



Analysis of the Impact of Singapore Government Policies on the Development of Halal Tourism (2020–2024)

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Article History:

Received: January 27, 2026

Revised: April 20, 2026

Accepted: April 23, 2026

Published: July 16, 2026

Keywords:

*Halal Tourism,
Government Policy,
Liberalism, Singapore,
Tourism.*

Abstract

The development of halal tourism has become one of the strategic policies of the Singapore government in responding to global tourism competition and the increasing mobility of Muslim international travelers. This study aims to analyze the impact of Singapore's government policies on halal tourism development using the perspective of Liberalism in International Relations. Liberalism views states as rational actors that promote cooperation, policy openness, and the use of institutions to achieve mutual benefits. This research employs a qualitative method through a literature review of government policy documents, tourism reports, and publications from international organizations. The findings indicate that Singapore's halal tourism policy is implemented through the provision of Muslim-friendly facilities, a credible halal certification system, and inclusive tourism promotion. These policies have contributed to enhancing Singapore's attractiveness to Muslim tourists, strengthening the tourism sector, and expanding regional and international tourism cooperation. Overall, the development of halal tourism in Singapore reflects liberal principles that emphasize cooperation, institutional roles, and mutual gains in international relations.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors in the global economy, making a significant contribution to economic growth, job creation, and the strengthening of interstate relations. Over the past few decades, this sector has undergone substantial transformation in line with changes in the preferences and characteristics of international tourists. One prominent trend is the growing demand for halal tourism, which is no longer narrowly understood as religious tourism, but rather as a tourism service concept that accommodates the needs of Muslim travelers, such as the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, and a culturally inclusive environment. This development indicates that halal tourism has evolved into a relevant global market segment, not only for Muslim-majority countries but also for non-Muslim countries seeking to enhance their tourism competitiveness in the international market. The World Tourism Organization notes that the growth in the number of global Muslim travelers has encouraged countries to adjust tourism policies, regulations, and marketing strategies to better respond to this market's needs (UNWTO, 2022).

This phenomenon has been further reinforced by the emergence of what is known as the “halal boom,” referring to the significant increase in international Muslim tourist mobility, particularly toward the Asian region. Southeast and East Asian countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Japan, and South Korea have become leading destinations, as they are perceived to successfully combine modern tourism attractions with the provision of Muslim-friendly facilities. The growth of the Muslim middle class, improved transportation connectivity, and increased awareness of religious identity in travel activities are the main factors driving the halal boom in Asia (CrescentRating, 2023). Asia is widely regarded as an adaptive and innovative region in developing a halal tourism ecosystem without fundamentally altering national identities. This condition has intensified competition among countries to attract Muslim tourists through the strengthening of halal tourism policies, certification systems, international promotion, and cross-border cooperation. Thus, the halal boom not only reflects changing travel patterns among Muslim tourists but also underscores the role of halal tourism as a strategic instrument in tourism development and economic diplomacy in Asia (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

Singapore, as a city-state with limited natural resources, relies heavily on the service sector—particularly tourism—as one of the main pillars of its national economic development. This dependence has driven the Singaporean government to adopt policies that are adaptive, innovative, and responsive to global market dynamics. One such adaptation is reflected in Singapore's serious efforts to capture opportunities in the halal tourism market amid the growing number of international Muslim travelers. Although Muslims constitute a minority population in Singapore, the country has actively developed a Muslim-friendly tourism ecosystem through the provision of halal-certified restaurants, hotels that accommodate worship needs, supporting facilities such as prayer

rooms in public spaces, and easy access to information for Muslim tourists. These policies reflect a pragmatic and inclusive approach that positions halal tourism not as an issue of religious identity, but as an economic strategy to broaden tourism market segmentation and enhance global competitiveness (Henderson, 2016). This approach also demonstrates that non-Muslim countries are capable of functionally integrating diversity values into public policy in a market-oriented manner.

From an International Relations perspective, Singapore's halal tourism development policies can be analyzed through Liberalism theory, which views states as rational actors that promote market openness, international cooperation, and the pursuit of mutual gains. Liberalism emphasizes that interstate interactions are driven not only by security interests but also by economic interests and societal welfare. In this context, Singapore's halal tourism policy also reflects the commodification of religion, namely the utilization of religious values and symbols as economic commodities to attract global Muslim tourists. This pragmatic approach illustrates how religious values are adaptively integrated into national tourism strategies and economic diplomacy without altering the country's secular character (Keohane & Nye, 2022).

The development of halal tourism as a global market segment has increased significantly alongside the rising mobility of international Muslim travelers in the post-pandemic period. In responding to this trend, Singapore has demonstrated strong institutional governance through the role of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS) as the official authority responsible for ensuring halal certification standards. This credible certification system strengthens tourist confidence and enhances Singapore's competitiveness as a Muslim-friendly destination in a non-Muslim country. Therefore, this study is important in analyzing the impact of Singapore's halal tourism policies in reinforcing the country's position within the global tourism system. The research is expected to explain how the role of the state and institutions, within the framework of liberalism, promotes economic integration, expands international cooperation, and positions halal tourism as an effective and sustainable policy strategy (Keohane, 1984; UNWTO, 2022).

The author's interest in this study arises from a paradoxical yet compelling phenomenon, namely how Singapore, as a country with a Muslim minority population, has nevertheless emerged as one of the most Muslim-friendly destinations in the world. This success is reflected in Singapore's achievement of ranking first among non-OIC countries in the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2023 (CrescentRating, 2023). This accomplishment demonstrates the consistency of policy implementation and the strong commitment of the Singaporean government to the sustainable development of Muslim-friendly tourism. Accordingly, this study is not only academically relevant but also provides an empirical contribution to understanding best practices in halal tourism development within non-Muslim countries (UNWTO, 2022).

This study is specifically focused on the period 2020–2025, a phase during which Singapore's halal tourism development policies have reached a relatively stable

level of maturity and gained recognition at the global level. The clear delimitation of this time frame is intended to ensure a more focused data collection process, while also enabling an in-depth, systematic, and contextually relevant policy analysis in line with the most recent dynamics of halal tourism development in Singapore.

The theory of liberalism in International Relations is employed in this study as an analytical framework to examine how interstate cooperation, institutional roles, and global market mechanisms influence tourism development policies, particularly in the context of halal tourism. This theoretical perspective is rooted in the ideas of liberal scholars such as Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, and has been further elaborated in contemporary analyses by Jackson and Sørensen (2016).

Liberalism posits that states are not the sole actors in the international system and emphasizes cooperation as a fundamental element in achieving national interests. In contrast to realism, which prioritizes power and conflict, liberalism views international relations as potentially cooperative, facilitated through economic interdependence, international institutions, and shared norms. States are considered rational actors that pursue policies aimed at maximizing economic benefits and societal welfare, both domestically and internationally.

A central assumption of liberalism is the importance of international cooperation. Through cooperation, states can achieve mutual gains despite differing interests. In the context of international tourism, such cooperation is reflected in open policies, cross-border promotion strategies, and the harmonization of service standards (Keohane, 1984). Singapore's development of halal tourism can be interpreted as a cooperative strategy designed to attract Muslim travelers worldwide while expanding its position within the global tourism network, without allowing religious differences to become structural barriers.

Liberalism also highlights the significance of institutions in reducing uncertainty and fostering trust among actors. Both national and international institutions function to establish norms, standards, and regulations that facilitate cross-border interactions. In halal tourism development, certification bodies play a crucial role in ensuring trust among Muslim travelers (Henderson, 2016). In Singapore, the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) serves as the official authority responsible for halal certification, thereby providing assurance, legitimacy, and reliability for both tourism industry stakeholders and international consumers.

From the perspective of economic liberalism, the global market is seen as a key driver of growth and prosperity. The state's role is primarily as a facilitator that creates a conducive environment for international economic activities. Halal tourism is viewed as a rapidly growing global market segment with significant economic potential, prompting governments to design policies that attract tourists and investment flows. This approach reflects the principles of economic openness and market efficiency emphasized in liberal thought (Balaam & Dillman, 2015).

The commodification of religion refers to the process of utilizing religious values, symbols, and practices as economic commodities that are integrated into market mechanisms. In the context of globalization, religion is no longer positioned solely as a system of spiritual belief, but also as a source of values that can be packaged, produced, and marketed to meet the needs of specific consumer groups. This phenomenon is increasingly evident in the tourism sector, where religious identities and practices are adapted into economic strategies to attract particular market segments, including global Muslim travelers.

Within the framework of Liberalism theory, the commodification of religion is understood as a rational state response to market opportunities arising from economic openness and cross-border mobility. Liberalism does not view religion as an obstacle to economic activity, but rather as a variable that can be pragmatically integrated into the market system. In this context, halal tourism not only serves to fulfill the religious needs of Muslim travelers, but also functions as an economic instrument that transforms the principle of halal into commercial value for tourism destinations.

The commodification of religion in Singapore's halal tourism development is reflected in the packaging of halal services, the provision of worship facilities, and the implementation of a credible halal certification system under MUIS. Halal certification functions as both a quality assurance mechanism and a symbol of trust that enhances destination competitiveness in the international tourism market (Henderson, 2016). Through this mechanism, religious values are maintained within a formal institutional framework while continuing to operate according to market logic and economic efficiency.

The commodification of religion in halal tourism also carries diplomatic and nation-branding dimensions. By positioning itself as an inclusive Muslim-friendly destination, Singapore not only pursues economic benefits but also strengthens its international image as a multicultural state that is adaptive to global diversity. From a liberal perspective, this strategy reflects the pragmatic use of religion as an instrument of economic policy and tourism diplomacy, in which market interactions and cross-border cooperation are expected to generate mutual gains and reinforce global economic integration.

Studies on halal tourism have been widely conducted by previous scholars using diverse focuses and approaches. Battour and Ismail (2016) examined the development of halal tourism in Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Their study emphasizes that halal tourism has evolved as an extension of religious practices institutionalized within national tourism policies. The main findings indicate that cultural factors, Islamic identity, and social support constitute the primary foundations of successful halal tourism development. However, this research primarily positions halal tourism as a domestically driven, identity-based strategy and does not sufficiently examine its implications within the context of International Relations.

Another study by Battour, Battor, and Ismail (2012) focuses on Muslim tourists' perceptions and satisfaction with halal facilities at tourism destinations. This research highlights demand-side aspects, such as the availability of halal food, prayer facilities, and Muslim-friendly environments. While it provides valuable insights into Muslim tourist preferences, the study adopts a micro-level perspective and tends to overlook the role of the state as a strategic policy actor within the global tourism system.

In the context of non-Muslim countries, Henderson (2016) compares Malaysia and Singapore in terms of halal certification management and halal tourism policies. The study shows that Singapore develops halal tourism pragmatically by emphasizing institutional efficiency and service standards, particularly through the role of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS). Nevertheless, this research remains limited to managerial and tourism industry aspects and lacks an in-depth analysis of the broader policy implications within an International Relations theoretical framework.

Meanwhile, Carboni, Perelli, and Sistu (2014) link halal tourism to destination branding strategies and global competitiveness. Their study positions halal tourism as a marketing and nation-branding tool but does not explicitly employ International Relations theory to explain state motivations, national interests, or the patterns of international cooperation that emerge.

Based on this comparison, a research gap can be identified between halal tourism studies that predominantly focus on cultural, marketing, and tourist satisfaction aspects, and International Relations scholarship that examines state policies and cross-border cooperation. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its analysis of Singapore's halal tourism development policies through the lens of Liberalism in International Relations, positioning the state as a rational actor that promotes openness, institutional roles, and international cooperation to achieve mutual gains. This approach enables a more comprehensive understanding of halal tourism as an instrument of economic diplomacy and global integration in a non-Muslim country (Keohane & Nye, 2012; UNWTO, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of the Singapore government's policies on halal tourism development as a phenomenon of public policy and international relations. A qualitative approach is chosen because it allows for the analysis of meanings, contexts, and policy dynamics that cannot be quantitatively measured, particularly with regard to the role of the state, institutions, and global economic interests (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research design adopts a descriptive qualitative case study, with Singapore as the unit of analysis. The selection of this case study is based on Singapore's success as a non-Muslim country in developing halal tourism in a competitive manner. The analysis focuses on government policies, the role of relevant institutions such as halal certification bodies, and their impacts on the tourism sector and international

cooperation. This approach enables a contextual and comprehensive examination of policy implementation within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018).

Data collection is conducted through literature review and document analysis, including official government documents, tourism agency reports, publications from international organizations, and relevant academic journals. The data are analyzed using thematic analysis by categorizing information into key themes such as institutional roles, policy openness, and international cooperation. To ensure data validity, this study applies source triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and consistency of the research findings (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Development of Halal Tourism in Singapore

The development of halal tourism in Singapore is rooted in the long-standing presence of the Muslim community, which has historically been an integral part of the country's multicultural society. Since the colonial period, areas such as Kampong Glam have evolved into centers of Muslim social, cultural, and religious activities (Henderson, 2016; Aulia, 2020). The existence of historic mosques and networks of local halal businesses was initially intended to meet the needs of the domestic Muslim community. However, as Singapore developed into an international trade and tourism hub, these halal-related needs began to be recognized as economic potential that could be expanded into the global market. At this early stage, halal tourism was not positioned as a strategic tourism policy, but rather as part of the management of social diversity within a multicultural city-state.

Entering the 2010s, the direction of halal tourism development in Singapore underwent a significant shift. The government, through the Singapore Tourism Board (STB), began to actively incorporate the Muslim tourist segment into its national tourism strategy. This move was driven by the growing number of global Muslim travelers and the emergence of the halal boom in the Asian region (Henderson, 2016; UNWTO, 2022). Singapore subsequently adopted a pragmatic approach that emphasized service efficiency, facility standardization, and ease of access to information for Muslim tourists. Halal tourism was not constructed as an expression of the country's religious identity, but rather as an inclusive, market-oriented economic strategy aligned with the principles of openness in economic liberalism.

The Singapore government's commitment has become increasingly evident through the strengthening of institutional roles, particularly that of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS) as the official halal certification authority. MUIS plays a crucial role in ensuring halal standards for food products, restaurants, hotels, and other tourism-related services (Keohane, 1984; Aulia, 2020). The existence of a credible and internationally recognized certification system enhances the confidence of Muslim tourists and tourism industry stakeholders. From an International Relations perspective, the role of this institution strengthens Singapore's reputation as a safe and reliable

destination while simultaneously supporting cross-border economic cooperation through the tourism sector.

In the contemporary phase, halal tourism development in Singapore has become an integral part of its global tourism competitiveness strategy. This is reflected in Singapore’s achievement as a top-ranked Muslim-friendly destination among non-OIC countries in the Global Muslim Travel Index in recent years. The government has demonstrated sustained commitment through international promotion, collaboration with industry stakeholders, and the integration of halal tourism into post-pandemic tourism recovery agendas. Thus, halal tourism in Singapore functions not only as a sectoral policy but also as an instrument of economic diplomacy that reflects openness, cooperation, and the pursuit of mutual gains, as emphasized in Liberalism theory (Keohane & Nye, 2012; UNWTO, 2022).

2. Indicators of Halal Tourism in Singapore According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI)

The Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), compiled by CrescentRating in collaboration with Mastercard, is a key reference for assessing the readiness and competitiveness of global halal tourism destinations. The GMTI assesses destinations based on four key indicators: accessibility, communication and information, environment, and Muslim-friendly services and facilities. These four indicators are used to measure a country's ability to create a safe, comfortable, and inclusive tourism ecosystem for international Muslim travelers. In this context, Singapore stands out as a non-Muslim country that consistently ranks high in the GMTI's Muslim-friendly destination category (CrescentRating, 2023; UNWTO, 2022). The details of Singapore's halal tourism indicators based on the GMTI can be seen in the following table, which illustrates the actual implementation of each assessment aspect.

Indicator	Brief Explanation	Evidence of Implementation in the Field
Accessibility	Singapore enjoys excellent international access as a global transit hub in Asia. Its visa requirements are relatively straightforward for travelers from Muslim-majority countries, and its public transportation system is modern, fast, and integrated. This allows Muslim travelers to easily access various tourist destinations, shopping centers,	Changi Airport is one of the world's best airports, boasting global connectivity; a city-wide MRT and bus network; and easy access to halal tourism areas and mosques without transportation barriers.

	halal culinary delights, and places of worship.	
Communication & Information	The government provides comprehensive, clear, and easily accessible halal tourism information through official digital platforms. This information includes locations of halal restaurants, mosques, prayer rooms, and Muslim-friendly hotels, as well as travel guides to help Muslim travelers plan their visits more comfortably and safely.	The Singapore Tourism Board (STB) provides a digital map of halal tourism; its official tourism app and website list halal restaurants and prayer facilities; and information is available in various international languages.
Environment	Singapore is known as a safe, clean, and politically stable country. Furthermore, its multicultural and multireligious character creates a tolerant and inclusive atmosphere for Muslim travelers, ensuring a comfortable travel experience.	Crime rates are very low; the city is consistently clean; there is no significant discrimination against Muslim tourists; and the public atmosphere is orderly and safe for family tourism.
Halal Services & Facilities	Singapore has a structured and internationally recognized halal service system. The country actively integrates the needs of Muslim travelers into its tourism industry, including food, accommodation, and widespread prayer facilities in public spaces.	Halal certification by MUIS guarantees the halal status of restaurants, hotels, and catering services; thousands of halal restaurants in city centers, airports, and malls; and the availability of mosques and prayer rooms in various strategic locations such as airports, shopping centers, and tourist attractions.

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that Singapore has successfully implemented all GMTI indicators comprehensively through infrastructure support, government policies, and strong institutional roles. This demonstrates that halal tourism in Singapore is not merely a facility, but has become part of an integrated and globally oriented tourism development strategy.

3. The Impact of Halal Tourism Development Policies on Singapore

Singapore's halal tourism development policies reflect the active role of the state in managing market openness within the tourism services sector. From a liberalist perspective, the state acts as a facilitator by creating conducive market conditions through regulatory adjustments and service provisions that align with the preferences of global Muslim travelers. By accommodating needs ranging from halal food and worship facilities to Muslim-friendly services, Singapore has expanded its tourism market segmentation amid intense international competition (Keohane & Nye, 2012). This approach demonstrates that halal tourism policies are not merely normative responses to religious needs, but rather rational economic strategies aimed at enhancing national competitiveness.

The impact of these policies is evident in the increased level of economic activity within the tourism sector and its supporting industries. International Muslim tourists are positioned as economic actors with relatively high consumption levels in accommodation, culinary, and retail sectors, thereby contributing to higher business revenues and job creation. This dynamic has also strengthened the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in the halal food and beverage sector, which has become increasingly integrated into the national tourism value chain (Aulia, 2020). Within the framework of economic liberalism, this development illustrates how state policies can optimize market mechanisms to generate sustainable, service-based economic growth.

Beyond economic growth, halal tourism policies have also contributed to institutional strengthening as a foundation for market stability. The role of the Majlis Ugama Islam Singapura (MUIS) as the official halal certification authority provides regulatory certainty for businesses and tourists, thereby reducing information asymmetry and market uncertainty (Keohane, 1984). This regulatory clarity enhances the confidence of investors and international tourists while reinforcing Singapore's reputation as a credible and consistent halal tourism destination (Henderson, 2016). From the perspective of institutional liberalism, the strengthening of such institutions is a key factor in sustaining cross-border economic cooperation.

Singapore's halal tourism policy can also be analyzed as a form of religious commodification within the global market system. Religious values and symbols are integrated into tourism products without altering the secular character of the state, allowing religion to function as a source of economic value added. Halal tourism is no longer understood solely as a religious practice, but rather as a tourism commodity designed to meet the preferences of the international market (Aulia, 2020). This approach reflects a liberal rationality that views religious identity as a variable of demand that can be productively utilized within market mechanisms (Henderson, 2016).

The impact of halal tourism policies is also evident in the strengthening of Singapore's position within the international tourism system and economic diplomacy. Singapore's success in maintaining its top ranking as a Muslim-friendly destination in

the non-OIC category of the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) has enhanced its global visibility and increased its attractiveness to investment in the tourism sector (CrescentRating, 2023). This achievement has expanded cross-border tourism cooperation networks and reinforced economic interdependence, positioning tourism as an instrument of *soft power* that supports national interests through economic and cultural channels.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the development of halal tourism in Singapore demonstrates that inclusive tourism policies supported by strong institutions can increase economic competitiveness while strengthening the country's position in the global tourism system. Singapore's pragmatic approach reflects the principles of liberalism, where openness and international cooperation are leveraged to achieve mutual benefits through the tourism sector. Furthermore, this policy expands international cooperation networks and creates positive interdependence with other countries, particularly in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Thus, halal tourism functions not only as an economic sector but also as an instrument of economic diplomacy that strengthens relations between countries in a sustainable manner.

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