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STAKEHOLDER READINESS IN MUSLIM FRIENDLY CULTURAL TOURISM

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Abstract:

Islamic tourism is embedded within the socio-cultural fabric of society, requiring development strategies that reflect both tangible and intangible cultural dimensions. This study aims to assess stakeholder readiness to comply with Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) guidelines in Malaysia, thereby evaluating the feasibility of integrating Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) principles into cultural tourism practices. A quantitative research design was employed, drawing on descriptive statistical analysis and ANOVA. Data were collected from 200 tour operators to examine their awareness, preparedness, and compliance with MFCT guidelines. The results indicate that MFCT implementation is feasible in Perlis, supported by strong stakeholder awareness and readiness. Readiness was categorised into five dimensions: syariah compliance, provision of halal food, availability of prayer facilities, delivery of Islamic services, and gender separation measures. These categories highlight the extent to which tourism stakeholders are prepared to align with MFCT principles. The findings underscore the potential for MFCT to enhance Malaysia's positioning as a leading global destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism. Effective implementation requires addressing governance challenges, particularly the fragmented issuance of fatwas by State Mufti Departments, improving service provider knowledge of MFT principles, and ensuring the maintenance of cultural heritage sites. This study concludes that MFCT guidelines can be effectively implemented among tourism stakeholders in Perlis, contributing to Malaysia's broader aspiration to

strengthen its global reputation in Muslim-Friendly Tourism. By situating cultural tourism within the framework of Islamic values, MFCT offers a strategic pathway for sustainable tourism development and enriches the cultural experience for Muslim travellers.

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Cultural Tourism, Islamic Tourism, Muslim Friendly Tourism



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Introduction

Tourism has long been recognized as a catalyst for socio-economic growth, cultural exchange, and national identity formation (UNWTO, 2023). Within this broad domain, Islamic tourism has emerged as a significant niche, reflecting the values, practices, and cultural heritage of Muslim communities worldwide. Unlike conventional tourism, Islamic tourism emphasizes both tangible and intangible cultural dimensions, ensuring that travel experiences are aligned with syariah principles while simultaneously preserving cultural authenticity (Battour et al, 2016). This dual emphasis positions Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) as a strategic pathway for destinations seeking to attract the expanding global Muslim travel market, which is projected to reach USD 225 billion by 2028 (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2023).

Cultural tourism, defined as travel motivated by the desire to experience and engage with a destination's cultural assets, intersects closely with MFT (Richards, 2018). The integration of cultural heritage and Islamic values creates opportunities for destinations such as Malaysia to strengthen their appeal to Muslim travellers. Malaysia, with its rich cultural diversity and Islamic identity, has actively promoted itself as a hub for Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality (MFTH). The Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) has initiatives to position Malaysia as a global model, collaborating with industry associations and international partners to enhance stakeholder capacity and awareness (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023).

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in the governance and implementation of Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT). At the federal and state levels, governance is complicated by the independent issuance of fatwas by State Mufti Departments, which often results in fragmented policy application (Hashim et al., 2020). Moreover, service providers frequently lack adequate understanding of MFT principles, while the maintenance and preservation of cultural sites remain inconsistent, undermining the overall tourist experience (Samori et al,

2016). These issues highlight the need for systematic evaluation of stakeholder readiness to comply with MFCT guidelines.

Stakeholders such as tour operators play a pivotal role in translating guidelines into practice, ensuring that services meet the expectations of Muslim travellers. Assessing their readiness is therefore crucial to determine the feasibility of MFCT implementation. This study investigates stakeholder preparedness across five dimensions: syariah compliance, halal food provision, prayer facilities, Islamic services, and gender separation. By employing a quantitative approach with descriptive analysis and ANOVA, the research provides empirical insights into stakeholder awareness and capacity.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on Muslim-Friendly Tourism by highlighting the readiness of tourism stakeholders in Malaysia, particularly in Perlis, to adopt MFCT guidelines. The findings aim to inform policy, enhance service delivery, and support Malaysia's aspiration to position itself as a leading global destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism.

Literature Review

Islamic Tourism and Muslim-Friendly Tourism

Islamic tourism has gained prominence as a niche market within global tourism, driven by the increasing demand for travel experiences that align with syariah principles (Battour et al, 2016). The concept extends beyond religious obligations to encompass lifestyle preferences, including halal food, prayer facilities, modest services, and gender-sensitive arrangements (Samori et al, 2016). Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) thus represents a holistic approach to tourism development, integrating religious values with cultural authenticity to enhance the travel experience for Muslim visitors. Recent studies emphasize that Muslim-Friendly Tourism extends beyond basic syariah compliance to include experiential dimensions such as Islamic social environments, cultural alignment, and service attributes tailored to Muslim travellers (Nirwani et al., 2024; Battour et al., 2026).

Cultural Tourism and Its Intersection with MFT

Cultural tourism as travel motivated by engagement with a destination's cultural assets, has been recognised as a major driver of sustainable tourism development (Richards, 2018). The intersection of cultural tourism and MFT creates opportunities for destinations to leverage heritage, traditions, and Islamic identity as unique selling points. Malaysia, with its diverse cultural landscape and Islamic governance framework, is well-positioned to integrate cultural tourism with Muslim-friendly principles (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023). However, challenges remain in ensuring that cultural heritage sites are adequately maintained and that service providers are equipped with knowledge of MFT standards (Mohamad et al, 2025). Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism is conceptualised as the integration of diverse cultural assets including heritage, festivals, and religious sites with Islamic principles, highlighting the need to balance authenticity with syariah compliance (Diton et al., 2023).

Governance and Policy Challenges in Malaysia

Governance plays a critical role in the implementation of MFCT. In Malaysia, tourism governance is complicated by the decentralized issuance of fatwas by State Mufti Departments,

which often results in fragmented policy application (Hashim et al, 2020). This fragmentation can hinder the standardization of Muslim-friendly practices across states, creating inconsistencies in service delivery. Effective governance requires coordination between federal and state authorities, alongside capacity-building initiatives for tourism stakeholders. Despite Malaysia's advancement through standards such as MS2610 and MFAR, inconsistencies in interpretation and implementation continue to challenge the standardisation of Muslim-friendly tourism practices (Zaidi et al., 2025).

Stakeholder Readiness and Theoretical Frameworks

Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of engaging diverse actors in tourism development, including government agencies, tour operators, service providers, and local communities (Freeman, 1984). In the context of MFCT, stakeholder readiness is critical to ensuring compliance with guidelines and delivering consistent Muslim-friendly services. Previous studies highlight that stakeholder awareness and preparedness significantly influence the success of tourism initiatives (Byrd, 2007). Assessing readiness across dimensions such as syariah compliance, halal food provision, prayer facilities, Islamic services, and gender separation provides a framework for evaluating feasibility and identifying gaps in implementation (Diton et al., 2023). Effective implementation of MFCT depends on multi-stakeholder collaboration and capacity building, as varying levels of awareness and readiness among industry players continue to affect service quality and compliance (Rachmiatie et al., 2023; Irshad et al., 2022).

Towards Sustainable Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism

The integration of MFCT into Malaysia's tourism strategy aligns with broader goals of sustainable tourism development. By embedding Islamic values within cultural tourism, Malaysia can enhance its competitiveness in the global Muslim travel market while preserving cultural heritage (Diton et al, 2025). Addressing governance challenges, strengthening stakeholder capacity, and ensuring site maintenance are essential steps toward realizing Malaysia's aspiration to be a leading destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism. Although the body of knowledge on Muslim-friendly tourism is expanding, existing studies remain largely conceptual, indicating a need for empirical research on the integration of MFCT within cultural tourism settings (Mady et al., 2024; Abdul Aziz, 2025).

Overall, the growing body of literature highlights that Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism represents a strategic convergence between Islamic tourism principles and cultural tourism development. While Malaysia demonstrates strong institutional support through governance frameworks and standards, challenges persist in terms of stakeholder readiness, policy coordination, and service standardisation. Furthermore, despite increasing scholarly attention, empirical studies on the implementation of MFCT remain limited. Therefore, further research is required to evaluate stakeholder readiness, governance mechanisms, and sustainability integration to strengthen Malaysia's position as a global leader in Muslim-friendly cultural tourism.

Research Gap

Although the literature on Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) has expanded significantly, several critical gaps remain. First, existing studies predominantly focus on the conceptualisation and

general attributes of MFT, such as halal services, prayer facilities, and Islamic social environments, with limited emphasis on their integration within cultural tourism contexts (Battour et al., 2026; Nirwani et al., 2024). While Diton et al. (2023) introduced the concept of Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT), empirical validation of this framework remains limited, particularly in diverse cultural settings such as Malaysia.

Second, governance-related studies highlight fragmentation and inconsistencies in halal tourism implementation, yet there is insufficient research examining how these governance challenges specifically impact cultural heritage tourism sites and experiences (Abdullah et al., 2025; Zaidi et al., 2025).

Third, although stakeholder theory has been widely applied, current studies largely emphasise stakeholder engagement rather than stakeholder readiness, leaving a gap in understanding the preparedness of tourism operators, local communities, and policymakers in implementing MFCT practices effectively (Rachmiatie et al., 2023).

Furthermore, sustainability frameworks such as the Triple Bottom Line and Maqasid al-Shariah have been explored in halal tourism research; however, their practical integration within cultural tourism settings remains underexplored, especially in relation to heritage conservation and cultural authenticity (Jabeen et al., 2025; Romalee et al., 2025).

Finally, recent literature reviews emphasise that MFT research remains largely conceptual and lacks empirical testing in destination-specific contexts, highlighting the need for applied studies that assess implementation challenges and outcomes in real-world settings (Adinugraha et al., 2025; Irshad et al., 2022).

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to assess stakeholder readiness for the implementation of Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) guidelines in Malaysia. A quantitative approach was selected to provide measurable insights into stakeholder awareness, preparedness, and compliance across multiple dimensions. The design integrates descriptive statistical analysis and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to evaluate differences in readiness levels among tourism stakeholders.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprised tourism stakeholders, specifically tour operators registered in Malaysia. A sample of 200 tour operators was selected using purposive sampling, as these stakeholders play a central role in delivering tourism services and ensuring compliance with MFCT guidelines. The sample size was deemed sufficient to generate reliable statistical outcomes and to reflect stakeholder perspectives within the study context (Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire survey, designed to capture stakeholder perceptions and readiness across five dimensions:

- Syariah compliance
- Halal food provision

- Prayer facilities
- Islamic services
- Gender separation

The questionnaire employed a Likert scale to measure levels of agreement and readiness, ensuring consistency and comparability across responses. Prior to distribution, the instrument was validated through expert review and pilot testing to ensure clarity, reliability, and alignment with MFCT principles (Sekaran et al, 2019).

Data Analysis

Collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarize stakeholder readiness levels and identify patterns. ANOVA was employed to test for significant differences in readiness across stakeholder categories, providing insights into variations in compliance and preparedness. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software, ensuring accuracy and reliability in data interpretation.

Research Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics Of Stakeholder Readiness By Category

Stakeholder Group	N	Mean Readiness	Std. Deviation
Accommodation	28	4.12	0.41
Travel Agents	55	4.25	0.38
Food & Beverage	41	3.89	0.44
Tour Operators	45	4.31	0.36
Homestay	10	3.78	0.47
Others	21	3.95	0.42
Total	200	4.08	0.42

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 1 provide valuable insights into the levels of readiness among various tourism stakeholders to implement Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) guidelines. The analysis reveals notable differences across stakeholder categories, highlighting both strengths and areas requiring targeted intervention.

Tour operators and travel agents emerged as the most prepared groups, with mean readiness scores of 4.31 and 4.25 respectively. These high scores suggest that these stakeholders are more familiar with MFCT principles and are better equipped to deliver services that align with Muslim-friendly standards. Their operational roles often involve direct engagement with Muslim tourists, which may explain their heightened awareness and compliance with syariah-based tourism practices.

In contrast, homestay operators and food and beverage providers recorded the lowest readiness scores, at 3.78 and 3.89 respectively. These findings indicate that while these groups contribute to the tourism ecosystem, they may lack sufficient exposure to MFCT guidelines or face practical challenges in implementing them. The lower scores are particularly concerning in areas such as gender management and staff attire, where cultural sensitivity and religious compliance are critical. This suggests a need for structured training programs and clearer operational guidelines tailored to these sectors.

Standard deviation values across stakeholder groups ranged from 0.36 to 0.47, indicating moderate variability in responses. Notably, homestay operators exhibited the highest variability (SD = 0.47), suggesting inconsistent practices and understanding within this category. This inconsistency may stem from the informal nature of homestay operations or limited access to formal tourism training.

Overall, the total mean readiness score across all stakeholders was 4.08, reflecting a generally high level of preparedness. This supports the conclusion that MFCT implementation is feasible within Malaysia's tourism landscape. However, the uneven distribution of readiness underscores the importance of targeted capacity-building efforts to ensure uniform adoption of Muslim-friendly practices across all stakeholder types.

Table 2: ANOVA Summary for Stakeholder Readiness

Construct	df (Between)	df (within)	f	Sig. (p)
Shariah Compliance	5	194	3.21	.02*
Prayer Facilities	5	194	2.87	.03*
Ethical Operations	5	194	1.12	.34
Gender Management	5	194	4.02	.01**
Staff Attire	5	194	2.15	.06
Seasonal Services	5	194	0.94	.45

Note: $p < .05$ = significant; $p < .01$ = highly significant

To examine whether stakeholder readiness for Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) implementation varies across different categories of tourism providers, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each readiness construct. The results, as presented in Table 2, reveal significant differences in several key areas, offering insights into the uneven adoption of MFCT principles across stakeholder groups.

The construct of Shariah compliance yielded a statistically significant result ($F(5, 194) = 3.21$, $p = .02$), indicating that stakeholders differ in their adherence to activities and services aligned with Islamic principles. Tour operators and travel agents, who are more directly involved in itinerary planning and guest interaction, likely demonstrate higher readiness in this area compared to food and beverage providers or homestay operators. This suggests that core service providers are more attuned to syariah-based expectations, possibly due to greater exposure to Muslim traveller needs.

Similarly, prayer facilities showed significant variation across stakeholder groups ($F(5, 194) = 2.87$, $p = .03$). This construct includes the provision of prayer spaces, time allocation for religious duties, and washroom facilities equipped with bidets. The results imply that while some stakeholders, such as accommodations and travel agents, have integrated these facilities into their operations, others particularly homestay and food service providers may lack the infrastructure or awareness to do so effectively.

The construct of gender management produced the most significant result ($F(5, 194) = 4.02, p = .01$), highlighting substantial differences in how stakeholders handle gender-sensitive arrangements. These include gender-segregated performances, accommodations, and restroom facilities. The findings suggest that tour operators are more likely to implement gender-sensitive practices, whereas homestay and food and beverage providers may struggle due to operational constraints or limited understanding of religious expectations.

In contrast, ethical operations ($F(5, 194) = 1.12, p = .34$) and seasonal services ($F(5, 194) = 0.94, p = .45$) did not show statistically significant differences across stakeholder groups. This indicates a relatively uniform approach to ethical conduct such as honest marketing, cleanliness, and courteous communication and a shared lack of emphasis on seasonal offerings like Ramadan-specific services. These findings suggest that while ethical standards are broadly upheld, seasonal services remain underdeveloped across the tourism sector.

The construct of staff attire approached significance ($F(5, 194) = 2.15, p = .06$), suggesting some variation in how stakeholders enforce modest dress codes and accommodate religious obligations among staff. Although not statistically conclusive, the trend points to potential disparities that merit further investigation, especially in sectors with less formalized dress policies.

Overall, the ANOVA results confirm that stakeholder readiness for MFCT implementation is not uniform. Significant differences in Shariah compliance, prayer facilities, and gender management underscore the need for targeted interventions and capacity-building efforts. These findings reinforce the importance of stakeholder-specific training, clearer guidelines on FATWA clauses, and coordinated governance to ensure consistent adoption of Muslim-friendly practices across Malaysia's tourism ecosystem.

Table 3: Post-Hoc Comparisons (Tukey's Hsd)

Construct	Significant Group Differences ($p < .05$)
Shariah Compliance	Tour Operators > Food & Beverage
Prayer Facilities	Travel Agents > Homestay, Accommodation
Gender Management	Tour Operators > Homestay, Food & Beverage
Staff Attire	No significant differences
Seasonal Services	No significant differences

Following the significant results identified through ANOVA, a post-hoc analysis using Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) test was conducted to determine which specific stakeholder groups differed in their readiness to implement Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) guidelines. The results, presented in Table 3, offer a more granular understanding of the disparities across stakeholder categories and highlight areas requiring targeted intervention. In the construct of Shariah compliance, tour operators demonstrated significantly higher readiness compared to food and beverage providers. This suggests that tour operators are more familiar with syariah-aligned practices such as promoting halal products and organizing activities that conform to Islamic principles. Their operational role, which often involves direct engagement with Muslim tourists, may contribute to their heightened awareness and

implementation of religiously appropriate services. In contrast, food and beverage providers may lack comprehensive understanding or structured guidelines, particularly in environments where halal certification and syariah-based operations are not uniformly enforced.

For prayer facilities, travel agents showed significantly greater readiness than homestay and accommodation providers. This indicates that travel agents are more proactive in ensuring the availability of prayer spaces, time allocation for religious duties, and washroom facilities equipped with bidets. The lower readiness among homestay and accommodation providers may reflect infrastructural limitations or a lack of standardized expectations regarding religious accommodations, especially in informal or budget-oriented settings.

The construct of gender management revealed that tour operators were significantly more prepared than both homestay and food and beverage providers. Gender-sensitive arrangements, such as segregated performances, accommodations, and restrooms, are critical components of MFCT. The disparity suggests that tour operators are more attuned to these requirements, possibly due to their exposure to international Muslim travelers and formal training. Conversely, homestay and food service providers may face challenges in implementing gender separation due to spatial constraints or limited awareness of religious sensitivities.

In contrast, no significant differences were found among stakeholder groups for the constructs of staff attire and seasonal services. This uniformity suggests that all groups share a similar level of readiness moderate in these areas. The lack of differentiation may indicate a general underdevelopment of policies related to modest dress codes and seasonal offerings such as Ramadan-specific services. These findings point to a broader need for awareness campaigns and operational guidelines that address these dimensions across the tourism sector.

Overall, the post-hoc analysis reinforces the conclusion that MFCT implementation is feasible but uneven across stakeholder categories. Tour operators and travel agents consistently demonstrate higher readiness, particularly in core religious and operational constructs. Meanwhile, homestay and food and beverage providers exhibit lower preparedness, especially in gender management and Shariah compliance. These insights underscore the importance of stakeholder-specific training, infrastructure support, and policy alignment to ensure consistent and effective adoption of Muslim-friendly tourism practices throughout Malaysia's tourism ecosystem.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the readiness of tourism stakeholders in Malaysia to implement Muslim-Friendly Cultural Tourism (MFCT) guidelines. Overall, the descriptive statistics revealed a relatively high level of preparedness, with a total mean readiness score of 4.08. This suggests that MFCT implementation is feasible within Malaysia's tourism ecosystem. However, the results also highlight uneven adoption across stakeholder categories and constructs, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

Tour operators and travel agents consistently demonstrated the highest readiness levels, particularly in Shariah compliance and prayer facilities. Their operational roles, which involve direct engagement with Muslim travellers, likely contribute to their stronger alignment with syariah principles and religious service provision. These groups appear to be more familiar with MFCT guidelines and better equipped to deliver Muslim-friendly services, reflecting their

central role in shaping the tourist experience. In contrast, homestay operators and food and beverage providers recorded lower readiness scores, especially in constructs such as gender management and staff attire. These findings suggest that while core religious dimensions are relatively well integrated, operational aspects remain inconsistently applied across sectors.

The ANOVA results confirmed significant differences in stakeholder readiness for Shariah compliance, prayer facilities, and gender management. Post-hoc comparisons further revealed that tour operators scored significantly higher than food and beverage providers in Shariah compliance, while travel agents outperformed homestay and accommodation providers in prayer facilities. Similarly, tour operators demonstrated greater readiness in gender management compared to homestay and food and beverage providers. These highlight the uneven distribution of MFCT practices, with certain stakeholder groups leading in compliance while others behind.

Interestingly, no significant differences were observed in ethical operations and seasonal services, suggesting a relatively uniform approach across stakeholders. Ethical practices such as honest promotion, cleanliness, and courteous communication appear to be consistently upheld, while seasonal services, including facilities for Ramadan, remain underdeveloped across the tourism sector. Staff attire showed marginal differences, indicating potential variation but not strong enough to confirm statistical significance.

Meanwhile, these findings underscore the importance of stakeholder-specific strategies in advancing MFCT implementation. While tour operators and travel agents demonstrate strong readiness, homestay and food and beverage providers require greater support through training, infrastructure development, and clearer operational guidelines. Addressing these gaps is critical to ensuring consistency in Muslim-friendly practices and enhancing Malaysia's competitiveness as a global destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism.

From a theoretical perspective, the results align with stakeholder theory, which emphasizes the need to engage diverse actors in tourism development. The disparities observed across stakeholder groups highlight the importance of coordinated governance and capacity-building initiatives to achieve uniform compliance. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the discourse on sustainable tourism by demonstrating how the integration of Islamic values within cultural tourism can strengthen Malaysia's positioning in the global Muslim travel market while preserving cultural heritage.

In conclusion, it highlights both the strengths and challenges of MFCT implementation in Malaysia. While the overall readiness is high, uneven adoption across stakeholder categories calls for targeted interventions. By addressing governance issues, enhancing stakeholder capacity, and clarifying FATWA clauses, Malaysia can move closer to its aspiration of becoming a leading destination for Muslim-Friendly Tourism.

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