

## The Intersection of Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Sports

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Conceptual Article

**Abstract:** With the continuous growth of the global Muslim population, there has been a noticeable increase in demand for travel experiences that respect and reflect Islamic values. However, limited research has explored how these values intersect with the sports tourism sector. This paper seeks to fill that gap by examining how sports-related travel can be made more accessible and welcoming for Muslim tourists. Relying on a qualitative approach rooted in library-based research, the study reviews academic literature, industry publications and policy documents to understand current practices and potential improvements. The analysis points to several crucial factors such as the availability of halal food, spaces for prayer, gender-sensitive facilities, and compliance with Shariah guidelines that are essential for creating a Muslim-friendly sports tourism experience. Ultimately, the paper offers a conceptual framework that can guide destinations and event organizers in designing inclusive and faith-conscious sports tourism offerings. By doing so, it highlights the potential of this niche to grow as a meaningful part of the global tourism industry, encouraging inclusivity while respecting religious values.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, the global tourism landscape has evolved significantly, resulting in the emergence of various niche markets that cater to the diverse preferences of modern travelers. One such growing segment is Muslim-friendly tourism, which refers to travel experiences designed in accordance with Islamic principles, including the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, modest dress codes, and gender-segregated services (CrescentRating, 2016).

The continuous growth in the global Muslim population, along with increased awareness of Islamic practices, has contributed to a rising demand for such services across the tourism sector. The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2024 by MasterCard-CrescentRating reflects this trend, highlighting the Muslim travel sector as a rapidly expanding market with strong economic potential. However, while Muslim-friendly tourism has developed considerably, its integration within the sports tourism sector remains underexplored. Sports tourism, which encompasses travel undertaken to observe or participate in sporting events, has become a major driver of international tourism. Countries such as Malaysia, Qatar, and Turkey have hosted a range of high-profile international sports events, but the consistent application of Muslim-friendly standards in these contexts is still lacking. As noted by Ibrahim (2016), a number of factors must be considered for sporting events to qualify as Muslim-friendly including advertising content, halal food and beverages, designated prayer areas, Shariah-compliant clothing, gender-segregated facilities, and scheduling that does not conflict with prayer times. Unfortunately, many international sporting environments still fall short of meeting these requirements, which may result in the exclusion or discomfort of Muslim athletes and visitors. For example, as highlighted by Hanrahan (2016), a driver celebrated his victory at the Malaysian Formula 1 Grand Prix in Sepang by drinking champagne from his shoe, a gesture rooted in motorsport tradition. While this act occurred publicly within a major Malaysian sports venue, it did not trigger any formal complaints or regulatory responses from the authorities. Since it was not officially regarded as a violation, no further action was taken. However, this incident subtly underscores the availability of alcohol at such venues, which contradicts the principles of a Muslim-friendly environment. In addition to concerns about alcohol, the concept of Muslim-friendly sports facilities also extends to basic amenities such as cleanliness, particularly of public restrooms. According to a report by Zulkifli (2022), Stadium Shah Alam, one of the main venues for the 1998 Commonwealth Games and numerous other international events was criticized for its deteriorating condition, especially in regard to poorly maintained and often malfunctioning toilets. From an Islamic perspective, cleanliness is not only a hygienic necessity but a core element of religious observance, as emphasized by A. Rahim (2005). Ensuring clean, functional, and accessible facilities is therefore fundamental to aligning sports venues with Muslim-friendly standards. These examples reflect broader, recurring challenges found in many sporting venues across the region. Issues related to alcohol availability, inadequate prayer spaces, lack of gender-sensitive facilities, and poor maintenance are still common. Addressing these concerns is essential for transforming such venues into spaces that are not only world-class in infrastructure but also respectful of Muslim values and inclusive to a

wider demographic of visitors. Thus, this situation highlights a clear research gap within the current body of knowledge. While previous studies have examined halal tourism and Shariah-compliant hospitality practices, there has been limited academic inquiry into how these principles intersect with sports tourism. The absence of structured guidelines and theoretical models leaves event organizers and destination managers with few resources to support the implementation of inclusive practices for Muslim participants and spectators. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature relating to both Muslim-friendly tourism and sports tourism. The main objective is to develop a conceptual framework that can guide stakeholders particularly in Muslim-majority countries in creating inclusive and Shariah-sensitive sporting events and experiences. In doing so, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on inclusive tourism and to position Muslim-friendly sports tourism as a viable and valuable niche within the global travel industry.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Evolving Concepts of Sports and Tourism

Historically, sports have always been a part of human civilization not just for entertainment, but also for social bonding, discipline, and physical development. Sutula (2018) defines sports as a socio-cultural phenomenon rooted in both competition and community values. Over time, sports have evolved into diverse forms, ranging from team games to individual and adventure sports, such as surfing and rock climbing. Parallel to this, tourism as an industry has also grown, defined by the movement of people for leisure, business, or cultural purposes (Dilek & Kulakoğlu, 2018). According to the Oxford Learner's Dictionaries (2023), sports is defined as activities that involve physical effort and skills by a person either alone or in teams and compete against each other. Sports have a diverse range of disciplines because they have progressed through time. These comprise team sports such as soccer, basketball, and cricket; individual sports such as tennis, golf and athletics; along with niche and extreme sports such as skateboarding, surfing and rock climbing. When people deliberately leave their home environments to visit another one, they are considered tourists (Camilleri, 2018). Tourism benefits not only the traveler but also the country when there are more prospects for it. Indeed, tourism is one sector that can create jobs and drive economic growth. However, sports tourism is, in general, travel that incorporates attending or participating in a sporting event while being outside of the visitors' usual environment. In

recent decades, the merging of these two sectors gave rise to sports tourism, where people travel specifically to watch or participate in sports events. It is a key component of the tourist business, integrating elements of travel, sports, and recreation. According to Mazza (2022), sport tourism is seen as a collection of services due to its nature, diversity, and composition. The demand for these services is divided to represent the variety of vacationers. Furthermore, sports tourism also provides a local economic boost in the form of money spent on hotels, food, transport, and entertainment. Major events allow the host city or country to develop its infrastructure and attract international attention, which can provide long term benefits of tourism, investment and global recognition. On the other hand, a fun method for people to indulge in their love of sports and discover new locations, cultures, and experiences is through sports tourism. Growing interest in sports and travel around the world is reflected in its growth.

## 2.2 The Rise of Muslim-Friendly Tourism

The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism has gained momentum over the past 15 years, influenced by the rapid growth of the global Muslim population. Initially framed under Islamic or Shariah-compliant, the idea emphasized religious-based travel such as Hajj or Umrah. Later, researchers began expanding this definition to include leisure travel that adheres to Islamic values such as the availability of halal food, separate recreational facilities for men and women, and prayer accommodations. According to Cetin *et al.* (2016), Muslim-friendly tourism consists of Islamic tourism, Shariah compliant tourism and Halal tourism. Islamic tourism may refer to travelling for religious reasons. For instance, visiting Mecca for pilgrimage. Abd Rahman & Laderlah (2018) defined that Islamic tourism may be regarded as ibadah, or worship in Islam if it is carried out in conformity with Islamic beliefs. Thus, the benefits of tourism to Muslims are also affirmed by the Qur'an and Hadith. Travel and tourism are prescribed in Islam based on the directives of Allah S.W.T:

*“He is the One who made the earth easy for you, so walk in all directions and eat some of His sustenance. And only to Him are you (returned after)” (al-Quran 67:15)*

Hajj, umrah, hijrah and jihad were all forms of travel for the Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. Rasulullah S.A.W stated, according to Abu Huraira:

*“Go on a journey you will be healthy and fight you will be rich!” (Kanz al-’Ummal, no. 17470)*

Shariah-compliant tourism is generally regarded as the most stringent form of Islamic travel. As described by Abdullah *et al.* (2022), it encompasses travel and hospitality services that strictly adhere to Islamic principles in both their production and consumption. For example, a hotel operating under Shariah guidelines would not serve alcoholic beverages and would provide separate swimming pools and spa facilities for men and women to ensure modesty and gender segregation. In contrast, halal tourism is characterized by fewer restrictions and is designed to accommodate a broader segment of Muslim travelers through globally adaptable offerings. Firdaus *et al.* (2021) clarified that halal tourism does not necessarily follow the same rigid interpretations of Islamic law as seen in regions like Aceh. Instead, it emphasizes providing essential Muslim-friendly services, such as halal food, accessible mosques, and the exclusion of prohibited items like alcohol. Importantly, halal tourism is not a new concept within the travel industry. As Chandra (2014) argued, the growing global Muslim population has created a need for more specialized halal tourism products and services to cater to this expanding market. Interestingly, these offerings appeal not only to Muslims but also to non-Muslims, largely due to their emphasis on cleanliness, quality, and ethical practices. The halal industry, in this sense, is grounded in principles of mutual respect and genuine cooperation. From an Islamic perspective, any tourism activity or service that aligns with Islamic teachings is considered halal (Battour & Ismail, 2015). As such, the broader term Muslim-friendly tourism is often used to encompass various related concepts including Islamic tourism, halal tourism, Muslim tourism, Shariah-compliant tourism, and Islamic hospitality (Hasanah, 2020). According to Aziz (2018), Muslim-friendly tourism focuses specifically on providing inclusive services across the tourism and hospitality sectors, particularly in areas like accommodation, food and beverages, and travel-related activities. This evolution has led to a more flexible and market-responsive approach to halal or Muslim-friendly tourism. It has also encouraged service providers in non-Muslim-majority countries to tailor their offerings to meet the expectations of Muslim travelers. Malaysia, for instance, has played a leading role in formalizing Muslim-friendly hospitality through standards such as MS 2610:2015, which demonstrates how inclusivity and commercial success can go hand in hand.

### *2.3 Missing Link: Muslim-Friendly Sports Tourism*

While the literature on both sports' tourism and Muslim-friendly tourism has grown, there remains a notable gap when it comes to examining how these two areas intersect. Most existing studies treat them as separate domains, offering little insight into how Islamic values can be thoughtfully integrated into sports tourism experiences. Only in recent examples such as Qatar's 2022 FIFA World Cup, most people witnessed meaningful efforts to incorporate

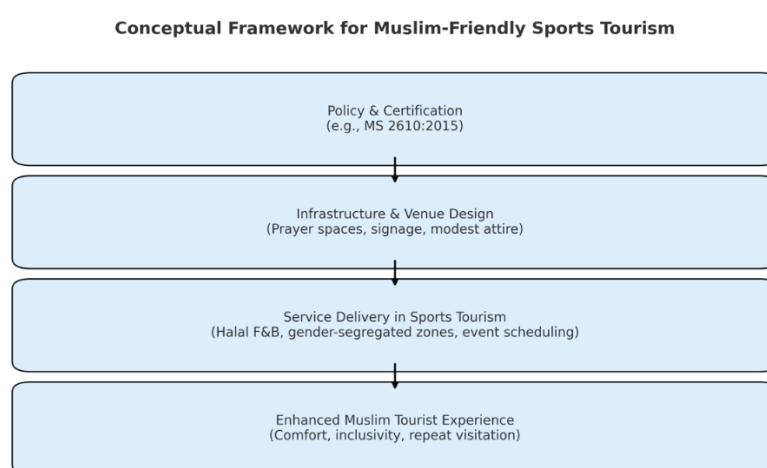
Muslim-friendly principles, including the provision of halal food, dedicated prayer spaces, and modest accommodation standards within a major international sporting context. However, such cases are still rare and remain exceptions rather than the norm. As in response, this study aims to address that gap by exploring how sports tourism can become more inclusive of Islamic values. Drawing on lessons from both fields, the research proposes a more integrated approach that can guide future policy and practice toward greater religious inclusivity in global sports tourism. Integrating religious and moral considerations into sports is not only possible but encouraged in Islam. According to Malchowicz-Mosko (2021), athletic activities should never divert Muslims from their spiritual responsibilities. In essence, Muslim-friendly sports tourism demands that all sporting events align with Islamic values not only through services such as halal food and prayer facilities, but also through infrastructure and scheduling that respects religious observance. Qatar's example during the World Cup illustrates this well. The Qatari government offered an array of Muslim-friendly amenities that were accommodating not only to Muslims but also respectful and accessible to non-Muslim attendees. The integration of Islamic elements and da'wah efforts into the event's framework demonstrated a balanced model of cultural authenticity and international hospitality. According to Malchowicz-Mosko (2021), for a non-secular Islamic country to successfully host global sporting events, it must evolve both socially and culturally, maintaining its religious identity while appealing to global markets, including both Western and Muslim-majority regions. In this broader context, Muslim-friendly tourism has emerged as a niche yet significant segment in the global tourism landscape. As Muslim travelers increasingly seek destinations that reflect their religious and cultural values, the demand for inclusive services continues to grow.

### **3. Material and Method**

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based research approach aimed at synthesizing existing literature on Muslim-friendly tourism and its application within the context of international sports tourism. Given the limited availability of empirical studies in this emerging field, a literature review methodology was deemed appropriate to identify conceptual linkages, emerging trends, and gaps for future investigation. Academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used to collect peer-reviewed articles, reports, and institutional guidelines relevant to halal tourism, Shariah-compliant hospitality, and sports tourism. While this approach enables a comprehensive thematic exploration, it is acknowledged that the lack of empirical fieldwork is a limitation. Future

studies may benefit from qualitative methods such as interviews with policymakers, tourism stakeholders, or Muslim athletes, as well as quantitative surveys measuring user satisfaction with Muslim-friendly sports services.

A literature review is an excellent way of synthesizing research findings to show evidence on a meta-level and to uncover areas in which more research is needed, which is a critical component of creating theoretical frameworks and building conceptual models (Snyder, 2019). In this respect, library research is fundamental to this process, allowing researchers to identify and use a range of crucial, nuanced material to contextualize their topic and the wider discussion around it. For instance, MS 2610:2015 Muslim Friendly Hospitality Services (MFHS) serves as one of the main references used due to its relevance to the writing of this thesis which involves all related elements pertaining to Muslim friendly services in Malaysia. This method enables the investigator to evaluate retrospectively what has been accomplished, identifying gaps in knowledge and recognizing where assistance is needed. Furthermore, the library research process contributes to the consistency of the study as it uses peer-reviewed sources that are credible and validate the information. In particular, over the course of the study methodological background from literature and library-based research will provide not only theory but also inform about the upcoming research in the scope of Muslim-friendly tourism and sports. To better organize and communicate the key themes emerging from this review, a conceptual framework is proposed (see Figure 1). It illustrates the interrelation between policy support, infrastructure design, and service delivery in shaping a Muslim-friendly sports tourism experience. This model may also serve as a foundation for future empirical research and testing in various country contexts.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework for muslim-friendly sports tourism

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Foundations of Muslim-Friendly Sports in Islam

A study by Lone (2017), sports and playing are inevitable aspects of life; they are natural activities that transcend age and condition, with everyone participating in some form of physical activity. In Islam, sports are not only allowed, but are also considered a religious obligation, with the Prophet inspiring these sports traditions. Sports and leisure are highly encouraged within a person's daily routine by Islam to maintain a person's good health. Besides, the attainment of an individual balanced well-being is also the object of Islamic teachings and practices. As long as it does not involve sin or conflict with other religious responsibilities, Islam encourages sports as a means of stimulating the mind and supporting physical fitness (Wabuyabo *et al.*, 2015; Abdulati, 1999). Islam clearly has causes and qualities of its own, and it has its own perspective on the idea of physical activity. Furthermore, Islam forbids engaging in any athletic endeavour that could be deemed damaging or immoral, or that could negatively impact a person's health, including doping or violent conduct. For instance, doping in which the use of physical steroids in sports by some athletes represents a blatant moral contradiction to the principle of honest athletic competition. It can be considered a fraudulent method that undermines the concept of fair play (Al-Dafrawi, 2020). Besides, Marwat *et al.* (2014) stated that it is permissible to participate in some sports activities as long as the sports activity that is carried out does not conflict with Islamic teachings and meet the standards set according to Islamic law. The guidelines state that one must cover all required body parts when playing, refrain from combining male and female players, and provide proper attention to the five daily prayers. That is essentially the core of what being Muslim-friendly is all about. This proves that Islam strongly encourages its followers to be involved in sports activities, in line with the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad and the call of God from time immemorial. Other than that, some previous studies have highlighted an example on Islamic countries such as Qatar and Malaysia, which often host international sports events, not only successfully organize prestigious events, but also wisely integrate Islamic elements in their organization. However, the literature on the specific relationship between Muslim-friendly tourism and sports is still relatively limited. This demonstrates that the intersection between the two is an intriguing one. Islam and sports refer to the connection of Islamic ideas with the world of sporting activities and sports events. As Muslim travelers become a more visible part of the global tourism market, it is crucial for sports tourism to evolve in ways that respect their religious and cultural needs. This section identifies several key themes that are essential to developing

a truly Muslim-friendly sports tourism experience. These themes are drawn from both academic literature and real-world practices in countries that have hosted major sporting events.

#### *4.2 Key Themes in Muslim-Friendly Sports Tourism*

##### *4.2.1. Facilities and infrastructure*

One of the most immediate needs for Muslim-friendly sports tourism is the availability of appropriate infrastructure, including gender-segregated spaces, prayer rooms, and ablution facilities. These are not only practical necessities but also symbols of respect for Islamic values. During the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, organizers implemented dedicated prayer spaces across venues, which served both local and international Muslim visitors. Similarly, there have been notable historical efforts to incorporate Muslim-friendly elements into major international sports events, even in non-Muslim countries. The Tokyo 2020 and London 2012 Olympics stand out as clear examples, demonstrating that inclusivity on a global scale is both achievable and effective. Despite being hosted by non-Muslim nations, these events integrated key features such as designated prayer spaces, halal food options, and accommodations for modest attire, ensuring that Muslim athletes and spectators could participate with comfort and dignity. A particularly significant initiative came from CEO Yasuharu Inoue, who introduced a mobile prayer space during the Tokyo Olympics to support both athletes and attendees in fulfilling their religious obligations (Tarrant, 2020). Inoue emphasized that such provisions not only help athletes remain motivated and focused, but also reflect a deeper commitment by host countries to recognizing and respecting diverse cultural and religious identities, thus contributing to a more peaceful and inclusive Olympic movement.

##### *4.2.2. Halal food and beverage services*

Food is another critical component. For Muslim travelers, the assurance of halal-certified meals is essential not just availability, but transparency and certification play a key role. According to Golnaz *et al.* (2010), the concept of halal has developed beyond its roots as a purely religious obligation, becoming a recognized standard not only for Muslims but also for many non-Muslim consumers worldwide. The growing interest in halal products among non-Muslims is often driven by ethical concerns related to animal welfare, as well as the

perception that halal food is cleaner, safer, and healthier. For example, the Olympics held in South Korea were among the largest international sporting events in Asia hosted by a Muslim-minority country, as reported by Fazira (2020). In alignment with halal food standards set by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the event provided halal meals for athletes and staff. A dedicated “halal food zone” was established in the Athlete’s Dining Hall, operated by Shinsegae Food and certified as halal by the Korea Muslim Federation. Thus, this trend highlights the widespread appeal and increasing acceptance of halal food beyond the Muslim community. This level of detail not only builds trust but helps Muslim tourists feel welcomed and included in the event experience.

#### *4.2.3. Time and Space for Worship*

Islamic prayer times must be observed five times daily, and this can be a challenge in busy sports environments. Because performing the five daily prayers is an obligation in Islam, it is essential for Muslims to have access to adequate prayer facilities while traveling (Muslim & Harun, 2022). According to Sarial *et al.* (2015), even if a prayer room is not physically prominent within a community, it should still create a sense of spiritual presence. This atmosphere helps individuals strengthen their beliefs and express their spirituality openly. A thoughtfully designed prayer space can positively influence religious practice, fostering an environment that encourages the community to engage in both spiritual and social responsibilities. Overall, the layout and size of prayer rooms should be planned according to user capacity to ensure comfort and accessibility. Other than that, Yusuf (2025) emphasizes that Muslim athletes are required to perform five daily prayers, including the Maghrib prayer, which often coincides with Iftar during the fasting month. These religious practices should be respected and accommodated, as they play a crucial role in providing holistic support for Muslim athletes. In his article, Yusuf explains that coaches can support their athletes by ensuring the availability of clean and quiet prayer spaces at both training and competition venues. Additionally, event schedules should be arranged in coordination with the athletes to avoid clashes with prayer times. If prayer happens to coincide with training or competition, athletes should be given short breaks to fulfill their religious obligations without disruption. Therefore, providing not just physical prayer spaces, but also designing schedules that consider prayer times, especially on match days, can significantly enhance the experience for Muslim visitors.

#### *4.2.4. Modesty, attire, and gender sensitivity*

Many Muslim tourists, particularly women, may feel uncomfortable in mixed-gender environments or where modest dress codes are not respected. Events can address this by offering family-only sections, separate seating, and even women-only participation days for certain activities. For instance, further illustrating this commitment, Dell'Orto and Bharath (2024) highlighted the participation of a devout Muslim athlete in the women's 3,000-meter steeplechase at the Tokyo Games. She competed while wearing modest sportswear, including a hijab, and maintained her training through Ramadan, fasting while continuing to meet the high demands of elite performance. Her story serves as a powerful example of how religious observance and top-tier athletic achievement can coexist. It also reflects the growing recognition within international sporting competitions of the need to accommodate such dual commitments in a respectful and supportive manner.

#### *4.2.5. Certification and policy support*

Establishing and promoting standards like MS 2610:2015 (Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services) helps formalize expectations for service providers. Certification programs not only give businesses a competitive edge but also ensure consistency and quality in Muslim-friendly service delivery. In Malaysia, the MS 2610:2015 Muslim-Friendly Hospitality Services standard has been established to guide the delivery of Muslim-friendly tourism. This standard governs the management of tourism-related facilities, products, and services in accordance with Islamic principles. Importantly, Islamic tourism under this framework does not serve only Muslim travelers, it promotes inclusive hospitality experiences that non-Muslims can also appreciate. The standard is made accessible by SIRIM QAS International to a wide range of industry players, including hoteliers, tour guides, cruise operators, manufacturers of tourism products, and homestay providers (SIRIM QAS International, 2022). Governments and tourism boards play a vital role in guiding event planners and venues on compliance and best practices.

### *4.3 Case Studies*

#### *4.3.1. Qatar*

In particular, Muslim-friendly tourism and sports have always been an emerging field of attention as Islamic countries develop within global tourism and sports. With the global

Muslim population on the rise, the need for travel experiences that are consistent with religious and cultural values, sporting or otherwise, has exploded. An excellent example of this convergence is the use of sport as a diplomatic tool such as the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, an Islamic country that succeeded in hosting the world's premier sports event and made sure it was welcoming to Muslim visitors. In Qatar, halal tourism is one of five key areas in which tourism is focused on developing. Qatar is a Muslim country with a halal ecosystem, such as the availability of Halal food, mosques, prayer facilities in malls, Muslim-friendly hotels with prayer rooms, Qibla signs marked in rooms, toilets with sprayers, and other relevant facilities (Abdrakhmanova & Moghavvemi, 2022). Qatar's ability to seamlessly integrate Muslim-friendly services during the event demonstrated how Muslim-friendly practices can be effectively incorporated into large-scale international sports events. The study by Luerdi (2022) stated that the estimated \$220 billion spent by Qatar to host the mega-event makes it the most expensive football match in World Cup history. Most of the funds went to infrastructure, including hotels and public transportation facilities, rather than stadiums. Moreover, the FIFA World Cup in Qatar is not only the safest World Cup ever but is also being billed as family-friendly and women-friendly. In Qatar, the government's attempts to create a healthy society are strongly supported by the religious encouragement of sports as well as the well-being of the body and soul (Mohammed & Qoronfleh, 2022). In fact, Qatar FIFA World Cup appears to be one of the most successful World Cup events, despite concerns being raised about whether the international sporting event would operate smoothly given that it is only a small country with a limited number of residents, little football history, and unfavourable weather (Luerdi, 2022). The country's meticulous planning included the provision of halal food at all stadiums and public venues, dedicated prayer rooms, and services that respected the modesty and gender preferences of Muslim visitors. Through the positive reception of these services, it demonstrates that Muslim-friendly tourism is possible during major world events, enriching the experience of Muslim spectators and athletes, and the wider tourism economy.

#### *4.3.2. Malaysia*

Likewise, Malaysia has also positioned itself as a host country for international activities, having a long practice of holding local and international events, along with a great deal of emphasis on sports tourism catering for the Muslim demographic. Malaysia has also hosted several world-class sport events, including the Royal Langkawi International Regatta,

Ironman Triathlon, Formula 1 Grand Prix Malaysia, FEI Showjumping World Cup, the Petronas Primax 3 Merdeka Millennium Endurance Race, Super GT, Malaysian Motorcycle Grand Prix, A1GP Malaysia, Monsoon Cup and the Petronas Malaysia Open, providing numerous sport occasions in the state-of-the-art facilities throughout its territory (Mapjabil *et al.*, 2015). Other than that, according to a recent global economic assessment, Malaysia is among the top five travel destinations in the world for Muslims. Standards and guidelines to strengthen the Muslim tourism and hospitality service delivery have been developed by Islamic Tourism Centre (Chin, 2022). Additionally, one of Malaysia's main sources of economic growth is the provision of Muslim-friendly hospitality services (Abas *et al.*, 2017). Besides, Ibrahim *et al.*, (2016) claimed that the provision of Muslim-friendly sports and recreation facilities is a necessity if Malaysia aspires to become a global Halal hub due to frequentness of international sporting competitions that are now regularly organised and serve as a major draw for tourists to Malaysia.

#### 4.3.3 *Turkiye*

Turkiye, a popular destination that bridges both East and West, has actively promoted halal tourism as part of its national tourism strategy. While not officially using the term “Muslim-friendly sports tourism,” the country has hosted major events like the UEFA Super Cup and Formula 1 Turkish Grand Prix, where services such as halal catering, female-only gym hours, and accessible prayer rooms were made available in select venues. Considering Turkiye's cultural and religious context, halal tourism serves as a significant form of alternative tourism. In this regard, diversifying tourism offerings and enhancing service quality are essential to supporting its growth (Pamukçu & Arpacı, 2016). According to Eddahar (2018), the Muslim-friendly tourism (MFT) market in Turkiye is expanding rapidly, driven by strong domestic and international demand. Turkish Airlines, a key global carrier, offers halal-certified meals on all flights and connects Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Atatürk International Airport in Istanbul, one of the world's fastest-growing airports, also caters to basic Muslim needs. Many hotels across Turkiye provide conservative, Muslim-friendly services targeting affluent and religious travelers. Overall, tourism products and services in Turkiye that align with Islamic values are considered part of its growing MFT sector. Another example, several beach resorts in OIC member countries have begun incorporating gender-segregated facilities such as separate swimming pools, fitness centers, and women-only beaches alongside core Muslim-friendly services like halal food and designated prayer areas. Turkiye is at the forefront of this development, particularly in the beach resort segment. One

notable example is the Adenya Resort, which features both indoor and outdoor pools separated by gender, as well as a beach exclusively for women and another for families, where modest dress codes are observed (COMCEC, 2016).

#### *4.3.4 United Arab Emirates (UAE)*

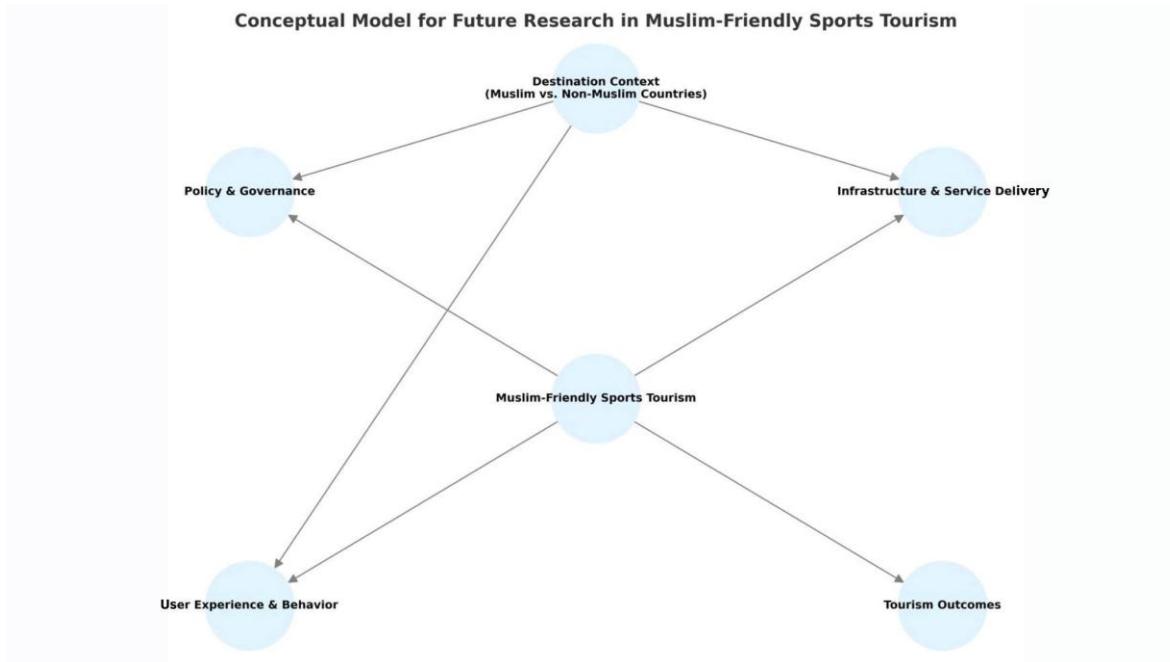
The UAE, particularly Dubai and Abu Dhabi, has emerged as a hub for both high-profile sporting events and halal tourism. According to news by CNN (2022), Abu Dhabi has firmly established itself as a key destination on the global sports calendar, hosting prestigious events such as the annual Formula 1 Etihad Airways Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship, UFC Abu Dhabi Showdown Week, the NBA Abu Dhabi Games, the Abu Dhabi T10, and the FINA World Swimming Championships. However, the city's sporting culture extends far beyond watching from the sidelines. Today, Abu Dhabi continues to attract major international sporting events, offering both residents and visitors the chance to witness memorable moments across a diverse range of disciplines. Facilities often include designated prayer areas, halal-certified food courts, and modesty-sensitive arrangements, especially for female participants. Government support through Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (DTCM) has also helped promote Muslim-friendly experiences through certifications, policy alignment, and partnerships with global halal organizations. For instance, Al Jawhara Hotels, operated by the Dubai-based Lootah Hotel Management Company offer fully Shariah-compliant services. These hotels do not serve alcohol or pork and provide separate recreational and sports facilities for men and women. Each room is also equipped with a prayer rug and Qibla direction indicator to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim guests (COMCEC, 2016; Wali, 2015).

## **5. Conclusion**

The junction of Muslim-friendly tourism and sports offers a distinct and fast expanding niche in the global tourism market. Additionally, associating halal principles and religious matters with sports tourism will increase the market and develop cultural understanding between the two. While the demand for Muslim-friendly tourism continues to grow, integrating these principles into sports tourism presents both opportunities and challenges particularly for non-Muslim-majority countries. Among the main issues are limited awareness of Muslim travelers' needs, resistance to religious accommodation in secular or multicultural societies, and inadequate infrastructure that fails to support core Islamic practices such as prayer,

modest dress, and halal food. Moreover, cultural adaptation remains one of the biggest hurdles. In some international contexts, the inclusion of features such as gender-segregated spaces or prayer breaks may be viewed as culturally unfamiliar or even incompatible with existing norms. However, with appropriate policy guidance, training, and stakeholder engagement, non-Muslim destinations can successfully implement Muslim-friendly practices without alienating other visitor groups. To realise this potential fully, stakeholders will have to keep innovating, collaborating, and ensuring their services meet the unique and evolving needs of Muslim traveler. Muslim-friendly sports tourism will have a rosy future but as a niche in tourism, it will require long-term commitment towards inclusivity, authenticity, and respect for traditions and religious and cultural values. As stated by Lone (2017), sports that entail love, respect, and collaboration amongst people are encouraged by Islam, whereas those that promote resentment, anger, or hostility are forbidden. This shows that Islam and sports have a close connection in the lives of mankind. Along with the passage of time, tourism services now need to be strengthened and adapted to the principles of Islam, because both aspects of traveling and sports are highly encouraged in this religion. However, this intersection remains underexplored in the academic literature, highlighting the need for further research into how Muslim-friendly principles can be integrated into the tourism and sports industries on a global scale. The intersection of Muslim-friendly Tourism and Sports requires that all sporting events meet Muslim-friendly criteria, as well as facilities and other requirements.

To guide future research and policy development, this study proposes a conceptual model that integrates key components influencing the implementation and outcomes of Muslim-friendly sports tourism. Each domain plays a crucial role in shaping how effectively Muslim-friendly practices are adopted in the sports tourism sector. Importantly, the model includes destination context whether a country is Muslim-majority or not as a moderating factor that influences policy enforcement, cultural acceptance, and operational feasibility. This framework serves as a foundation for empirical studies to test relationships between institutional support, service quality, and tourist satisfaction. It also enables comparative analysis across regions and can inform the development of inclusive tourism strategies that align with both religious values and international standards of hospitality.



**Figure 2.** Conceptual model future research in muslim-friendly sports tourism

Finally, as a suggestion, governments, event planners, and tourist authorities can implement a number of policy measures to improve the real-world implementation of Muslim-friendly concepts in sports tourism. In order to give precise criteria that cover more than just hotels and restaurants such as sports facilities and event venues national certification standards like Malaysia Standard MS 2610:2015 must be established or adopted. In order to accommodate religious needs, stadiums, athlete villages, and fan zones should all have prayer rooms, restrooms, and Qibla direction indications. Another top concern is making sure that halal-certified food is served at all athletic events. The certification should be prominently displayed and come from reputable halal authority. Equally important is by promoting gender-sensitive facility design such as offering women-only gym, distinct wellness rooms, or locations that are suitable for modest clothing is probably crucial. These characteristics make Muslim tourists' experiences more welcoming and pleasant, especially for women. Furthermore, in order to guarantee that such characteristics are thought of early on, governments ought to incorporate Muslim-friendly requirements in national event bidding paperwork. Cultural sensitivity training should be provided to frontline employees, including those in tourism, hospitality, and sports operations, to help them comprehend and politely address the demands of Muslim tourists. Other than that, authenticity and trust can also be increased through collaborations with local community leaders, halal authorities, and Islamic

organisations. Finally, appropriate monitoring and feedback methods should be in place when these policies are put into place so that organisers may assess their efficacy and make adjustments as needed. When taken as a whole, these actions can contribute to the development of a more hospitable and inclusive sports tourism landscape that is consistent with the beliefs and preferences of Muslim tourists.

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