given a high status and are not considered the weaker sex. The principle behind the narrations from the Prophet ﷺ on travelling with a mahram is to honour, protect and give special care for women.

It is up to the individual to choose which opinion he or she is comfortable with, without dismissing the others. All the opinions mentioned came from scholars who are knowledgeable

and worthy in giving their *ijtihad*. May Allah have mercy on them and may Allah guide us all.'

On the other hand, other Muslim women might not find it problematic to travel on their own. The difference in opinions could arise from different interpretations of the religion, but it could also come from the psychological state of the various women. Feeling comfortable and confident while traveling alone could also be a factor influencing whether or not a Muslim woman decides to travel solo. Indeed, these are the traits I have observed in many solo travelling Muslim women. Still, traveling alone for Muslim women is an ongoing open

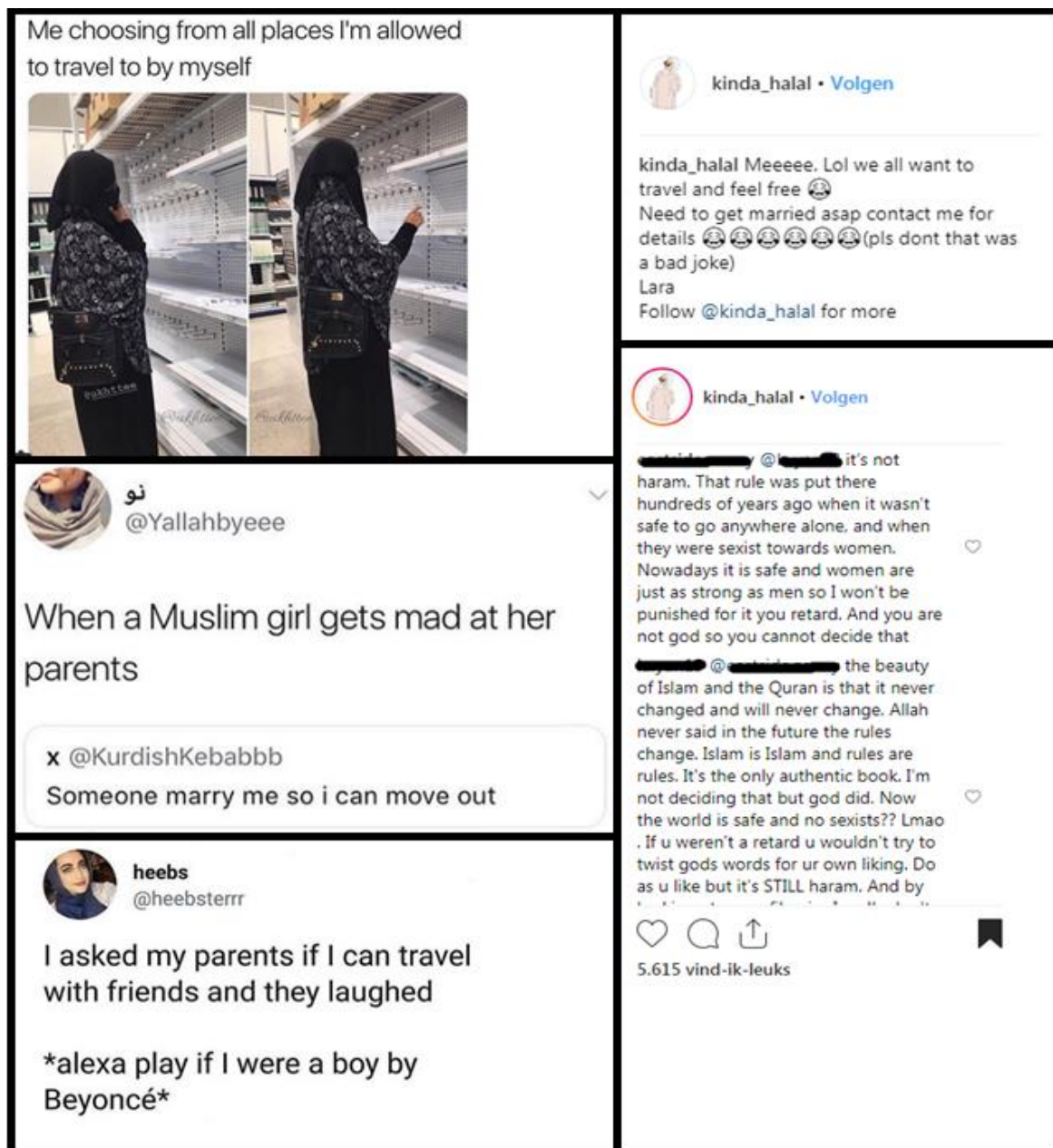


Figure 19. Instagram posts on Muslim meme page, about Muslim women and travelling alone or without a mahram. Posts are supposed to be funny and sarcastic. On the figure on the right, a discussion is presented on the comment section.

discussion. For example, many Muslim girls are talking about marriage as breaking free of the constraints of living with the parents (figure 19).

Many of the solo travelling Muslim women feel the need to negotiate their actions with the public. For example, in figure 20, a solo Muslim travelling woman feels the need to justify her action of travelling alone, while at the same time, looking her text and at the hashtags she has used, she seems to encourage solo travelling and also women to travel. My Egyptian friend similarly explained how she always argued with her friends, who disapproved of her



travelling alone. This was less the case with my Mauritanian interlocutors, whose social environment shared more or less the same opinion about travelling. Similarly, for most of my Malaysian interlocutors, travelling with female companions without a mahram did not seem to be a problem, and was in fact done frequently.

Figure 20. Instagram post of a female Muslim traveller.

Mahmood (2006) argues that Western notions of women's rights and female empowerment are not universal and therefore do not depict an accurate image of women throughout the world. These Western narratives usually create simplistic dichotomies of patriarchy versus female empowerment, violators versus victims (Archambault, 2011). In her study on Middle Eastern Muslim women in Egypt, Mahmood (2006) concludes that, contrary to the Western narrative of women's right these women are not passive and submissive but are active agents within their own living contexts. Analyses such as this and many others has led some feminists to be critical about global feminist conceptions of women's rights. 'Third World' and 'transnational' feminists have argued that the assumption of the universality of Western

notions of feminism do not reflect the truth everywhere. Such assumption run the risk of excluding and misinterpreting ‘Third World women’ and their concerns (Richards, 2005). Therefore, gender roles should be regarded in their own contexts. In Islam, gender roles are mainly dictated in the Qur’an and in the example of the prophet Muhammad. Of course, culture influences how Islam is practiced and in turn Islam has influence on culture. Generally speaking, although the Qur’an states that both husband and wife have rights over each other, men have been given the role as decision making authority (Tayob, 2018). However, with Muslim women being more and more engaged in educating themselves about Islam and Islamic teachings, they have gained a voice in discussing these matters with their male counterparts, be it their husbands, fathers and brothers, or any other male figure. This way they can defend and justify their actions against these ‘decision making authorities’.

In many areas, questions about how a Muslim woman should behave or should not behave are present and they are more prominent than questions about male behaviour. The rise of the new Muslim middle classes and modernity has been instrumental in changing gender roles: more often Muslim women are well educated, politically active, and especially very visible in the public sphere (Göle as described in Barendregt, 2007). Especially this visibility in public spheres and social life is increasingly creating ‘gendered anxieties’ (Slama & Barendregt, 2018; Barendregt, 2011; 2007; Jones, 2010; Slama, 2017a; 2017b; Nisa, 2017;). Muslim women, with their bodily representation of Islam, the hijab, are the target of such anxieties (Ong, 1990) (figure 21). However, this does not mean that, especially according to Western ideals of feminism, that Muslim women are passive figures.



subhi.taha • Volgend

subhi.taha : as a muslim guy, i've always wondered what it's like to be apparently muslim in regards to what i'm wearing. muslim women bare the heavy responsibility of the hijab where their muslim identity is 100% apparent, something us muslim guys will never understand. this picture was me & ma boiii at vidcon this year—a convention for youtubers. i was asked to speak on panels about social injustice from the perspective of the muslim community. me & my friend made the choice to wear 'islamic-ish clothing' (even tho obv its cultural, islamic clothing doesn't exist) to try to push the muslim identity from the mens side. i believe there was only one hijabi youtuber so we wanted to be able to make it known we were from the same religious community & be able to uphold our side as muslim men. surprisingly, a lot of non-



subhi.taha • Volgend

bit of our identity but it's imperative we take pride in our religious background. i think all muslim guys should try going a full day in their thoub to get a small taste of what our sisters go thru. hijabi sisters out there—y'all killin it. y'all alone are holding down the muslim community here in the west. may y'all's struggles never go unseen in God's eyes 🤲

Meer opmerkingen laden

Figure 21. Instagram post about the visibility of Muslim women.

As we can see in the case of Muslim female travellers, but also in many other areas such as Muslim female singers (Barendregt, 2017), social media celebrities (Nisa, 2017), and fashion icons, that women are not without agency. They actively shape, construct, and discuss their (Islamic) position in society.

CONCLUSION

Travelling is an important part of the new 'modern' lifestyle of the Muslim middle classes. Using new technologies such as the Internet, the (especially) young Muslim generation is ever more present in the modern world. Travel, just like many other modern trends, has become a lifestyle option for these young Muslim middle classes, easily made compatible with Islam. Like other non-Muslim tourists, Muslims travel and engage with the rest of the (non-Muslim) world, to get to know the world, for personal experience, but also to get closer to Allah. Muslim travellers have special needs related to their faith and carry these needs with them throughout their travel. The need for prayer and Halal food are some examples of these needs. Although Muslim countries are convenient for Muslim travellers to carry out these needs, non-Muslim countries can be challenging in terms of fulfilling these needs. Here, I have analysed the activities of Muslim travellers in both a Muslim country, Malaysia, and a non-Muslim country, Japan. Based on the findings I have drawn a few conclusions about the act of travelling for Muslims and the needs of Muslim travellers. By reading these conclusions however, one needs to keep in mind, that among Muslims throughout the world, there may be differences in interpretations and opinions about Islamic matters. My conclusions are based on my sample of Muslim travellers I have met, mostly in Malaysia, during my fieldwork and on online information from social media posts and individual writings of Muslims on blogs, forums and other websites. And of course, what one says and what one does are not always compatible with each other, which should be kept in mind as well. Still, what one does these days is pretty much traceable through social media posts which are made public, because sharing such an activity as travelling is very much a part of being and portraying oneself as 'modern'. Especially the young generation nowadays, is as much present in the online spheres as the offline spheres. Therefore, I am of the opinion that online research is a valuable and additional component of fieldwork and should be carried out more often by researchers.

To come back at some of the research questions which I posed in the beginning of this thesis, I will now answer the main question: **What does Halal travel currently entail with Muslim tourists travelling in and from Malaysia?** First, what motivates Muslims to travel, which factors are shaping the motivations?

Motivations to travel are somewhat universal among travellers. Many travellers do so for the experience of new places and cultures. Muslim travellers are no different with addition of some religious motives as well. Muslims are encouraged to travel around the world by the Qur'an, through some verses. By travelling and discovering new peoples and places, and by

contemplating God's creations, one is supposed get closer to Allah. Another reason is that by travelling around and sharing the religion with different people around the world, Muslim travellers claim to perform Da'wa. This has become an important motivation for Muslims, especially after almost two decades of negative stereotypes attached to Islam. Although the act of travelling is not necessarily considered an act of piety, these motivations add a pious layer to the act. Furthermore, many Muslim travellers look for Islamic sites, mosques or other holy places in the countries they travel to. Visiting these sites gives a sense of familiarity and belonging to Muslims. Through visiting such places and contemplate, and through praying in mosques, one will have done something pious and rewarding.

What is being offered in terms of Halal (tourism) services? And what is expected or demanded by Muslim travellers in terms of Halal services? Also, how do they look at the current Halal services that are being offered in Malaysia and in other (non-Muslim) countries?

Before going to non-Muslim countries, Muslim travellers look up tips and recommendations from special Halal travel websites which are increasingly becoming very popular. Halal food restaurants and prayer facilities are sought up and added to the itinerary. However, if such services are not provided, Muslim travellers take alternatives ways to keep their travels Halal. For example, if Halal food is not available or simply out of reach, vegan options are taken. If there are no prayer facilities, prayer is done in public spaces. Although Halal services are very much appreciated and demanded, the lack of it does not keep most Muslim travellers away from not taking a trip to a certain destination. In fact, many of my interlocutors wanted to travel to European countries, which are not particularly 'Muslim friendly'. If, on a Muslim travel website, a restaurant is said to serve Halal food, but the restaurant bears no Halal trustmark, still most of the time Muslim travellers will eat there. It seems that such posts on Muslim travel websites are enough to eat at a restaurant. We can say that, to some extent, such posts and tips from other Muslim travellers, act as a certain form of trustmark as well. Similarly, if the (Muslim) owner of a restaurant is trusted, Halal certification is not necessarily required by Muslims to eat there. Thus, although the first thing that comes in mind is Halal certification when one speaks about Halal trustmarks, trustmark can come in other forms as well, such as tips and information from fellow Muslims, and from familiarity with or trust in the owner of a restaurant. Still, development of Muslim friendly services in non-Muslim countries will be a huge convenience for Muslims tourists and it will provide huge profits for the tourism industry, as there much potential in these markets. Travelling is becoming more and more a frequent activity for the Muslim middle classes, who

would like to make their presence visible in the world.

Halal services are provided in abundance in many Muslim countries. In Malaysia, such services are officially branded and commercialized the state and businesses. The offer of many of such services, such as Halal certification and Shariah compliant hotels, is not only religiously motivated but also politically and lucratively. In fact, my interlocutors, both travellers and citizens in Malaysia, often criticised that such services had lucrative motives, set up by profit makers. Criticism includes that such businesses used the name of Islam to make money, which would in turn harm the essence and sentiments of Islam. In Muslim countries such as Malaysia, where the majority of the citizens are Muslim, the social and physical infrastructure is already compatible for an Islamic lifestyle. This is simply because Muslims live there and make their environment suitable for their Islamic lifestyle. In a new modern society this means, Halal certifications, Muslim music bands, Islamic clothing fashion and many other aspects. However, because in Malaysia an Islamic lifestyle is a ‘natural’ phenomenon, whereas in non-Muslim countries, branded Halal services are demanded and considered very convenient, in Muslim countries such as Malaysia many of such services can be perceived as unnecessary. The Halal certification market in Malaysia seems to be not so much created by the demand of Halal certification, as it is created by the businesses which problematize the ‘Halal-ness’ of products and services. Many products which are sold in the West and other non-Muslim countries, are Halal certified in Malaysia. The question that remains is however, if products that are considered non-Halal are remade to become Halal, or do they simply make their place in the market without getting a trustmark?

Although some authors argue that the awareness for Halal consumption has increased among Muslim consumers, during my stay in Malaysia I could not find evidence for this premise. Consumers were not necessarily cautious about the Halal trustmark on products or foods. However, there is a possibility that this observation is the consequence of the already prevalent presence of the Halal trustmarks. That is, because Malaysian citizens are already used to the ubiquitous existence of the Halal trustmarks, checking for these trustmarks may be unnecessary. Still, aside from my observations, I asked my interlocutors whether they found it important that products were Halal certified. Most of the time, and with many non-food products but also with food, this was not that important for my interlocutors. This, could be due to the already present trust in the Malaysian markets. However, this same trust in the state’s Halal markets is present in both Turkey and Egypt. And although I have not been in Egypt to check on this myself, both in Turkey and in Egypt, trust is not based on Halal certifications. I have witnessed personally many times, that salesmen and business owners get

offended when asking them whether their products are Muslim friendly.

Similarly, Shariah compliant hotels are not a must for Muslim travellers who travel to a Muslim country, where most regular hotels will provide a similar 'shariah compliant' experience. Critique includes that many of such services' Islamic components are rather superficial. Piety is not experienced by staying at such hotels. Usually the prices of such hotels are typically higher than regular hotels. Thus, although such hotels would be very beneficial in non-Muslim countries, in Muslim countries, providing the basic Muslim-friendly needs is enough for Muslim travellers to make the choice. New projects of Muslim states or businesses and their Muslim friendly services will be even more profitable and useful in non-Muslim countries, where there is genuine need for them. Crowdsourcing is a good and effective way to do this (Garrigos-Simon et al., 2017). By analysing reviews and stories of Muslim travellers online, on travel websites, blogs, or social media accounts, the needs and desires of Muslim traveller can be gauged.

Finally, the question what gendered difficulties and constraints Muslim women experience while travelling. Firstly, women generally experience gendered difficulties while travelling solo, regardless of whether they are Muslim or not. Difficulties involve especially safety issues. Therefore, most women prefer going in duo's or groups rather than alone.

However, there are hadith forbidding Muslim women to travel alone without a mahram. Although this does not always prevent Muslim women from travelling alone, doing so still causes controversy. Muslim women more than men are often the target of criticism involving discussions about what proper behaviour should be for a woman. They represent the religion and that what needs to be protected, from danger and bad influences. Their prominent visibility, which has been growing in the last few decades, is creating gendered anxieties. This does not mean however, that Muslim women are passive figures without a voice. Muslim women educate themselves, and partake in discussions about Islamic matter. This is not only limited to verbal participation, women partake in many activities which make them visible to the public. Similarly, Muslim women do go travelling alone, although it is not that frequent, just like other non-Muslim women. However, while doing so, they often have to negotiate their actions with other people, be it their families, friends, or the public. Nevertheless, Muslim women's participation in public life is inevitably becoming more and more present.

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