

INTERPRETING MUSLIM WOMEN'S TOURIST GAZE
ON THE COASTAL LANDSCAPE OF PENINSULAR
MALAYSIA

BY

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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

The tourist gaze has long been theorised through secular, Western-centric lenses that overlook how faith, gender, and culture shape what tourists perceive and value. This gap becomes more pressing with the rise of Muslim women travellers, whose growth and distinct needs remain underrepresented in mainstream tourism scholarship and practice. Addressing this, the study aims to investigate the perceptions, expectations, and travel experiences of Muslim women in coastal destinations to broaden the theoretical understanding of the tourist gaze from Muslim women's perspectives. Specifically, the study examines the Muslim women tourist gaze in the coastal setting of Port Dickson, Malaysia. Adopting an interpretivist qualitative case study, the research draws on semi-structured interviews with 25 participants (15 Muslim women tourists; 10 stakeholders from government, industry, and community) and contextual on-site observations. Data were thematically coded and analysed in ATLAS.ti using inductive and deductive logics aligned with Islamic tourism and tourist gaze literature. Six interrelated themes emerged: (1) Muslim-friendly environment (privacy, safety, *halal* food, prayer access, cultural respect); (2) Recreational activities (beach leisure, family gatherings, selective water sports contingent on modesty and privacy); (3) Accessibility (good highway links but limited public transport; proximate parking as both practical and religious need); (4) Facilities (cleanliness, adequate toilets and changing rooms, comfortable and well-located prayer spaces as non-negotiables); (5) Environmental concerns (clean beaches, preserved greenery, erosion-conscious landscaping, sustainability as part of appeal and religious stewardship); and (6) Tourists' perceptions (peace, safety, moderate expectations, desire for diversified attractions, and a distinctive spiritual dimension of contemplation, gratitude, and inner tranquillity). Synthesising these insights, the study proposes the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze, a multidimensional framework showing how religious principles, cultural norms, gendered experiences, and environmental quality mediate perception and participation. A key theoretical contribution is the articulation of a Spiritual Tourist Gaze, coastal landscapes are read through *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection), reframing leisure spaces as sites of worship, moral reflection, and divine appreciation. The study extends tourist gaze theory beyond secular Western frames by centring faith, modesty, and spiritual meaning, and offers practical guidance for Muslim-friendly coastal destination planning (e.g., privacy-enhanced recreation, quality prayer facilities, *halal*-certified services, inclusive access and parking, cleanliness and environmental stewardship, and culturally sensitive narratives). These findings support more inclusive and sustainable coastal tourism that recognises Muslim women's voices and needs.

ملخص البحث

لطالما صيغت نظرية النظرة السياحية من خلال عدسات غربية علمانية، تتمحور حول كيفية تشكّل ما يدركه السائحون ويقدّرونه في ضوء الإيمان والجنس والثقافة. وقد أصبحت هذه الفجوة أكثر إلحاحًا مع بروز المسافرات المسلمات بوصفهن شريحة متنامية، في حين لا تزال احتياجاتهن المتميزة ونمو حضورهن غير ممثلين تمثيلاً كافياً في الدراسات والممارسات السياحية السائدة. وانطلاقاً من ذلك، تستكشف هذه الدراسة نظرة السائحات المسلمات في المناطق الساحلية، مع التركيز على بورت ديكسون في ماليزيا. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج دراسة الحالة النوعية التفسيرية، واستندت إلى مقابلات شبه منظّمة مع 25 مشاركاً، منهم 15 سائحة مسلمة و 10 من أصحاب المصلحة من الجهات الحكومية والصناعية والمجتمعية، إلى جانب ملاحظات سياقية ميدانية في الموقع. وقد جرى ترميز البيانات موضوعياً وتحليلها باستخدام برنامج ATLAS.ti، بالاستناد إلى منطقتين استقرائي واستنتاجي منسجمين مع أدبيات السياحة الإسلامية ونظرية النظرة السياحية. وأسفر التحليل عن ظهور ستة موضوعات مترابطة، هي: 1- البيئة الصديقة للمسلمين، وتشمل الخصوصية، والسلامة، والطعام الحلال، وإمكانية الوصول إلى أماكن الصلاة، والاحترام الثقافي؛ 2- الأنشطة الترفيهية، مثل الترفيه الشاطئي، والتجمعات العائلية، والرياضات المائية الانتقائية المنضبطة بقيم الحياء والخصوصية؛ 3- سهولة الوصول، بما في ذلك جودة الربط عبر الطرق السريعة، مقابل محدودية وسائل النقل العام، وأهمية قرب مواقف السيارات باعتباره ضرورة عملية ودينية؛ 4- المرافق، وتشمل النظافة، وكفاية دورات المياه، وغرف تغيير الملابس، وأماكن الصلاة المريحة والملائمة بوصفها ضرورات أساسية؛ 5- الاهتمامات البيئية، مثل نظافة الشواطئ، وحماية المساحات الخضراء، والمحافظة على المناظر الطبيعية في مواجهة التعرية، والنظر إلى الاستدامة بوصفها جزءاً من الجاذبية

والمسؤولية الدينية؛6- تصورات السائحات، وتشمل الشعور بالسلام والأمان، والتوقعات المعتدلة، والرغبة في تنويع المعالم السياحية، فضلاً عن بُعد روحي مميز قوامه التأمل والامتنان والسكينة. ومن خلال دمج هذه الرؤى، تقترح الدراسة مفهوم "نظرة السائحة المسلمة" بوصفه إطاراً متعدد الأبعاد يوضح كيف تؤثر المبادئ الدينية، والأعراف الثقافية، والخبرات الجندرية، وجودة البيئة في الإدراك والمشاركة السياحية. ومن أبرز إسهاماتها النظرية أيضاً صياغة مفهوم "النظرة السياحية الروحية"، حيث تُقرأ المناظر الطبيعية الساحلية من خلال التفكير والتدبر، بما يعيد تشكيل فضاءات الترفيه بوصفها مواقع للعبادة، والتأمل الأخلاقي، واستشعار الجمال الإلهي. وتتجاوز هذه الدراسة نظرية النظرة السياحية في صيغتها الغربية العلمانية، من خلال إبراز دور الإيمان، والاحتشام، والمعنى الروحي، كما تقدم إرشادات عملية لتخطيط وجهات ساحلية صديقة للمسلمين، مثل: توفير ترفيه يعزز الخصوصية، ومرافق صلاة عالية الجودة، وخدمات حلال معتمدة، وإتاحة شاملة ومواقف سيارات كافية، والحفاظ على النظافة والحماية البيئية، وبناء سرديات ثقافية حساسة. وتدعم هذه النتائج التوجه نحو سياحة ساحلية أكثر شمولاً واستدامة، تراعي أصوات النساء المسلمات واحتياجاتهن.

APPROVAL PAGE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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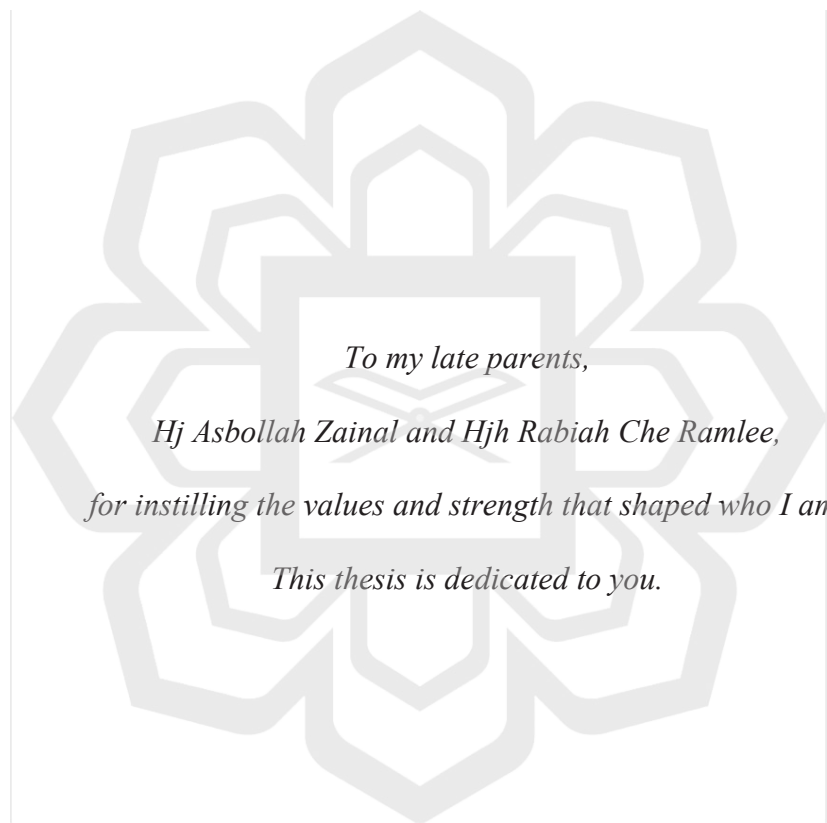
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*To my late parents,
Hj Asbollah Zainal and Hjh Rabiah Che Ramlee,
for instilling the values and strength that shaped who I am.
This thesis is dedicated to you.*

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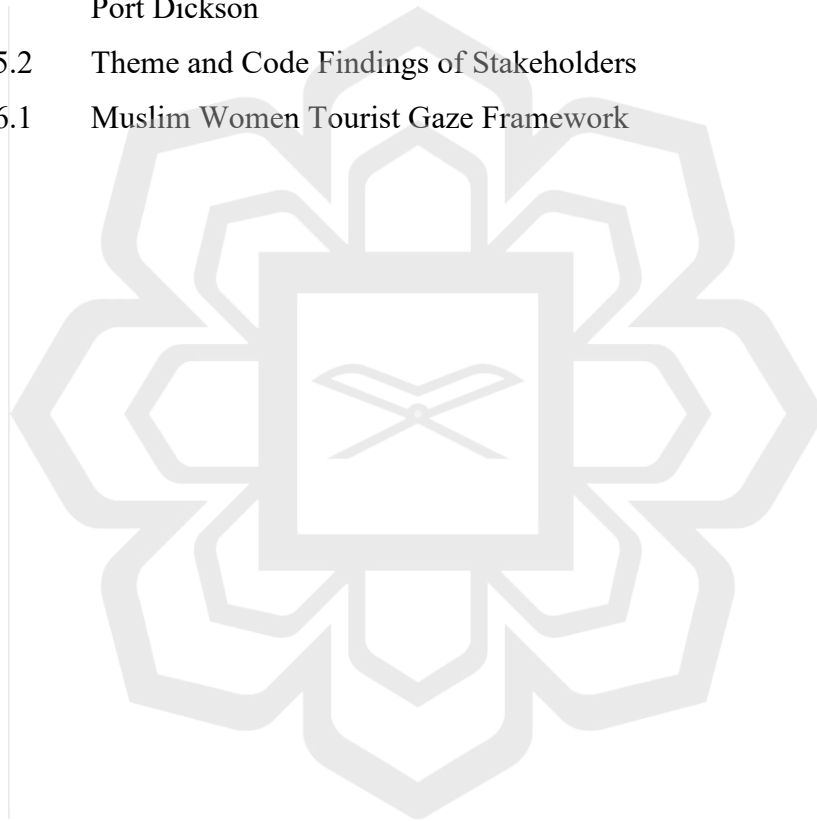
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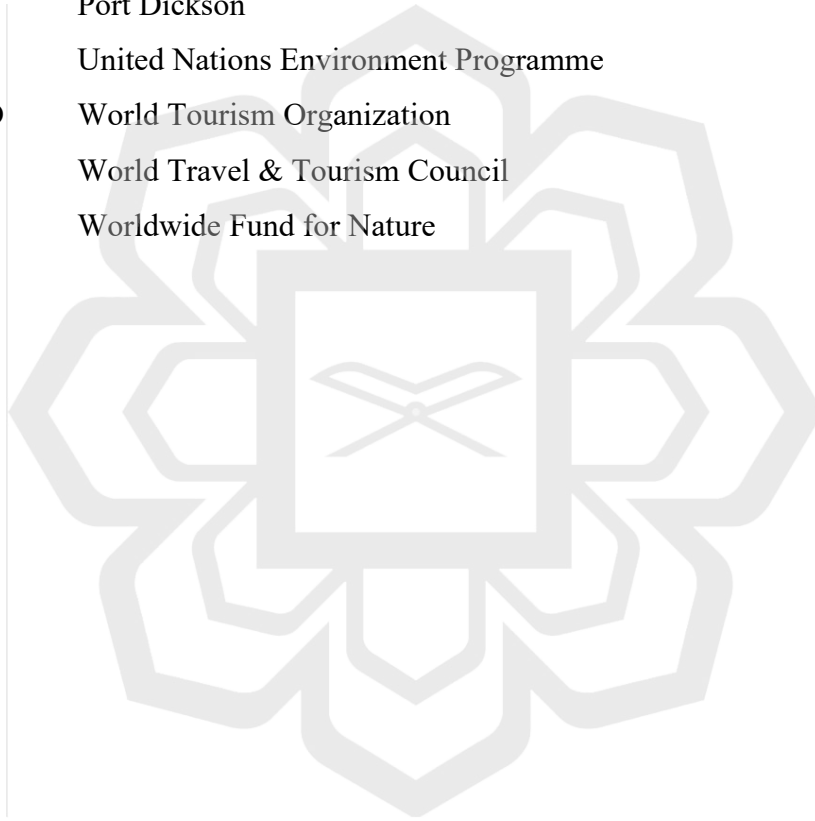
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ABBREVIATIONS

GMTI	Global Muslim Travel Index
ITC	Islamic Tourism Centre
MFAR	Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition
MOTAC	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia
MWTG	Muslim Women Tourist Gaze
PD	Port Dickson
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization
WTTC	World Travel & Tourism Council
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism, as a global phenomenon, encompasses the movement of people across geographical boundaries for leisure, business, cultural, or personal purposes. It is a multifaceted industry that not only drives economic growth and cross-cultural exchange but also shapes the ways in which individuals and societies interact with places and cultures. The tourism experience is inherently subjective, shaped by a complex interplay of personal motivations, expectations, and the sociocultural context of both the visitor and the destination. As tourists engage with new environments, their perceptions and interpretations are influenced by a range of factors, including prior knowledge, cultural background, and the social meanings attached to particular sites and practices.

Central to understanding these experiences is the concept of the "tourist gaze," introduced by Urry (1990), which posits that tourism is not merely about physical travel but also about the ways in which tourists view, interpret, and assign meaning to the places they visit. The tourist gaze is shaped by social norms, media representations, and cultural narratives, guiding what is seen as desirable, authentic, or worthy of attention. Over time, this framework has evolved to recognise that the gaze is not monolithic; rather, it is mediated by individual and collective identities, including gender, ethnicity, religion, and class. As such, contemporary tourism research increasingly seeks to unpack the diversity of tourist experiences, acknowledging that the act of gazing is deeply embedded in broader social structures and power relations.

Since its introduction by Urry (1990), the concept of the tourist gaze has become a fundamental framework in tourism research, offering significant insights into how tourists perceive and interpret their experiences. However, while the framework has

traditionally been viewed through a Western lens, recent scholarship argues for a more inclusive approach that considers diverse cultural perspectives (Cohen & Cohen, 2019).

Despite Urry's foundational contribution, recent critiques highlight the framework's limitations in addressing gender-specific dimensions (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). This research addresses this gap by examining the tourist gaze through the distinct lens of Muslim women's experiences, responding to calls for more inclusive theoretical approaches in tourism studies. The study aims to identify the unique sociocultural and religious factors that shape Muslim women's tourist gaze, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of diverse tourist experiences and behaviours in contemporary tourism contexts (Henderson, 2021).

1.2 BACKGROUND OVERVIEW

Tourism encompasses social, cultural, economic, and anthropological dimensions, expressed through activities such as shopping, water sports, camping, and visits to cultural sites. Understanding tourist behaviour patterns especially when shaped by work schedules, gender norms, or religious and family commitments is an important area of tourism research. At its core, tourism involves interactions between people and places (Baggio, 2019), while destination development and social change shape social spaces, economies, and environments (Lei, Suntikul, & Chen, 2023). This evolution aligns with tourists' consumption of place and culture and corresponds with Urry's concept of the tourist gaze (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

The tourist gaze explains that visitors look at destinations in socially organised ways rather than purely individual ones (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Research shows that destination design, marketing, media images, and routine practices guide attention and behaviour in predictable patterns (Larsen, 2008; MacCannell, 1999). In urban heritage and museums for example, routes, signage, viewing points, lighting, and exhibit order structure where people go and what they notice, creating narrow ranges of expected seeing (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Osborne, 2001). Coastal settings display similar dynamics, where brochures, influencer content, and resort layouts promote

standardized images of sun, sea, and leisure bodies that normalise dress and conduct in public spaces (Wheeller, 2005).

However, the gaze is not uniform. Tourists adjust or resist dominant visual scripts based on age, roles and values (Patterson & Pegg, 2009). A growing body of work links the gaze to identity, modesty, and moral norms, showing that visitors in conservative or multicultural settings adapt routes, clothing, and activity choices to align with religious commitments (Din, 1989; Henderson, 2003; Olsen, 2008; Stephenson, 2014). The situation becomes more complex in coastal tourism contexts, where behavioural, economic, and sociocultural dynamics intersect. While extensive research examines community participation in tourism development (Lo & Janta, 2020; Mason, 2003), the tourist perspective, particularly that of Muslim women remains understudied. This gap is significant because Islamic principles emphasising modesty and privacy (Alam et al., 2024) can conflict with mainstream coastal tourism activities and design. Moreover, although tourism planning studies often focus on community and development issues (Lo & Janta, 2020; Telfer & Sharpley, 2007), there is limited understanding of how Muslim women's religious and cultural identities shape their tourist gaze and coastal tourism experiences (Nisha & Cheung, 2022).

In the Malaysian context, Muslims constitute the predominant religious group, with the majority being ethnic Malays (Haque, 2003), comprising approximately 63.5% of the national population according to the 2020 census, thus understanding these dynamics is especially important. The Malay identity encompasses adherence to Islam, use of the Malay language, and practice of Malay traditions [further elaborated in Chapter Two]. The Malay culture, which is deeply intertwined with Islamic values, offers a rich context for studying how Muslim women perceive and experience tourism. This cultural framework provides valuable insights into both the tourist gaze concept and gender-cultural relationships. Therefore, this research employs a qualitative approach to guide interpretation, analysis, and theoretical conceptualisation, aiming to develop a comprehensive understanding of women's tourist gaze at Malaysian coastal destinations.

Yang, Khoo-Lattimore and Arcodia (2017) highlight the limited engagement with gender and identity perspectives in tourism studies, particularly in qualitative research methodologies. This study utilises field observation and semi-structured interviews within a case study framework, examining tourist experiences at dominant coastal destination in Malaysia; Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan. This is to explore how Muslim women navigate these spaces and what their "tourist gaze" looks like in practice.

While existing studies acknowledge that tourist behaviour is shaped by sociocultural and environmental factors, limited attention has been given to how these factors intersect with religious identity and gender in shaping the tourist gaze. In Islamic contexts, tourism experiences are not solely driven by leisure motivations but are also mediated by values such as modesty, spirituality, and moral responsibility. This underscores the need to reinterpret the tourist gaze through a culturally and religiously embedded lens, particularly in relation to Muslim women's experiences in coastal tourism settings.

1.3 RESEARCH ISSUES

Tourism is a central element in modern society from a sociological perspective (Urry, 2002), and coastal tourism has become one of the most popular and rapidly developing segments globally. Coastal destinations, with their natural beauty and recreational opportunities, attract millions of tourists each year and play a significant role in the tourism industry, especially in countries like Malaysia. While Getz and Page (2015) view tourism as a celebration of life and modern society's positive outcomes, recent studies highlight how gendered structures and religious identities significantly impact tourism participation and consumption patterns (Khoo-Lattimore & Gibson, 2018; Nisha & Cheung, 2022). This intersection becomes particularly relevant for Muslim women travellers, as Islam plays a pivotal role in defining gendered ideologies, norms, and practices in tourism contexts (Raday, 2003; Alam et al., 2024). As gender and religious dimensions continue to shape tourism experiences, it becomes increasingly important to examine how these factors intersect within the context of coastal tourism,

where issues of modesty, privacy, and leisure practices are often brought to the forefront.

The expansion of the global tourism industry has highlighted the growing significance of Muslim women travellers as an emergent and influential market segment, particularly in coastal destinations that are central to Malaysia's tourism offerings. Recent statistics reveal that the global Muslim travel market is projected to reach USD 235 billion by 2030 (CrescentRating, 2024), with over 70% of Muslim women actively influencing family and couple travel decisions (CrescentRating, 2024). The *halal* tourism market is expected to grow from USD 301.9 billion in 2025 to USD 548.1 billion by 2035 (Future Market Insights, 2025), representing a robust CAGR of 6.1%. Despite their economic impact and their role as key travel decision-makers, the perspectives and experiences of Muslim women remain underrepresented in academic literature, especially in relation to coastal tourism. This gap is particularly notable in Malaysia, where tourism contributed 15.1% to the national GDP in 2024, generating RM291.9 billion (Travel and Tour World, 2025), surpassing pre-pandemic levels, and coastal destinations remain among the most visited. Yet, there is limited understanding of how Muslim women's religious and cultural identities shape their tourist gaze and experiences in these settings (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore & Arcodia, 2017).

Islamic principles emphasising modesty, privacy, and gender separation create unique considerations for Muslim women travellers, particularly in coastal tourism environments where traditional values may conflict with contemporary leisure practices such as beachwear, mixed-gender spaces, and recreational activities (Hall & Girish, 2020; Alam, Nisa, Haque, and Hamid, 2024). While several studies have examined community participation in tourism development (Mason, 2003; Lo & Janta, 2020), there remains a critical gap in understanding how Muslim women's religious and cultural identities influence their tourist gaze and shape their tourism experiences in coastal destinations. This is especially significant given that Muslim women are not a homogeneous group, and their perceptions of travel and tourism are multifaceted and distinctive (Nisha & Cheung, 2022), necessitating focused research on specific cultural contexts and destination types such as coastal areas.

The tourist gaze theory, predominantly constructed from a Euro-centric perspective (Lee, 2001), requires critical re-examination through non-Western lenses, particularly regarding Muslim women travellers in coastal tourism. While extensive research exists on Western tourist perspectives, limited analysis has been conducted on Muslim tourists' behavioural patterns and preferences, especially concerning Muslim women in beach and coastal settings. Recent studies highlight significant gender differences in travel behaviour, including variations in locations visited, trip purposes, and transport modes (Scrutton et al., 2022). However, these studies primarily focus on Western contexts, leaving a substantial gap in understanding non-Western perspectives. This limitation not only perpetuates theoretical biases in tourism research but also results in missed economic opportunities, as the global Muslim travel market is projected to reach USD 235 billion by 2030, up from USD 189 billion in 2024 (CrescentRating, 2025), with international Muslim arrivals reaching 176 million in 2024, a 25% increase from 2023 and 10% above pre-pandemic levels (CrescentRating, 2025). Furthermore, the broader Muslim-friendly travel sector is expected to grow at a 12.1%, reaching USD 384 billion by 2028 (Dinar Standard, 2025), making it the fastest-growing segment within the Islamic economy. The lack of inclusive research frameworks hinders the development of culturally sensitive tourism services and policies that could better serve diverse global markets, particularly in coastal tourism that remain central to Malaysia's tourism offerings (Carboni et al., 2014).

The tourist gaze concept, as theorised by Urry (1990, 2002), emphasises that tourism experiences are constructed through anticipation, visualisation, and interpretation of places. This gaze is particularly complex in coastal tourism, where the intersection of religious identity, cultural norms, and gender-specific considerations is heightened. While studies have explored various cultural perspectives of the tourist gaze, such as Chinese landscapes (Li, 2005) and Indonesian ethnic tourism (Volkman, 2009), the unique perspective of Muslim women in coastal destinations remains largely unexplored. This under-exploration continues the invisibility of Muslim women's voices in tourism discourse, contributing to their systematic exclusion from tourism planning and policy development (Henderson, 2003). Moreover, the absence of authentic research frameworks leads to reliance on stereotypical assumptions about

Muslim women's travel needs, potentially resulting in inadequate service provision and culturally insensitive tourism experiences (Jafari & Scott, 2014).

This research gap becomes particularly significant in contemporary coastal tourism contexts, where the intersection of religious principles, cultural norms, and leisure activities creates unique challenges that are increasingly relevant to current tourism trends. The global tourism industry has witnessed substantial growth in faith-based and culturally sensitive tourism, with the *halal* tourism market alone projected to reach \$300 billion by 2026 (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2021). Despite this economic significance, the tourist gaze in coastal settings remains underexplored from Muslim women's perspectives, involving not merely the physical landscape but also the complex sociocultural dimensions that shape their destination experiences. As Urry (1990, p.45) suggests, "The gaze is constructed through difference, in relation to the 'other' and through the organisation of its objects. What is visually consumed is, therefore, not merely the landscape or townscape, but also the social practices and relations that are found there." This conceptualisation reveals that the tourist gaze is socially organised and systematised, influenced by various factors including cultural background and religious beliefs, yet current tourism research predominantly reflects Western secular perspectives, with limited exploration of innovative approaches to understanding diverse cultural tourism experiences (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Battour, Hakimian, & Ismail, 2020).

This theoretical limitation is especially relevant for Muslim women travellers, whose gaze is fundamentally shaped by Islamic principles of modesty, privacy, and family-oriented leisure (Alam et al., 2024; Battour & Ismail, 2016), potentially creating a distinct form of tourist gaze that differs significantly from mainstream Western perspectives. Contemporary tourism development increasingly recognises the importance of cultural authenticity and inclusive experiences, with destinations worldwide adapting their offerings to accommodate diverse cultural and religious needs (UNWTO, 2019). Understanding this unique gaze becomes crucial for both theoretical advancement and practical tourism planning, particularly in Malaysia's coastal destinations where cultural sensitivity and religious considerations must intersect strategically with sustainable tourism development. The failure to incorporate these

perspectives not only limits academic understanding but also constrains the industry's ability to develop culturally responsive tourism products that serve Malaysia's diverse domestic market and growing international Muslim tourist segments.

Consequently, this research addresses several critical gaps in current tourism literature: (1) the limited understanding of non-Western perspectives of the tourist gaze, (2) the underrepresentation of Muslim women's tourism experiences despite their growing market significance, (3) the lack of research on how religious and cultural identities shape tourism perceptions and behaviours, and (4) the specific challenges and opportunities of coastal tourism for Muslim women travellers. These gaps, combined with Malaysia's significant Muslim population, the popularity of coastal destinations, and the growing tourism sector, make this research particularly timely and relevant for both academic understanding and practical tourism development.

Over time, tourism research has evolved from focusing primarily on economic and structural dimensions to more interpretive approaches that emphasise identity, meaning, and experience. Early formulations of the tourist gaze were grounded in Western contexts, with limited consideration of cultural and religious diversity (Oktadiana et al., 2017). More recent studies have begun to acknowledge non-Western perspectives, particularly through studies on Islamic tourism and Muslim travellers by Oktadiana et al. (2017) and Osman (2024); however, the integration of gender and religious identity, particularly in relation to Muslim women, remains limited. Despite the growing economic significance of Muslim travellers and increasing scholarly attention to Islamic tourism, the intersection between tourist gaze, gender, religion, and coastal tourism remains insufficiently explored. This gap underscores the need for a more integrated and contextually grounded framework that captures these interrelated dimensions.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study focuses on understanding the tourist gaze from the perspective of Muslim women, particularly in the context of coastal destinations. The purpose is to explore

how these women perceive, expect, and experience coastal tourism, considering their unique cultural and religious backgrounds. By examining these aspects, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how the tourist gaze is shaped by non-Western and Muslim identities. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Muslim women perceive a coastal tourist destination?
2. What expectations do Muslim women have when visiting a coastal tourist destination?
3. What experiences do Muslim women have when visiting a coastal tourist destination?

These questions are designed to systematically explore the perceptions, expectations, and experiences of Muslim women in coastal tourism settings. By addressing these questions, the research aims to highlight the diversity of tourist experiences and challenge the dominance of Western-centric perspectives in tourism studies.

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this research is to investigate the perceptions, expectations, and travel experiences of Muslim women in coastal destinations, with the intention of broadening the theoretical understanding of the tourist gaze to include Muslim and non-Western viewpoints. This aim is based on the recognition that current literature often overlooks the perspectives of Muslim women, especially in the context of leisure and tourism. To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To explore women's perceptions towards coastal destination.
2. To identify Muslim women's expectations towards coastal destination.
3. To determine the overall travel experiences of Muslim women in coastal destination.

These objectives provide a clear structure for the research, ensuring that each aspect of the study is addressed in a systematic manner. By focusing on perceptions, expectations, and experiences, the research will generate findings that are relevant for both academic and practical purposes, such as informing tourism development and policy. In addition to the main objectives, this research also seeks to gather perspectives from key stakeholders such as tourism operators, local authorities, and community leaders regarding Muslim women's experiences in coastal tourism destinations. This supplementary objective is intended to provide a broader context and enrich the understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by Muslim women travellers.

In summary, this research aims to fill a gap in the literature by focusing on the coastal travel experiences of Muslim women. Through the listed research questions and objectives, the study will contribute to a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the tourist gaze and offer insights for improving tourism practices to better accommodate the needs of Muslim women travellers.

1.6 SCOPE OF STUDY

To ensure that the research remained within the boundaries of the intended subject areas, a clearly defined scope was established in line with the research aim and objectives. While the primary focus of this research is on the perceptions, expectations, and experiences of Muslim women in coastal destinations, the study also incorporates the viewpoints of relevant stakeholders. By including insights from tourism operators, local authorities, and community leaders, the research aims to contextualise the findings and offer a more comprehensive picture of the factors influencing Muslim women's tourism experiences.

The primary focus of this research centres on examining how Muslim women view coastal tourism destinations within Malaysia. This investigation seeks to understand the complex attitudes, beliefs, and initial impressions that these women form both prior to and throughout their coastal visits. For the purpose of this study, coastal tourism refers to tourism activities occurring in coastal environments, including beach-

based recreation, leisure activities, and socio-cultural interactions shaped by environmental and spatial characteristics. By exploring these perceptions, the study aims to capture the nuanced ways in which cultural and religious backgrounds influence how destinations are initially evaluated and understood.

Building upon these foundational perceptions, the research then moves to investigate the specific expectations that Muslim women hold regarding coastal tourism experiences. This examination encompasses their anticipated needs for appropriate facilities, quality services, personal safety measures, cultural sensitivity from service providers, and adequate religious accommodations. The scope of this investigation particularly emphasizes how these expectations are shaped by Islamic principles and cultural considerations that may differ from mainstream tourism expectations.

The study further progresses to conduct comprehensive analysis of the actual travel experiences encountered by Muslim women at coastal destinations. This detailed examination covers multiple dimensions including levels of satisfaction achieved, various challenges encountered during visits, memorable moments that stand out, and the significant ways in which religious beliefs and cultural factors influence the overall travel experience. Through this approach, the research captures the reality of how expectations align or conflict with actual experiences.

To provide a more complete understanding of the tourism ecosystem, the research additionally incorporates perspectives from key stakeholders who play important roles in shaping Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. This supplementary component gathers insights from tourism operators, local government authorities, and community leaders regarding their understanding of the specific needs, existing challenges, and potential opportunities related to serving Muslim women travellers. These stakeholder perspectives offer valuable context for understanding the broader tourism environment and identifying areas for improvement in service delivery.

1.7 OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Basically, this research adopted a qualitative case study design to explore the perceptions, expectations, and experiences of Muslim women in coastal tourism destinations. The qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their real-life context, focusing on the subjective meanings and interpretations of participants. The case study method allowed the researcher to investigate the topic holistically, considering the interplay of cultural, religious, and gendered factors that shaped the tourist gaze among this specific group.

The study targeted Muslim women who had visited coastal destinations in Port Dickson, Malaysia. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the research questions. The sample consisted of exactly twenty-five (25) participants, comprising fifteen (15) Muslim women tourists and ten (10) stakeholders, which was sufficient to achieve data saturation while maintaining a manageable scope for qualitative analysis. Participants for stakeholders on the other hand, were recruited through community organisations, social media platforms, and personal networks to ensure a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

Data collection was conducted using two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and observation. The semi-structured interviews were guided by an interview protocol developed to elicit detailed narratives about participants' perceptions, expectations, and experiences in coastal tourism settings. The protocol was pilot tested to ensure clarity and cultural appropriateness. Observation was carried out at selected coastal destinations to document environmental features, available facilities, and tourist behaviours. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, while observational data were documented immediately after each site visit.

For data analysis, the study employed thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). Interview transcripts and observation notes were coded using ATLAS.ti software to identify recurring themes and patterns. The analysis involved initial open coding, followed by the development of thematic

categories and the identification of relationships among themes. Key variables such as “perception,” “expectation,” and “experience” were operationalised through participants’ descriptions and observable behaviours, allowing for the translation of abstract concepts into measurable terms. The research process followed a structured timeline: participant recruitment and pilot testing of instruments, data collection, transcription and coding, thematic analysis, and finally, synthesis and reporting of findings. This operational framework ensured a systematic and rigorous approach to investigating the unique coastal tourism experiences of Muslim women.

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research examines the complex interplay between tourist perceptions and the tourist gaze, specifically focusing on how Muslim women interpret and experience coastal destinations. The study's significance is particularly relevant given the unprecedented growth in global tourism, with Muslim women travellers emerging as an influential market segment (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2023). Despite this growth, contemporary anthropological research on Muslim women's tourism experiences, particularly through the lens of the tourist gaze in Malaysian coastal contexts, remains notably limited (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). In accordance, the National Tourism Policy of Malaysia (2020-2030) emphasises the need to transform tourism experiences through innovation and demand sophistication.

While the policy acknowledges the importance of customised travel experiences, there remains a gap in understanding gender-specific tourist perspectives, particularly women's interpretations of coastal landscapes. The policy's focus on product augmentation and tourist experience enhancement makes it timely to examine how women perceive and interact with Malaysia's coastal environments. This research aligns with the policy's strategic direction of increasing tourist experience depth and supporting customised travel forms. By studying women's tourist gaze on coastal landscapes, this research contributes to Malaysia's goal of developing more sophisticated, inclusive, and sustainable tourism products that cater to specific market segments.

The study's significance is twofold. First, it addresses a critical gap in tourism literature by examining the tourist gaze from a non-Western, gendered perspective. Second, it contributes to the evolving discourse on gender and tourism by investigating how religious and cultural identities shape tourism experiences. This is particularly relevant as female Muslims increasingly emerge as influential travel decision-makers (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018).

In this regard, this research challenges traditional Western-centric tourism paradigms by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives, addressing what Henderson (2023) identifies as persistent structural inequalities in tourism research. The study aims to identify and analyse the unique constraints and considerations that shape Muslim women's tourism experiences, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of tourist behaviour and preferences.

The research's findings have both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it expands the tourist gaze concept by incorporating religious and cultural dimensions, addressing what Cohen and Cohen (2019) identify as a significant gap in tourism theory. Practically, it provides valuable insights for tourism stakeholders in developing culturally sensitive and inclusive tourism experiences. This understanding is crucial as the global tourism industry increasingly recognises the importance of catering to diverse market segments, including Muslim women travellers (Timothy & Olsen, 2021).

By examining the intersection of gender, religion, and tourism through the perspective of Muslim women, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of tourist behaviour and preferences, ultimately advancing both tourism scholarship and industry practices.

1.9 THESIS STRUCTURE

This research is structured systematically across six chapters, each addressing distinct aspects of investigating the tourist gaze through the lens of Muslim women's experiences in coastal destinations.

Chapter Two establishes a comprehensive theoretical foundation through multiple interconnected sections. The chapter begins by examining the evolution and application of tourist gaze theory, followed by detailed exploration of Islamic tourism frameworks. It then focuses on Muslim women in tourism, analysing their travel behaviours, religious and cultural considerations, and specific needs. The chapter further examines Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development, including infrastructure requirements, recreational activities, and environmental considerations. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of literature themes and identification of research gaps.

Chapter Three delineates the methodological framework, employing a dual methodological approach combining exploratory research and case study methods to investigate Muslim women's tourist gaze on coastal landscapes, acknowledging that complex social phenomena require multiple qualitative methods for comprehensive understanding. While the exploratory component enables the discovery of emerging patterns in Islamic tourism and addresses gaps in understanding gender-specific experiences, the case study approach provides a structured framework for examining the specific context of Peninsular Malaysia's coastal landscapes. The research methodology encompasses multiple data collection techniques, including semi-structured in-depth interviews and systematic on-site observations, followed by rigorous data management processes including transcription, translation, and thematic analysis procedures.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth analysis of Port Dickson as the study area, examining its tourism infrastructure, environmental challenges, and potential for Islamic tourism development.

Chapter Five presents a comprehensive analysis of the empirical findings, focusing on key theoretical constructs related to tourist interests, experiences, motivations, perceptions, and expectations. The analysis synthesises the collected data to provide insights into the unique characteristics of Muslim women's tourist gaze in coastal settings.

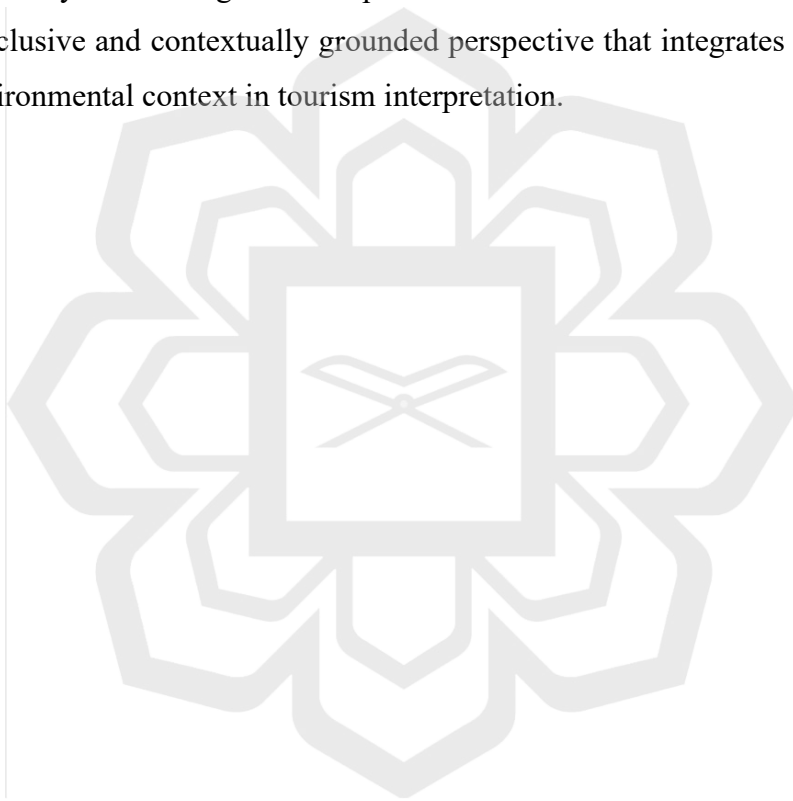
Chapter Six presents a comprehensive discussion of the research findings, examining the intricate relationship between tourist gaze theory and Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations. This chapter critically analyses how religious identity and gender intersect to shape tourism experiences, while exploring the theoretical implications for understanding the Muslim female tourist gaze. The discussion synthesises empirical findings with existing literature, demonstrating how Muslim women's perceptions and experiences both align with and challenge traditional conceptualisations of the tourist gaze in coastal settings.

This final chapter also concludes the research by presenting theoretical contributions and practical implications derived from the study's findings. The chapter then articulated how the research advances the understanding of Muslim women's tourist experiences through the lens of tourist gaze theory, while offering evidence-based recommendations for tourism stakeholders. The chapter ends in a theoretical framework that explicates the distinctive nature of the Muslim female tourist gaze in coastal environments, as illustrated in Figure 1.1 below, which demonstrates the logical progression and interconnections between the study's key components.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The tourist gaze represents a multifaceted theoretical framework that has garnered significant scholarly attention. This study aims to examine the perceptions and expectations of Muslim women tourists in coastal destinations, offering a novel perspective to this discourse. By investigating the distinct tourist gaze developed from Muslim women's viewpoints, this research addresses a critical gap in tourism literature. The study's significance is twofold: it provides practical insights for destination

development and contributes to the theoretical understanding of Muslim women's tourism behaviour. The research framework emphasises the intersection of cultural and religious dimensions, particularly within the context of Muslim women's experiences in Malaysia coastal area. Through analysing their perceptions, expectations, and motivations, this study seeks to bridge cultural-religious gaps and illuminate the factors influencing their destination choices. Understanding these nuanced perspectives is crucial for both theoretical advancement and practical applications in destination management, particularly in contexts where cultural and religious sensitivities play pivotal roles in tourism experiences. Ultimately, this study advances the tourist gaze framework by introducing the concept of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze, offering a more inclusive and contextually grounded perspective that integrates religion, gender, and environmental context in tourism interpretation.



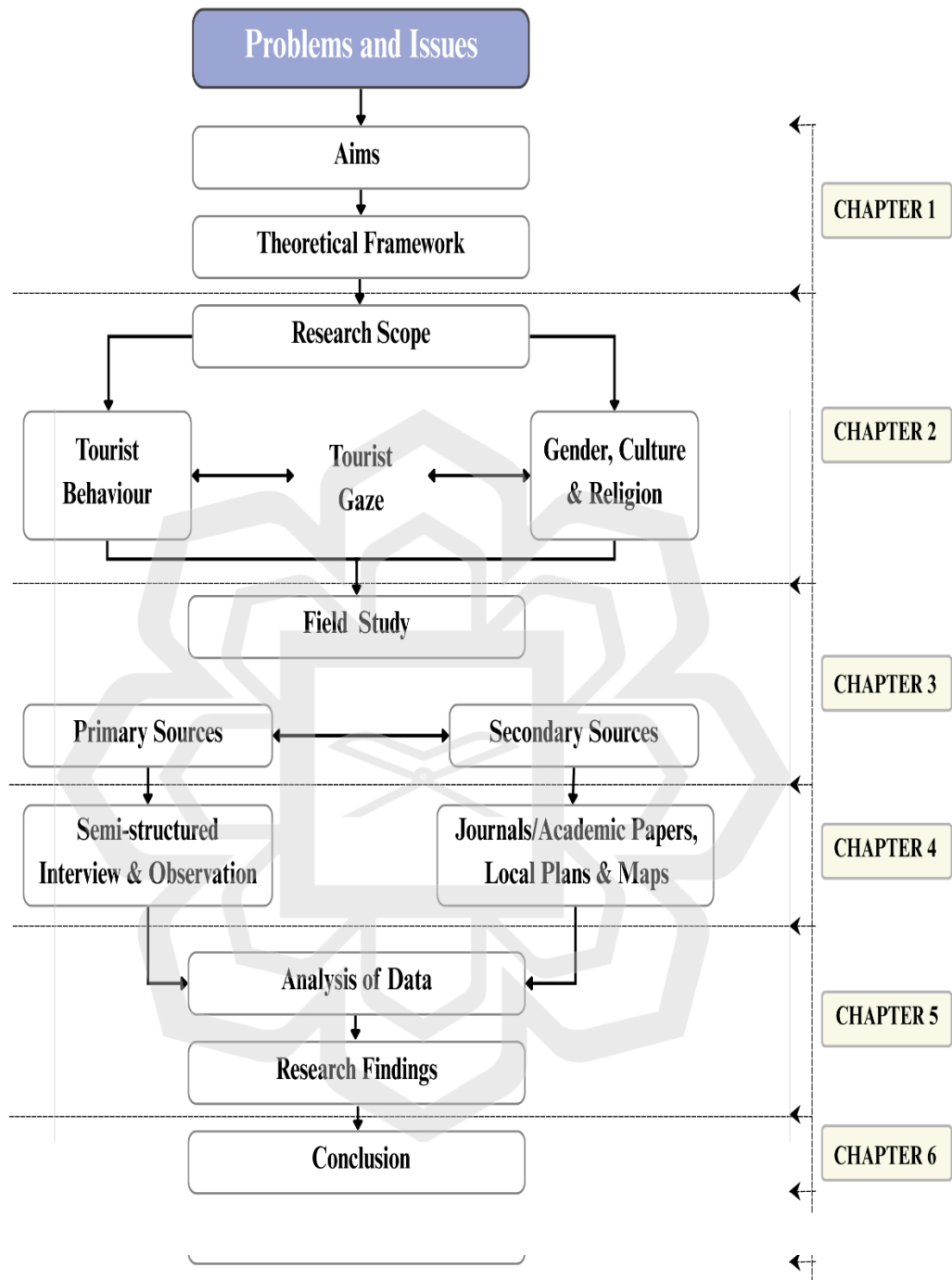


Figure 1.1 Research Framework and Thesis Structure

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a critical analysis of tourism through the theoretical lens of the tourist gaze, a concept pioneered by John Urry (1990) that has significantly shaped the understanding of tourist experiences and behaviours. The tourist gaze serves as the primary theoretical framework for this research, offering a systematic approach to examining how tourists perceive, interpret, and interact with destinations and local cultures.

Central to this literature review is the exploration of the tourist gaze from the perspective of Muslim women, a demographic whose tourism experiences and viewpoints remain largely unexplored in existing scholarship. This focus is particularly significant as it intersects with important considerations of gender, culture, and religious practices that influence how Muslim women engage with tourism spaces and experiences. By examining this unique perspective, this research addresses a notable gap in tourist gaze literature, which has predominantly focused on Western perspectives and general tourist populations.

The review systematically examines how various social determinants, and cultural factors shape tourist behaviours and preferences, particularly in the context of Muslim women's tourism experiences in Malaysia coastal area. Through this analysis, the chapter explores the complex interconnections between tourist behaviour, cultural norms, religious considerations, and visitors' perceptions of destinations. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how the tourist gaze operates within specific cultural and social frameworks.

This research also contributes to the existing discourse on tourist gaze theory by extending its application to a distinct social, cultural, and geographical context, where tourism development plays a crucial role in understanding tourist experiences and behaviours. By incorporating perspectives from Southeast Asian tourism studies and Islamic tourism literature, this review provides a more nuanced and culturally informed analysis of the tourist gaze concept.

2.2 THEORIES ON TOURIST GAZE AND ISLAMIC TOURISM

This study is grounded in two complementary perspectives: Urry's Tourist Gaze (1990, 2002) and the Islamic Tourism Framework of Battour, Ismail, & Battor (2011) and Battour & Ismail (2016). Urry's theory explains how tourism experiences are filtered through cultural and social understandings, highlighting the central role of visual interpretation in shaping encounters with destinations. The concept of the gaze has been applied widely over the years by tourism researchers to investigate visitor behaviour, destination imagery, and embodied practices, making it one of the most frequently referenced approaches within the field (Souza Bispo & Goncalves, 2023). For Muslim women, this gaze is influenced not only by general cultural patterns but also by religious values and modesty standards that shape their perceptions of coastal and leisure spaces (Henderson, 2016; Jafari & Scott, 2014).

Alongside this social perspective, the Islamic Tourism Framework by Battour and Ismail (2016) on the other hand, offers a religiously informed structure, stressing *Syariah* compliance, *halal* services, and sensitivity to cultural needs as essential components of tourism. Since its development, it has been increasingly recognised as a valuable lens for analysing Muslim-friendly travel experiences, tourism management, and product development (Rahman et al., 2021; Mohsin & Ramli, 2022). When integrated with the tourist gaze, this framework enables a fuller understanding of Muslim women's travel behaviour: how destinations are visually and culturally interpreted, and at the same time, how religious requirements guide what is acceptable and meaningful (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Stephenson, 2014).

2.2.1 Tourist Gaze Theory

The following sections provide a detailed examination of the tourist gaze theory and its theoretical applications, starting with a historical overview, evolving to its modern interpretations, then delving into the foundation of the theory, and concluding with its applications across various cultural contexts. This structured approach establishes a robust foundation for analysing tourism through the unique lens of Muslim women's experiences and contributes to the broader understanding of how cultural and gender-specific factors influence tourist perceptions and behaviours.

2.2.1.1 Evolution of the Tourist Gaze Theory

Tourism is an integral aspect of contemporary society and is an area of interest across the social sciences (Holden, 2004). The most well-known gaze research in social science is Foucault's medical gaze, which examined how medical professionals construct knowledge through observation and clinical examination. Building upon this foundational work, British sociologist John Urry later adapted Foucault's concept to the tourism context. In 1990, Urry proposed the concept of tourist gaze by 'borrowing' the term from Foucault's medical gaze framework, transforming it to analyse how tourists visually consume and interpret destinations through culturally constructed ways of seeing. In *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1976), Foucault discusses the power associated with the gaze in a medical setting by presenting the active vision attributed to physicians. He basically examined the gaze of doctors over their patients and found that it had the disciplinary power over patients. This is because of the fact that doctors viewed patients as bodies with disease and thus they had the authority to label patients as diseases.

When people travel, gazing towards destination is an unavoidable part of the tourist experience. Gaze, however, is a complicated concept and related to multiple knowledge bodies that belong to different disciplines. Researchers in the field of human behaviour have long recognised that gaze encompasses more than mere visual perception; it serves as a significant channel of nonverbal communication that conveys

psychological and social meanings. Argyle and Cook (1976) assert that gaze behaviour is intrinsically linked to interpersonal dynamics, playing a vital role in managing attention, expressing interest, and regulating the flow of social interaction. They emphasise that mutual gaze, in particular, can signal intimacy, dominance, or attentiveness, depending on the context. Expanding on this perspective, Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016) highlight that gaze is instrumental in impression management and the expression of attitudes. Their work underscores the idea that eye behaviour not only reflects an individual's internal state but also actively shapes the perceptions and responses of others in social settings. Thus, gaze functions as a multidimensional behavioural cue that influences both how individuals are perceived and how they intend to be perceived. In general, the concept of gaze is studied in two different disciplines: social science and tourism.

Foucault's concept of the "medical gaze" describes how doctors often perceive patients not as individuals, but merely as bodies afflicted by disease. Through this gaze, physicians examine, diagnose, and label people based solely on observable symptoms, reducing them to cases rather than persons. Foucault highlights how this active vision, attributed to medical professionals, becomes institutionalised as their observations are passed down as accepted truth and knowledge to medical students (Soper, 2006). In this manner, Foucault sees the doctor as a very powerful and influential person who physically and visually examines his patients and intellectually examines his student. However, medical gaze, only existed in few social environments such as hospital, prison and schools. In short, the tourist gaze can be said has emerged from medical perspective by Foucault in 1975 and later was adapted by John Urry in 1990s as shown in Figure 2.1.

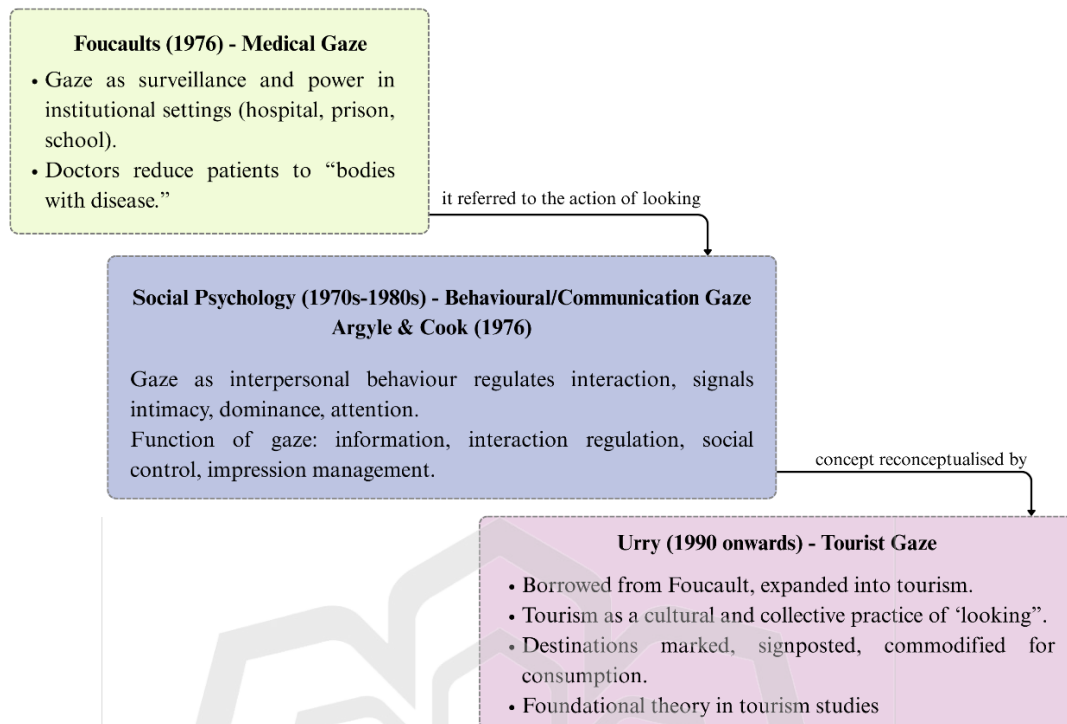


Figure 2.1 The evolution of the Tourist Gaze

Several scholars have built upon and extended Foucault’s theory of the gaze. Armstrong (1983), for instance, investigated the ways in which the medical gaze informs the doctor-patient relationship and contributes to the formation of medical knowledge. Lupton (1997) elaborated on the impact of the medical gaze on patient experiences, particularly in relation to the dynamics of power within healthcare environments. Furthermore, Turner (1992) analysed the wider significance of the medical gaze within the sociology of health and illness, highlighting its function in the social regulation and control of bodies. Together, these studies demonstrate the enduring influence and versatility of Foucault’s gaze theory in understanding the complexities of medical practice and the broader social dynamics within healthcare.

While Foucault’s gaze has been influential in the fields of sociology and medical humanities, the concept of gaze has also been explored within social psychology, though from a different perspective. Social psychology, which examines how individuals interact with and adapt to broader society, contrasts with sociology’s focus on group dynamics (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). In this context, gaze was first studied as

a form of human social behaviour (Argyle & Cook, 1976), referring specifically to the act of looking. Argyle and Cook (1976) further emphasised gaze as a non-verbal signal in communication, with attention given to its role in conveying messages and shaping impressions during social interactions. Thus, gaze is recognised as a crucial element in facilitating social interaction.

Patterson (1983) and Kleinke (1986, p. 78) believed the dynamics of gaze as “a function of individual and environmental variables”. In accordance, Patterson (1983) identified two categories of variables that affect the interaction phase, namely antecedents and pre-interaction mediators. Antecedent factors include personal factors, experimental factors and relational factors. Both classic studies (Kleinke, 1986; Patterson, 1983) and recent research (Hietanen, 2018) have demonstrated that antecedent factors such as individual differences, social context, and situational awareness play a significant role in moderating gaze and eye contact during social interactions. Kleinke (1986) in short summarised these studies and categorised the antecedent factors (refer Figure 2.2).

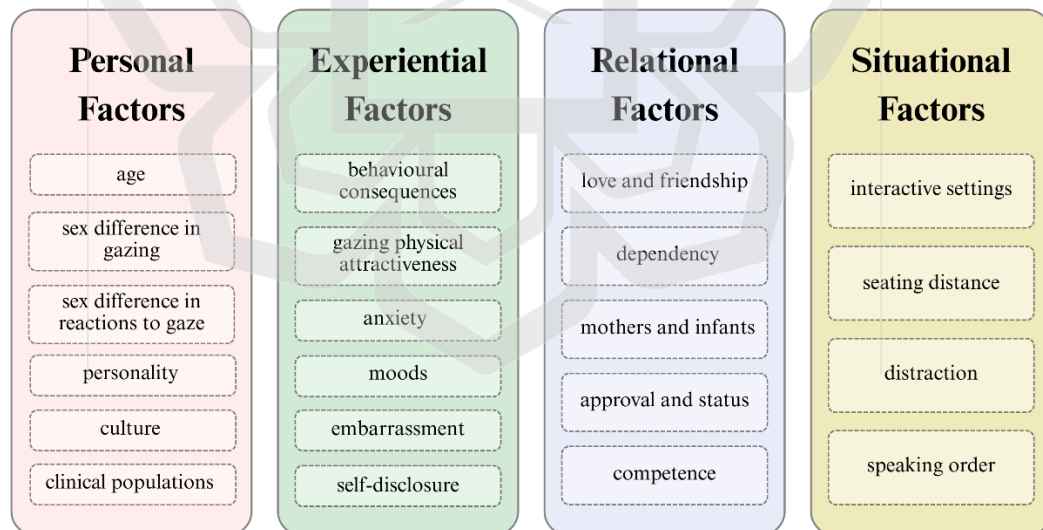


Figure 2.2 Antecedent factors in Gaze

Source: Kleinke (1986)

Personal factors such as age, culture, sex and experiential factors such as gazing physical attractiveness, and situational factors such as interactive setting and seating distance are antecedents of gaze that can be used to analyse the relation between gaze and physiological responses. All these measures serve to make predictions about people's perceptions of their own gazing behaviour and the gazing behaviour of others. Kleinke (1986) in addition utilised Patterson's (1983) gaze function classification and developed a more detailed function classification of gaze (refer Figure 2.3).

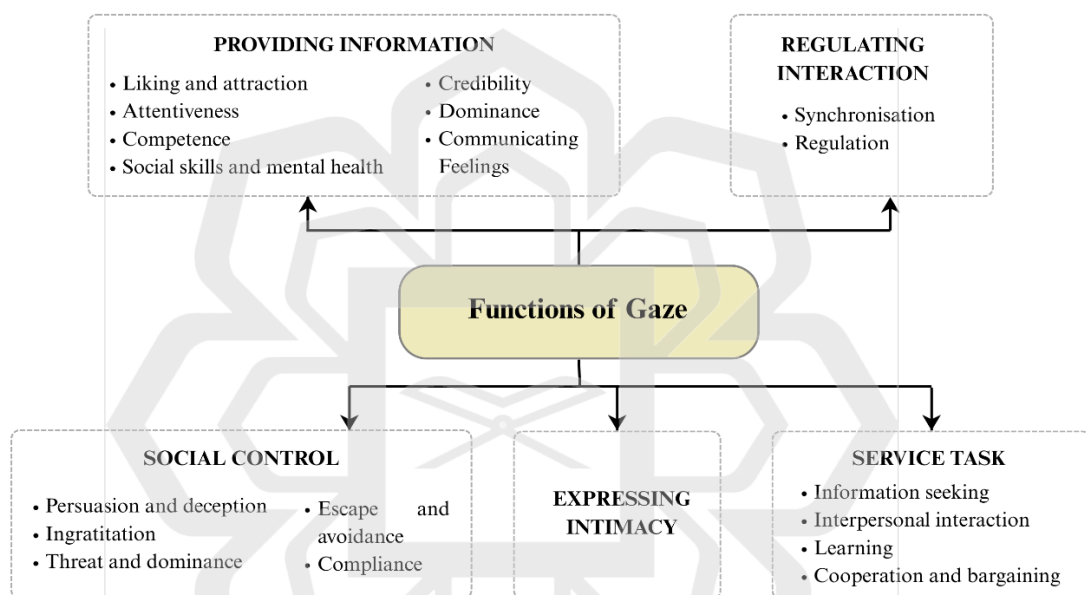


Figure 2.3 Function of Gaze
Source: Kleinke (1986)

Gaze has been said to have several different functions in social interaction (Argyle & Cook, 1976). Figure 2.3 shows how gaze functions to provide information, regulate interaction, express intimacy, exercise social control, and facilitate service and task goals. In information seeking, looking while talking, listening, observing appears to be the communication of interpersonal attitudes, the signal that is sent which depend on the facial expression that accompanying the gaze which suggested that the intensity of the attitude communication. In related, Risko et. al. (2016) stated, when in authentic social situations, the eyes both collect information from the environment (an encoding

function) and communicate one's mental states to others (a signalling function). In addition, many of researchers in social psychology have studied the functions of gaze and there were many independently conducted studies about this topic as well such as Argyle & Cook (1976), Kleinke (1986) and Dovidio, Ellyson, & Keating (1988), and Urry's contribution can be seen as extending this broader body of work into the field of tourism.

Together, these developments demonstrate that the notion of gaze has evolved significantly across disciplines. To recall, beginning with Foucault's conceptualisation of the medical gaze as a form of power and surveillance, it later expanded into social psychology where gaze was studied as a communicative behaviour shaping interpersonal relationships. These diverse interpretations laid the intellectual groundwork for John Urry's (1990) theorisation of the tourist gaze, which transformed the concept into a lens for examining how societies consume places, landscapes, and cultures through visual and symbolic practices.

Unlike Foucault, who confined the gaze to institutional contexts such as hospitals or prisons, Urry applied the concept to the wider social phenomenon of tourism, framing tourism as a distinct form of leisure constructed through signs, symbols, and expectations. Unlike social psychology, which views gaze primarily as interpersonal behaviour, Urry interpreted it as a collective and cultural practice of looking, central to how tourism operates as an industry and as a social ritual. Thus, the tourist gaze represents the evolution of earlier conceptualisations of gaze into a foundational theory in tourism studies, shaping subsequent research that examines how places are commodified, marked, and consumed in the global tourism system.

2.2.1.2 Urry's Tourist Gaze: Foundational Concepts

In relation to tourism, Urry unties Foucault's thoughts and finds applicability in understanding the realm of tourism and touristic behaviour. Undeniably, tourism, a part of which usually incorporates sightseeing or touring, is a very heightened visual practice where tourists seek out a visual environment to consume that they think will recreate

the image held in their mind's eye. Since then, tourist gaze has rapidly become an important concept in tourism research. Urry (1990) stated that the gaze is constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of signs. He suggested that the perceptions, experiences, and subsequent evaluations made by tourists, are shaped by how they gaze and interpret what they see. The gaze while systematic and socially organised involves spectacle and self-indulgence (Urry, 1990). In other words, it is constructed through difference and as a product of social construction, tourist gaze not only refers to the action itself, but also denotes the integration and abstraction of tourists' desires, motivation, and behaviours, which represents tourists' force on tourism destination.

Urry's (1990) research singled out the importance of the visual, or in particular, the consumption of visual signs and symbols. He contended that the tourist gaze was essentially about discovering "the different and the unusual". Thus, a key component of the tourist gaze is the anticipation of sights viewed or imagined, regardless of the mechanisms (Cabello, 2007). In addition, Cabello (2007) states that the tourist gaze is recognised as a primary factor in deciding where to travel. Thus, it can be mentioned that the tourist experience is very closely mediated by sight, and by the practices of representation of destination, the fleeting manner in which tourists consume sights. Urry (1990, p. 86) argues this is because it "involves spectacles and self-indulgence". He also suggested "places are chosen to be gazed because there is anticipation.... Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines... which construct and reinforce that gaze" (Urry, 2002, p. 3). In accordance, it is worth noting at this stage that an understanding of tourism is required and one route to such an understanding lies in the gaze theory.

Urry (1990, p. 1) articulates this foundational concept: "When we 'go away', we look at the environment with interest and curiosity... we gaze at what we encounter. This gaze is as socially organised and systematized as the gaze of the medic." This systematic organisation of the tourist gaze manifests through nine social practices (Urry, 1990) that is fundamentally different from the routines of everyday life and paid work. As outlined in Table 2.1, the tourist gaze is defined by nine central principles which collectively distinguish tourism from regular activities. Tourism is framed as leisure, in

opposition to regulated labour, and involves travel to places outside the normal settings of residence and work. Central to this experience is anticipation, imagination, and a desire to gaze upon distinctive landscapes or cultural objects. These gazes are socially constructed and reinforced through a variety of non-tourist practices such as literature, film, television, and advertising, which shape expectations and meanings of destinations. Moreover, the tourist gaze functions through the use of signs and symbols, allowing destinations to be interpreted and consumed in ways that are different from ordinary life, thereby reproducing ever-new objects of tourist interest (Bono, 2008).

Table 2.1 The Tourist Gaze Dichotomies

1	Tourism is a leisure activity, which presupposes it is the opposite of regulated and organised work.
2	Tourist relationships arise from a movement of people to, and their stay in, various destinations.
3	The journey and stay are to, and at, sites which are outside the normal places of residence and work.
4	The places gazed upon are for reasons which are not directly connected with paid work.
5	A substantial proportion of the population of modern societies engages in such tourist practices.
6	Places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered. Such anticipation is constructed and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, television, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze.
7	The tourist gaze is directed to features of the landscape and townscape which separate them from everyday experience.

8	The gaze is constructed through signs and tourism involves the collection of signs.
9	An array of tourist professionals develops, and these people attempt to reproduce ever-new objects of the tourist gaze.

Source: Urry (2002, p. 10)

Expanding on this theoretical foundation, Jenkins (2000) highlights specific dichotomies within the tourist gaze that further illuminate the complexities of tourist experiences (refer Table 2.2). The first is the romantic versus collective gaze, where the romantic gaze relates to individual contemplation or solitude, while the collective gaze involves shared experiences within crowds, such as festivals or carnivals. The second dichotomy is historical versus modern gaze, with the historical gaze directed toward nostalgia, heritage, and cultural memory (e.g., historical sites and monuments), whereas the modern gaze focuses on contemporary culture, fashion, and new technologies. Finally, the authentic versus inauthentic gaze interrogates questions of originality and staged experiences, acknowledging that authenticity is highly subjective and often contested within tourism studies. This framework demonstrates that tourists do not simply consume places passively but engage with them through complex cultural lenses that influence both the meaning and value of their experiences.

Building on these dichotomies, Urry's work further extends to the issue of travel patterns and the conditions that shape distinctive tourist gazes. Urry (2002) argued that tourists travel not only to seek novelty or authenticity, but equally to encounter forms of contrast that differentiate tourism from the routines of everyday life. These contrasts are structured along three key dimensions: the spatial (types of travel and mobility), the temporal (duration and anticipation of the tourist experience), and the institutional (the overlaps between tourism and other social activities such as shopping, sport, culture, or education). The core of this argument is that destinations must possess qualities that distinguish them from what is ordinarily encountered, thereby producing a unique tourist gaze. The three key dimensions can be described as follows:

1. **The spatial:** the diverse types of travel and mobility involved;
2. **The temporal:** the length of time and the prospective dimensions; and,
3. **The institutional:** the overlap between tourism and other related forms of activity, such as shopping, sport, culture, hobbies, education and partial residence in an area.

Table 2.2 The Tourist Gaze Dichotomies and Explanations

Tourist gaze dichotomies	Explanations
Romantic/Collective	The romantic gaze is that of the individual observing the majesty of some physical wonder or enjoying the solitude of the wilderness. Crowds may destroy the romantic gaze but enhance the collective gaze. The collective gaze necessitates large numbers of people; for example, the street cafes of Paris, festivals, expositions or carnivals.
Historical/Modern	The historical gaze relates to nostalgia and heritage. It includes tourism to particular sites such as historical buildings, or places where important events occurred or simply represent relics from earlier times. The modern gaze implies the display of fashion, pop-culture, new technologies and all things modern.
Authentic/Inauthentic	The third dichotomy of authentic/inauthentic has been strongly debated in the tourism literature. Classifying objects or experiences as authentic or inauthentic is highly subjective, particularly when historical authenticity is concerned.

Source: Jenkins (2000, p. 172)

In articulating the character of the gaze, Urry outlines diverse ways in which the gaze is constructed (see Table 2.3). These range from gazing upon unique landmarks and iconic objects, to interpreting signs and semiotic cues within landscapes, to finding meaning in both unfamiliar cultural elements and ordinary activities reframed in unusual contexts. In doing so, Urry highlights the semiotic nature of tourism, drawing from Culler's (1981) notion of tourists as "readers of signs" who engage with destinations as texts. Importantly, signposting plays a central role in guiding the gaze, whereby certain attractions are deliberately marked out as "worthy" of tourist attention, thereby structuring perceptions of the extraordinary (Urry, 1990, 1995).

As Urry (1990, p. 47) noted, "The contemporary tourist gaze is increasingly signposted". There are markers which identify the things and places worthy of our gazes. Such signposting identifies "a relatively small number of tourist nodes", which means that tourists have different signs and therefore different gazes. Accordingly, Urry's research is central to an updated theorisation in several ways (Knudsen, 2008, p. 3):

1. It redefines the tourism industry so that "the fundamental characteristic of tourist activity is to look upon particular objects or landscapes which are different from the tourist's everyday experiences" (Gaffey 2004, p. 4);
2. It redefines tourism as an increasingly "signposted experience" involving the "spectacalization of place" (Urry 1995, p. 139); see also MacCannell (1976) where in, the "tourist industry" is built around the production of symbols to be gazed upon (Urry 1990, p. 101);
3. Tourism contains numerous face-to-face interactions that must be well managed and give rise to particular forms of social relations.
4. The tourist gaze creates a situation whereby culture and tourism become one since culture is increasingly commodified as a spectacle for consumption by tourists.

Table 2.3 The Character of the Gaze

	Character	Explanations
1	Unique Object	Examples: Eiffel Tower, the Empire State Building Notes: These are very distinct and well-known objects that are gazed upon. They are famous for being famous and entail a kind of pilgrimage to a sacred centre, which is often a capital city, a major city or the site of a unique mega-event (Roche, 2000).
2	Particular Signs	Examples: English garden, German beer-garden and typical American skyscraper Notes: This mode of gazing shows how tourists are in a way semiotician, reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel and tourism (Culler, 1981, p. 128).
3	Unfamiliar aspects	Example: Museums Notes: Museums are representations of the lives of ordinary people and particularly reveal their cultural artefacts. Often these are set out in a 'realistic' setting to demonstrate what their houses, workshops and factories were roughly like.
4	Ordinary Aspect of Social Life in Unusual Context	Examples: Tourism in China Notes: Visitors have found it particularly interesting to gaze upon the carrying out of domestic tasks in a 'communist' country, hence to see how the routines of life are surprisingly not that unfamiliar.
5	Familiar Activities Within Unusual Environment	Examples: Sports activities, shopping, eating, etc Notes: All have particular significance if they take place against a distinctive visual backcloth. The visual gaze renders extraordinary, activities that otherwise would be mundane and every day.
6	Particular Sign That is Indeed Extraordinary	Examples: For an object such as a moon rock which appears unremarkable Notes: The attraction is not the object itself but the sign referring to it that marks it out as distinctive. Thus, the marker becomes a distinctive sight (Culler, 1981, p. 139).

Source: Urry (2002, p. 10)

This theorisation situates the tourist gaze at the heart of tourism studies. It redefines the tourism industry as a field of sign production (MacCannell, 1976; Urry, 1990), reinterprets tourism as an increasingly spectacularised experience (Urry, 1995), underscores the relational and face-to-face dimensions of encounters within tourism contexts, and identifies the commodification of culture as part of tourism's fabric. As MacCannell (cited in Urry, 1998) observes, tourist attractions must be deliberately produced and marked so that meaningful and profitable gazes can be sustained. Hence, the tourist gaze is not random but systematically constructed, learned, and reproduced.

Subsequent studies have acknowledged the enduring significance of this framework. For instance, Buddhahumbhitak (2010) interprets the tourist gaze as the way tourists perceive experiences shaped by their own socially informed expectations; essentially what tourists see, anticipate, and remain conscious of. Thus, Urry's theorisation provides a foundational concept that captures the social construction of tourism experiences, positioning the gaze as both a lens for analysis and a mechanism for understanding how culture, signs, and spaces are consumed in contemporary tourism.

Michael (2007) in parallel reveals that in traditional analysis of tourism, people are recognised for participating in a physical movement to a destination. However, defining tourism solely by travel did not prove particularly helpful for a detailed tourism analysis. Michael (2007, p. 17) added, "The emphasis has switched to the behaviour and motivation of travellers, bringing the purpose of travel into the assessment and this helps to identify a particular group of consumers with particular attributes as the defining focus of the industry". Thus, to review gazes and the gaze theory based on Urry's ideas (1990), which he himself acknowledges is derived from a Western perspective, is most appropriate. The significance of the concept of the gaze in tourism studies has been criticized elsewhere in the work of writers such as Bianchi (2009) and Buddhahumbhitak (2010). The worldwide growth of tourism in recent decades has seen the emergence of many new ideas concerning this industry.

The tourist gaze theory has evolved considerably since its original formulation, moving beyond its Western-centric roots to embrace wider cultural perspectives. Early

research findings, largely based on Western contexts, tended to present consistent patterns of gaze perception, but this was a limitation of the framework rather than evidence of universal behaviour. Critics such as Franklin and Crang (2001) and Bianchi (2009) highlighted that the gaze was shaped by Eurocentric assumptions, with Bianchi in particular arguing that Urry's approach often neglected the political-economic structures and unequal power relations underpinning global tourism. Likewise, Buddhahumbhitak (2010), in a study of Western tourist representations of Phuket, Thailand, showed how dominant images of beaches, nightlife, and culture reinforced Western stereotypes while marginalising local voices, thereby calling for recognition of alternative gazes.

Responding to these critiques, scholars have examined how types of tourism and cultural context create different forms of gaze. Li (2005) noted that tourists look for and interpret distinct things depending on their cultural background, and Urry (2002) similarly emphasised that the gaze shifts according to what is being sought or consumed. Non-Western perspectives have been particularly valuable in this regard. Fountain, Espiner, and Xie (2011), for example, found that Chinese tourists often evaluated natural landscapes through collectivist traditions and Confucian values, stressing human–nature harmony. Lee (2001) observed that South Korean tourists tended to prefer family-oriented and group travel practices, contrasting with more individualised Western leisure norms. Li (2005) further demonstrated that the Chinese system of values reflects anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, contrasting with the biocentric orientation common in Western understandings of wilderness. Together, these studies illustrate that interpretations of the gaze differ across cultures, thereby challenging the assumption of universal patterns. She continues:

“One outcome of this research is the identification of a Chinese tourist gaze that has many elements which distinguish it from the western tourist gaze ... and this has produced what I termed ‘the relational tourist gaze’”.

Urry in 2002 acknowledged these variations, noting how different cultures produce distinct gazes, exemplified by the "reverential gaze" of Muslim visitors at sacred sites. The reverential gaze, which is “used to describe how Muslims spiritually consume the sacred site of the Taj Mahal. Muslim visitors stop to scan and to concentrate their attention upon the mosque, the tombs and the Koranic script”. This shows that there will always be other senses in which the gaze varies from place to place (Urry, 2002). This perspective aligns with Culler's (1981) old assertion that tourists function as "semioticians," interpreting destinations through their unique cultural and personal frameworks. The intersection of these theoretical perspectives demonstrates how tourist gaze varies systematically across different cultural contexts, particularly in settings where religious and cultural significance influences the nature of tourist engagement.

Moufakkir (2019a) in parallel demonstrates how Middle Eastern tourists' gaze differs from Western counterparts in terms of spatial preferences and social interactions yet shares similar elements of seeking authenticity. Similarly, Pearce and Wu (2016) highlight how Asian tourists' gaze is often influenced by collective cultural values and social media representations, creating unique hybrid forms of tourist engagement that combine traditional cultural elements with contemporary practices. These varied perspectives challenge the universality of Western-centric tourism theories while acknowledging the existence of shared fundamental elements across different cultural contexts. The recognition of these nuanced differences and similarities has significant implications for tourism management, marketing strategies, and the development of culturally sensitive tourism experiences (Chen & Rahman, 2022).

The evolution of tourist gaze theory points out the necessity for more culturally inclusive theoretical frameworks, particularly in understanding tourism phenomena beyond Western paradigms. While Urry's foundational work provides valuable insights, contemporary tourism scholarship emphasises the importance of incorporating diverse cultural interpretations and non-Western perspectives (Buddhabhumbhitak, 2010). This theoretical expansion becomes particularly relevant when examining how different cultural groups may share common elements of tourist experiences while simultaneously maintaining distinct patterns of engagement and interpretation. This is

crucial for tourism destinations because understanding culturally varied gazes allows planners and providers to design experiences that are both attractive and respectful to different visitor groups, reducing the risks of cultural misrepresentation or exclusion. By acknowledging diverse expectations, destinations can improve visitor satisfaction, develop more inclusive marketing strategies, and strengthen their competitiveness in an increasingly global and multicultural tourism market (Cohen & Cohen, 2015, Alves et al., 2024).

2.2.1.3 Gaze in the Tourism Context

In a broader context, gazing upon a different destination engages the appreciation of different signs and symbols. Signs in tourist destinations are critical elements because they indicate the meaning of the destination; as Bono (2008, p. 47) observes, signs “are indicators of the uniqueness of places”. In line with this, tourists’ experiences of a destination are shaped by their own preferences and patterns of movement. Physical aspects of a place, along with available activities, are perceived differently by each visitor, making the interpretation of a destination inherently subjective (McKercher, Wong, & Lau, 2006).

In the tourism field, gaze behaviour has drawn some attention. One of the gaze behaviours that has been examined is the gaze between tourists and local residents and destinations. This line of research mainly has focused on how tourists can impact destination and local residents through their gaze behaviour. Key constructs examined in this area are the construction/formation of the gaze and the power that the gaze can have over the local residents and destinations.

Tourists usually perceived the tourism destinations with the anticipation of seeing the authentic appearances and behaviours of local people (Bunten, 2013). On the other hand, the local community take the tourist gaze into consideration when they portray their public image (Light, 2000). In this sense, the tourist gaze disciplined the destination identity and thus gained power. The power of the tourist gaze was also often related to gender inequality. Craik (1997) pointed out that the tourist gaze had been

normatively male. Not only were the local women cast as passive objects of the gaze, but also the destination landscape was feminised purposely to meet the tourists' perspectives.

The concept of the tourist gaze has been debated among tourism analysts over the past 20 years. When first introduced, the concept focuses on the often-subjective nature of tourism experiences, as well as on the perception of these experiences. This reflects the idea of the tourist gaze as the way in which the tourist perceives his or her experience (Buddhabhumbhitak, 2010), and it also serves as a conceptual link with several other tourism sub-fields, such as tourist behaviour and social and cultural geography. In accordance, in tourism studies, the notion of "gaze" and "perception" are related but not identical. The "tourist gaze" refers to a socially constructed framework through which visitors observe and interpret destinations which it is shaped by cultural norms, media images, collective expectations, and institutional representations (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In other words, the gaze is not purely individual but embedded in wider discourses about what is worth seeing and how it should be valued. For example, many tourists approach heritage sites or tropical beaches with pre-formed images shaped by advertisements, guidebooks, or social media portrayals.

Perception, on the other hand, is more closely connected to an individual's sensory and cognitive processes during the travel experience. It involves how one personally interprets stimuli such as sights, sounds, or local interactions, and may vary greatly between individuals (Stepchenkova & Li, 2019). Whereas gaze reflects a collective way of seeing, perception emphasises subjective meaning-making at the personal level. Recent research suggests that the two concepts interact continuously. Tourists' perceptions are influenced by the gaze, but individual interpretation also reshapes, and challenges established gazes. For example, a traveller may approach a destination expecting the "sun, sand, and sea" imagery but leave with a new perception centred on local hospitality or environmental concerns (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2022). Recognising this distinction is important in tourism analysis, since it highlights the tension between broader cultural narratives and unique personal experiences in shaping how places are consumed and remembered. As shown in the Table 2.4 below, the two concepts differ in scope but interact in practice.

Table 2.4 The Tourist Gaze and Perception

Aspect	Tourist Gaze	Tourist Perception
Definition	A socially and culturally constructed way of viewing places and people, influenced by media, institutions, and collective expectations	An individual's cognitive and sensory interpretation of stimuli during travel, shaped by personal experiences
Scope	Collective, shared across groups and societies	Personal, varies significantly between individuals
Influence	Formed by cultural narratives, marketing, guidebooks, and social norms (Urry & Larsen, 2011)	Based on direct sensory input, emotions, and subjective meaning-making (Stepchenkova & Li, 2019)
Example	Tourists approaching Paris with pre-constructed images of the Eiffel Tower and romantic culture	A traveller perceiving Paris differently. Perhaps focusing more on local food experiences or street life
Interrelation	Frames the expectations and "lens" through which tourists view destinations	Provides the actual lived response that may confirm, resist, or redefine the gaze (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2022)

The table highlights that gaze and perception are not competing but intersecting phenomena. The gaze establishes general frameworks for how destinations are promoted and understood, while perception captures the individual variations in interpreting those contexts. For example, mass media may present iconic images of Paris, but tourists' perceptions may differ as they personally connect with everyday details, such as markets or local interactions. Together, these perspectives emphasise the dynamic relationship between collective imagery and personal meaning-making in shaping tourism experiences.

2.2.1.4 Application in Various Tourism Context

According to Lin and Fu (2020), the subject of the gaze has expanded from tourists to hosts, and gaze types have developed into local gaze, reverse gaze, intra-tourist gaze, mutual gaze, among others. At its roots, however, Urry (1990, 1992) suggested that sight or vision is the most important of the human senses within tourist gaze theory. It has become an important theoretical lens in tourism research to understand tourist experience, tourist behaviours, host-guest relationships, sociocultural changes in a destination, and other tourism phenomena (Yu & Xu, 2018; Lin & Fu, 2020). In another paper 'The Tourist Gaze Revisited', John Urry (1992) maintains that the tourist gaze is institutionalised, and socially and culturally constructed. Institutionalised here means that the tourist gaze is socially constructed and reinforced by institutions, not just a natural or personal way of looking. Indeed, from the works of numerous scholars, such as Adler (1989), Ousby (1990) and Lofgren (1999), also demonstrated that the tourist gaze in Western societies is not only institutionalised but has also long been subject to and influenced by the taste in society.

Building on this foundation, scholars have argued that the gaze extends beyond tourists themselves. Lin and Fu (2020) note that the subject of the gaze has expanded to include hosts, while gaze types have diversified into local gaze, reverse gaze, intra-tourist gaze, and mutual gaze, among others. This broadening underscores the evolving complexity of the concept across different contexts.

However, despite these theoretical contributions, critiques highlight significant limitations in the framework's Western origins. Emerging from European and North American sociological traditions (Urry & Larsen, 2011), the theory initially reflected Western cultural practices. However, research in Asian settings challenges its universality. Studies by Li (2005) in China and Lee (2001) in South Korea demonstrate distinct cultural variations in tourism perspectives, exposing the inadequacy of applying Western assumptions in non-Western contexts. Moufakkir and Reisinger (2013) similarly critique the framework's inability to capture contemporary global tourism complexities, while Qi (2021) illustrates how Western-based interpretations fail to reflect diverse cultural experiences.

Recent scholarship offers more nuanced perspectives. Jin and Wang (2016), in their review of Chinese outbound tourism research, highlight geographical and topical gaps in the field (noting Europe was relatively under-studied) and call for more contextually grounded work on cultural and digital influences. Subsequent empirical and measurement work confirms the importance of culture: Huang and Wen (2021) developed the Chinese Cultural Value Scale in Tourism (CCV-T) and show that collective social values significantly shape Chinese outbound tourist experiences a cultural dimension largely absent from earlier, behaviour-oriented formulations. These insights align with Mok and DeFranco's (2020) analysis of cultural influences in tourism, together reinforcing the need for theoretical expansion beyond Western-centric assumptions.

Alongside theoretical limitations, methodological gaps also persist. Winter (2009) calls for diversified approaches to better capture non-Western experiences, while Cohen and Cohen's (2015) meta-analysis shows persistent underrepresentation of such perspectives in the literature. Responding to these issues, more recent frameworks, such as Pritchard and Morgan (2017), propose incorporating multiple cultural perspectives, recognising modern tourism's inherent complexity.

Consequently, the implications are twofold. First, without inclusive theoretical frameworks, tourism scholarship risks overlooking critical cultural variations in tourist behaviour. Second, tourism practice itself may fail to devise effective management strategies tailored to diverse tourist groups. As Jafarov and Isazada (2024) argues, an inclusive and culturally sensitive approach is essential to deepen understanding of the tourist gaze and to enhance cross-cultural tourism experiences, marking a significant step toward a more comprehensive global tourism theory.

2.2.2 Islamic Tourism Framework

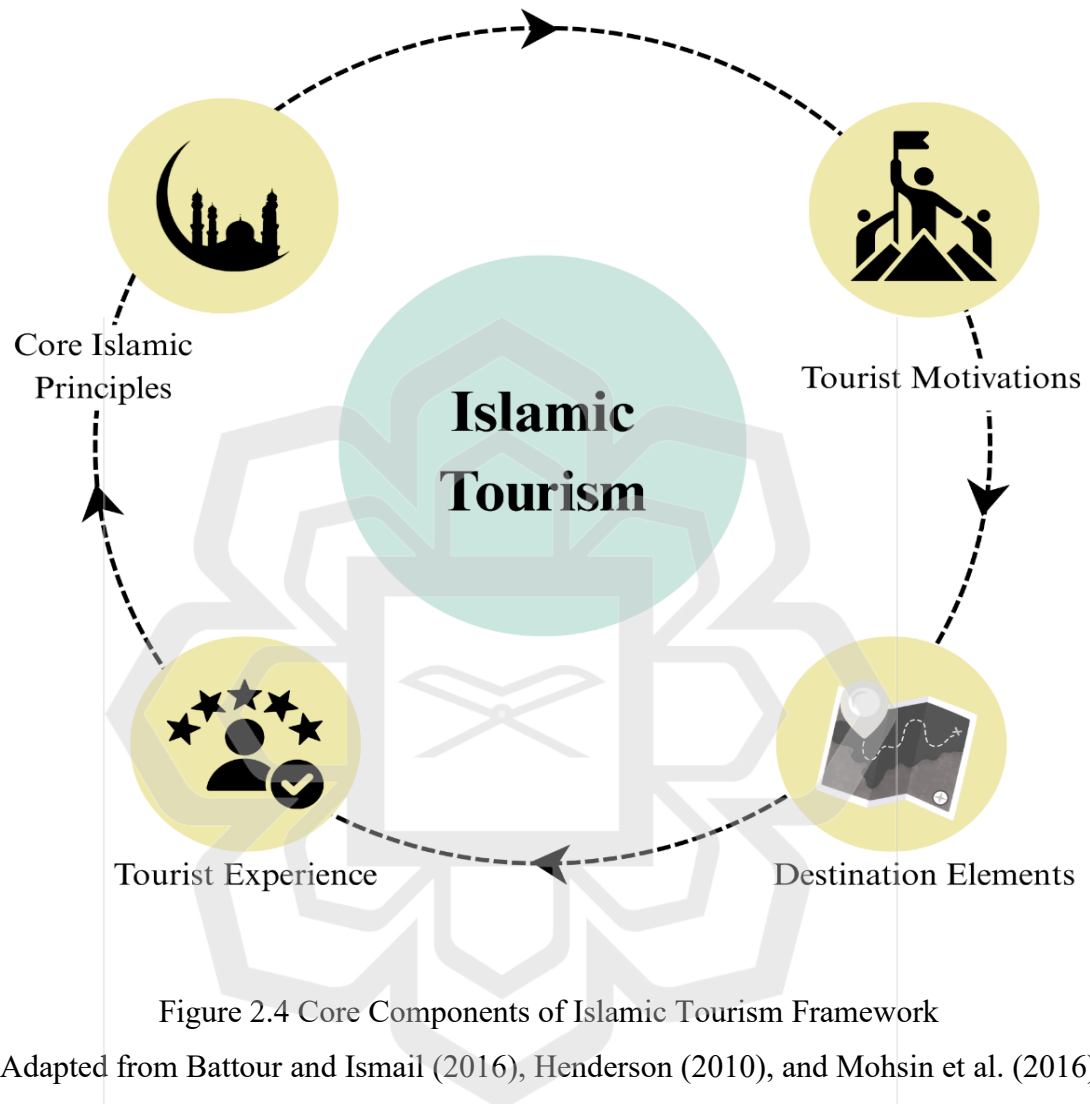
The concept of Islamic tourism has evolved significantly over the past two decades, with various scholars and institutions contributing to its theoretical development. Early contributions by Battour and Ismail (2016) played a foundational role in establishing a

framework that integrates *Syariah*-compliant principles into tourism services and experiences. Their work emphasised key components such as the availability of *halal* food, prayer facilities (mosques or prayer spaces), gender segregation, and avoidance of non-permissible activities, forming a practical and spiritual foundation for Muslim travel behaviour. Similarly, Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) explored the interplay between Islamic values, cultural norms, and tourism practices, further enriching the theoretical discourse surrounding Islamic tourism. In other words, destinations offering *halal* food, spaces for prayer, and modest leisure activities are more likely to attract Muslim visitors, especially those traveling with families or observing religious rituals (Hall, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, 2023).

In addition to academic contributions, institutional frameworks have also shaped the field. Malaysia's Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) has been instrumental in developing national standards such as the Muslim-Friendly Tourism and Hospitality Assurance and Recognition (MFAR) system, which serves as a practical guideline for tourism operators. On a global scale, organisations like Dinar Standard and Crescent Rating have introduced the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), offering a comprehensive model that assesses destinations based on their accessibility to *halal* food, prayer facilities, safety, and Muslim-friendly services. These frameworks collectively provide a robust theoretical and practical basis for understanding and developing Muslim-friendly tourism, particularly in niche segments such as coastal tourism.

The dynamics of Islamic tourism can be illustrated through a conceptual framework that highlights the interconnections between its key components (see Figure 2.4). At the foundation, core Islamic principles, rooted in *Syariah* compliance and spiritual values, shape Muslim travellers' tourist motivations, such as the pursuit of *halal* services, family-oriented leisure, and religiously meaningful experiences (Battour & Ismail, 2016). These motivations influence the types of desired tourist experiences, ranging from worship spaces and modest leisure activities to heritage appreciation and social bonding. The realisation of such experiences depends on the availability of destination elements, including facilities, infrastructure, and services that enable Muslim-friendly travel (Henderson, 2010). The cyclical relationship illustrated in the framework emphasises that tourism behaviours and motivations are not isolated

phenomena but instead emerge through the continuous interaction of Islamic values, traveller expectations, and destination provisions (Mohsin et al., 2016).



Underlying these institutional efforts is a broader Islamic worldview that emphasises the integration of faith and daily life, including travel. Islam emphasises the importance of balancing material and spiritual needs to achieve well-being and a fulfilling life (Mohsin et al., 2016). Within this framework, travel is encouraged in the Qur'an as a means to support this balance. It is viewed as a valuable activity for social connection, such as visiting friends and family, promoting health, gaining knowledge, and reflecting on the wonders of God's creation. These dimensions highlight the holistic

purpose of travel in Islam, aligning it not only with leisure but also with personal, social, and spiritual enrichment forming a foundational perspective for understanding Islamic tourism.

Beyond these practical aspects, Qur'anic epistemology emphasises that travel and encounters with nature are opportunities for *tafakkur* (deep contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection). The Qur'an repeatedly calls believers to observe the heavens, the earth, and the sea as signs (*ayat*) that point towards divine wisdom (Al-Qur'an, Āl 'Imrān 3:190–191; Šād 38:29). *Tafakkur* refers to contemplating the physical world and natural phenomena as manifestations of God's creation, while *tadabbur* signifies reflection on the meanings and ethical lessons derived from them (Nasr, 1996; Kamali, 2003). These spiritual practices demonstrate that Muslim engagement with landscapes is not merely visual or recreational but carries intellectual and religious depth. Introducing these theological concepts provides an important foundation for understanding how Muslim women perceive coastal environments as sites that invite both leisure and remembrance of Allah.

2.2.2.1 Islamic Principles in Tourism: Definition and Scope

The conceptualisation of Islamic tourism encompasses a comprehensive framework where religious activities are naturally interwoven with spiritual development through mindful practices that strengthen one's relationship with Allah (SWT) (Jafari & Scott, 2014). This framework has evolved to integrate various dimensions of tourism experiences that align with Islamic principles and values (Henderson, 2016). At its core, Islamic tourism emphasises the importance of maintaining religious obligations while engaging in leisure activities, creating a unique synthesis of spiritual and recreational experiences (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

The practical manifestation of Islamic tourism principles can be observed in various activities that combine spiritual enrichment with environmental consciousness. For instance, sunset prayer (Maghrib) gatherings by the beach create profound spiritual experiences while appreciating Allah's natural creation, exemplifying the deep

connection between worship and nature appreciation in Islamic teachings (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). This connection extends to educational activities such as beach walks organised to learn about marine conservation from an Islamic perspective, emphasising the concept of khalifah (stewardship) and the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) teachings about protecting natural resources (El-Gohary, 2016).

The holistic approach to Islamic tourism further incorporates *halal*-compliant recreational and culinary experiences, where Muslim travellers should avoid destinations or accommodations where alcohol is served openly. Like alcohol, avoiding pork is a dietary requirement shaping travel behaviour. Instead, Muslim travellers can participate in activities such as family-friendly boat tours with gender-segregated spaces and *halal* seafood culinary experiences demonstrated by local fishing communities (Mohsin, Ramli, & Alkhulayfi, 2016). These activities are complemented by community engagement initiatives like beach clean-up programs that reflect the Islamic principle of cleanliness being half of faith. Such experiences not only allow Muslims to enjoy coastal tourism while maintaining Islamic values but also contribute positively to local coastal communities, creating a sustainable model of tourism that balances religious obligations, environmental stewardship, and community development (Stephenson, 2014).

On top of that, the multifaceted nature of Islamic tourism serves a dual purpose by preserving cultural heritage while nurturing *taqwa* (God-consciousness) and *adab* (ethical conduct), ensuring that entertainment and social engagement remain within the *halal* framework prescribed by Islamic teachings (Stephenson, 2014). This integration enables Muslims to experience joy and community connection while maintaining their religious principles (Eid & El-Gohary, 2014). The concept of *ibadah* (worship) forms the foundation of these experiences, where every conscious action becomes an act of devotion when performed with the right intention (*niyyah*) and in accordance with Islamic teachings (Rahman, 2014).

The spiritual dimension of Islamic tourism on the other hand, is further enhanced through the incorporation of daily Islamic practices such as meditation (*muraqabah*), mindful breathing during salah, and self-reflection (*muhasabah*), which naturally align

with Islamic principles as they enhance one's connection with Allah (SWT) (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011). These practices, when integrated within the broader framework of Islamic tourism and accompanied by regular prayers, Quran recitation, and remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*), create a comprehensive approach to spiritual development that remains firmly rooted in Islamic values and cultural traditions (Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). This holistic integration of spiritual practices within tourism activities demonstrates how Islamic tourism can serve as a vehicle for both physical recreation and spiritual growth, while maintaining the essential boundaries of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*). The convergence of spiritual practice and leisure in Islamic tourism creates a meaningful framework through which the influence of *Syariah* principles on travel behaviour and destination selection can be more clearly understood.

2.2.2.2 Distinguishing Islamic, Religious, and Spiritual Tourism

Tourism motivated by faith and belief can be broadly categorised into religious tourism, spiritual tourism, and Islamic tourism, each reflecting different dimensions of travel behaviour. Religious tourism traditionally refers to pilgrimage and visits to sacred sites, often driven by obligation or ritual practices (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Spiritual tourism, on the other hand, is associated with personal growth, reflection, and the search for meaning, which may or may not be connected to organised religion (Halim et al., 2021).

Islamic tourism differs in that it is shaped by both behavioural and value-based dimensions guided by *Shariah* principles, including *halal* consumption, modest conduct, and gender-sensitive environments (Henderson, 2016). Unlike religious tourism, which is largely location-specific and centred on designated sacred sites, Islamic tourism extends to a wider range of travel contexts, including leisure-based activities such as coastal tourism, where Islamic values continue to influence behaviour and decision-making (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

This distinction is important for understanding Muslim women travellers, whose tourism experiences may involve an integration of religious adherence and spiritual

reflection within leisure settings. In this regard, coastal tourism spaces are not limited to recreational purposes but may also serve as sites of contemplation (*tafakkur*) and reflection (*tadabbur*), highlighting the need to interpret tourism experiences through a more integrated and context-sensitive lens.

2.2.2.3 Influence of Syariah Principles on Travel Behaviour

Building upon the conceptual framework of Islamic tourism, the application of *Syariah* principles provides a concrete structure that governs Muslim travel behaviour, ensuring that every aspect of the tourism experience aligns with religious obligations and ethical expectations. Islamic law underpins Muslim travel behaviour through both detailed legal rulings and overarching ethical objectives. The Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah; protection of faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, serves as a values-based compass that guides destination choice, service expectations, and on-site conduct (Chapra, 2008). Jurists classify actions into *fard* (obligatory), *mustahab* (recommended), *mubāḥ* (permissible), *makruh* (disliked), and *haram* (forbidden), creating a framework within which every aspect of a journey from itinerary planning to daily rituals, must align with Islamic norms (Al-Hamarneh & Steiner, 2006). This dual emphasis on specific legal prescriptions and higher-order objectives has prompted scholars to explore how *Syariah* principles translate into practical tourism management and destination development.

Extant studies consistently highlight a set of core requirements that shape Muslim-friendly travel. As stated by Battour & Ismail (2016), the influence of *Syariah* principles on Muslim travel behaviour represents a complex interplay between religious obligations and tourism practices. First, *halal* food certification and alcohol-free dining environments rank as the primary determinants in hotel and restaurant selection (Crescent Rating & Mastercard, 2020). Henderson (2009) and Battour et al. (2011) beforehand, note that Muslim travellers actively avoid destinations where alcohol is prominently served. Similarly, the availability of *halal* food, particularly *dhabiha* (*halal* meat), significantly influences destination choice and tourist satisfaction (Bonne & Verbeke, 2008). This adherence to dietary requirements demonstrates how religious principles directly impact travel decisions and destination preferences.

Second, the availability of dedicated prayer spaces, clear Qiblah indicators, and real-time prayer-time alerts has become necessity for airports, malls, and resorts as well other Muslim tourist destinations (Wan Sulong, Wan Muhammad, Zin, Husain, Othman, and Ismail (2021). At its core, Islamic tourism emphasises the adherence to fundamental religious requirements while travelling, with prayer facilities and mosques being paramount considerations. Research by Henderson (2010) demonstrates that Muslim travellers prioritise destinations that provide adequate prayer spaces and accommodate prayer timings, reflecting how religious obligations shape destination choices and travel patterns.

Third, modesty norms, including dress codes and gender-segregated recreational facilities such as women-only beaches, drive resort design and marketing (Tavakoli & Mura, 2021). This provision of appropriate facilities and entertainment options further shapes Muslim travel behaviour. Stephenson (2014) emphasise the importance of family-friendly, culturally sensitive entertainment options that align with Islamic values. Recent research by CrescentRating (2023) highlights the growing demand for gender-segregated facilities in Muslim-friendly destinations, including separate swimming pools, spas, and recreational areas. These requirements reflect a broader trend in Islamic tourism where religious principles actively shape the tourist experience and infrastructure development in destination countries. The avoidance of haram activities (gambling, alcohol) channels Muslim tourists toward family-oriented cultural, nature-based, and heritage experiences (Alam et al., 2024).

Finally, the concept of Islamic tourism extends beyond mere religious considerations to encompass broader social and cultural dimensions. Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) highlight the significance of travelling with a mahram (male guardian) for Muslim women, while Mohsin et al. (2016) emphasise the importance of appropriate dress codes and hijab acceptance in destination selection. In short, the following framework (see Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6) summarises how *Syariah* principles influence travel behaviour.

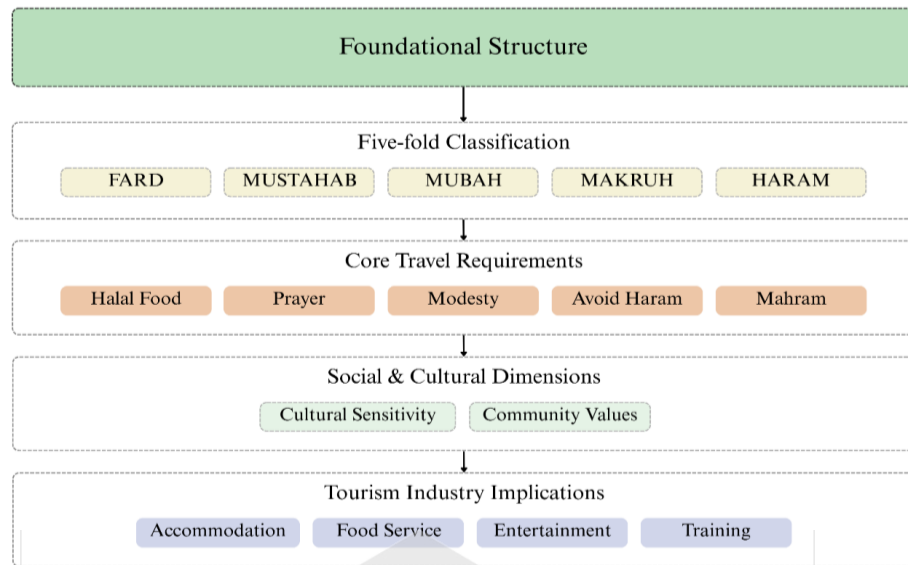


Figure 2.5 Syariah Principles Framework

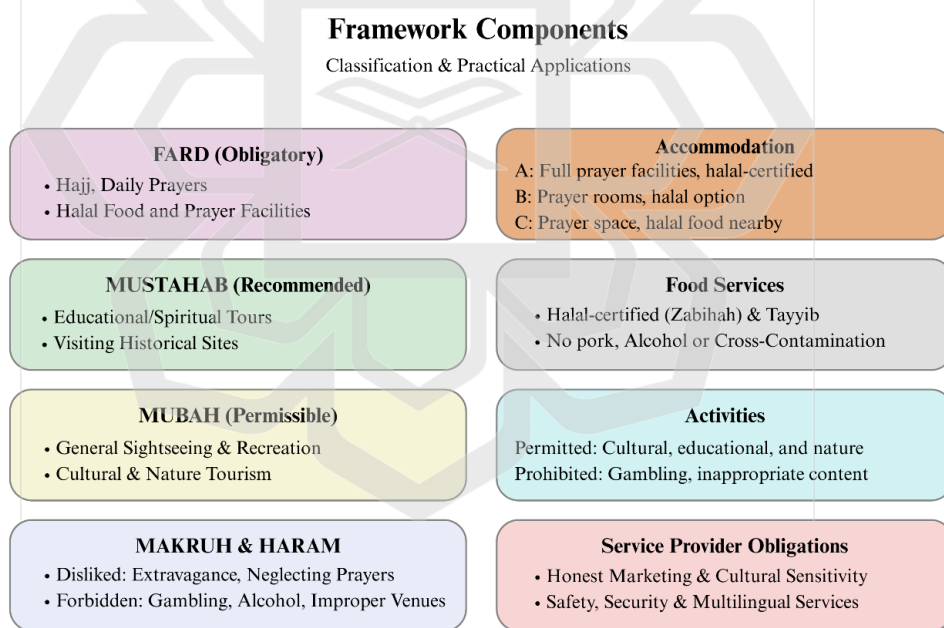


Figure 2.6 Syariah Framework Components

2.2.2.4 Cultural Considerations

The concept of Islamic tourism is not only grounded in religious doctrines but also closely intertwined with cultural expectations that shape the travel experiences of Muslim tourists. When examined through the lens of the "tourist gaze" as theorised by Urry & later scholars, Muslim travellers do not only observe but also interpret destinations through filters of religious values and cultural norms. Unlike the secular Western gaze, which may emphasise novelty, entertainment, or visual pleasure, the Islamic gaze emphasises modesty, spiritual enrichment, and cultural familiarity. This difference influences what is deemed acceptable or desirable during travel.

In the Islamic tourism context, cultural considerations often begin with the preservation of moral values during leisure. Muslim travellers seek destinations where their behaviour, dress code, and practices are not only accepted but also facilitated (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). This includes avoiding environments that contradict their ethical principles, such as places with excessive alcohol use, immodest public behaviour, or inappropriate recreational activities (Henderson, 2016). The interaction between hosts and Muslim guests also holds cultural significance. Cultural misalignment can result in negative perceptions or discomfort, especially when service providers lack understanding of Islamic norms (Stephenson, 2014). For instance, greeting styles, gender interactions, or the availability of gender-specific services can affect tourist satisfaction (Hashim, Murphy, & Hashim, 2007).

Another cultural dimension under the Islamic tourism framework is the importance of symbolic and historical identity. Muslim travellers are often drawn to destinations that reflect shared cultural or religious heritage, such as mosques and Islamic museums (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Din, 1989). These spaces become sites of reflection and connection, allowing tourists to strengthen their religious identity through travel (Timothy & Iverson, 2006). However, the interpretation of such places may differ between local hosts and international Muslim visitors. While local communities might view heritage sites through national or secular perspectives, international Muslim tourists may perceive them as part of the broader *ummah* (global

Islamic community) (Qurashi, 2017). Therefore, tourism development in these contexts must be sensitive to diverse interpretations and avoid commodifying sacred sites in ways that may conflict with religious values (Qurashi, 2017).

The cultural considerations in Islamic tourism extend beyond mere religious obligations to encompass broader aspects of hospitality and consumption. While religious requirements such as *halal* food and prayer facilities remain fundamental, the contemporary Muslim travel culture also reflects evolving consumer demands, gender roles, and the emergence of Islamic cosmopolitanism driven by increased mobility and education (Hall et al., 2020). This evolution has led to the development of diverse market segments, including emerging Islamic middle classes, Muslim millennial travellers, and second and third-generation Muslim communities in Western countries, each with distinct cultural characteristics and travel preferences (Wong, 2007). The cultural dimensions of Islamic tourism are further complicated by the varying interpretations of what constitutes *halal*, Muslim-friendly, or Islamic tourism across different contexts (Henderson, 2009; Razzaq et al., 2016). While some interpretations favour more conservative approaches to Islamic tourism, emphasising religious and cultural sites with "pedagogical" elements (Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 2017), others recognise the broader interests of Muslim travellers in experiencing diverse cultural contexts and destinations. This diversity in interpretation and practice highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of Islamic tourism that acknowledges both religious requirements and the evolving cultural preferences of contemporary Muslim travellers.

The cultural dimensions of Islamic tourism present a complex interplay between religious obligations, modern travel practices, and diverse cultural interpretations across the Muslim world. While Islam provides a unifying framework for Muslim travellers, the cultural manifestations and interpretations, however, vary significantly across different societies and regions (Hourani, 1992). This diversity is particularly evident in the fact that Arabs, despite being the historical origin of Islam, now constitute a minority within the global Islamic community, with the largest Muslim populations found in non-Arabic speaking countries such as Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nigeria (Seyfi & Hall, 2019). Rather than viewing culture as static or exotic, Islamic tourism

promotes a dynamic interaction between faith, heritage, and destination experience. This interaction challenges mainstream tourism models and demands a culturally nuanced approach to tourism planning. Recognising the diversity within Muslim travel behaviours, shaped by levels of religiosity, cultural background, and regional norms, is vital for building sustainable and respectful tourism offerings that align with both Islamic teachings and contemporary travel expectations.

2.2.2.5 Gender Deliberations

The theoretical framework of Islamic tourism must acknowledge the significant role of gender in shaping travel experiences and cultural practices. Research indicates notable gender differences in tourism consumption patterns, with distinct preferences and behaviours observed between male and female Muslim travellers (Kim, Im, & King, 2015). These differences are particularly significant in understanding the complexities of gendered spaces and travel practices, especially for single women travellers in different contexts (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). The intersection of gender with religious and cultural norms creates unique considerations for research and tourism development, often requiring careful navigation of cultural sensitivities and institutional norms.

Beyond differences in consumption patterns, Muslim women's mobility is shaped by overlapping concerns around safety, modesty norms, and access to gender-sensitive services (Nisha & Cheung, 2022; Kim et al., 2015). Practical aspects such as women-only or family sections, privacy in accommodation and leisure facilities, clear *halal* options, and reliable access to prayer spaces and ablution areas often influence trip planning and destination choice (CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2019). These considerations intersect with nationality, age, class, and marital status, indicating that Muslim women comprise several sub-segments with distinct constraints and preferences rather than a single homogeneous market (CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2022). Recent industry intelligence also shows stronger reliance on digital communities and peer reviews to assess cultural fit, safety signals, and the usability of on-site services, which affects perceived trust in destinations and brands (CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2022).

For destination managers, gender-responsive design is less about parallel products and more about embedding inclusive standards into mainstream offerings (UNWTO, 2022a). Measures include visible safety protocols and accessible complaint channels, enabling women-led tours and guides where appropriate, offering women-only time slots for certain facilities, and training frontline staff on modesty and privacy expectations relevant for Muslim travellers (CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2019). Such approaches can increase participation and satisfaction among Muslim women while aligning with wider sector commitments to gender equality and inclusive growth in tourism (UNWTO, 2022a). Evidence from development initiatives further suggests that supporting women's entrepreneurship and leadership within local tourism value chains improves service relevance for female travellers and strengthens destination competitiveness over time (CrescentRating, 2024; UNWTO, 2019).

2.2.3 Intersection of Tourist Gaze and Islamic Tourism

The integration of theoretical frameworks concerning the tourist gaze and Islamic tourism provides a unique analytical lens through which to understand the travel experiences of Muslim tourists, particularly women. The concept of the tourist gaze, originally introduced by Urry (1990), refers to how tourists perceive, and experience destinations based on their cultural expectations, social norms, and personal identities. In Islamic tourism, the tourist gaze is deeply influenced by religious obligations, cultural values, and individual interpretations of Islamic principles (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Rahman, 2014; Battour & Ismail, 2016). This intersection acknowledges both the socio-cultural construction of tourist experiences and the specific requirements dictated by Islamic teachings, offering a more refined understanding of how Muslim travellers engage with tourism spaces.

Religious perspectives significantly shape Muslim tourists' perceptions and consumption patterns. Muslim travellers often seek experiences that align not only with leisure desires but also with religious and spiritual fulfilment (Rahman & El-Gohary, 2023). Their travel behaviour is guided by principles such as modesty, *halal* consumption, prayer obligations, and avoidance of prohibited (*haram*) activities. Thus,

Islamic tourism extends beyond visiting religious sites to encompass everyday travel behaviours such as choosing gender-segregated facilities, *halal*-certified accommodations, and culturally respectful experiences. This shaping of the tourist gaze foregrounds moral and spiritual considerations, diverging from the secular, consumption-driven narratives that dominate conventional Western tourism discourse (Scott & Jafari, 2010).

The concept of modesty and privacy is particularly significant within this Islamic tourist gaze. Muslim travellers, especially women, prioritise destinations and services that respect their religious expectations regarding dress codes, physical interaction boundaries, and privacy needs. Coastal tourism development, for instance, must consider gender-segregated beaches, women-only recreational spaces, and culturally sensitive service staff to meet these needs (Battour, Hakimian, Ismail & Bogan 2018; Bangsawan, MS, Rahman, & Razimi, 2019). In Malaysia, where coastal tourism is prominent, balancing modern tourism infrastructure with Islamic values reflects a growing movement toward culturally inclusive tourism planning.

Cultural background also mediates how Muslim tourists interpret destination spaces. When traveling to non-Muslim majority countries, Muslim tourists often navigate a negotiation between maintaining religious practices and adapting to local customs (Fauzihana & Ayob, 2020). These travellers carry with them an "Islamic gaze" that filters their experiences through the lens of faith and identity. Their selective consumption of activities, favouring *halal* dining, modest entertainment, and religious accessibility, illustrates how Islamic principles actively shape their tourism experiences.

The interaction between Muslim tourists and host communities further complicates the Islamic tourist gaze. Unlike traditional models where tourists are passive observers, Muslim travellers are simultaneously observed and often judged based on their visible markers of faith, such as hijab or prayer practices. This "mutual gaze" dynamic can either foster inclusivity when hosts respond with cultural sensitivity or provoke alienation when misunderstandings arise (Hall & Prayag, 2020). Destinations that invest in staff training, culturally appropriate communication, and respect for religious diversity position themselves favourably in this growing market.

As Muslim travellers' significance in the global tourism market expands, destination management organisations have begun to recognise the importance of faith-based service provision. The rise of Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure such as *halal*-certified restaurants, dedicated prayer facilities, women-only transport, and Islamic heritage tours, illustrates an industry response to the Islamic tourist gaze (Han, Al-Ansi, Olya, & Kim, 2019; CrescentRating & Matcard, 2019). However, scholars caution against the commodification of religion purely for economic gain. Qurashi (2017) warns that over-commercialisation risks diluting the spiritual authenticity that Muslim tourists seek, highlighting the need for ethical and sincere approaches in Muslim-friendly tourism development.

The Islamic tourist gaze also reflects an evolving diversity within Muslim travel culture. While traditional interpretations emphasised conservative religious observances, contemporary Muslim travellers demonstrate varied interests, including leisure, adventure, business, and cultural exchange (Hall, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, 2023). Particularly among younger generations and second-generation Muslims living in Western contexts, there is a broader acceptance of diverse tourism motivations, albeit still framed within Islamic ethical boundaries (Abdul Rashid, Ghazali, & Othman, 2019). This pluralism challenges the tourism industry to avoid monolithic representations of Muslim travellers and instead embrace a more segmented and nuanced market approach.

Spiritual dimensions of travel further enrich the intersection of the tourist gaze and Islamic tourism. The Qur'anic encouragement to travel to observe and reflect upon God's creation provides a theological endorsement of travel experiences (Al-Qur'an: al-'Ankaboot 29:20). Consequently, Muslim tourists often seek both worldly enjoyment and spiritual enrichment through travel. Simplified perceptions of Muslim tourism as exclusively religious or leisure-focused are complicated by this dual goal. Rather, travel turns into a place of integrated identity expression where worldly discovery and religious commitment coexist (Rahman & El-Gohary, 2023).

The concept of the Islamic gaze thus repositions tourism not merely as consumption but as a culturally and spiritually significant act. It critiques dominant

Western narratives in tourism that prioritise individualism, sensuality, and material indulgence (Stephenson, 2014). Instead, it promotes values such as modesty, community, spiritual reflection, and ethical consumption. Recognising this framework enables tourism scholars and practitioners to design experiences that are inclusive, respectful, and enriching for Muslim travellers.

While Urry's tourist gaze emphasises the consumption of sights through visual symbols, the Islamic interpretive tradition extends this act of gazing into spiritual domains through *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*. For Muslim travellers, gazing at a sunset, listening to waves, or walking by the shoreline may not only satisfy aesthetic enjoyment but also activate modes of contemplation and reflection encouraged in the Qur'an. In this sense, coastal landscapes become more than leisure backdrops they become stages for remembrance (*dhikr*), reflection (*tafakkur*), and moral insight (*tadabbur*). This perspective suggests that the gaze itself can be spiritually transformative, positioning Muslim leisure as a practice of both recreation and devotion (El-Gohary, 2016; Jafari & Scott, 2014).

This intersection between tourist gaze theory and Islamic tourism highlights a critical gap in existing tourism literature. While the tourist gaze has largely been developed within Western secular contexts, emphasising visual consumption, leisure, and individual freedom, Islamic tourism introduces a value-based framework shaped by religious principles, cultural norms, and ethical considerations. This contrast suggests that the act of "gazing" is not universal but is instead mediated by underlying belief systems and cultural expectations. For Muslim women, this intersection becomes particularly significant, as their tourism experiences are shaped not only by cultural identity but also by gendered expectations rooted in religious values. Their gaze therefore extends beyond visual appreciation to include moral interpretation, emotional reflection, and spiritual awareness. Consequently, there is a need to reconceptualise the tourist gaze by incorporating religious and gendered dimensions, forming the foundation for what this study conceptualises as the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze.

2.2.4 Integration of Islamic Tourism and Sustainable Development

Islam holds constitutional status as Malaysia's official religion, predominantly practiced by the ethnic Malay population (Mohd Sani & Abdul Hamed Shah, 2020). Historical evidence suggests Islamic influence reached the Malay Peninsula through Melaka's maritime trade networks with Arab and Indian merchants during the 15th century (Hall, 2022). Prior to Islamic prominence, the region exhibited strong Hindu-Buddhist influences, alongside indigenous animistic practices and ancestral veneration (Johns, 1993). The propagation of Islam throughout the Peninsula occurred through strategic royal marriages and political alliances centred around Melaka's sultanate (Aljunied, 2019). This religious dissemination pattern significantly shaped the region's socio-political landscape (Lee & Wong, 2022). Contemporary Malaysia maintains religious plurality while upholding Islam's official status. Non-Malay communities predominantly practice Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and traditional Chinese beliefs, reflecting Malaysia's multi-religious fabric (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020). This religious diversity operates within a framework that balances Islamic principles with constitutional guarantees of religious freedom (Neo, 2023).

In accordance, the religious composition of Malaysia's population reflects the country's multicultural character, with Islam being the predominant religion. This religious in accordance composition has significant implications for social policy, tourism development, and cultural preservation initiatives in Malaysia. The latest demographic based on the latest official data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020 Census) show the following distribution (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5 Religious Demographics in Malaysia

Religion	Percentage (%)	Population (Million)
Islam	63.5	22.86
Buddhism	18.7	6.73
Christianity	9.1	3.28
Hinduism	6.1	2.20
Traditional Chinese Religions	1.3	0.47
Others/No Religion	2.7	0.97
Total	100	31.9

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020)

This religious profile not only shapes visitor expectations and local norms but also provides a strong policy rationale for The Islamic Tourism Centre ITC to align Muslim-friendly tourism and hospitality MFTH standards with sustainability principles:

"Both Islamic Tourism and MFTH models are based upon taking care of our environment and having regard for the visited communities. Qualities such as cleanliness, safety, etiquette, and respect are universally accepted human values that form the basis of Islamic Tourism" (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021).

The integration of Islamic tourism principles with sustainable development practices offers a promising approach to addressing the challenges of coastal tourism development while meeting the needs of Muslim travellers.

In the context of Port Dickson, however, despite its potential, the destination faces several challenges in developing sustainable coastal tourism. Like other coastal areas in Southeast Asia, Port Dickson has encountered significant environmental issues, including pollution, resource overexploitation, and habitat destruction, which are

particularly concerning given Islamic tourism's emphasis on environmental stewardship (Nasuchon, 2009). The challenge of balancing development with environmental conservation is evident in the impact of infrastructure expansion, where the construction of coastal towns, roads, and tourism facilities has led to significant losses in mangrove areas and other natural habitats across Malaysian coastal regions (Nasuchon, 2009). These environmental concerns are further reflected in stakeholder perspectives, particularly at popular locations such as Teluk Kemang beach, where research has revealed varying levels of satisfaction with tourism development and growing concerns about environmental quality.

These findings underscore the urgent need for more sustainable tourism practices that can better preserve the natural environment while supporting tourism growth (Baloch et al., 2023). The integration of these challenges highlights the complex nature of developing sustainable coastal tourism that aligns with both environmental conservation principles and the needs of various stakeholders in the region. More interestingly, a key aspect of Port Dickson's development strategy is the integration of Islamic tourism principles with sustainable development practices. This alignment creates opportunities for Port Dickson to develop tourism offerings that appeal to Muslim travellers while also promoting environmental conservation and community well-being.

Building on earlier theoretical debates, the concepts of tourist gaze and perception provide a valuable framework for understanding the relationship between collective expectations and individual meaning-making in tourism. The tourist gaze has been described as a socially constructed way of seeing, shaped by media, cultural narratives, and industry representations (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In contrast, perception emphasises the subjective dimension of tourism, reflecting how visitors interpret, and experience destinations based on values, emotions, and backgrounds (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2022). These perspectives are particularly relevant in contexts where culture and religion influence leisure practices. In Muslim-majority settings, tourism spaces may still be promoted through globalised images of leisure, yet individual perceptions are moderated by modesty, family orientation, and religious identity (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Putit, Muda, Mahmood, Ahmad Taufek, &

Wahib, 2016). Drawing on these insights, this study explores how Muslim women negotiate the tourist gaze and construct their own perceptions within the beach environment context.

Figure 2.7 hence presents the study's theoretical framework, which combines the Tourist Gaze with Islamic Tourism principles to explain how Muslim women perceive, expect, and experience coastal destinations. Drawing on Urry's notion of socially constructed seeing and sign interpretation, the model situates destination engagement within cultural meanings and visual cues (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011). This is integrated with Islamic requirements that commonly shape travel choices such as *halal* food availability, prayer access, modesty and privacy needs, and avoidance of prohibited activities, highlighted in Islamic tourism scholarship (Battour et al., 2020). Together, these elements provide the lens that informs the study's research questions and the interview-led analytical approach.

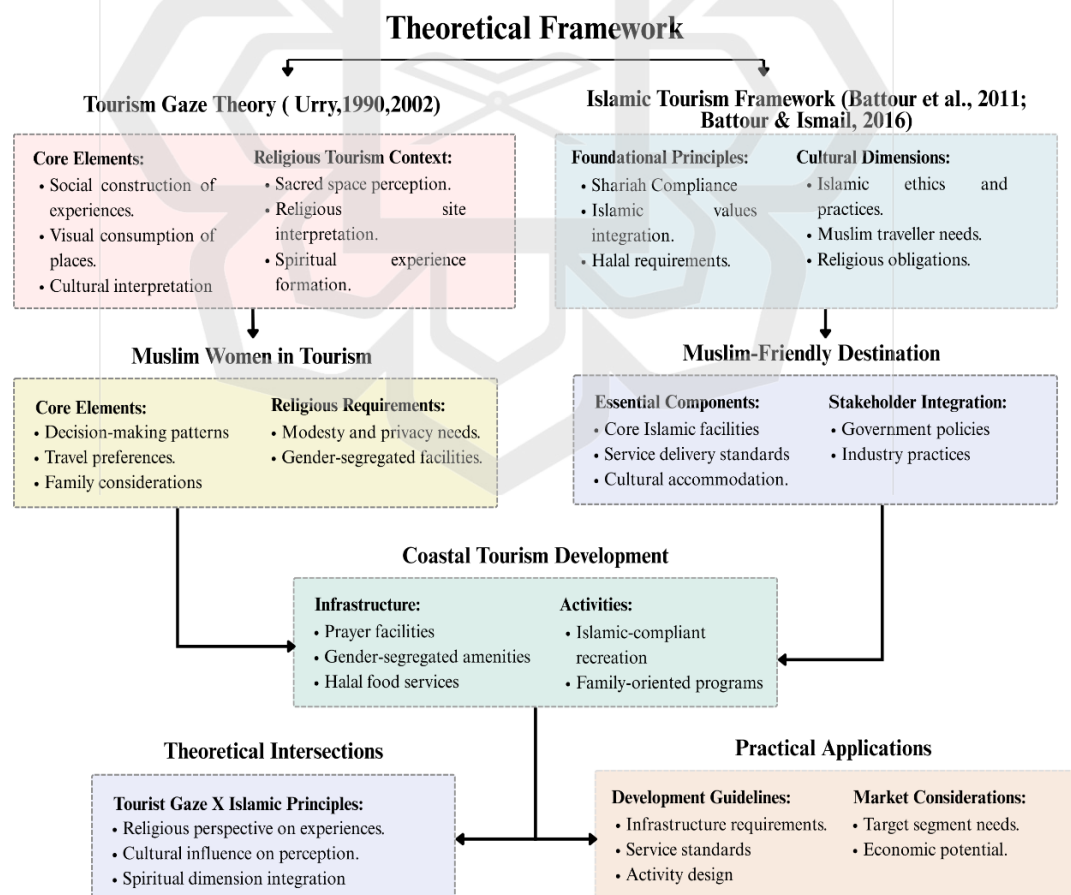


Figure 2.7 The Islamic Tourist Gaze Theoretical Framework

2.3 MUSLIM WOMEN IN TOURISM

Muslim women's contributions to the travel sector have become increasingly important. The distinct requirements and viewpoints of Muslim women are changing the way tourism services are planned and provided as more Muslim women embrace travel experiences. This section examines Muslim women's travel choices, cultural and religious obligations, and unique preferences while travelling. The focus on Malaysia's tourism landscape demonstrates how Muslim women's involvement in tourism reflects the dynamic balance between Islamic values and contemporary travel experiences.

2.3.1 Travel Behaviour and Decision-Making

Muslim women have emerged as influential agents in global tourism, particularly within the Muslim travel market. No longer viewed as passive participants, they are increasingly shaping travel decisions for themselves and their families. Based on data from CrescentRating and Mastercard (2019), Muslim women accounted for 63 million travellers in 2018, contributing approximately \$80 billion to the global tourism economy and making up 45% of the Muslim tourism market. More recently, the CrescentRating (2024) report highlights that Muslim women continue to represent a significant and growing segment of this demographic, influencing the majority of family and group travel decisions. Notably, over 70% of Gen Z Muslim women now play an active role in travel planning. This upward trend reflects broader social changes, including rising levels of education, increased digital connectivity, and greater economic independence.

One of the most significant developments is the evolving role of Muslim women as travel decision-makers. Across many Islamic societies, women especially young professionals are taking the lead in researching destinations, making bookings, and evaluating travel options. In many middle-income households, they are responsible for planning both personal and family vacations. While traditional interpretations once emphasised male authority over women's mobility, recent studies highlight how

Muslim women now exercise greater autonomy, particularly in leisure, shopping, and educational travel (Tilley & Houston, 2016; Shah, 2018).

Despite cultural and religious frameworks influencing their choices, women are asserting themselves within these boundaries rather than being constrained by them. Travel decisions often take into account Islamic principles such as *halal* food, prayer facilities, modest dress codes, and gender-sensitive accommodations. Women function as cultural gatekeepers, ensuring that selected destinations align with religious and family values while also accommodating leisure and entertainment needs (Wilson & Little, 2005; Battour & Ismail, 2016). Their decisions are both practical and value-driven, balancing personal interests with ethical and spiritual considerations.

Travel patterns among Muslim women are also diversifying. While the 2019 CrescentRating and Mastercard study reported that 71% of Muslim women travellers journeyed with family and 28% travelled solo, more recent Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) findings suggest rising solo and women-only travel trends. Muslim women now exert strong influence over family travel planning (>70%), and new women-only tour services are seeing high demand, particularly among younger demographics (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2024). These trends indicate a growing demand for flexible and culturally appropriate tourism offerings, including women-only beach areas, female tour guides, and safe transport options (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2024; UNWTO & Crescent Rating, 2023). Digital tools and online platforms have further empowered women to research, plan, and share travel experiences, helping others navigate destinations that meet their faith-based needs.

Economic participation is another key factor driving this behavioural shift. As women gain greater financial independence, their spending power within the tourism sector has grown, especially in hospitality, retail, and cultural experiences (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Yang et al. (2018) highlight that women from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and urban North Africa are not only spending more but are also demanding higher standards in terms of both service quality and religious accommodation. Their economic role is influencing the supply side of the industry, prompting service providers to develop Muslim-friendly and women-centred travel options. This has led to the

innovation of services specifically tailored to Muslim women, helping destinations tap into this rapidly expanding market.

However, despite these advances, structural and cultural challenges persist. In some conservative regions, societal expectations and legal restrictions may discourage women from traveling without male guardians. Gender-based visa policies, limited availability of women-only spaces, and safety concerns in certain destinations also pose barriers (Mastercard & Crescent Rating, 2024; UNWTO & Centre of Excellence on Gender in Tourism, 2022). These issues often intersect with economic capability, creating a gap between aspiration and actual travel behaviour. Nevertheless, tourism businesses and governments are gradually responding by introducing inclusive policies, promoting women-led travel initiatives, and enhancing infrastructure to support independent female travellers (Hall & Prayag, 2020).

The influence of Muslim women is not only economic but also strategic in shaping the future of Muslim-friendly tourism. Their preferences rooted in a mix of religious observance, safety, and modern lifestyle aspirations are reshaping how destinations market themselves (Stephenson, 2014). Young Muslim women, in particular, are tech-savvy, socially engaged, and culturally aware, leveraging platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and travel blogs to document their journeys and guide others. This digital engagement further amplifies their role as thought leaders and cultural influencers within the travel space (Janmohamed, 2016).

In short, Muslim women are emerging as powerful contributors to the global tourism industry, not only in terms of their economic impact but also in shaping inclusive, value-sensitive travel trends. Their growing role as decision-makers, driven by rising education, financial independence, and cultural confidence, signals a fundamental transformation in the dynamics of Muslim travel. For tourism stakeholders, acknowledging and addressing the unique preferences and challenges of this demographic is essential for creating sustainable and culturally responsive tourism experiences. As barriers continue to be challenged and more women step into leadership roles within travel planning, Muslim women are poised to redefine the landscape of global travel in both visible and meaningful ways.

2.3.2 Religious and Cultural Considerations

The participation of Muslim women in tourism is deeply influenced by religious and cultural frameworks, particularly those concerning modesty, privacy, and cultural sensitivities. Within Islamic teachings, modesty (*ḥayā'*) is a foundational value that governs not only attire but also behaviour, speech, and interaction in public spaces. As emphasised by Sawai et al. (2020), *ḥayā'* is not limited to external appearance but reflects an internalised moral consciousness rooted in Qur'anic and Prophetic teachings. It functions as a behavioural and emotional compass, shaping how Muslim individuals, particularly women, navigate public life, including their experiences as tourists.

For many Muslim women, wearing modest clothing such as the hijab is not merely a personal or cultural expression but a religious obligation. This influences their travel decisions in various ways, including destination selection, the types of activities they feel comfortable engaging in, and their expectations regarding hospitality services. Destinations that recognise and accommodate modest dress codes, offer privacy-conscious facilities, and provide gender-sensitive environments such as female-only swimming areas, prayer spaces, or *halal* food options are often prioritised (Stephenson, 2014; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Battour et al., 2018).

In modern tourism contexts, however, modesty is not a static or uniform concept. Muslim women often negotiate their religious identity with contemporary travel experiences, media exposure, and social interactions. As Islam (2023) highlights, many Muslim women especially younger generations and social media influencers reinterpret and express modesty in diverse ways, balancing religious values with the aesthetics and expectations of modern travel and lifestyle cultures. These dynamics illustrate how *ḥaya'* remains a central but evolving construct, deeply embedded in both the spiritual lives and practical travel behaviours of Muslim women.

Modesty requirements further extend to the spatial design of tourism services. Women from more conservative backgrounds often seek out gender-segregated spaces that allow them to enjoy leisure activities such as swimming, spa treatments, or fitness while maintaining religious principles. The absence of such facilities can act as a

deterrent to travel (Qurashi, 2017; Din et al., 2011). As noted by Henderson (2016), the presence of female-only zones, family-friendly accommodations, and accessible prayer facilities significantly increases the appeal of a destination among Muslim women. These services allow them to engage in tourism while adhering to their spiritual and cultural values.

Closely linked to modesty is the need for privacy, which remains a crucial consideration in tourism settings. Privacy involves both physical separation and the assurance of not being observed by unrelated men during personal or leisure activities. Accommodations that provide private villas, gender segregated amenities, or family only areas are often favoured (Stephenson, 2014; Han et al., 2019). Research by Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) emphasises that the availability of such infrastructure like women-only pools or spa hours can directly influence the travel decisions of Muslim women, particularly those travelling with family or in all-female groups.

In addition to spatial concerns, cultural sensitivities play a substantial role in shaping the travel behaviour of Muslim women. Experiences of misunderstanding or discrimination based on appearance such as wearing the hijab can lead to discomfort and destination avoidance (Abdel-Ghaffar, 2017). This is especially relevant in non-Muslim-majority contexts, where visible religious expression may trigger bias or exclusion. Accordingly, staff training and cultural competence are essential. As noted by Stephenson (2014) and Eid and El-Gohary (2015), service providers who demonstrate understanding of Islamic practices such as gender interaction norms and prayer times enhance Muslim women's sense of belonging and satisfaction during travel.

Service delivery that respects these cultural sensitivities often includes employing female staff for personal services and promoting respectful interaction boundaries. According to CrescentRating and Matercard (2019), destinations that train staff to engage respectfully with Muslim guests, and provide culturally appropriate amenities, are more likely to build long-term trust and loyalty. This is particularly true when hospitality offerings are designed with awareness of Islamic etiquette, such as the

use of appropriate greetings, avoidance of alcohol in shared spaces, and flexibility around religious practices (El-Gohary, 2016).

These religious and cultural considerations intersect with broader socio-economic developments. As Muslim women, particularly from middle- and upper-income backgrounds, gain financial independence and education, their participation in travel has increased (Qurashi, 2017; Karim, 2008). However, their involvement remains constrained by infrastructural and cultural gaps in the tourism industry. Even when financially capable, many women face difficulties in finding tourism products that meet their needs. Consequently, destinations are now investing in Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure, including *halal* food services, private transportation, and female tour guides (Zailani et al., 2017; Hall & Prayag, 2020).

It is important to recognise that these religious and cultural needs exist on a spectrum, shaped by variations in personal beliefs and societal norms. What constitutes modesty or appropriate behaviour varies across Islamic cultures from more flexible urban interpretations to stricter traditional practices (Syed et al., 2005). As Jafari and Scott (2014) suggest, this diversity requires the tourism industry to move beyond one-size-fits-all approaches and embrace nuanced, culturally responsive service delivery.

The growing demand for modesty, privacy, and respectful service has contributed to the emergence of a global Muslim-friendly tourism segment, where destinations and businesses actively tailor offerings to suit Islamic values. For example, The *Halal Times* (2025) reports that Japan has seen a surge in Muslim women visitors after hotels began offering prayer spaces, Qurans, prayer mats, and *halal*-certified meals, as well as modest swimwear for women to enjoy hot springs privately. In Saudi Arabia, the introduction of a women-only airport terminal staffed entirely by women and the rise of women-run tour companies have made travel more accessible and comfortable for female travellers. European countries like France have reserved train compartments for women and families, while UK museums now provide modesty kits at entrances. Additionally, technology such as travel apps helps Muslim women find women-only gyms, private pool times, and nearby prayer spaces, further improving their travel experience. These efforts reflect not only cultural inclusivity but also

strategic market positioning as well as led to increased travel frequency and higher spending among Muslim women. As the Muslim travel market continues to expand, integrating the needs of Muslim women travellers becomes both a moral obligation and a competitive advantage (Battour et al., 2018; Han et al., 2019).

To operationalise these religious and cultural considerations, destinations should incorporate micro-level features that make faith-aligned practices effortless in daily touchpoints such as clear, culturally sensitive signage in the primary languages of target markets, the provision of Islamic reading materials (including Qur'an copies and short devotional literature) in rooms and lounges, and Ramadan-specific services like adjusted operating hours, pre-dawn (suhoor) and sunset (iftar) meal arrangements, and gentle prayer-time reminders (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Crescent Rating & Mastercard, 2023). Complementary details can include discreet Qibla indicators, wudu-friendly washroom fittings, and modesty-supporting amenities where appropriate, ensuring that core principles translate into tangible, visitor-facing experiences (Stephenson, 2014; Mohsin et al., 2016).

In short, Muslim women's engagement in tourism is strongly shaped by religious obligations and cultural expectations. Modesty, privacy, and cultural sensitivity are not optional preferences but foundational criteria that inform their travel decisions. The tourism industry must respond by providing inclusive, respectful, and faith-compliant experiences that support Muslim women in their roles as travellers, decision-makers, and consumers. As awareness grows and infrastructure evolves, destinations that embrace these values will be best positioned to attract and retain this important and growing demographic.

2.3.3 Specific Needs and Preferences

An examination of Muslim women travellers' specific needs reveals three fundamental aspects that warrant detailed examination. This section analyses the provision of *halal* facilities and amenities, the significance of gender-segregated spaces, and essential safety and security considerations. These interconnected elements form the foundation

for understanding and addressing Muslim women's distinct travel requirements. Islamic tourism in Malaysia in accordance, is conceptualised through multiple dimensions that extend beyond traditional religious pilgrimages. As Kamarudin and Ismail (2013) explain, from an Islamic perspective, tourism encompasses several concepts: "Rehlah" (recreational gatherings), "Ziarah" (visiting people and sacred places), "Siyahah" (traveling throughout the world), and "Umrah and Hajj" (pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina). These diverse Islamic tourism concepts have shaped Malaysia's approach to developing its tourism industry, particularly in accommodating both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors. The country has carefully balanced religious considerations with broader tourism appeal, ensuring that Islamic tourism principles are integrated without alienating other tourist segments.

According to the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) (2021), a government agency under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), the Malaysian government in accordance, strategically uses the term "Muslim-friendly" or "Muslim tourism" rather than "Islamic tourism" to avoid creating extreme expectations from non-Muslims. This approach aims to create a welcoming environment for all tourists while catering to the specific needs of Muslim travellers. The term "Muslim-friendly tourism" is employed to ensure that tourism services are inclusive and not exclusively bound by strict Syariah compliance. This allows for a broader appeal to both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists, ensuring that services meet the needs of Muslim travellers without alienating others. The ITC also emphasises that this terminology helps in providing facilities and services that are accommodating to Muslim tourists while remaining accessible to all.

However, recently, Crescent Rating introduced a more comprehensive and sophisticated framework called RIDA, which stands for Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured (Crescent Rating, 2024). According to UK inbound (2024, p.1), "The Mastercard-CrescentRating & Mastercard Global Muslim Travel Index 2024 looks at the latest trends in global Muslim travel. This year, the report introduces the RIDA framework which focuses on Responsible, Immersive, Digital and Assured travel dimensions". In accordance, The RIDA framework basically establishes a comprehensive paradigm for understanding Muslim travellers' needs through four interconnected dimensions as mentioned above. The framework emphasises sustainable

tourism practices and cultural engagement while integrating technological innovations to enhance travel experiences for Muslim travellers. Central to this framework is the assurance of faith-compliant services, coupled with environmental stewardship and authentic cultural immersion, thereby creating a holistic approach to Muslim-friendly tourism development (Crescent Rating, 2024).

The Muslim traveller market has specific needs categorised by Crescent Rating (2012) into three tiers (as Figure 2.8). This hierarchical visualisation effectively communicates how these needs are prioritised, with the most critical requirements forming the foundation and the desirable features at the top of the pyramid. These requirements are believed help to form the foundation for developing Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure in any destinations.

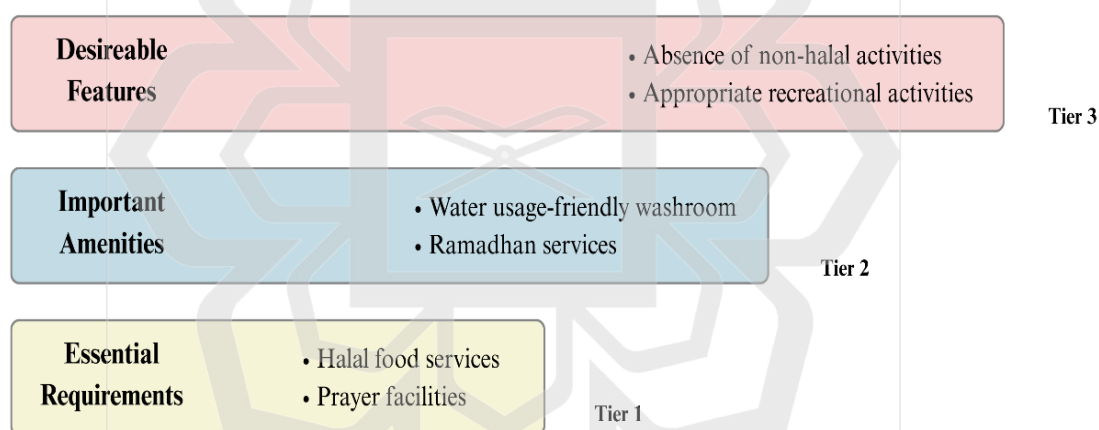


Figure 2.8 Muslim Traveller Needs Framework

Source: Crescent Rating (2012)

While the RIDA framework was developed specifically for Muslim travellers, it is important to contextualise it within broader Western tourism paradigms. Rhama (2021) conducted a comparative analysis of *halal* tourism guidelines against Western sustainable tourism frameworks, finding that "*halal* tourism has unique characters compared with mass and non-mass tourism types" (p. 1492). This suggests that while

the RIDA framework incorporates elements of sustainability and responsible tourism that align with Western frameworks, its implementation and priorities may differ significantly from other regions.

However, the evolution from the three-tier framework (2012) to the RIDA framework (2024) demonstrates the growing sophistication in understanding and addressing Muslim traveller needs. While incorporating elements familiar to Western tourism frameworks such as sustainability and digital innovation, the RIDA framework maintains a distinct focus on faith-based requirements and cultural sensitivities specific to Muslim travellers. This evolution reflects the growing importance of the Muslim travel market, which according to the *Halal Focus* (2024) report, "is projected to reach 230 million arrivals and contribute US\$225 billion by 2028."

2.3.4 Muslim Women in Malaysia Tourism Context

The dynamics of Muslim women tourists in Malaysia's tourism sector present a distinctive intersection of religious observance, cultural sensitivity, and leisure experiences (Ramli & Zawawi, 2020). Recent research indicates a significant transformation in how Muslim women engage in tourism activities within Malaysia's Islamic-oriented tourism framework, with increasing autonomy and visibility among female travellers (Henderson, 2021). Traditionally, Muslim women's participation in tourism was shaped by cultural expectations and religious obligations, often resulting in limited mobility and restricted leisure choices (Oktadiana et al., 2020). However, there has been a marked shift as Muslim women now actively participate in travel planning and seek experiences that harmonise their faith with personal aspirations (Ramli & Zawawi, 2020). The tourism industry has responded by offering more *Syariah*-compliant services, such as *halal* food, prayer facilities, women-only spaces, and modest fashion options (Henderson, 2021). Studies from countries such as Turkey, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates demonstrate varying approaches to accommodating Muslim women travellers, including the provision of women-only spaces, *halal*-certified services, and privacy-oriented facilities (Battour, 2017; COMCEC, 2016; Hakim et al., 2025). These examples indicate that while the principles

of Islamic tourism are shared, their implementation differs across contexts, highlighting the importance of examining Malaysia as a unique case within the global landscape of Muslim-friendly tourism. Additionally, social media and digital platforms have empowered Muslim women to share experiences, access information, and build supportive communities, further normalising their presence in the tourism sector (Oktadiana et al., 2020).

This evolution reflects broader changes in Muslim women's roles and identities, both within Malaysia and globally (Ramli & Zawawi, 2020). Muslim women's travel behaviours and decision-making processes are significantly influenced by their unique socio-cultural milieu and religious requirements, particularly in the context of Malaysia's Islamic-oriented tourism framework (Oktadiana et al., 2020). The willingness of Muslim women to travel, explore, and assert their preferences mirrors wider trends of increased education, economic participation, and self-expression (Henderson, 2021). As Muslim women negotiate their religious values with contemporary lifestyles, they contribute to a more nuanced and empowered image of Muslim womanhood (Ramli & Zawawi, 2020). Ultimately, these changes not only reshape the tourism industry but also signal a broader societal shift towards recognising and supporting the diverse aspirations and identities of Muslim women (Oktadiana et al., 2020).

The evolution of Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure in Malaysia has fundamentally transformed the travel experiences of Muslim women tourists. Malaysia's strategic positioning as a premier *halal* tourism destination has catalysed the development of specialised amenities and services tailored to Muslim women's requirements (Rahman et al., 2022). The implementation of private recreational facilities, gender-segregated spaces, and *halal*-certified dining establishments demonstrates Malaysia's commitment to addressing faith-based tourism needs. The pioneering development of Muslim-friendly hospitality services (MFHS) in Malaysia has been established primarily by a combination of government agencies, tourism authorities, and private sector stakeholders within the hospitality and tourism industry (Abdul Aziz, 2019). Specifically, organisations such as the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) under the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, along with hotels,

travel agencies, and service providers, have played key roles in formulating and implementing MFHS standards and offerings to cater to the needs of Muslim travellers, including women.

According to Abdul Aziz (2019), these initiatives encompass certifying hotels and restaurants as *halal*, providing accessible prayer facilities, offering women-only amenities, and training staff in Islamic hospitality standards. Additionally, the Islamic Tourism Centre promotes guidelines and accreditation schemes, while private businesses develop tailored packages and services to ensure comfort and compliance for Muslim women travellers. This comprehensive infrastructure development has not only enhanced Muslim women's confidence in engaging with leisure tourism but has also solidified Malaysia's reputation as a leading destination for faith-conscious travellers.

Studies examining Muslim women's tourist behaviours reveal complex patterns in destination selection and travel experiences. Research by Jamaludin, Rosli, & Saffine (2023) indicates that Muslim women tourists prioritise destinations that offer a balance between modern tourism experiences and Islamic compliance. The availability of prayer facilities, *halal* food, and culturally sensitive environments significantly influences their travel decisions and overall satisfaction. In accordance, present research highlights the evolving nature of Muslim women's tourist gaze in tourism industry. Asbollah et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive systematic review examining Muslim women tourists' perspectives, finding that they increasingly seek experiences that balance authentic cultural encounters with religious obligations. Their study revealed that Muslim women tourists' decisions are significantly influenced by the intersection of faith, cultural practices, and societal expectations, particularly valuing destinations that accommodate both religious requirements and meaningful cultural experiences.

Beyond infrastructure and cultural fit, the role of technology also plays a pivotal part in shaping how Muslim women engage with tourism in Malaysia. Digital transformation in parallel has revolutionised how Muslim women tourists navigate their travel experiences in Malaysia. Khan et al. (2022) found that social media platforms

and digital technologies enable Muslim women travellers to make informed decisions about Muslim-friendly destinations and accommodations. This technological integration has particularly empowered Muslim women tourists in planning and executing their travel plans while maintaining religious obligations.

Despite the comprehensive development of Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure in Malaysia, several gaps remain in fully addressing the nuanced needs of Muslim women travellers. While facilities such as *halal*-certified dining, prayer rooms, and women-only amenities are increasingly available, studies indicate that the consistency and quality of these services can vary significantly across destinations and providers (Rahman et al., 2022). For example, not all recreational or wellness facilities maintain strict privacy or gender segregation, and some rural or less-developed areas may lack adequate Muslim-friendly options (Asbollah et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is often limited availability of female tour guides and staff, which can affect comfort and safety for women travellers (Jamaludin, Rosli, & Saffine, 2023). Additionally, while digital platforms have empowered Muslim women to plan and share their travel experiences, there remains a lack of centralised, reliable information on the full range of Muslim-friendly services, leading to uncertainty and potential dissatisfaction (Khan et al., 2022).

The implications of these shortcomings are significant. Inconsistent service standards and limited options may undermine Muslim women's confidence and willingness to travel, particularly to less urbanised destinations (Rahman et al., 2022). The lack of comprehensive support can also restrict the depth of cultural engagement and leisure experiences, as women may feel compelled to compromise on either religious observance or travel enjoyment (Asbollah et al., 2024). Ultimately, these gaps may hinder Malaysia's efforts to position itself as a truly inclusive and leading destination for Muslim women travellers, highlighting the need for ongoing improvements in service delivery, staff training, and information accessibility (Jamaludin, Rosli, & Saffine, 2023; Khan et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, a number of destinations have begun to cater more effectively to the needs of Muslim women travellers, particularly in coastal settings where nature,

privacy, and modesty can be better accommodated. Lombok Island, for example, benefits from its natural beauty and Muslim-majority culture, with initiatives such as community-led *halal* village tourism and education-based planning enhancing its appeal to Muslim women seeking coastal and wellness experiences (Sulhaini, Saufi, & Rusdan, 2015). In Malaysia, Langkawi UNESCO Global Geopark stakeholders are collaborating to realise Muslim-friendly geo-tourism offerings through sustainable, *halal*-compliant services and enhanced local participation (Saffinee & Jamaludin, 2023). Regional comparisons, such as coastal destinations in southern Thailand, also highlight the effective integration of sustainable principles and Islamic values in attracting Muslim tourists while preserving natural and social resources (Pongsakornrungrasit et al., 2024). In light of these examples, the next section will focus on Muslim-Friendly Coastal Tourism Development, exploring how destinations can be planned and managed to meet the needs of Muslim travellers while promoting sustainable coastal tourism.

2.3.5 Conceptual Distinctions Between Muslim Tourism, Muslim-Friendly Tourism, and Muslim Women Tourism

While existing studies have examined various aspects of Muslim travel, the terms Muslim tourism, *halal* tourism, and Muslim-friendly tourism are often used interchangeably to describe tourism services that accommodate Islamic requirements, such as *halal* food, prayer facilities, and modest environments (Battour & Ismail, 2016). These concepts primarily focus on the supply side, emphasising how destinations and service providers adapt their offerings to meet the needs of Muslim travellers. Similarly, the notion of a Muslim-friendly destination refers to locations that provide such facilities and services to enhance accessibility and comfort for Muslim tourists.

In contrast, Muslim women tourism represents a more specific and underexplored perspective that centres on the demand side, focusing on the lived experiences, perceptions, and decision-making processes of Muslim women as a distinct tourist group. Unlike broader *halal* tourism frameworks, this perspective

highlights the intersection of religion, gender, and cultural values, which collectively shape Muslim women's travel behaviour and expectations.

While previous studies have identified various factors influencing Muslim women's travel behaviour and decision-making, these insights remain largely descriptive and lack a structured framework for categorising such behaviours (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). To better understand these patterns, it is useful to draw on established tourist typologies that have been widely applied in tourism studies. Tourist typologies have long been used to categorise travellers based on their motivations, behaviours, and preferences. Early frameworks, such as Cohen's (1972) classification of organised mass tourists, individual mass tourists, explorers, and drifters, highlight varying levels of familiarity, risk-taking, and engagement with local cultures. Similarly, Plog's (1974) psychographic model distinguishes between allocentric and psychocentric tourists, reflecting differences in personality and travel preferences.

However, these typologies do not explicitly consider the influence of religion, gender, and cultural values (Cohen, 1972; Plog, 1974; Uriely, 2005). In the context of Muslim women travellers, these dimensions play a significant role in shaping travel decisions, destination choices, and on-site experiences (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Muslim women tourists may therefore display characteristics that do not fit neatly within conventional categories. For instance, they may prefer familiar and safe environments (aligned with psychocentric traits), while at the same time seeking meaningful and reflective experiences involving cultural and spiritual engagement (Nisha & Cheung, 2022).

This indicates that existing tourist typologies are limited in capturing the complexity of Muslim women's tourism experiences. Accordingly, this study extends beyond traditional classifications by incorporating religious and gendered perspectives, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of tourist behaviour through the concept of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze. This perspective provides a useful foundation for understanding how Muslim women's travel behaviour and decision-making are shaped by a combination of practical, cultural, and spiritual considerations.

2.4 MUSLIM FRIENDLY COASTAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism has gained increasing attention as the global Muslim travel market expands. In coastal areas, where tourism activities often involve sun, sea, and sand, the development of destinations that align with Islamic principles presents both opportunities and challenges. Muslim-friendly coastal tourism focuses on ensuring that products, services, and environments cater to the spiritual, cultural, and practical needs of Muslim travellers such as *halal* food, prayer facilities, modest recreational options, and gender-sensitive spaces. As coastal regions attract increasing numbers of Muslim travellers (CrescentRating, 2023), there is a growing need to align tourism development practices with Islamic principles while ensuring ecological preservation and community inclusivity. This section reviews key literature on the principles, practices, and strategies involved in developing coastal tourism that is inclusive, respectful, and appealing to Muslim tourists.

According to the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), Muslim tourists contributed 4.5 million international arrivals and generated RM14.70 billion in revenue for Malaysia in 2023. In the same year 2023, approximately 20% of Malaysia's 20.1 million annual visitors were Muslims, generating RM14.7 billion in spending (The Star, 2024). Malaysia's popularity among Muslim travellers stems from its accessibility to *halal* food, faith-related facilities and services, beautiful beaches, diverse culture, and shopping experiences (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2024). This positions Malaysia closer to surpassing its pre-pandemic record of 5.3 million Muslim arrivals in 2019. In accordance, Malaysia has established itself as a leading destination for Muslim travellers. In 2023, Malaysia retained its top position for the ninth consecutive time in the CrescentRating and Mastercard Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) and was named the "Top Muslim-Friendly Destination of the Year (OIC)" at the *Halal* in Travel Awards (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2024).

Within coastal tourism contexts, the interaction between environment, activity, and social norms becomes particularly pronounced. Coastal spaces such as beaches are often associated with openness, leisure, and exposure, which may create specific considerations for Muslim women whose participation in such environments is shaped

by values of modesty, privacy, and appropriate social conduct. This highlights that engagement with coastal destinations is not solely a visual experience, but is also mediated by moral, cultural, and religious interpretations of space. In this sense, the tourist gaze in coastal settings extends beyond visual consumption to include value-based interpretation, reinforcing the need for a more differentiated understanding of the Muslim women tourist gaze within Islamic coastal tourism contexts.

2.4.1 Infrastructure Requirements

The development of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism infrastructure requires careful consideration of multiple elements to ensure compliance with Islamic principles while meeting tourists' needs. A key priority is the establishment of proper prayer facilities, which should be readily accessible and appropriately designed. These facilities must include separate prayer rooms for men and women, equipped with washing facilities for ablution (*wudhu*), prayer mats, and clear Qibla direction indicators (Islam & Ashton, 2024). The strategic placement of these prayer spaces throughout coastal tourism areas, including beachfronts, shopping districts, and accommodation facilities, enables Muslim tourists to fulfil their religious obligations without disruption to their vacation activities.

Internationally, several destinations have set benchmarks in developing Muslim-friendly coastal tourism infrastructure. For example, in Turkey, many coastal resorts in regions such as Antalya and Alanya provide women-only beaches, dedicated prayer rooms, and *halal*-certified amenities, ensuring privacy and religious comfort for Muslim guests (Battour et al., 2011). In Indonesia, particularly on the island of Lombok often called the “Island of a Thousand Mosques” coastal tourism infrastructure includes easily accessible mosques and prayer rooms at major tourist sites and hotels, catering to the needs of Muslim travellers (Samori et al., 2016). Similarly, Malaysia’s popular beach destinations, such as Langkawi and Terengganu, are recognised for their comprehensive provision of *halal* food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities, which have become integral to their tourism offerings (El-Gohary, 2016; Pongsakornrunsilp et al., 2024). These international practices demonstrate how

integrating prayer facilities and other Islamic amenities into coastal tourism infrastructure can significantly enhance the travel experience for Muslim tourists.

The availability of *halal* food infrastructure represents another crucial component for Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development. This encompasses not just the presence of *halal*-certified restaurants but also the entire food supply chain infrastructure. Destinations must establish reliable *halal* certification systems, proper storage facilities to prevent cross-contamination with non-*halal* items, and clear labelling protocols (Henderson, 2016). Food preparation areas in hotels and restaurants should maintain strict segregation between *halal* and non-*halal* ingredients and cooking equipment. Additionally, the development of *halal* food markets and suppliers within the coastal tourism zone ensures that self-catering Muslim tourists can access appropriate ingredients for meal preparation.

Gender-segregated amenities form a vital aspect of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism infrastructure. This includes the development of separate beach areas, swimming pools, spa facilities, and recreational zones for men and women (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2019). The design of these facilities must ensure complete privacy while maintaining high standards of service and comfort. For example, women-only beach sections should be equipped with proper screening and security measures to guarantee privacy, while still offering full access to beach activities and water sports. Similarly, accommodation facilities should incorporate design elements that respect Islamic principles of modesty and privacy, such as prayer direction markers in rooms and appropriate bathroom fixtures.

Transportation accessibility represents the fourth crucial pillar of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism infrastructure. This encompasses both the physical transportation network and supporting services that cater to Muslim travellers' needs. The development should include reliable public transportation systems that connect major tourist attractions with prayer facilities and *halal* dining options. Additionally, transportation services should consider gender-sensitive arrangements, such as women-only sections in public transport or female-driven taxis for women travellers (Seyfi & Hall, 2019). The infrastructure should also include clear signage in multiple languages,

including Arabic, to help Muslim tourists navigate the destination easily. In the context of coastal tourism, embedding these *Syariah* driven requirements prayer rooms, *halal* kitchens, modesty-friendly recreational zones, and ethical service standards has been shown to enhance visitor satisfaction and length of stay (Rasoolimanesh, Masron, & Jaafar, 2017).

However, the successful implementation of these infrastructure requirements demands regular assessment and stakeholder collaboration. Local authorities, tourism operators, and religious bodies must work together to ensure that the infrastructure meets both religious requirements and quality standards. This includes establishing monitoring systems for *halal* compliance, maintaining certification standards, and gathering feedback from Muslim tourists to continually improve facilities and services. Furthermore, staff training programs should be developed to ensure service personnel understand and respect Islamic customs while providing high-quality tourism experiences (Han et al., 2019). Through careful attention to these infrastructure requirements, coastal destinations can create welcoming environments that cater to the growing Muslim tourism market while respecting Islamic principles and practices.

2.4.2 Recreational Activities

The development of Muslim-friendly recreational activities in coastal tourism requires careful consideration of Islamic principles while ensuring enjoyable experiences for Muslim travellers. Beach activities present unique challenges in maintaining Islamic compliance, particularly regarding modest dress codes and gender segregation. According to relevant studies such as by Henderson (2010) and Stephenson (2014), successful Muslim-friendly beach destinations have implemented innovative solutions such as designated family areas, separate swimming zones for men and women, and privacy screens that allow Muslim visitors to enjoy coastal activities while adhering to religious requirements (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2019). These adaptations demonstrate how traditional beach recreation can be modified to accommodate Islamic values without compromising the essential appeal of coastal tourism. For instance, resorts in Alanya, Turkey, provide secluded women-only beaches (Figure 2.9). Such

spatial arrangements illustrate how tourism infrastructure can adapt to the cultural and religious needs of Muslim women.

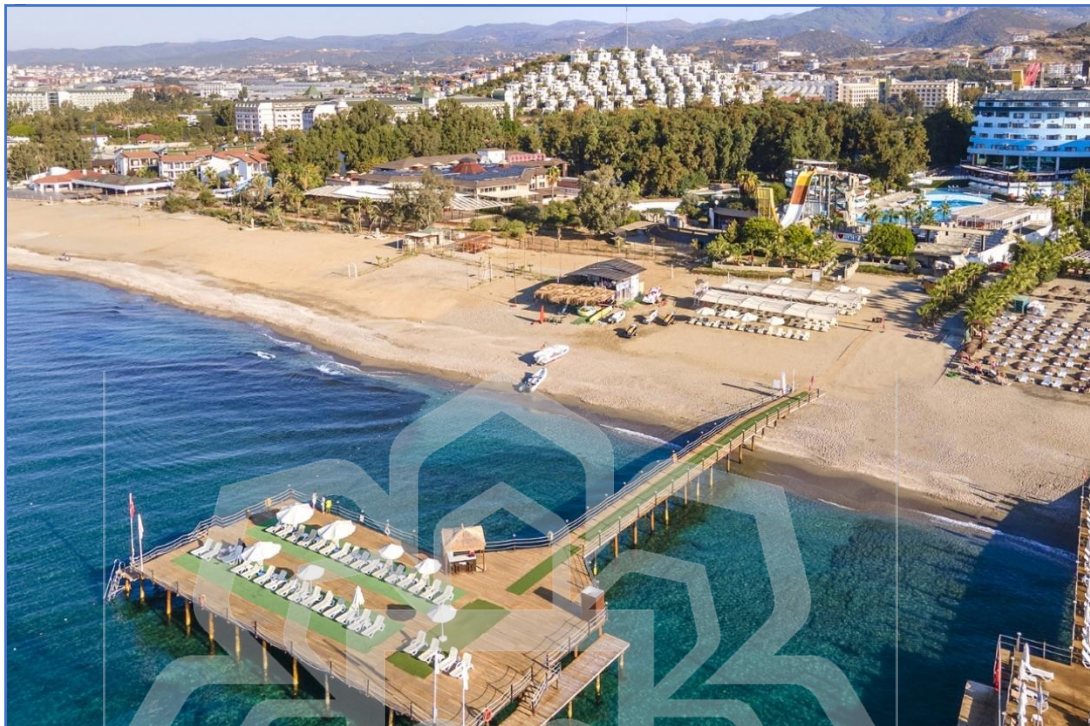


Figure 2.9 Women-only beach facility with privacy screens at Adin Beach Hotel,
Alanya, Turkey
Source: Imran (2024)

Family-oriented facilities represent a cornerstone of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development, reflecting the strong emphasis on family values in Islamic culture. Research indicates that Muslim travellers predominantly travel with family members, with over 70% choosing family-oriented vacation experiences (CrescentRating & Mastercard, 2019). Successful Muslim-friendly coastal destinations have developed comprehensive family entertainment centres, supervised children's activities, and spacious family suites that cater to extended family groups. These facilities often incorporate prayer rooms, *halal* dining options, and modest entertainment choices that align with Islamic principles while fostering family bonding and creating memorable experiences for all age groups.

The adaptation of water sports and recreational activities requires careful consideration of both religious requirements and safety standards. Contemporary approaches to Muslim-friendly water sports include modified equipment and attire that maintain modest coverage while ensuring mobility and safety. For instance, several coastal resorts have introduced specialised swimwear rental services and adapted water sports programs that accommodate Islamic dress codes without compromising participation (Hall & Prayag, 2020). Additionally, gender-specific timing for certain activities and female instructors for women's programs have become increasingly common, allowing Muslim visitors to fully engage in water-based recreation while maintaining their religious obligations.

Cultural considerations in activity design extend beyond mere physical adaptations to encompass the broader spiritual and social aspects of the Muslim travel experience. Successful Muslim-friendly coastal destinations have integrated Islamic cultural elements into their recreational offerings, such as sunset prayer breaks during boat tours, educational programs about local Islamic heritage, and culturally sensitive entertainment options. These destinations recognise that activity design must reflect an understanding of diverse Muslim market segments, from conservative travellers seeking strictly *Syariah* compliant experiences to more moderate visitors who may prefer flexible arrangements (Seyfi & Hall, 2019). This cultural sensitivity in activity planning helps create an inclusive environment that respects Islamic values while providing engaging recreational experiences.

The implementation of these recreational elements requires careful attention to both physical infrastructure and service delivery systems. Successful Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development depends on regular assessment of visitor needs, staff training in cultural sensitivity, and clear communication of available facilities and services. This comprehensive approach ensures that recreational activities not only meet religious requirements but also deliver high-quality tourism experiences that can compete effectively in the growing Muslim travel market while maintaining authenticity and respect for Islamic principles.

2.4.3 Environmental Considerations

Environmental sustainability remains a crucial dimension in the development of coastal tourism, especially in popular destinations like Teluk Kemang, Port Dickson. As tourism activities intensify, balancing environmental protection with economic growth becomes increasingly challenging.

Recent qualitative research on stakeholder perceptions by Hanafiah, Jamaluddin & Kunjuraman. (2021) at Teluk Kemang reveals a complex interplay between economic benefits and environmental concerns. Local business owners, government officials, and visitors often have divergent views on coastal tourism development priorities, with economic stakeholders emphasising infrastructure development while environmental advocates and some visitor segments express concern about beach degradation and water quality issues. According to Hanafiah et al. (2021), sustainable coastal tourism development requires balancing these competing interests through inclusive stakeholder engagement and evidence-based policy decisions. For Muslim women visitors specifically, research by Battour et al. (2018) indicates that beach cleanliness, adequate privacy facilities, and family-friendly environments significantly influence their satisfaction and likelihood to return, highlighting the importance of environmentally considerate and culturally responsive tourism planning in coastal destinations like Port Dickson.

2.4.3.1 Environmental Considerations in Muslim-Friendly Coastal Tourism Development

Islamic principles fundamentally emphasise environmental stewardship (*khalifah*) as a core religious responsibility, making it an essential consideration in Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development. According to Islamic teachings, humans are appointed as guardians of Allah's creation, with a divine mandate to protect and preserve the natural environment (Ibrahim, Abdul Razak, Asmawi, & Sarkawi, 2024). This concept of environmental stewardship in Islam extends beyond mere conservation, encompassing the responsible use of resources and the maintenance of ecological balance in coastal

areas (Sanjotis, 2012). The principle of *mizan* (balance) in Islamic teachings requires tourism developers to ensure that economic benefits do not overshadow environmental protection, particularly in sensitive coastal ecosystems. This balance is emphasised in both classical sources and contemporary Islamic environmental ethics, which advocate for sustainable development that integrates economic progress with ecological stewardship (Hanif, 2024).

Sustainable tourism development in Muslim-friendly coastal destinations should integrate Islamic environmental ethics such as *khalifah* (stewardship), *amanah* (trust), and *taharah* (cleanliness) with contemporary sustainability practices. In practice, this integration is reflected in green building standards for resorts, adoption of renewable energy, and waste management systems designed around Islamic principles of cleanliness and harm avoidance, alongside the use of coordinated policy frameworks that align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Khan et al., 2025). Empirical work on coastal clusters also shows that blending cultural sensitivity for Muslim travellers with sustainability objectives can improve destination planning, including the provision of prayer facilities and *halal* dining while minimising ecological disturbance through tools like environmental impact assessment (Integrating Sustainability and Cultural Sensitivity, 2024). Few research also indicate a clear trend toward integrating *halal* or Muslim-friendly tourism with sustainability agendas which is moving beyond purely religious compliance to incorporate environmental stewardship and operational standards, thus encouraging destinations to institutionalise impact assessments, certification, and technology-enabled green operations (Suban, Madhan, & Shagirbasha, 2023; Chantarungsri, Popichit, Rugthangam, Wattana, Chuan chom, & Sukmak, 2024; Khan et al., 2025). Recent studies in Islamic marketing and tourism also suggest that Muslim tourists' nature-based experiences and place attachment can reinforce pro-environmental attitudes, supporting the case for destinations to embed sustainability across infrastructure and services tailored to Muslim needs (Arissaputra, Gaffar, Sultan, Andriana, Abror, Sentika, & Christiyanto, 2025).

The preservation of natural resources in coastal areas holds particular significance in Islamic environmental ethics, as water bodies are considered special creations of Allah that require protection and respect. This religious perspective aligns

with contemporary environmental conservation practices, creating a unique opportunity for Muslim-friendly coastal tourism to lead in sustainable development. For instance, several coastal resorts in Malaysia and Indonesia (such as Tanjong Jara Resort's partnership with Lang Tengah Turtle Watch; Gaya Island Resort Marine Centre's turtle rescue and Misool Eco Resort's privately protected no-take marine reserve with documented biodiversity recovery have successfully implemented conservation programs that combine Islamic principles with marine ecosystem protection, including coral reef preservation and sea turtle conservation initiatives (Mohd Salleh et al., 2024). These programs not only protect natural resources but also educate Muslim tourists about their religious duty toward environmental conservation.

The relationship between religious values and environmental preservation in Muslim-friendly coastal tourism creates a distinctive approach to destination management. This approach emphasises the concept of *barakah* (divine blessing) in resource utilisation, encouraging tourism operators to adopt practices that ensure long-term sustainability rather than short-term gains (Gueye & Mohamed, 2022). For example, coastal tourism developments in the Gulf region have begun incorporating traditional Islamic architectural principles that minimise environmental impact while maximising natural ventilation and lighting, thereby reducing energy consumption (Rahman & Abdullah, 2024). This integration of religious values with environmental preservation demonstrates how Islamic principles can enhance sustainable tourism practices.

The success of environmentally conscious Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development requires collaboration between religious scholars, environmental scientists, and tourism stakeholders (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005; Stephenson, 2014). This collaborative approach ensures that development plans address both the spiritual needs of Muslim travellers and the environmental challenges facing coastal ecosystems (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Regular environmental audits, aligned with recognised standards and certification criteria, combined with Islamic principles of accountability (*amanah*), help maintain high standards of environmental stewardship while providing authentic Muslim-friendly tourism experiences (Kamla et al., 2006; Henderson, 2010).

2.4.3.2 *Environmental Stewardship in Islamic Context*

Recent studies in Islamic tourism have highlighted the integration of spiritual practices within coastal tourism destinations, emphasising the importance of maintaining religious obligations while engaging in leisure activities (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Henderson, 2016). The concept of Islamic coastal tourism encompasses various faith-based activities, including congregational prayers and *halal* culinary experiences featuring locally sourced seafood prepared according to Islamic dietary guidelines. These activities are fundamentally grounded in the Islamic principle of *khalifah* (environmental stewardship), which emphasises the responsibility of Muslims to preserve and protect natural resources while engaging in tourism activities (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011).

Contemporary research has demonstrated that Islamic coastal tourism activities serve multiple purposes, including the preservation of cultural heritage, the enhancement of spiritual consciousness (*taqwa*), and the maintenance of ethical conduct (*adab*) within the parameters of *Syariah*-compliant tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Mohsin, Ramli, & Alkhulayfi, 2016). Studies have shown that Muslim travellers increasingly seek destinations that offer a harmonious blend of recreational activities and religious observances, particularly in coastal settings where gender-segregated facilities and *halal*-certified services are available (Rahman, 2014; Samori, Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). This trend reflects a growing demand for tourism experiences that align with Islamic values while contributing to sustainable coastal community development.

The integration of spiritual activities through the concept of *ibadah* (worship) in coastal tourism contexts has emerged as a significant area of academic interest (Henderson, 2010; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Research by Stephenson (2014) indicates that practices such as meditation (*muraqabah*) and self-reflection (*muhasabah*) are increasingly being incorporated into Islamic tourism packages, creating what scholars' term as 'holistic Islamic tourism experiences.' These findings suggest that successful Islamic coastal tourism development requires a careful balance between recreational activities and spiritual practices, underpinned by the principles of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*) and cultural authenticity (Stephenson, 2014; El-Gohary, 2016)

2.4.3.3 Sustainable Coastal Tourism

The planning framework for coastal tourism must consider multiple dimensions, including environmental sensitivity, social impacts, and economic benefits. Gee and Fayos-Sola (1997) emphasise that coastal tourism operates within an environment shaped by various forces, with government policy playing a crucial role in regulating development activities. This aligns with Tosun's (2000) and Murphy's (1985, as cited in Pearce, 1997) assertion that coastal planning must anticipate and regulate changes to maximise socio-economic benefits while minimising environmental impacts on coastal ecosystems. Without a careful balancing act between development and conservation, the long-term viability of coastal tourism is put at serious risk.

The evolution of sustainable coastal tourism concepts, as analysed by Sanders (2005), emerged from environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, emphasising responsible resource utilisation in coastal areas. This perspective becomes particularly crucial in coastal contexts, where inappropriate development can lead to severe environmental degradation and irreversible ecosystem damage. Recent studies by Aziz & Niazi (2023) highlight coastal tourism's unique dependency on environmental quality, emphasising the need for careful destination management and environmental preservation. Tourism depends more on the development of the destination environment than any other industry, making environmental stewardship crucial for long-term sustainability (Aziz & Niazi, 2023).

A sustainable approach to coastal tourism also requires integrating Islamic environmental ethics into planning and management processes, particularly in Muslim-majority destinations. Islamic teachings emphasise stewardship of the Earth (*khalifah*) and responsible use of natural resources (*amanah*), providing a religious framework that complements modern environmental sustainability goals (Hashim, Murphy, & Hashim, 2007). In this context, coastal tourism development must prioritise ecological balance, biodiversity conservation, and resource efficiency, aligning both with sustainable development principles and Islamic values. Incorporating Islamic environmental ethics not only ensures compliance with religious obligations but also enhances the attractiveness of coastal destinations for Muslim travellers, who may seek experiences

that reflect their spiritual and ecological values. Therefore, Muslim-friendly coastal tourism initiatives should embrace conservation strategies such as the protection of marine ecosystems, environmentally responsible construction practices, and the promotion of green tourism activities that respect the natural environment.

Moreover, environmental considerations must be mainstreamed into policy frameworks that govern coastal tourism development. Effective regulation should mandate environmental impact assessments (EIA), sustainable land-use planning, and carrying capacity analysis to prevent overdevelopment and degradation of coastal zones (UNWTO, 2018). Best practices from successful Muslim-friendly coastal destinations suggest that integrating environmental certification programs, such as Green Globe or eco-labelling systems, can enhance destination credibility among environmentally conscious travellers. Furthermore, involving local communities in sustainable tourism initiatives ensures that conservation efforts are socially inclusive and culturally appropriate, aligning with the participatory development approaches advocated by Tosun (2000). When Muslim-friendly coastal tourism is planned through an environmentally sustainable lens, it not only protects fragile ecosystems but also strengthens destination resilience, improves local livelihoods, and fulfils the religious and ethical expectations of Muslim travellers.

2.4.4 Stakeholder Roles

The development of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism is largely driven by the collaboration of government institutions, industry stakeholders, and local communities. At the governmental level, policies and frameworks are critical for shaping tourism that respects Islamic values. Many Muslim-majority nations, such as Malaysia, have introduced Muslim-friendly tourism guidelines, promoting the provision of *halal*-certified food, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated recreational spaces (Hall, Seyfi, & Rasoolimanesh, 2023; Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 2017). However, a consistent challenge across destinations is the gap between policy declarations and practical enforcement. Research highlights inconsistencies in applying Muslim-friendly

standards, particularly regarding the standardisation of *halal* certification processes and service guidelines (Hall & Prayag, 2020).

Tourism industry actors, including hotels, travel agencies, and food establishments, have increasingly adapted their offerings in response to the rising demand from Muslim travellers. Measures such as alcohol-free environments, female-only amenities, modest dress codes for staff, and the provision of prayer spaces have become more common in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority destinations (El-Gohary, 2016; Razzaq et al., 2016). Nevertheless, significant variations exist in the quality and authenticity of Muslim-friendly services across establishments. Some businesses self-identify as "Muslim-friendly" without undergoing proper training or certification, contributing to confusion and a lack of consumer trust (Khan & Callanan, 2017). This lack of standardized guidelines and monitoring mechanisms underlines the need for clearer and more enforceable industry regulations.

Local communities play a vital role in shaping Muslim-friendly coastal tourism experiences, particularly by adding authenticity through cultural exchange, traditional hospitality, and community-based tourism activities. Community engagement can enhance the social sustainability of tourism while offering economic opportunities for residents (Battour & Ismail, 2016). However, successful community involvement depends on sufficient awareness of Muslim travellers' religious needs and supportive institutional frameworks that encourage inclusive participation (Razak et al., 2020a). Without proper education and empowerment initiatives, there is a risk that changes introduced to attract Muslim tourists may cause cultural tension or resistance among residents, especially where secular tourism traditions are deeply entrenched.

Effective collaboration among governments, industry players, and communities is critical for achieving sustainable and authentic Muslim-friendly tourism development. Governments must strengthen the translation of policies into actionable support mechanisms by facilitating public-private partnerships, offering stakeholder training programs, and ensuring consistent monitoring and evaluation systems (Hall et al., 2023; Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 2017). Meanwhile, tourism businesses need to commit to offering genuinely Muslim-friendly products and services

aligned with standardised criteria to foster consumer confidence and market credibility. Community empowerment through education, capacity building, and active participation in tourism planning is equally essential for maintaining cultural integrity while meeting the expectations of Muslim travellers.

Ultimately, the success of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism relies on an integrated and holistic approach that respects religious sensitivities while promoting sustainable destination development. Addressing the challenges of standardisation, service consistency, and community participation will be key to fostering inclusive growth and strengthening the appeal of coastal destinations to Muslim tourists worldwide (Han et al., 2019; Henderson, 2016).

2.5 SYNTHESIS OF LITERATURE THEMES AND IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH GAPS

The review of literature highlights three key streams of research: (1) tourist gaze theory, (2) Islamic tourism, and (3) Muslim women's travel behaviour. While each of these areas has been explored independently, there remains a lack of integration across these domains. Tourist gaze theory provides insight into how destinations are visually and socially constructed; however, it remains largely grounded in Western perspectives. Islamic tourism introduces a value-based dimension but often focuses on service provision rather than experiential interpretation. Meanwhile, studies on Muslim women travellers highlight specific needs and constraints, yet rarely engage with broader theoretical frameworks such as the tourist gaze.

This fragmentation results in a significant gap in understanding how Muslim women interpret tourism environments, particularly in coastal settings where religious values and leisure practices intersect. The following subsections further elaborate these gaps by examining the limitations in existing literature and establishing the need for a more integrated and context-sensitive framework. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by proposing an integrated framework that conceptualises the Muslim Women

Tourist Gaze as a multidimensional construct shaped by religion, gender, culture, and environmental context.

2.5.1 Limited Studies on Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze

Although Urry's (1990) theory of the "tourist gaze" has undergone major revisions and cultural reinterpretations, the particular perspective of Muslim women remains rarely examined in depth. Much of the tourism scholarship applying the gaze concept has traditionally been framed inside Western-centric paradigms, with limited attention given to travellers whose religious, cultural, and gendered identities shape distinct experiences (Bianchi, 2009; Buddhabhumbhitak, 2010). While some recent research has begun to recognise multiple and culturally situated gazes, the experiences of Muslim women shaped through Islamic obligations, modesty principles, and family-oriented expectations continue to be marginal in mainstream tourism debates (Stephenson, 2014; Moufakkir, 2019b).

Existing works often treat Muslim travellers as a homogenous group, with few attempts to separate gendered differences that can strongly influence travel behaviour (Abdul Rashid et al., 2019). When Muslim women are discussed, they are sometimes portrayed in overly general terms, overlooking variation between age cohorts, economic resources, or socio-cultural backgrounds. This becomes especially visible in coastal or resort contexts, where issues of swimwear, privacy, and Islamic adherence create challenges and require negotiation. The absence of detailed investigation into such dynamics highlights a clear research gap in understanding how Muslim women interact with tourism spaces under an Islamic lens.

Beyond identifying gaps, it is now clear that Muslim women represent an emerging and influential tourist segment on the global scene. Growing middle-class incomes, improved airline access, and the development of *halal*-friendly infrastructure have stimulated greater mobility among Muslim women, both in groups and individually (Mahadin & Akroush, 2019; Battour & Ismail, 2016). Market data demonstrates their rising importance. The Mastercard–Crescent rating Global Muslim

Travel Index (GMTI 2024) reported that female Muslim travellers express strong preferences for gender-segregated prayer areas, women-only facilities, and authentic cultural experiences, which directly shape how destinations design products and services (CrescentRating, 2024). Similarly, studies from diverse regions such as Hunza Valley, Pakistan, show women assuming roles not only as travellers but also as entrepreneurs and hosts, linking tourism participation with community empowerment and identity formation (Ali, 2024).

In addition, sociological research confirms that they face particular structural and cultural constraints. A 2022 investigation into solo female Muslim travel highlights continuing barriers of safety and cultural perceptions yet also shows growing resilience and strategies among women negotiating these obstacles (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). Such findings affirm that gendered differences matter crucially when considering Muslim participation in global tourism flows.

The concept of the tourist gaze is especially pertinent in this context, as it does not only describe the act of observation but also the social meanings attached to vision, movement, and representation (Urry & Larsen, 2011). For Muslim women, applying this theoretical view helps unearth how leisure spaces are interpreted through religious values, modesty ideals, and the simultaneous awareness of being gazed upon by others. For example, in coastal tourism settings, decisions about participation, dress, or family involvement are filtered through both internalised cultural expectations and perceived external judgments. Recent comparative research on Malaysia and Brunei illustrates how national policies are actively adjusting infrastructures toward Muslim-friendly environments, positioning these destinations at the forefront of *halal* tourism while recognising gender- and faith-based preferences (Sumardi, Osman, & Sumardi, 2025).

Altogether, these insights demonstrate that Muslim women are not peripheral but rather central to emerging trends within contemporary tourism. Yet the insufficient attention given to their distinctive gaze, shaped at the overlap of religion, gender, culture, and market dynamics which continues to represent an important scholarly void. Addressing this gap will not only broaden theoretical debates on the tourist gaze but

also aid destinations and practitioners in crafting inclusive strategies that respond to diverse cultural expectations.

2.5.2 Gaps in Coastal Tourism Literature

The literature on coastal tourism has traditionally emphasised economic impacts, environmental sustainability, and mass tourism patterns (Gee & Fayos-Sola, 1997; Aziz & Niazi, 2023). Although sustainability concerns have become increasingly prominent, the intersection of faith-based needs and coastal tourism development has received minimal scholarly attention. In particular, coastal tourism studies have not sufficiently addressed how Muslim travellers, especially women, experience coastal environments that often emphasise sun, sea, and sand elements potentially at odds with Islamic principles of modesty and privacy.

Moreover, while Muslim-friendly tourism research has expanded (Battour et al., 2018; Hall et al., 2023), most studies centre on urban settings, religious heritage tourism, or generalised Muslim-friendly hospitality services. The specific challenges and opportunities related to developing Muslim-friendly coastal destinations such as gender-segregated beaches, *halal* recreational services, and culturally sensitive infrastructure remain underexplored. This lacuna limits the ability of tourism planners and policymakers to effectively cater to the growing Muslim travel market in coastal areas, especially given that coastal destinations are pivotal to tourism economies in Muslim-majority countries like Malaysia.

Recent evidence suggests that for Muslim women travellers, seaside and coastal destinations remain among the most desired vacation choices. Reports such as the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2024 indicate that Muslim women consistently rank beach resorts as attractive for leisure, even while seeking accommodation with female-only pools or private family areas (CrescentRating, 2024). Linking this with the theoretical framework of the tourist gaze, such preferences reveal how Muslim women negotiate visibility and modesty in public leisure spaces. The coastal setting dominated by bodily display and open interaction strengthens their awareness both of how they

observe the environment and how they may be observed by others. Thus, the “Islamic tourist gaze” provides an interpretative tool to understand how women reconcile religious commitments with aspirations for relaxation and enjoyment by the sea (Urry & Larsen, 2011; Stephenson, 2014).

Nevertheless, a contradiction emerges. On one hand, many governments and private developers are actively investing in upgrading coastal tourism facilities through improved infrastructure, eco-certifications, and branded hospitality packages designed to attract international markets (Aziz & Niazi, 2023). On the other, specific adaptations for Muslim women’s needs, such as gender-sensitive spatial design, *halal*-certified sea-based activities, and protected privacy zones, are rarely given institutional priority. While destinations like Malaysia, the Maldives, and the UAE are experimenting with women-only beaches or family-friendly coastal zones, systematic research on these initiatives and their reception among Muslim women is still scarce. This imbalance reinforces the research gap; coastal settings are both the most popular and the least studied contexts for Muslim women’s travel experiences, creating misalignment between industry development and academic attention (Ali, 2024; Sumardi et al., 2025).

In summary, despite the centrality of coastal areas in global tourism and the documented interest of Muslim women in such destinations, scholarship remains limited in analysing how their cultural and religious expectations shape engagement with coastal environments. Bridging this gap would not only enrich debates around the tourist gaze but also support policy and planning strategies that create inclusive coastal tourism spaces.

2.5.3 Need for Integrated Theoretical Frameworks

Another notable gap in the existing scholarship is the insufficient integration of diverse theoretical frameworks that capture the layered complexities of Muslim women’s travel experiences. Although tourist gaze theory provides a valuable foundation for analysing tourist behaviours, its traditional focus on visual consumption and socio-cultural

constructions requires expansion to accommodate religious and gender-specific dimensions (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Simultaneously, the Islamic tourism framework offers practical guidelines for faith-compliant travel but often lacks the critical socio-cultural analysis that tourist gaze theory provides (Battour et al., 2020; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015). Few studies have attempted to synthesise these frameworks systematically to explore how Muslim women's experiences of tourism spaces are co-shaped by religious obligations, cultural interpretations, and gendered social expectations.

Moreover, current models like the RIDA framework (CrescentRating, 2024), although innovative in incorporating digital and environmental considerations, still emphasise service provision more than the nuanced interpretative acts of Muslim travellers. An integrated theoretical framework that fuses the interpretative insights of tourist gaze theory with the behavioural and ethical mandates of Islamic tourism would provide a richer, more holistic understanding of Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences.

Despite the recognition of spirituality in Islamic tourism literature such as discussions of *taqwa* (God-consciousness), *adab* (ethical conduct), and *ibadah* (acts of worship) within leisure contexts (Battour, Ismail & Battor, 2011; Jafari & Scott, 2014; Stephenson, 2014), few frameworks explicitly operationalise *tafakkur* (contemplation on natural signs) and *tadabbur* (reflection on meanings and lessons) as interpretive tools shaping Muslim tourists' perceptions. Existing studies often highlight practices like *muraqabah* (meditative awareness) or *muhasabah* (self-reflection) in Islamic tourism packages (Stephenson, 2014; El-Gohary, 2016), yet they stop short of theorising how Qur'anic imperatives of *tafakkur* and *tadabbur* can transform leisure spaces into spiritual experiences. Addressing this gap, the present study integrates *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection) into the conceptualisation of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze, thereby extending Urry's (1990) theory in a direction that foregrounds faith-based epistemologies.

2.5.4 Framework Justification: Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG)

While existing theories such as the tourist gaze, gendered tourism perspectives, and integrated cultural frameworks provide useful insights, they remain insufficient in fully capturing the nuanced realities of Muslim women's tourism experiences, particularly in coastal contexts. The conventional tourist gaze (Urry, 1990; Urry & Larsen, 2011) tends to universalise tourist practices, often overlooking intersections of gender, faith, and cultural identity. Gender-focused tourism studies contribute to highlighting women's differentiated experiences (Figuerola-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Perez, Morgan, & Villace-Molinero, 2015; Khoo-Lattimore & Mura, 2016), yet they rarely extend their focus toward the religio-cultural specificities of Muslim women. Likewise, integrative cultural frameworks acknowledge the role of norms and values in shaping the gaze, but they generally lack the sensitivity to Islamic practices that profoundly influence choices regarding mobility, social interaction, modesty, and coastal leisure pursuits.

This gap becomes more critical when considering the growing visibility of Muslim women as tourists, particularly in destinations where coastal environments intersect with culturally sensitive concerns around dress, mixed-gender spaces, and religious obligations. The limited research that does exist often treats Muslim women as a homogeneous category, overlooking the diversity of their aspirations, negotiations, and strategies in navigating tourism spaces (Jafari & Scott, 2014; Stephenson, 2022). Consequently, a tailored lens that embeds gendered, cultural, and faith-based elements is necessary to capture these complex dynamics.

The Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG) is introduced in this study as such a conceptual framework (Figure 2.10). It draws on the conceptual foundations of existing gaze theories but reorients them toward Muslim women situated perspectives. The present study's adoption of the MWTG conceptual framework is justified not only by gaps in the literature but also by its ability to provide an inclusive, context-sensitive analytical lens. It ensures that Muslim women are not merely positioned as passive subjects within the broader tourist gaze, but rather as active agents whose perceptions, constraints, and practices re-shape coastal tourism experiences. Importantly, this

conceptual framework will also be explored and tested in the study's selected case of Port Dickson, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

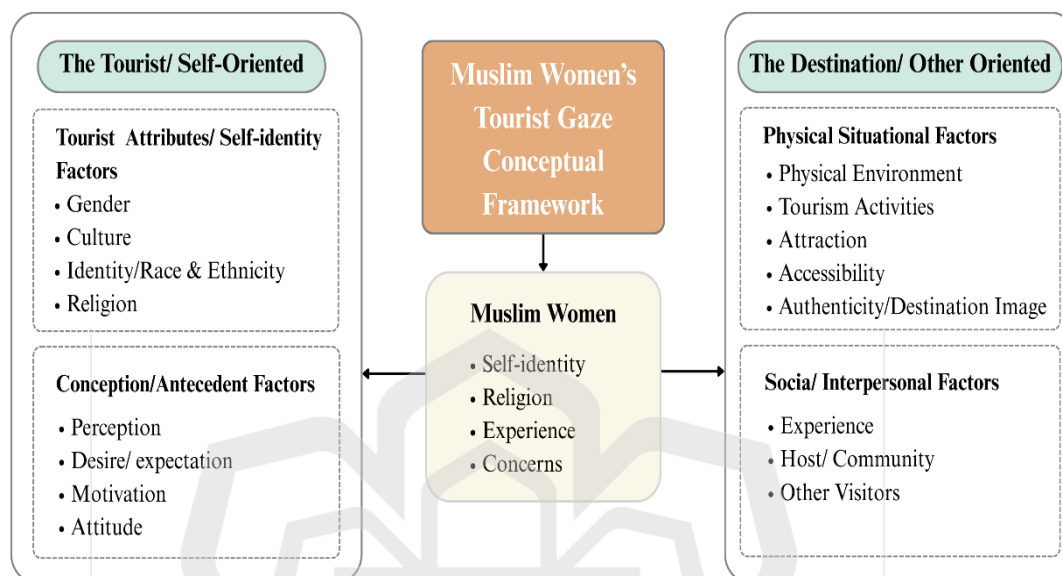


Figure 2.10 The Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze Conceptual Framework

2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has critically examined the existing literature surrounding the concepts of the tourist gaze, Islamic tourism, Muslim women's travel behaviour, and sustainable coastal tourism development. Through a synthesis of diverse theoretical frameworks and empirical studies, it is evident that while substantial progress has been made in understanding Muslim-friendly tourism, significant gaps persist particularly in relation to Muslim women's distinct tourist gaze and the integration of religious values into coastal tourism contexts.

The literature highlights the urgent need for more nuanced, gender-sensitive, and culturally inclusive frameworks that reflect the complexities of Muslim women's travel experiences. Current scholarship inadequately addresses how religious, cultural, and gendered dimensions intersect to shape Muslim women's perceptions and

interactions with coastal tourism spaces. Furthermore, while coastal tourism development increasingly emphasises sustainability, it often overlooks the specific requirements of Muslim travellers, particularly in terms of modesty, privacy, and faith-compliant services.

Identifying these critical gaps justifies the present study's contribution to advancing theoretical discourse and practical applications in Muslim-friendly tourism planning. By integrating the tourist gaze theory with Islamic tourism principles, this research offers an innovative approach to analysing Muslim women's experiences in coastal tourism, providing valuable insights for policymakers, industry stakeholders, and scholars seeking to foster more inclusive, sustainable, and culturally respectful tourism environments.

Informed by the identified gaps in the literature, the study is guided by three central research questions: (1) How do Muslim women perceive a coastal tourist destination? (2) What expectations do Muslim women have when visiting a coastal tourist destination? and (3) What experiences do Muslim women have when visiting a coastal tourist destination? These questions aim to explore the complex interplay between religious values, cultural interpretations, and tourism experiences from the perspective of Muslim women. The following chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to investigate these questions, detailing the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and analytical approaches employed to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive inquiry.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology adopted to address the study's central research questions concerning Muslim women's perceptions, expectations, and experiences in coastal tourist destinations. Building on the gaps identified in the existing literature, a qualitative research approach was selected to capture the depth and complexity of Muslim women's travel experiences through an interpretative lens. This chapter details the research design, sampling procedures, data collection techniques, and analytical strategies employed to ensure methodological rigor, credibility, and alignment with the study's theoretical framework. The chosen methodology is intended to generate rich, contextually grounded insights that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the fields of Islamic tourism, tourist gaze theory, and sustainable coastal tourism development.

3.1.1 Overview of Methodological Approach

This study adopts a qualitative methodological framework combining exploratory research with a case study approach to examine the Muslim female tourist gaze in coastal settings, specifically focusing on Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The research design integrates multiple complementary methods to address the complex interplay between religious identity, gender dynamics, and tourism experiences. Operating within an interpretive paradigm, this methodology acknowledges that tourism experiences are socially constructed phenomena shaped by cultural and religious perspectives, aligning with Urry's tourist gaze theory.

The research process employed a systematic data collection strategy, with semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the primary method. Twenty-five participants were interviewed: fifteen (15) Muslim women tourists and ten (10) stakeholders. On-site observations were conducted in a supporting role, used to provide additional context and to validate or enrich the findings from interviews. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how Muslim women construct and negotiate their tourist experiences in coastal environments, while ensuring that the core data and analysis remained focused on the interview material.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis through ATLAS.ti software, which facilitated the organisation and interpretation of interview transcripts and observational data. This computer-assisted qualitative data analysis approach enabled systematic coding and theme identification, revealing patterns in how Muslim women perceive and interact with coastal destinations. While this methodological approach offers robust insights into the Muslim female tourist gaze, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations inherent in qualitative research, particularly regarding generalizability and potential researcher bias. Nevertheless, the chosen methodology provides a structured framework for examining these phenomena while maintaining sensitivity to the cultural and religious dimensions that influence tourist experiences.

3.1.2 Research Aims and Objectives Alignment

The selected methodological approach directly aligns with the research's primary aim of understanding how Muslim women construct and experience their tourist gaze in coastal destinations. The qualitative methods chosen specifically to address the following research objectives:

First, the semi-structured in-depth interviews facilitate deep exploration of Muslim women tourists' perspectives, experiences, and expectations, directly supporting the objective of understanding how religious identity shapes their tourist gaze. The flexible nature of these interviews allows for the emergence of unexpected themes while maintaining focus on key research areas.

In addition to interviews with tourists, this study also incorporates semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including representatives from the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC), the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), and local tourism stakeholders such as tourism product operators and community leaders. These interviews provide valuable insights into policy frameworks, the implementation of Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives, and the challenges and opportunities faced by the destination in catering to Muslim women travellers. Engaging with stakeholders ensures a more comprehensive understanding of the broader institutional and community context in which Muslim women's tourist experiences are situated, and allows for triangulation of perspectives between policy, practice, and lived experience.

To further enrich and contextualize the interview data, on-site observations were conducted as a supporting method. These observations were not used as a standalone data source, but rather to provide direct evidence and contextual details such as the use of facilities, interactions with staff, and engagement with religious amenities that complement and deepen the understanding gained from participant and stakeholder interviews.

The case study approach, focused on Port Dickson, allows for detailed examination of how destination attributes influence the Muslim female tourist gaze, addressing the objective of understanding the relationship between coastal destination characteristics and Muslim women's tourism experiences.

3.1.3 Chapter Structure Outline

This methodology chapter is structured to provide a comprehensive and logical progression through the research design and implementation process. The chapter begins by establishing the philosophical foundations and theoretical framework that guide the research approach. This includes discussion of the interpretive paradigm and its relevance to understanding the Muslim female tourist gaze.

The subsequent sections detail the research design, explaining the rationale for combining exploratory research with a case study approach. This is followed by a detailed examination of the case study selection process, highlighting why Port Dickson serves as an appropriate setting for investigating Muslim women's tourism experiences in coastal environments.

The chapter then progresses to a detailed discussion of data collection methods, including the design and implementation of semi-structured interviews and systematic observations. This section provides transparent documentation of participant selection criteria, sampling strategies, and data collection procedures. The data management and analysis section follow, outlining the processes of transcription, translation, and thematic analysis, with particular attention to maintaining data integrity and analytical rigor.

The final sections address research quality considerations, ethical procedures, and methodological limitations. This structure ensures comprehensive coverage of all methodological aspects while maintaining clear connections between different components of the research process. Throughout the chapter, methodological choices are justified with reference to relevant literature and research objectives, demonstrating the thoughtful alignment between research aims and methods.

3.1.4 Research Framework for the Study

Building on the theoretical foundations in Section 2.2 and the gaps synthesised in Section 2.5, Figure 3.1 presents the research framework for this study which shows how the identified problems connect to the overall aim, the three research questions, and their related objectives. It also states the qualitative design used in this study, where interviews guide both data collection and analysis. In addition, the framework indicates the planned contributions: on the theoretical side, it extends the tourist gaze discussion to include Muslim and non-Western views, as discussed by Urry (1990) and Urry & Larsen (2011); on the practical side, it supports Muslim-friendly planning and management for Malaysia's coastal destinations (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011; Battour & Ismail, 2016).

The study is centred on interviews. Semi-structured interviews with Muslim women and with relevant stakeholders are the main source of evidence. The literature review is used to position the topic, support the coding, and help with interpretation. Any field notes from brief site visits or basic mapping were only for context and were not collected or analysed in a systematic way. They are not used as independent evidence.

Within this arrangement, the framework works as follows. Aim: to examine Muslim women's perceptions, expectations, and travel experiences in coastal settings, and in doing so to widen the theoretical understanding of the tourist gaze beyond Western cases (Urry, 1990). Research questions: (1) how Muslim women perceive a coastal destination; (2) what they expect from such destinations; and (3) what they actually experience during visits. These questions guide the objectives and the analysis. Objectives and methods: each question is linked to a specific objective and addressed through semi-structured interviews. A thematic approach is used to organise and interpret the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The literature provides both conceptual background and empirical comparisons for the themes. Significance and outputs: the findings are expected to add to the tourist gaze literature by centring Muslim women's views, and to offer practical guidance for Muslim-friendly destination planning and service delivery in Malaysian coastal areas. In short, this framework forms a clear bridge from theory and gaps to the empirical plan described in Chapter 3, so that the evidence collected directly answers the study aim and research questions.

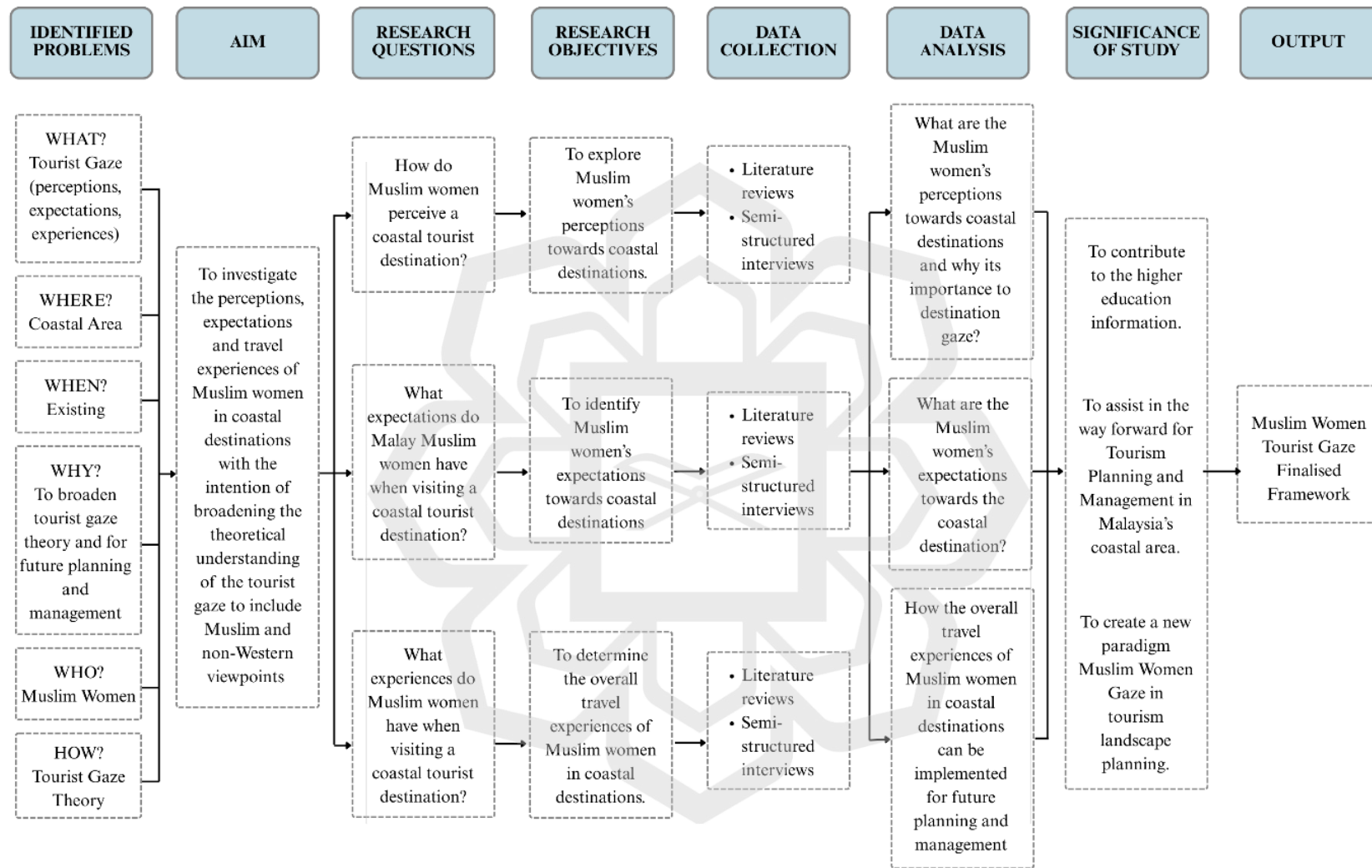


Figure 3.1 Research Framework for the Study

3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY AND PARADIGM

In order to comprehend Muslim women's tourist experiences in coastal destinations, this study's methodological approach is guided by the research philosophy and paradigm. The philosophical foundations that influence the research design, data collecting, and analytical procedures are described in this part. This study, which adopts an interpretive paradigm, recognises that travel experiences are socially produced phenomena that are impacted by personal viewpoints, cultural settings, and religious convictions. The philosophical framework used here acknowledges the intricate relationship between gender, religious identity, and tourism spaces while allowing for a thorough investigation of how Muslim women derive meaning from their travel experiences.

The ontological and epistemological stances that guide the study methodology are described in this section, along with the theoretical framework of tourist gaze theory that has been modified to look at the particular context of Muslim women's tourism experiences. Through this philosophical foundation, the study aims to generate rich, contextually grounded insights that contribute to the advancement of knowledge in Islamic tourism and tourist gaze theory.

3.2.1 Interpretive Paradigm Justification

The study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which acknowledges that social reality is subjectively constructed through individual experiences and interpretations (Creswell and Poth, 2018). The selection of an interpretivist approach is informed by the nature of the research problem, which seeks to understand how Muslim women interpret and assign meaning to their tourism experiences. Unlike positivist approaches that emphasise measurable variables and generalisable outcomes, interpretivism enables the exploration of subjective meanings, lived experiences, and socially constructed realities.

This paradigm is particularly appropriate for investigating the Muslim female tourist gaze, as tourism experiences are deeply embedded in personal, cultural, and

religious contexts. The concept of the tourist gaze itself centres on perception, interpretation, and meaning making rather than objective measurement (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In line with this, previous studies on tourist experiences and identity-based tourism have adopted interpretive qualitative approaches to capture nuanced, context-dependent insights (Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011).

Furthermore, the interpretive paradigm is especially relevant for examining the intersection of gender, religion, and tourism, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences while recognising the complex sociocultural and religious factors that shape them. This approach enables the researcher to understand how Muslim women construct and negotiate their tourist gaze in coastal destinations, acknowledging the existence of multiple realities within their social world (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). Therefore, the interpretivist paradigm provides the most suitable framework for examining the complex interplay between religion, gender, and tourism experiences in this study.

3.2.2 Ontological and Epistemological Positions

The ontological position of this research embraces relativism, recognizing that reality is socially constructed and that multiple valid interpretations of reality exist (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This stance acknowledges that Muslim women's tourism experiences and their interpretation of coastal landscapes are influenced by their unique cultural, religious, and personal backgrounds. The relativist ontology allows for the recognition that different participants may construct varying meanings from similar tourism experiences, influenced by their individual contexts and beliefs.

Epistemologically, this research adopts a subjectivist stance, acknowledging that knowledge is created through the interaction between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2006). This position recognises that understanding Muslim women's tourist experiences requires active engagement with their perspectives, stories, and interpretations. The researcher's role is acknowledged as an active participant in the knowledge creation process, rather than a detached observer. This epistemological

approach enables the development of rich, contextual understanding of how Muslim women construct and experience their tourist gaze.

3.2.3 Theoretical Lens: Tourist Gaze Theory

The theoretical framework of this study is anchored in Urry's (1990, 2002) tourist gaze theory, which has been adapted to examine the specific context of Muslim women's tourism experiences. While Urry's original conceptualisation focused on how Western tourists view and consume tourism spaces, this research extends the theory to explore how religious identity and gender intersect to create a distinctive Muslim female tourist gaze. The application of this theoretical lens helps understand how Muslim women's religious and cultural backgrounds influence their perception and interpretation of coastal tourism spaces.

The tourist gaze theory is particularly relevant as it acknowledges the socially constructed nature of tourism experiences while recognizing the power dynamics inherent in how tourists view and interact with destinations (Urry & Larsen, 2011). In the context of Muslim women tourists, this theoretical framework helps examine how religious requirements, cultural norms, and gender considerations influence their gaze and subsequent tourism experiences. The theory provides a structured approach for analysing how Muslim women navigate their presence in public spaces while maintaining their religious and cultural identity.

Furthermore, the adaptation of tourist gaze theory in this research contributes to its evolution by incorporating religious and gender perspectives that were not central to its original formulation. This theoretical lens helps examine how Muslim women's gaze differs from the traditional Western tourist gaze, particularly in how religious obligations and cultural considerations mediate their tourism experiences and interactions with coastal landscapes. However, the tourist gaze is not solely personal; it is shaped by societal norms and expectations, establishing a moral framework that guides behaviour in tourism settings. (Ya & Yan, 2024). Thus, the theory provides a framework for understanding how Muslim women actively construct and negotiate their tourism experiences while maintaining their religious identity in secular spaces.

This theoretical framework aligns with the interpretive paradigm and the study's ontological and epistemological positions, creating a coherent philosophical foundation for investigating the complex interplay between religious identity, gender, and tourism experiences. The integration of tourist gaze theory with the chosen research paradigm enables a comprehensive examination of how Muslim women's religious and cultural backgrounds influence their tourism experiences and perceptions of coastal destinations.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

To explore Muslim women's travel experiences in coastal destinations, this study adopts a qualitative approach, combining exploratory research with a case study method. Building on this foundation, the research design framework has been thoughtfully developed to ensure scientific rigour and cultural sensitivity, while effectively capturing the complex nature of the Muslim female tourist gaze. This design allows for a thorough examination of how Muslim women create, manage, and feel their presence in coastal tourism places by combining several complementing approaches. The method offers a formal framework for in-depth investigation while acknowledging the necessity for flexibility in examining hitherto unexplored facets of Islamic tourism. This section outlines the integration of methodologies, describes the qualitative research strategy, and justifies the dual methodological approach that was used.

3.3.1 Qualitative Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach to investigate the complex nature of Muslim women's tourist experiences in coastal destinations. The selection of a qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate given the study's focus on understanding the subjective experiences, perceptions, and meanings that Muslim women construct during their tourism encounters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach enables the researcher to capture the nuanced ways in which religious identity, gender, and cultural factors influence the tourist gaze.

The qualitative approach's strength lies in its ability to provide rich, detailed descriptions of social phenomena and to uncover the underlying meanings that participants attribute to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the context of this study, this methodology allows for deep exploration of how Muslim women emphasise their presence in coastal tourism spaces while maintaining their religious and cultural identity. Furthermore, the flexible and emergent nature of qualitative research enables the discovery of unexpected themes and patterns that might not be captured through more structured quantitative methods (Bryman, 2006).

In accordance, this research adopts a qualitative methodology utilizing a case study design. Following Yin's (2018) guidance for establishing the credibility of qualitative findings, the case study method was selected to investigate a contemporary issue within its real-world context, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly delineated. Accordingly, the study centres on the experiences and behaviours of Muslim women tourists in Port Dickson as the primary case. The investigation focuses exclusively on this group, recognizing that the participation of Muslim women in tourism is an increasingly common occurrence both in Malaysia and internationally. No comparative analysis with other destinations or tourist groups was undertaken, as the objective was to gain a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of this specific context.

The application of a single instrumental case study approach in tourism research is well-established. For example, Amarul and Muhammad (2021) conducted a study examining non-Muslim postgraduate students' visits to *Halal* restaurants, employing a similar methodological framework. Their research concentrated on a single group within a particular setting, without drawing comparisons to other populations or locations, thereby providing in-depth insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This established precedent further validates the methodological choices made in the present study (Amarul & Muhammad, 2021).

3.3.2 Integration of Exploratory Research and Case Study Methods

The research design integrates a case study approach with exploratory research, creating a comprehensive framework for investigating the Muslim female tourist gaze. The exploratory component allows for the investigation of previously unexplored aspects of Muslim women's tourism experiences, particularly in coastal settings where religious requirements and leisure activities intersect. This approach is especially valuable given the limited existing research on gender-specific aspects of Islamic tourism (Hariani & Anggraeni, 2022).

The case study method complements the exploratory approach by providing a bounded context within which to examine these phenomena in detail. Port Dickson serves as an instrumental case to understand the broader phenomena of Muslim women's tourism experiences in coastal destinations. The integration of these methods enables both depth and breadth in data collection, allowing for detailed examination of specific instances while maintaining awareness of broader patterns and implications.

Within this framework, semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data source, while on-site observations are used in a supporting capacity to provide additional context and to validate findings from the interviews. This combination allows for both theoretical insight and practical application, contributing to both academic understanding and tourism management practice.

3.3.3 Justification for Dual Methodological Approach

The adoption of a dual methodological approach is justified by several key considerations. First, the complexity of investigating religious and gender dimensions in tourism requires multiple complementary methods to ensure comprehensive understanding. The exploratory component enables the identification of emerging patterns and themes, while the case study approach provides a structured framework for detailed analysis within a specific context (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004).

Second, this dual approach enhances the study's ability to address its research objectives effectively. The exploratory element facilitates understanding of how Muslim women construct their tourist gaze and navigate their tourism experiences, while the case study component enables detailed examination of how these processes manifest within a specific coastal destination context. Employing both exploratory and case study approaches is essential to comprehensively examine the multiple dimensions of the tourist gaze, capturing both its broader conceptual aspects and the specific ways it unfolds within particular settings. This combination allows for both theoretical insight and practical application, contributing to both academic understanding and tourism management practice.

Furthermore, the dual methodology enables methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The combination of methods allows for cross-verification of findings through different data collection techniques, providing a more robust and nuanced understanding of the phenomena under study. This approach also acknowledges the multifaceted nature of tourism experiences and the need for multiple perspectives to understand them fully.

The integration of exploratory research with a case study approach also addresses potential limitations that might arise from using either method in isolation. While exploratory research provides flexibility and openness to emerging themes, the case study approach offers structure and boundedness that helps focus the investigation. This combination creates a balanced methodology that is both rigorous and flexible, capable of capturing both the breadth and depth of Muslim women's tourism experiences.

This dual methodological approach aligns with contemporary developments in tourism research methodology, which increasingly recognise the value of multiple complementary approaches in understanding complex social phenomena (Tribe, 2009). The combination of methods enables the research to contribute both to theoretical understanding of the Muslim female tourist gaze and to practical knowledge about how destinations can better accommodate Muslim women tourists' needs and preferences.

3.4 CASE STUDY SELECTION

The selection of an appropriate research setting is crucial for investigating the Muslim female tourist gaze in coastal destinations. This study identifies Port Dickson, Malaysia, as the primary case study location due to its strategic importance as one of the country's most prominent coastal tourism destinations and its accessibility to major urban centres, particularly Kuala Lumpur. Located approximately 60 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur, Port Dickson has evolved into a significant domestic tourism hub with well-established infrastructure and a diverse visitor demographic (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). The selection of this site aligns with the need for contextual relevance in case study research, ensuring that the setting appropriately reflects the research objectives (Yin, 2018). Importantly, Port Dickson represents a mainstream coastal destination where Muslim-friendly considerations intersect with conventional tourism practices, offering a relevant context for examining how Muslim women interpret and navigate tourism experiences.

Its transformation from a historical port town into a contemporary tourist destination, alongside the systematic integration of Muslim-friendly facilities, provides a suitable environment to explore the intersection of religion, gender, and leisure. The incorporation of *halal*-certified services, prayer facilities, and gender-sensitive amenities supports the needs of Muslim travellers while shaping their tourism experiences (Henderson, 2016). This setting enables an in-depth examination of how Muslim women negotiate their identities and preferences within coastal tourism spaces, particularly through the lens of the tourist gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, existing studies highlight the importance of Muslim-friendly attributes in influencing tourist behaviour and satisfaction (Mohd Salleh et al., 2023). As such, Port Dickson offers a valuable and practical case for understanding the broader dynamics of Muslim-friendly tourism within the Malaysian context.

3.4.1 Site Selection Criteria and Justification

In selecting Port Dickson as the focal case study, several criteria were considered to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Its accessibility and proximity to major urban centres, particularly Kuala Lumpur, make it a popular choice for both domestic

and international tourists, resulting in a diverse visitor demographic. The town's well-developed tourism infrastructure including a wide range of accommodations, recreational facilities, and transportation networks ensures that the experiences of Muslim women tourists can be observed in a setting that reflects both convenience and comfort. Furthermore, Port Dickson's proactive adoption of Muslim-friendly tourism standards, such as *halal*-certified dining, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated amenities, distinguishes it from many other coastal destinations in Malaysia. These features not only cater to the religious and cultural needs of Muslim women but also create a supportive environment for exploring how these travellers negotiate their identities and preferences within a leisure context.

These qualitative attributes are reinforced by strong demographic and infrastructural considerations. For instance, primary data from Tourism Negeri Sembilan (2023) indicates that 75% of domestic visitors identify as Muslim, with an 8.5% annual growth rate in Muslim tourist arrivals between 2015 and 2019, providing a statistically significant population for examining the Muslim female tourist gaze. The selected site records an average stay duration of approximately two nights among Muslim family visitors. This duration provides sufficient opportunity to observe and document behavioural patterns, interactional dynamics, and experiential dimensions within the tourism setting. Consequently, the site offers an appropriate context for examining visitor engagement over short-term family-oriented stays.

Port Dickson's strategic development as a Muslim-friendly destination not only reflects its local significance but also exemplifies broader trends in Malaysian coastal tourism, where destinations are increasingly balancing mainstream appeal with the requirements of Muslim travellers. The town's transformation, supported by government initiatives and private sector investment, is evident in its infrastructure: 85% of registered restaurants maintain *halal* certification, and all major resorts incorporate prayer facilities (Tourism Negeri Sembilan, 2023). Additionally, the widespread implementation of Muslim-centric amenities, such as Qibla direction in 90% of accommodations, demonstrates a systematic approach to meeting the religious needs of visitors (Henderson, 2016; Mohd Salleh et al., 2023). These features create an

optimal research environment for investigating the intersection of religious observance and tourism experiences, particularly for Muslim women.

By situating this study within Port Dickson, it is possible to capture the interplay between policy, infrastructure, and lived experience, offering insights that are relevant not only to the local context but also to other coastal destinations in Malaysia and the wider region. This comprehensive Muslim-friendly ecosystem, while catering to Islamic requirements, presents a unique laboratory for examining how Muslim women navigate and interact with these specialised tourism spaces (Nisha & Cheung, 2022). Thus, the case study approach provides a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of the Muslim female tourist gaze and the evolving landscape of coastal tourism in a multicultural, Muslim-majority country.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

To capture the diversity of Muslim women's tourist experiences in coastal areas, this study adopts a comprehensive data gathering strategy centred on semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary method, complemented by supporting on-site observations. The primary data collection, conducted over six months from March to August 2024, involved twenty-five interviews: fifteen (15) with Muslim women tourists and ten (10) with key stakeholders, including representatives from MOTAC, ITC, and local tourism operators. While hotel operators were not specifically targeted as a distinct participant category, some stakeholder participants were involved in accommodation and tourism services. This reflects the study's emphasis on capturing broader stakeholder perspectives rather than conducting a sector-specific analysis. The focus was on eliciting detailed perspectives and experiences through interviews.

On-site observations at selected sites in Port Dickson were conducted solely to provide additional context and to enrich the understanding of participants' interactions within the tourism environment, rather than serving as a primary data source. This section further outlines the interview design and protocols, participant selection criteria, sampling techniques, and ethical considerations, with particular attention to cultural sensitivity and respect for participants' religious values throughout the research process.

3.5.1 Semi-Structured In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured in-depth interviews are a qualitative research method combining open-ended and guided questions to explore participants' experiences and perspectives. This approach allows flexibility while maintaining focus on key topics. It is widely used in social sciences for its adaptability and depth (Kallio et al., 2016).

3.5.1.1 Interview Design and Protocol

This study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method, following Bryman's (2006) approach to qualitative research design. The interview protocol was developed through an iterative process, incorporating insights from pilot interviews and expert feedback. However, before the main data collection, a pilot study was conducted to refine the interview guides and ensure the clarity of questions. Four (4) pilot interviews were carried out, involving two Muslim women tourists and two tourism stakeholders. The feedback from these initial interviews helped to identify ambiguous questions and improve the overall flow of the interview process. Conducting pilot interviews is a common practice in qualitative research, as it allows researchers to test and adjust their instruments before the full study begins (Turner, 2010; Kim, 2011). The insights gained from the pilot phase contributed to the reliability and validity of the final interview protocol.

Following the refinement process, the finalized interview guides were structured as follows. The research instruments consisted of two complementary interview guides with open-ended questions. The first guide, aimed at Muslim women tourists, was structured into three main sections: Muslim Women Tourist as a Market Segment, Destination Factors, and Muslim Women Tourist Gaze (Appendix A). The questions explored various aspects including travel choices and motivations, destination perceptions and experiences, religious and cultural influences, and specific considerations as Muslim women travellers in coastal destinations. Importantly, these questions were designed to elicit how participants perceive, interpret, and engage with tourism destinations which are core elements of the tourist gaze framework. The second guide, designed for industry stakeholders, was organised around two major themes: The

Tourist and The Destination (Appendix B). This comprehensive approach allowed for a thorough examination of coastal tourism development from both the demand (tourist) and supply (stakeholder) perspectives, with particular emphasis on the unique needs and experiences of Muslim women tourists. This flexible structure allowed for organic conversation flow while ensuring consistency across interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.5.1.2 Participant Selection Criteria

In qualitative studies, researchers emphasise collecting samples that represent social life activities in specific locations, as highlighted by Howitt and Cramer (2005). Following this approach and drawing from previous research experiences, conducting twenty-five detailed interviews was considered sufficient to achieve data saturation and fulfil research objectives (Yin, 1994). Rather than gathering extensive surface-level information, this methodological choice aligns with the fundamental aim of qualitative research, which seeks to develop deeper, more meaningful insights into social phenomena (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993).

To ensure the richness and relevance of the data collected, the study targeted two distinct participant groups: Muslim women tourists (n=15) and tourism industry stakeholders (n=10). For Muslim women tourists, the inclusion criteria specified: (a) self-identification as Muslim, (b) minimum age of 18 years, and (c) willingness to share detailed travel experiences. The selection of 18 years as the minimum age threshold ensures participants have legal autonomy in decision-making and travel choices and most likely to be able to make independent travel decisions (Trelohan, Lagier, & Montarget, 2025).

While the study primarily targeted Muslim women tourists residing in or visiting the research setting, efforts were also made to include both domestic and international travellers to capture broader perspectives. However, due to contextual constraints such as limited accessibility to international respondents at the research location and practical challenges of recruitment, only one international Muslim woman tourist was successfully recruited. Although the number of international participants is limited, her

inclusion nonetheless contributes valuable comparative insights by highlighting potential differences in expectations, cultural background, and travel practices when contrasted with domestic respondents. Qualitative research emphasises the depth and richness of individual experiences over statistical generalisability (Patton, 2015), and thus even a single international perspective meaningfully broadens the analytical scope of the study.

The use of in-depth interviews with a sample size of approximately 20 to 30 participants is well-established in qualitative tourism research, as it allows for the exploration of complex social phenomena while ensuring data saturation (Jennings, 2010). For instance, Andriotis (2024) discusses how semi-structured interviews are frequently employed in tourism studies to capture nuanced perspectives from both tourists and industry stakeholders, with sample sizes often ranging from 15 to 30 respondents. This approach is further supported by Jennings (2010), who notes that qualitative studies in tourism commonly justify such sample sizes as sufficient for generating rich, meaningful insights. By adopting a similar methodological framework, the present study aligns with established practices in the field, ensuring that the data collected are both comprehensive and analytically robust (Jennings, 2010). In accordance, data saturation occurred following completion of 15 interview sessions, where additional participants did not contribute new thematic insights or conceptual understanding, which corresponds with research by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) who demonstrated that thematic saturation frequently emerges within 12-15 interviews when studying homogeneous participant groups. The selected sample size remains consistent with methodological recommendations for phenomenological qualitative studies, as Creswell (2014) suggests that 5-25 participants provide adequate depth for comprehensive exploration of lived experiences and phenomena.

Stakeholder participants on the other hand, were chosen according to their professional roles in tourism industry, representing different groups from government sector, travel agencies and business services who work directly with Muslim women tourists' services or policymaking (Henderson, 2016). The selection of experienced professionals was important because they have developed good understanding of industry and encountered many situations involving Muslim women tourists. Their professional background allows them to observe various industry changes, seasonal

patterns, and changing Muslim tourist requirements, which helps provide reliable and detailed insights for research topic (Timothy & Olsen, 2021).

3.5.1.3 Sampling Strategy

The research participant selection process (sampling strategy) began with non-random sampling techniques, where convenience and judgment sampling methods were specifically employed to examine Muslim women tourists' perceptions at beach destinations (Patton, 2015). Building upon this sampling approach, the selection criteria were further refined by focusing on specific demographic characteristics, particularly gender and religious affiliation, which ensured alignment with the study's research objectives and participant requirements (Bryman, 2006).

The sampling strategy employed in this study followed a purposive-snowball hybrid approach, designed to access and engage Muslim female tourists while ensuring data richness and credibility. The initial sampling framework established specific inclusion criteria: participants must be Muslim women who had visited Port Dickson for leisure purposes, staying a minimum of 1 night (Islamic Tourism Centre [ITC], 2021), and had utilised at least one Muslim-friendly facility during their stay.

As for the stakeholders, the primary phase utilised purposive sampling to identify and recruit initial participants through established tourism networks. This approach enabled targeted access to participants who could provide rich, relevant data aligned with the research objectives. The selection criteria ensured participants had meaningful engagement with Port Dickson's Muslim-friendly infrastructure, including its major beachfront resorts with Muslim-friendly facilities.

Subsequently, snowball sampling was implemented, wherein initial participants referred other potential respondents who met the inclusion criteria. This method proved particularly effective in accessing the stakeholders and domestic visitors in Negeri Sembilan, which received 14.96 million domestic visitors in 2023 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). The final sample size of all twenty-five (25) participants was determined through theoretical saturation, where data collection continued until no new

significant themes emerged. This sampling strategy, while acknowledging potential limitations in demographic diversity, successfully facilitated access to participants with varied experiences and perspectives within the target population as well as the combined strategy ensured diverse perspectives while maintaining the focus on information-rich cases (Yin, 2018).

3.5.1.4 Interview Process and Ethical Considerations

The data collection process spanned across a six-month period from March to August 2024, with each interview session ranging between 50 to 90 minutes in duration. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. To ensure cultural sensitivity and participant comfort, female interviewers conducted the sessions with Muslim women participants, and participants could choose their preferred interview location and language (Bernard, 2017).

Furthermore, respondents were assured their identity and any information given would remain confidential. An information was then provided to each interviewee explaining the nature and purpose of the study with the assurance that if at any time during the interview they felt uncomfortable, they could withdraw. The letter of invitation (Appendix C) was presented to the intended stakeholder respondents.

3.5.2 On-site Observations

On-site observations in this study served a supporting role, providing contextual information to supplement and validate the primary interview data. The purpose of these observations was to offer additional insights into the physical environment and general patterns of tourist behaviour, rather than to serve as a main data source. Documentation methods (field notes, mapping, and approved digital photography) were used selectively to illustrate and confirm findings that emerged from the interviews. All observation activities were conducted with careful attention to cultural sensitivities and ethical considerations.

3.5.2.1 Ethical Considerations in Observation

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the observation process. The researcher obtained necessary permissions when conducting observations. Particular attention was paid to maintaining participant anonymity and respecting cultural norms regarding privacy and modesty. All observation activities were conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and with respect for the cultural and religious sensitivities of participants. As Ashdown & Maitner (2024) in their writing, maintaining confidentiality is crucial, especially in culturally sensitive contexts.

3.5.2.2 Documentation Methods

Documentation followed a multi-modal approach, combining digital photography (with appropriate permissions) and field notes. For observations of the physical environment, researchers recorded the areas where Muslim women tourists gathered and their preferred locations. Observations of social interactions focused on activity patterns and interpersonal dynamics with other beachgoers. Visual documentation was particularly important for capturing physical arrangements and facilities relevant to the needs of Muslim women tourists. All documentation adhered to pre-established ethical guidelines and respected cultural sensitivities regarding photography and privacy (Pink, 2013).

All photographs presented in this section were taken during observation sessions to visually document the physical environment, facilities, and spatial arrangements relevant to Muslim women tourists. Every image was captured with the necessary permissions and in accordance with ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants' privacy and cultural sensitivities were respected at all times.

3.5.2.3 Field Notes Procedures

Field notes were recorded in a systematic yet flexible manner, capturing both descriptive details and reflective insights throughout the observation period.

Observations took place at various times of day, with particular attention to peak tourist hours between 7:00 AM and 7:00 PM. Each observation session typically lasted around two hours. This approach allowed the researcher to document events and interactions as they unfolded, while also noting personal reflections and interpretations. Maintaining consistency in the timing and duration of observations helped to identify recurring patterns and provided a rich contextual understanding of Muslim women tourists' experiences in coastal spaces.

3.6 DATA PREPARATION AND ANALYSIS

Utilising ATLAS.ti (version 9) software to help systematic coding and topic generation, the analysis adhered to the six-phase thematic analysis paradigm developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Both inductive and deductive methods were used in the analysis process, ensuring a relationship to established theoretical frameworks in Islamic tourism and tourist gaze studies while permitting the emergence of unanticipated topics. Triangulation was primarily achieved by comparing interview data from different participant groups (tourists and stakeholders), with supporting observation data used to enrich and validate the findings. Regular peer debriefing sessions and member checking protocols were put in place to increase the findings' legitimacy and dependability.

3.6.1 Data Preparation

Data preparation is a critical step before analysis, involving tasks such as organizing, cleaning, and formatting data to ensure accuracy and consistency. Proper preparation enhances reliability and validity of results (Bazeley, 2013). It ensures data is ready for meaningful interpretation.

3.6.1.1 Transcription Procedures

The research process involved converting recorded interviews into detailed written documents. Each audio recording underwent careful transcription to capture spoken

words, emotional expressions, and non-verbal elements. The transcription method included specific notation symbols for documenting pauses, voice changes, and other significant communication patterns. A dual verification system enhanced accuracy through initial transcription followed by interviewer validation. This systematic approach ensured complete data capture, preserving both verbal content and contextual meaning throughout the interview materials. The final transcripts served as comprehensive records for subsequent analysis phases.

3.6.1.2 Translation Process and Validation

The translation process commenced after completing analysis of original interview data. All Malay language interviews transcripts underwent systematic translation into English through certified translators. A meticulous back-translation procedure followed, where different language experts converted English texts back to Malay, ensuring meaning accuracy. The process focused on maintaining cultural context and specific terminology throughout the translation. This validation step guaranteed that translated content preserved authentic meanings from the original interviews. The translation approach prioritised conceptual accuracy over literal translation to capture the true essence of participant responses.

3.6.1.3 Data Organisation and Storage

The research data management employed straightforward digital storage methods. All collected materials followed a systematic file naming system using participant codes. Primary storage utilised a password-protected computer, with backup copies saved on an external hard drive. Digital folders maintained clear organisation through main categories and sub-folders, making data retrieval efficient. A simple text document listed file locations and processing status. This basic yet effective organisation method ensured data safety and accessibility throughout the research process.

3.6.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures involve systematic steps to process and interpret collected information. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), qualitative data analysis includes familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, reviewing themes, defining final themes, and producing findings. This organised approach helps researchers transform raw data into meaningful insights while maintaining research integrity.

3.6.2.1 Thematic Analysis Approach

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) study, the six-phase thematic analysis framework. It was selected for its systematic yet flexible approach to identifying patterns within qualitative data. As Naude (2024) stated, the framework consists of six distinct phases: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. In accordance, this method was particularly appropriate given the study's interpretive paradigm and the complex nature of Muslim women's tourism experiences. The analysis process was guided by both inductive and deductive approaches, allowing for the emergence of unexpected themes while maintaining alignment with the theoretical framework of Islamic tourism and tourist gaze studies.

Following Nowell et al.'s (2017) guidelines for trustworthy thematic analysis, the researcher maintained detailed documentation of analytical decisions and theoretical assumptions throughout the process. For example, when analysing responses about destination choice and travel experiences, initial codes such as '*halal* food availability,' 'prayer facilities,' and 'private beach areas' were identified. These were then consolidated into the focused code of 'Muslim-friendly amenities.' Finally, through theoretical coding, this was linked to the broader theme of 'Islamic tourism infrastructure,' which connected to existing frameworks of Muslim-friendly destination development. The interview questions were structured to explore three main thematic areas: Muslim women as a market segment, destination factors, and the Muslim women

tourist gaze, allowing for systematic analysis of how religious and cultural factors influence coastal tourism experiences. The procedures are described in detail below.

3.6.2.2 Coding Procedures

The coding process followed a three-stage approach as recommended by Saldana (2021). Initial coding involved line-by-line analysis of transcripts to identify significant statements and preliminary codes. This was followed by focused coding, where initial codes were consolidated into more conceptual categories. The final stage involved theoretical coding to establish relationships between categories and align them with existing theoretical frameworks. Example is as shown in Figure 3.2.

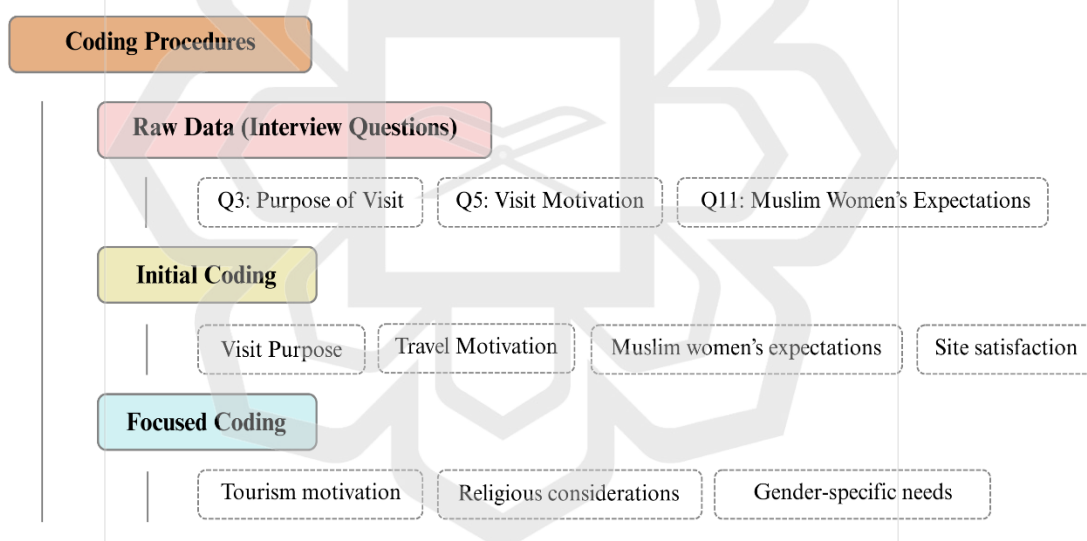


Figure 3.2 Example of Coding Procedure

3.6.2.3 Theme Development Process

Theme development followed an iterative process of pattern recognition and refinement. Initial themes were identified through the clustering of related codes and categories, guided by both the frequency of occurrence and theoretical significance. Following Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic networks approach, themes were organised

into three levels: basic themes (lowest-order premises), organizing themes (categories of basic themes), and global themes (super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the data). The theme development process was supported by visual mapping techniques, including mind maps and thematic networks diagrams, to illustrate the relationships between different levels of themes. Regular peer debriefing sessions were conducted to challenge assumptions and refine theme interpretations. Below is the example of the theme development process.

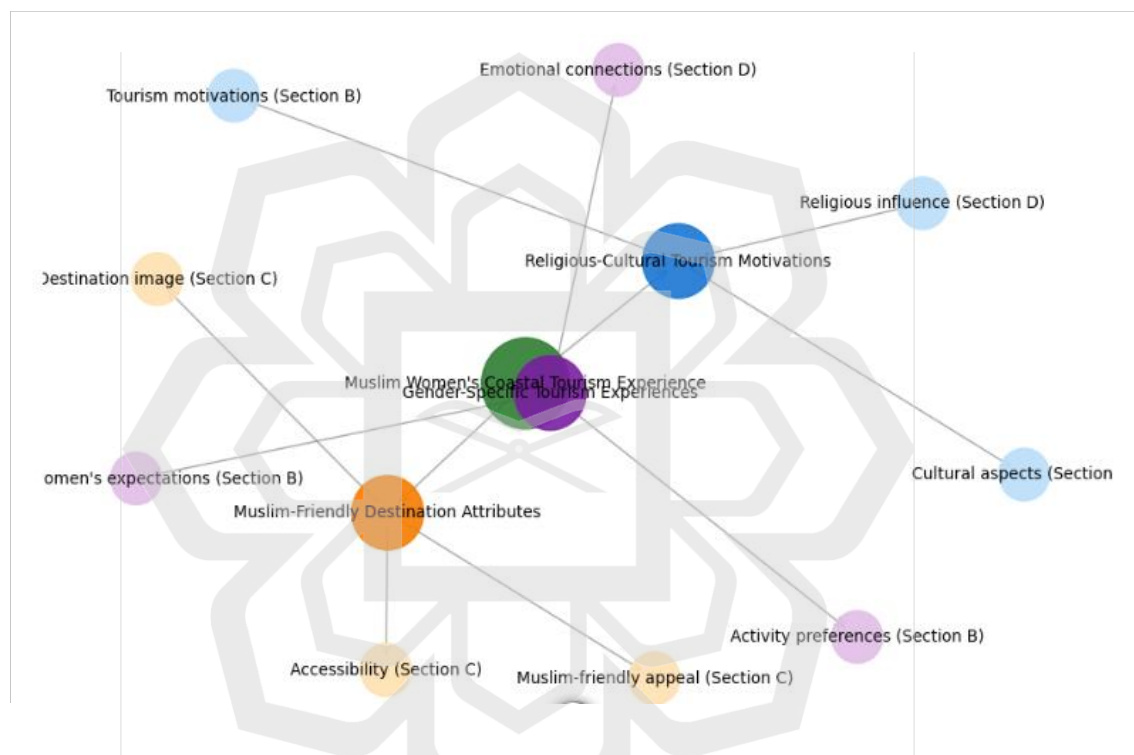


Figure 3.3 Theme development process shows how individual elements from different sections of the interview data come together to form coherent themes.

3.6.2.4 Use of Qualitative Analysis Software – ATLAS.ti

ATLAS.ti (version 9) was employed as the primary software tool for data analysis, chosen for its robust capabilities in handling multiple data types and its sophisticated coding and visualisation features (Frieze, 2019). The software facilitated systematic coding, theme development, and the creation of conceptual networks. Specific ATLAS.ti functions utilised included:

- Code co-occurrence tables to identify patterns and relationships between codes
- Network View function to visualise relationships between themes and concepts
- Query Tool for complex Boolean searches across the dataset
- Memo writing feature for maintaining an audit trail of analytical decisions
- Document comparison tools for cross-case analysis

Following Woods, Paulus, Atkins, and Macklin's (2016) recommendations for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, the researcher maintained a balance between software-aided analysis and traditional interpretive approaches, ensuring that technological tools enhanced rather than replaced careful human interpretation.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research design incorporated comprehensive ethical considerations to protect participant rights, ensure data integrity, and maintain cultural sensitivity throughout the study. All procedures adhered to institutional ethical guidelines and international research standards while paying particular attention to the unique considerations required when working with Muslim women participants.

3.7.1 Informed Consent Procedures

The informed consent process was designed and implemented following the principles outlined by Israel and Hay (2006) for ethical research practice. Participants received detailed information about the study in their preferred language (Malay, or English), including:

- Research objectives and potential implications
- Expected participation duration and requirements
- Rights to withdraw at any time without consequences
- Data usage and storage procedures
- Publication intentions and participant anonymity measures

Special attention was paid to ensuring consent was truly informed and voluntary, with participants given adequate time to review materials and ask questions before providing written consent. For participants who expressed cultural or religious preferences, verbal consent was recorded as an alternative to written documentation, following Guillemin and Gillam's (2004) recommendations for culturally sensitive research practices.

3.7.2 Participant Privacy and Confidentiality

Vigorous measures were implemented to protect participant privacy and maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Following Kaiser's (2009) guidelines for protecting participant identities in qualitative research:

- Participants were assigned unique identification codes
- All identifying information was removed from transcripts and field notes
- Pseudonyms were used in all research documentation
- Specific locations and organisations were anonymized where requested

Particular attention was paid to protecting participants' religious and cultural identities, with additional measures taken to ensure that descriptions of specific practices or experiences could not lead to participant identification within their communities.

3.7.3 Data Protection Measures

To ensure data security and confidentiality, this research implemented comprehensive protection protocols for all collected materials. A systematic digital management approach was established, incorporating unique participant identification codes and chronological markers in the file naming structure. The primary data storage utilised dual-layer security, with materials housed on a password-secured computer system and mirrored on an encrypted external drive for redundancy. A hierarchical folder structure

with clearly defined categories facilitated secure data organisation and retrieval. Documentation tracking was maintained through a protected metadata log, while physical documents were safeguarded in restricted-access storage facilities. These multi-tiered protection measures guaranteed both data integrity and participant privacy throughout the research lifecycle.

3.7.4 Cultural Sensitivity Considerations

Cultural sensitivity was a guiding principle throughout the research process, especially when working with Muslim women participants. To respect religious norms and gender propriety, all interviews were conducted by a female researcher, which helped to foster trust and comfort. Planning timelines also accommodated prayer times and other religious obligations. During fieldwork, modest dress and respectful behaviour were observed. Interviews were conducted in private or gender-segregated spaces as needed. Care was also taken to use religious and cultural terminology accurately and respectfully, in line with ethical recommendations for research in Muslim settings (Lalani & Ali, 2020).

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were treated as an ongoing process rather than a one-time requirement. Regular ethical reviews were conducted to assess and address emerging ethical challenges. The research team maintained a reflexive approach, continuously evaluating the impact of research procedures on participants and adjusting protocols as needed to ensure participant wellbeing and cultural respect. Particular attention was paid to power dynamics and potential vulnerabilities, acknowledging the intersectionality of gender, religion, and cultural identity in the research context. Following Sultana's (2007) framework for ethical research in cross-cultural contexts, the team-maintained awareness of potential power imbalances and worked to create an environment where participants felt empowered to share their experiences while maintaining their dignity and cultural integrity.

3.8 RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

This section acknowledges the inherent limitations and challenges encountered during the research process while detailing the strategies employed to mitigate their impact on the study's quality and outcomes.

3.8.1 Methodological Limitations

The research methodology encountered several constraints that warrant acknowledgment. The participant selection process, while achieving the targeted sample size (n=25), presented representational challenges. Although snowball sampling facilitated access to Muslim women tourists and stakeholders, this approach potentially created participant clusters with homogeneous characteristics. This limitation affects the transferability of findings especially to broader Muslim female tourist populations, particularly those from diverse geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Cross-linguistic complexities emerged as a significant methodological challenge. Despite implementing comprehensive translation protocols including multiple translators and back-translation procedures, certain cultural-specific expressions and contextual nuances may have experienced subtle semantic shifts during the translation process. This linguistic limitation potentially impacts the depth of phenomenological interpretation, especially regarding culturally embedded tourism experiences and religious perspectives.

The temporal scope of data collection, confined to a six-month period, restricted the research's ability to capture longitudinal patterns in Muslim women's tourism behaviour. Seasonal tourism fluctuations during the study timeframe may have influenced participant narratives and observational data. This temporal limitation affects the research's capacity to identify long-term trends or evolutionary changes in Muslim female tourist experiences and perspectives.

Although this study offers meaningful contributions to understanding Muslim women's tourist gaze in Port Dickson, there are also several limitations suggest

important directions for future research. The investigation's restriction to a single destination means findings might not fully reflect how Muslim women experience coastal tourism across Malaysia, where local culture, infrastructure, and tourism planning vary considerably. Comparative studies in destinations such as Langkawi or Terengganu could provide broader insights into destination-specific dynamics.

3.8.2 Field Challenges

The fieldwork phase presented multifaceted challenges that necessitated careful methodological adjustments. Primary obstacles emerged in participant recruitment, particularly regarding access to Muslim tourists where privacy sensitivities and family obligations influenced participation rates. The research process demanded constant negotiation of cultural protocols, especially in gender-segregated environments, echoing similar difficulties noted in cross-cultural tourism studies.

Weather conditions along Port Dickson's coastal areas frequently disrupted scheduled observations, while technical constraints affected data collection quality in certain settings. Additionally, coordinating with diverse stakeholders while adhering to prayer times and religious observances required significant schedule modifications. These limitations potentially influenced the depth and breadth of data collection, though mitigation strategies were implemented to maintain research integrity.

Additionally, the minimal involvement of international tourists with only one overseas participant reflects practical recruitment challenges and reduced tourist flow during fieldwork. While qualitative research values depth over large sample sizes (Tracy, 2024), future studies with larger, more balanced samples of international visitors could generate stronger cross-cultural insights. The cross-sectional design also limits understanding of how the tourist gaze evolves across life stages or under changing social and technological conditions, suggesting that longitudinal approaches could enrich theoretical understanding.

3.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This methodology chapter has presented a comprehensive framework for investigating Muslim women's tourism experiences through a rigorous qualitative research design. The chapter detailed the systematic approach employed to collect, analyse, and interpret data while maintaining high standards of research quality and ethical consideration.

The research design integrated multiple data collection methods, with semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary source of data, and supporting on-site observations used to provide additional context and validation. This methodological approach enhanced the depth and reliability of the findings while providing rich contextual insights into the phenomena under study. The sampling strategy combined convenience, purposive and snowball techniques, ensuring access to appropriate participants while maintaining theoretical alignment with the research objectives.

Data preparation and analysis followed a rigorous protocol, incorporating detailed transcription procedures, careful translation validation, and systematic coding using ATLAS.ti software. The thematic analysis approach, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, enabled the identification of meaningful patterns while maintaining sensitivity to cultural nuances and participant perspectives. The implementation of multiple quality assurance measures, including member checking, peer review, and external auditing, strengthened the trustworthiness of the research findings.

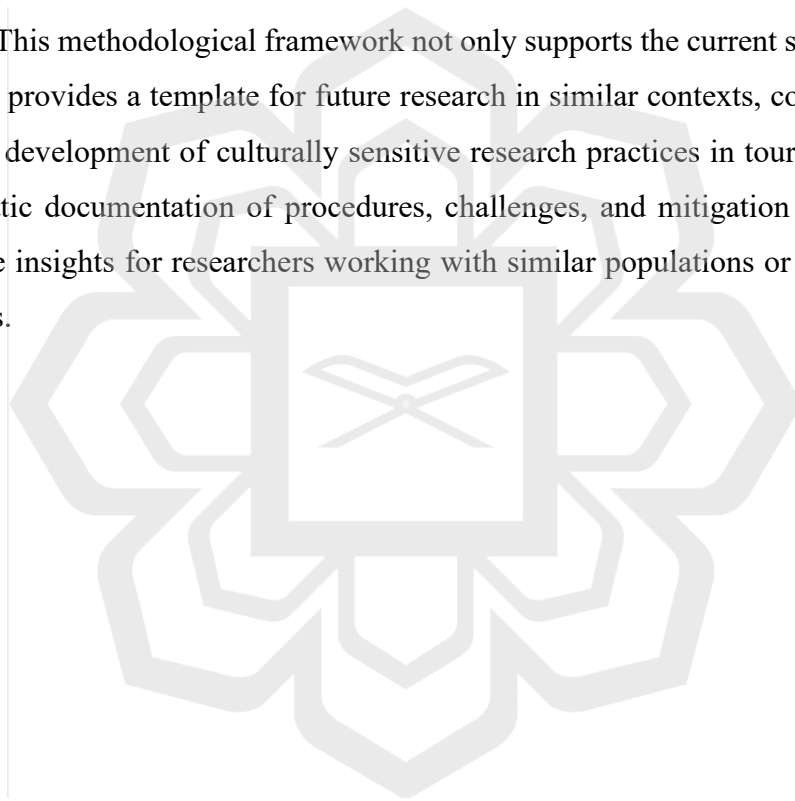
Particular attention was paid to ethical considerations and cultural sensitivity throughout the research process. Comprehensive informed consent procedures, strict data protection measures, and careful attention to cultural protocols ensured participant rights and dignity were protected. The researcher's commitment to cultural competency and ongoing reflection contributed to the establishment of trust and rapport with participants, facilitating rich data collection while maintaining ethical research practice.

The chapter also acknowledged methodological limitations and field challenges, presenting transparent documentation of these constraints. This approach demonstrates

the study's commitment to research integrity while providing valuable context for interpreting the findings.

In conclusion, the methodology chapter establishes a robust foundation for the research, demonstrating alignment between the research objectives, theoretical framework, and methodological choices. The careful attention to research quality, ethical considerations, and cultural sensitivity ensures that the findings presented in subsequent chapters are both credible and meaningful within the context of Muslim women's tourism experiences.

This methodological framework not only supports the current study's objectives but also provides a template for future research in similar contexts, contributing to the broader development of culturally sensitive research practices in tourism studies. The systematic documentation of procedures, challenges, and mitigation strategies offers valuable insights for researchers working with similar populations or in cross-cultural contexts.



CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY SELECTION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Coastal tourism in Malaysia is a major segment of the country's tourism industry, attracting both local and international tourists to its extensive and varied shoreline. Malaysia's coastline, which spans over 4,800 km, encompasses the Peninsular Malaysia as well as the states of Sabah and Sarawak on Borneo Island (Tourism Malaysia, 2022). These coastal regions are known for their sandy beaches, mangrove forests, coral reefs, and numerous islands, each offering distinct attractions and leisure activities. Prominent destinations such as Langkawi, Penang, Tioman, Redang, and Sipadan have become central to Malaysia's tourism promotion, recognised for their natural beauty, biodiversity, and accessibility (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). The government has prioritised these areas in its tourism strategies, investing in infrastructure and marketing to enhance their appeal (Government of Malaysia, 2023). While these destinations have flourished due to their natural and cultural assets, their growing popularity has also brought new challenges.

The popularity of Malaysia's coastal destinations is closely tied to their rich natural resources and ecological diversity. Islands like Redang and Perhentian are famous for their clear waters and vibrant marine life, making them hotspots for snorkelling and diving (WWF-Malaysia, 2022). Meanwhile, Langkawi and Penang combine beach tourism with cultural and historical experiences, appealing to a wide range of visitors (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). However, rapid growth of tourism in these areas has raised concerns about environmental sustainability, particularly regarding coral reef degradation and pollution (WWF-Malaysia, 2022), as well as coastal erosion and habitat loss due to reclamation and development (Chee, Tan, Tew, Sim, Yee, & Chong, 2023). In response, Malaysia has implemented policies such as the National Ecotourism Plan and established marine parks to protect sensitive ecosystems while allowing for controlled tourism activities (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture

Malaysia, 2016). Community engagement and awareness programs are also promoted to encourage responsible tourism practices. Despite these efforts, challenges remain in enforcing regulations and ensuring that local communities benefit equitably from tourism development (UNEP, 2005). To better understand these dynamics, it is essential to examine the specific context of coastal tourism within Peninsular Malaysia, where many of these issues are most pronounced.

4.2 CONTEXT OF COASTAL TOURISM IN PENINSULAR MALAYSIA

Malaysia has a land area of about 330,000 km² and the coastline line is over 1,930 km in Peninsular Malaysia. The concept of the exclusive economic zone has defined the coastal zone as an area of land extending lines of up to five kilometres to land, starting from the coastline or shoreline that became a meeting point of seawater and land (Loganathan and Syahrin Said, 2004). By having a coastal zone area of 4,416,292 hectares or 13.3 per cent of the country covering an area of over 4,800 kilometres, making it is the main tourism asset, and Malaysia has picked up among the tourists as one of the best choice destinations in the world. Acreage and population for each destination are also different making this destination different, especially in their development appearance.

Malaysia on the other hand, has emerged as a leading destination for Islamic tourism, consistently ranking at the top of the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) since 2015 (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021). Coastal tourism stands as one of the most prominent and economically significant segments within Malaysia's tourism industry, consistently attracting the highest number of tourist arrivals compared to other tourism types such as ecotourism or urban tourism (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). The popularity of Malaysia's beaches and islands underscores the central role that coastal destinations play in shaping the country's overall tourism landscape. Within this context, Port Dickson, a coastal town in Negeri Sembilan, represents a significant case study for examining the intersection of Islamic tourism principles with coastal tourism development. Port Dickson's unique position within this landscape is further highlighted by its proactive adoption of Muslim-friendly tourism practices.

Port Dickson serves as a significant case study for examining the intersection of Islamic tourism principles with coastal tourism development due to its unique blend of natural coastal attractions and its growing focus on Muslim-friendly facilities and services. As a popular beach destination located close to major urban centres, Port Dickson has seen increasing investments in *halal*-certified accommodations, prayer facilities, and family-oriented recreational activities that align with the needs and preferences of Muslim travellers (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021). The town's tourism stakeholders have actively adopted Islamic tourism standards, such as providing separate swimming areas, modest dress codes at certain resorts, and *halal* food options, making it a model for how coastal destinations can cater to the expanding global Muslim travel market while maintaining broad appeal for all visitors (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021; Samori, Md Salleh, & Khalid, 2016). This approach not only enhances the destination's competitiveness but also supports Malaysia's position as a leader in Islamic tourism (Crescent Rating, 2023). Beyond its religious and cultural appeal, Port Dickson's strategic location and accessibility further contribute to its prominence as a coastal tourism hub.

Situated on the western coast of Peninsular Malaysia along the Straits of Malacca, Port Dickson has been recognised by the Islamic Tourism Centre as a destination with considerable potential for Islamic tourism development, owing to its natural resources and existing attractions (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021). Furthermore, Port Dickson is frequently highlighted by Tourism Malaysia and supported by academic research as a significant coastal tourism destination, attracting a large number of domestic and international visitors each year (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). With 18 km of coastline and a 22-kilometer beach road running parallel to the shore, the town boasts from Tanjung Gemuk to Tanjung Tuan, Port Dickson is home to approximately 120,000 residents and has historically been a popular seaside destination for domestic tourists (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021) which connects major cities like Seremban and Melaka, making it easily accessible to domestic and international tourists. The area attracts between 20,000-30,000 visitors on weekends, with numbers reaching 80,000 during public holidays (Abdullah, Ali, Che Rose, Mat Jali, & Awang, 2012). This coastal area presents a unique opportunity to examine how physical environments shape tourist experiences, particularly for Muslim women travellers. Given these characteristics, the

following section will elaborate on the rationale for selecting Port Dickson as the focal case study for this research.

While coastal tourism in Malaysia is often associated with leisure, relaxation, and recreational activities, these environments also reflect broader social and cultural norms that influence how tourists engage with space (Hall, 2001). From a tourist gaze perspective, coastal destinations are not neutral landscapes but are socially constructed spaces where expectations of behaviour, dress, and interaction are embedded (Urry & Larsen, 2011). For Muslim women, these settings may present both opportunities and constraints, particularly in relation to modesty, privacy, and cultural expectations (Battour & Ismail, 2016). This highlights the importance of examining coastal destinations not only as physical environments but also as socially and culturally mediated spaces that shape tourism experiences.

4.3 PORT DICKSON: RATIONALE FOR CASE STUDY SELECTION

Beyond its popularity, Port Dickson represents a typical coastal tourism setting where conventional leisure practices coexist with emerging demands for Muslim-friendly tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Unlike purpose-built Islamic tourism destinations, Port Dickson operates as a mainstream tourism environment, making it an appropriate site to examine how Muslim women navigate, adapt, and interpret coastal spaces that are not exclusively designed to meet their needs. This provides valuable insight into the lived realities of Muslim women tourists and the extent to which existing coastal environments align with their expectations and values (Henderson, 2016).

Port Dickson's significance within Peninsular Malaysia's coastal tourism landscape is evidenced by recent development initiatives and economic indicators. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council's 2024 Economic Impact Research, Malaysia's tourism sector contributed significantly to regional economies, with Port Dickson being identified as a key growth area (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2024). The federal government has recently announced plans to develop a dedicated tourism and service corridor to boost Port Dickson's economic growth, recognising its strategic importance in the region's tourism landscape (The Sun Daily, 2024). The destination's

development is further supported by the implementation of infrastructure upgrades and tourism facilities enhancement (refer Figure 4.1) through the 2024 federal budget allocation (Weekly Echo, 2024). These economic and infrastructural advancements are reflected in the destination's tourism performance and its growing contribution to the state's economy.

According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2023), the destination contributes 12% to Negeri Sembilan's tourism revenue, generating RM 450 million in tourism receipts (2019) and sustaining approximately 15,000 tourism-related employment positions. In accordance, Port Dickson's tourism significance is demonstrated by recent tourism performance data and development initiatives. According to Tourism Malaysia's latest statistics (Tourism Malaysia, 2024), the destination has shown strong recovery in domestic tourism, with hotel occupancy rates reaching 90% during peak seasons. The implementation of 31 strategic tourism projects through the Port Dickson Coastal Special Area Plan (RKK) has enhanced its appeal as a coastal destination (Bernama, 2024). Recent visitor satisfaction surveys conducted by Hanafiah et al., (2021) at major tourist facilities in Port Dickson show consistently positive feedback, particularly among Muslim tourists who appreciate the increasing availability of *halal*-friendly amenities and services. In relation, Port Dickson's coastal area represents a significant tourism destination that warrants comprehensive study, particularly from the Muslim women tourists' perspective. However, alongside these positive developments, Port Dickson also faces environmental pressures that must be addressed to ensure sustainable growth.



Figure 4.1 Infrastructure and Tourism Facilities Enhancement in PD

On the other hand, recent environmental studies by Chew et al. (2024) and Khairul Anuar, Muhammad Zamri, Mohd Yuzaidey, Su Nyun Pau, and Mustaffa (2024) have highlighted the area's ecological significance while facing tourism development pressures. The implementation of 59 development projects through the Port Dickson Coastal Special Area Plan (RKK) 2020-2030 demonstrates the area's strategic

importance in regional tourism development (Malay Mail, 2024). This quantifiable transformation reflects broader trends in Malaysian coastal tourism development, where beaches and islands serve as primary attractions for recreational tourism (Hanafiah et al., 2021). Port Dickson's emergence as a benchmark for Muslim-friendly coastal tourism, while maintaining mainstream appeal, is evidenced by its high visitor satisfaction rates and community support, with research showing positive resident perceptions of tourism development impacts (Hanafiah et al., 2021). The destination's successful integration of religious and cultural considerations alongside conventional beach tourism demonstrates effective market adaptation and sustainable tourism planning. This growth, coupled with the specific needs of Muslim women travellers, makes this research particularly timely and relevant. To further illustrate the town's transformation, it is important to consider recent and ongoing development projects that have shaped Port Dickson's tourism landscape.

Tourism development in Port Dickson has been a focal point for local authorities, with initiatives such as proposals for a smart port, the construction of a RM25 million floating mosque, and the creation of a duty-free zone with a theme park, all aimed at strengthening the town's position as a premier tourist destination (The Sun, 2024b). In addition, major projects like the Lexis Hibiscus 2 resort are projected to attract around 1.1 million tourists annually and generate approximately 5,000 jobs during both the development and operational stages, offering substantial economic benefits to the local community (The Sun, 2024b). These developments are complemented by findings that tourism growth in Port Dickson contributes positively to local employment and income, while also underscoring the importance of community participation and sustainable management to ensure long-term benefits (Hanafiah et al., 2021).

Despite these advancements, Port Dickson has faced challenges, notably environmental concerns stemming from pollution that led to a decline in tourist arrivals in the late 1990s. Efforts have since been made to rejuvenate the town's tourism sector, focusing on sustainable development and environmental conservation (The Edge Malaysia, 2020). Beyond its beaches, Port Dickson offers various attractions, including the Army Museum, ostrich farm, lunar observatory, and the Pengkalan Kempas Historical Complex, which houses ancient megaliths and a 15th-century Islamic tomb

(Negeri Sembilan State Government, 2023). These sites contribute to the town's cultural richness and diversify its tourism offerings. In summary, Port Dickson's evolution from a colonial port to a modern tourist destination underscores its historical significance and economic potential. Continued emphasis on sustainable tourism development and environmental stewardship will be crucial in maintaining its status as a cherished coastal town in Malaysia. Given the centrality of the natural environment to tourism, it is essential to recognise how increased visitation impacts both infrastructure and local ecosystems.

The tourism industry fundamentally relies on the natural environment as its resource base. The increase in tourist arrivals has correspondingly increased demand for related services including transportation, accommodation, food, recreational facilities, and amenities like toilets and changing rooms (see Figure 4.2). Meeting these infrastructure needs can significantly alter the visitor experience for better or worse and may adversely impact local ecosystems. With these considerations in mind, the following section details why Port Dickson was selected as the research setting for this study.



Figure 4.2 Toilets and Changing Rooms in PD

4.3.1 Port Dickson as Research Setting

Port Dickson, situated in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, approximately 60 kilometers from Kuala Lumpur, constitutes the primary research setting for this investigation. The destination recorded 3.8 million tourist arrivals in 2019, with domestic tourists comprising 80% of visitors (Tourism Malaysia, 2020). Its physical geography encompasses an 18-kilometer coastline featuring 12 major beaches (refer Figure 4.3 & Figure 4.4), including the prominent locations of Teluk Kemang, Blue Lagoon, and Tanjung Tuan, supported by over 40 registered accommodation providers ranging from budget hotels to luxury resorts (Port Dickson Municipal Council, 2023).

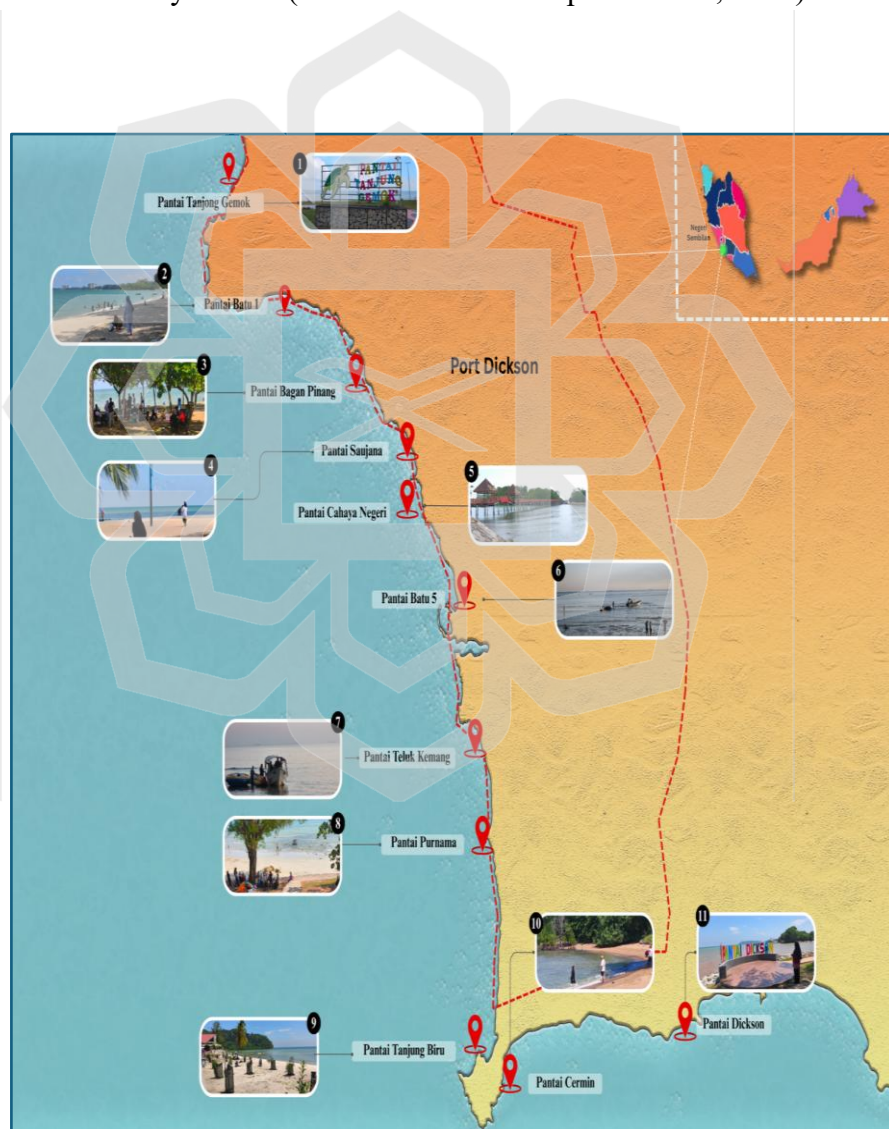


Figure 4.3 Map of Port Dickson's Coastal Area



Figure 4.4 Selected Main Beaches of Port Dickson

In accordance, Port Dickson, was chosen as the study area due to its relevance as a coastal tourism destination frequently visited by domestic travellers. Based on tourism data from 2020, Port Dickson was identified as the top tourist attraction in its state, particularly known for its beach-related offerings, which positions it among the notable beach and coastal sites in Malaysia (Tourism Malaysia, 2021). In comparison with other locations, Negeri Sembilan recorded significant tourist interest in coastal experiences, highlighting its potential for focused research on tourism development (as shown in Table 4.1 below). Understanding the motivations behind travel to Port Dickson further clarifies its role as a leisure-oriented destination.

Table 4.1 Main Destination Visited by Tourist Year 2020

STATE	BEACH / COASTAL	SHOPPING	HILLS	GALLERY / MUSEUM	THEME PARK	CITY	1 st TOP DESTINATION
Perlis	2	1	1		1		Kuala Perlis
Kedah	1	1	2			1	Langkawi
Pulau Pinang	2	1	1		1		Bukit Bendera
Perak	2		1	1		1	Durio Tourism Mardi
Selangor	2	1			2		Zoo Negara
Negeri Sembilan	1	2		1	1		Port Dickson
Melaka	1			1	2	1	Melaka River Cruise
Johor	5						Desaru
Pahang	1		3		1		Cameron Highland
Terengganu	1	2		2			Pasar Besar Kedai Payang
Kelantan	2	2		1			Pasar Siti Khadijah
	20	10	8	6	8	3	

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021)

In addition, as indicated in Table 4.2, the primary motivation for travel to Port Dickson was to visit relatives and friends, accounting for 62.8% of the trips. This was followed by leisure and relaxation at 34.9%, indicating that holidaymaking remains a key driver for tourism in the area. These statistics suggest a dual purpose for visits, social and recreational, which reflects a practical balance between personal and tourism-related activities. The minimal percentage of travel attributed to business or incentives

supports the interpretation that Port Dickson serves primarily as a leisure-oriented destination. Given its strong appeal for leisure and social travel, Port Dickson provides an ideal context for examining Muslim-friendly tourism, particularly as it relates to the experiences of Muslim women.

Table 4.2 Main Purposes of trips for Tourist 2020

	1	2	3
Kedah - Langkawi	Visiting Relatives & Friends (66.5%)	Holiday/Leisure/ Relaxation (29.4.9%)	Official Business/ education (2.2%)
Negeri Sembilan - Port Dickson	Visiting Relatives & Friends (62.8%)	Holiday/Leisure /Relaxation (34.9%)	Incentive Travel/Others (1.9%)
Johor - Desaru	Visiting Relatives & Friends (75.4.8%)	Holiday/Leisure /Relaxation (18.0%)	Incentive Travel/Others (3.5%)

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021)

Given its popularity and the strong presence of domestic tourism patterns, Port Dickson provides a suitable context for examining themes such as Muslim-friendly tourism, particularly along Malaysia's coastal regions. Its inclusion as a prominent destination in both tourism volume and purpose highlights its relevance for research into sustainable and culturally responsive tourism strategies. Of particular interest is the destination's growing appeal to Muslim women tourists, a trend that aligns with broader shifts in the global *halal* tourism sector.

The destination's appeal to Muslim women tourists on the other hand, is particularly noteworthy, aligning with the growing trend in Muslim-friendly tourism. According to Crescent Rating (2024), the Global Muslim Travel Index 2024 emphasises the increasing focus on destinations that cater specifically to Muslim women's needs, prioritising safety, privacy, accessibility, and a welcoming environment. Yaqub (2024) notes that the *halal* tourism sector is experiencing significant growth, with destinations developing specialised infrastructure and services to accommodate Muslim travellers' requirements.

The destination's Muslim-friendly infrastructure, as documented by the Islamic Tourism Centre Malaysia (2023), demonstrates systematic integration of religious facilities within its tourism framework, comprising *halal*-certified restaurants, mosques and suraus strategically positioned within tourist zones, and major beachfront resorts equipped with Muslim-friendly amenities. The provision of dedicated prayer rooms (refer Figure 4.5), across public beaches further exemplifies the destination's commitment to accommodating religious requirements while maintaining its mainstream coastal tourism appeal (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021).

This methodologically significant transformation from a historical port town to a contemporary tourist destination has created a sophisticated tourism ecosystem that merges modern infrastructure with traditional cultural elements (Hanafiah et al., 2021). The coexistence of purpose-built Muslim-friendly facilities alongside conventional tourism amenities provides an optimal research environment for examining the construction and manifestation of the Muslim female tourist gaze within these differentiated spaces. To fully appreciate Port Dickson's development, it is necessary to examine its tourism infrastructure and the environmental challenges it faces.

In addition to these physical and policy developments, the perspectives of key stakeholders further highlight Port Dickson's strategic importance as a tourism destination. Local authorities in Negeri Sembilan, including the Port Dickson Municipal Council have consistently highlighted Port Dickson's strategic location and accessibility as key factors in its tourism development. The town's proximity to major urban centres such as Kuala Lumpur and Seremban, as well as its direct road links and public transport options, make it a preferred destination for both short-term and extended visits. Government planning documents and recent policy statements emphasize that ongoing infrastructure improvements such as road upgrades, enhanced public amenities, and the development of new tourism corridors are intended to support sustainable growth and attract a wider range of visitors (Port Dickson Municipal Council, 2023; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia, 2024). Local government representatives also point to the area's natural assets, including its beaches and forest reserves, as important resources that require careful management to balance economic benefits with environmental protection (Bernama, 2024).

Tourism operators and community leaders in Port Dickson generally view the destination's Muslim-friendly positioning as a competitive advantage in the national and regional tourism market. Many resort managers and business owners have adopted *halal* certification, family-oriented services, and religious facilities to meet the needs of Muslim travellers, in line with national strategies for Islamic tourism (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2023). Community organisations have also supported initiatives that promote local culture and environmental stewardship, recognising that these efforts can enhance visitor satisfaction and encourage repeat tourism. Stakeholders agree that collaboration between the public and private sectors is essential for maintaining Port Dickson's appeal, especially as the destination faces challenges related to environmental sustainability and the diversification of tourism products (Hanafiah et al., 2021; The Sun Daily, 2024).

4.3.2 Port Dickson's Tourism Infrastructure & Environmental Challenges

Tourism destination attractiveness stems from the synergistic interaction between natural and built environments, as evidenced in Port Dickson's development as a prominent Malaysian coastal resort town (Rahman et al., 2021). The amalgamation of pristine beaches stretching 18 kilometers along the Strait of Malacca with strategically developed infrastructure has positioned Port Dickson as a significant weekend destination, particularly for visitors from Kuala Lumpur and Singapore.

The accommodation sector plays a pivotal role in Port Dickson's tourism ecosystem, with numerous hotels and resorts catering to a wide range of market segments (Hanafiah et al., 2021). These facilities span from luxury beach resorts to more budget-friendly options, reflecting the destination's ability to accommodate diverse tourist preferences and economic backgrounds. In recent years, several resorts in Port Dickson have shifted their focus to the Muslim-friendly tourism segment. For instance, Klana Beach Resort Port Dickson is recognised for its Muslim-friendly amenities, such as separate swimming pools for women (refer Figure 4.6), *halal*-certified dining (refer Figure 4.7), prayer mats and garments in rooms, and a strict no-alcohol policy. The resort actively promotes itself as a family-friendly and Islamic-compliant destination, making it especially attractive to Muslim travellers (Klana Beach

Resort Port Dickson, 2025). Additionally, prominent resorts like Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson and Grand Lexis Port Dickson regularly organize Ramadan and *Aidilfitri* events, offer *halal* food options, and cater to the specific needs of Muslim guests, further supporting the shift towards Muslim-friendly tourism in the area (Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson, 2025; Grand Lexis Port Dickson, 2025). This shift is part of a broader national trend, as hotels and resorts across Malaysia increasingly adopt Muslim-friendly practices.



Figure 4.5 Prayer Room



Figure 4.6 Swimming Pool for Women only



Figure 4.7 *Halal Restaurant*

This trend towards Muslim-friendly tourism is part of a broader movement observed across Malaysia. A recent study by Mazlan, Izham, & Ahmadun (2023) explores the broader issues and challenges faced by Muslim-friendly hotels as Islamic tourism products in the country. Although the research does not specifically mention Port Dickson, it provides valuable insights into how hotels and resorts in Malaysia, including those in popular coastal destinations, are increasingly adopting Muslim-friendly practices to meet the growing demand from Muslim tourists. In line with these developments, research by Amin, Yahya, Ismayatim, Nasharuddin, and Kassim (2013) highlights that the quality and variety of accommodation significantly influence tourist satisfaction and the likelihood of return visits, underscoring the importance of continuous improvement and diversification within the accommodation sector.

Transportation infrastructure and accessibility on the other hand, emerge as crucial factors in Port Dickson's tourism development. Studies highlight the importance of well-maintained road networks connecting major urban centres to tourism destinations (Lee & Tan, 2019). Port Dickson's strategic location, approximately 90 kilometers from Kuala Lumpur International Airport, coupled with efficient public

transportation systems, facilitates seamless tourist mobility and enhances the destination's appeal.

Cultural and historical attractions contribute substantially to Port Dickson's tourism portfolio. The Lukut Museum and Fort, dating back to the 19th century, provides historical context to the region's tin-mining heritage. Tanjung Tuan (refer Figure 4.8), also known as Cape Rachado, serves dual purposes as a historical lighthouse location and an important stopover for migratory birds, attracting both history enthusiasts and nature lovers (Wong & Ibrahim, 2022).



Figure 4.8 Taman Eko Rimba, Tanjung Tuan

Recreational activities and facilities demonstrate Port Dickson's evolution as a comprehensive tourist destination (refer Figure 4.9). The establishment of Dataran Seri Kemang as a central tourism hub, featuring an information centre and recreational facilities, reflects strategic planning in tourism infrastructure development. Water-based activities, including jet skiing, sailing, and kayaking, capitalise on the natural coastal resources while providing economic opportunities for local operators (Hashim et al., 2021).

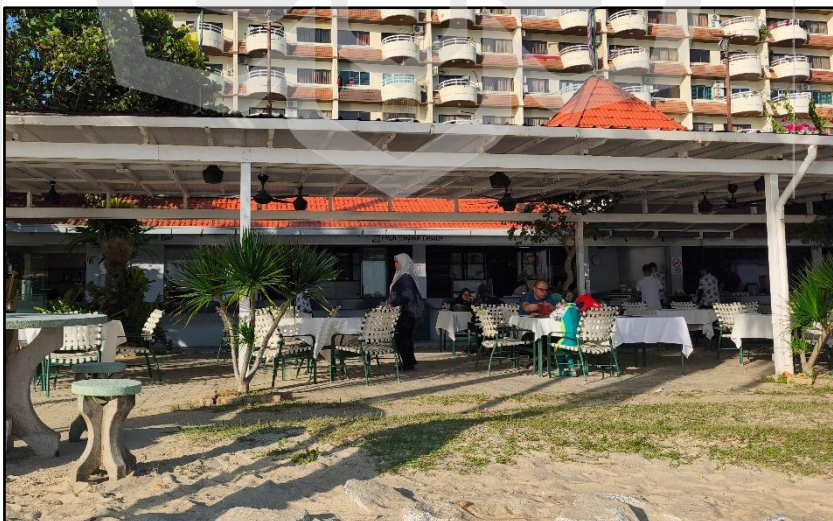


Figure 4.9 Recreational Activities and Facilities in Port Dickson (camping, water sports & family areas)

In relation, Port Dickson possesses several assets that make it suitable for Islamic tourism development that enhance its appeal as a Muslim-friendly destination. The area features a distinctive trail of mosques, including Masjid Qariah Lukut, Masjid Jamek Abdullah Sijang, Masjid Jamek Pasir Panjang, and Masjid Kariah Telok Kemang (refer Figure 4.10), which not only provide essential prayer facilities for Muslim travellers but also create opportunities for mosque tourism experiences (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021). Additionally, the Baitul Hilal Complex (refer Figure 4.11), also known as Teluk Kemang Observatory, serves dual purposes as a significant religious landmark for determining the beginning of Ramadan and as an educational centre for astronomy, thereby creating unique opportunities for astro-tourism that aligns perfectly with Islamic principles emphasising knowledge acquisition and scientific exploration.



Figure 4.10 Mosques in Port Dickson



Figure 4.11 Baitul Hilal Complex

Complementing these cultural and educational attractions is the Sungai Menyala Edu-Ecotourism Centre (refer Figure 4.12), situated within the expansive 1,280-hectare Sungai Menyala Forest Reserve, which offers immersive nature-based tourism experiences that highlight environmental stewardship a core value consistent with Islamic principles of responsible custodianship of natural resources and environmental conservation (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2021). Having established Port Dickson's strengths and assets, it is instructive to compare its development with other leading Malaysian coastal destinations.



Figure 4.12 Sungai Menyala Edu-Ecotourism Centre and Forest Reserve

4.4 COMPARATIVE CONTEXT: PORT DICKSON AND OTHER MALAYSIAN COASTAL DESTINATIONS

Malaysia has experienced one of the highest growth rates in coastal tourism in Southeast Asia, with destinations like Port Dickson, Langkawi, and Penang at the forefront of this expansion (Hanafiah et al., 2021). Recent development initiatives in Port Dickson, such as the Port Dickson Coastal Special Area Plan (RKK), propose 59 projects aimed at transforming the area into an international coastal tourism destination (Malay Mail, 2024). These projects are categorised into strategic, main, and support projects, and are being implemented in phases through 2030. Additionally, collaboration between the federal and Negeri Sembilan state governments seeks to establish a tourism and service economic corridor to attract large-scale foreign investment and create world-class facilities (The Sun, 2024). While these efforts are ambitious, a critical comparison with other destinations reveals both strengths and areas for improvement in Port Dickson's approach to Muslim-friendly tourism. To better understand Port Dickson's position, it is useful to compare its Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives with those of Langkawi, Malaysia's flagship destination in this segment.

Compared to Langkawi, which is widely recognised as Malaysia's flagship for Muslim-friendly tourism, Port Dickson is still in the process of building its reputation and infrastructure. Langkawi has long benefited from a well-established ecosystem that includes *halal*-certified hotels and restaurants, dedicated prayer facilities, and a robust marketing strategy targeting Muslim travellers from the Middle East and Southeast Asia (UNWTO, 2023). The island's status as a UNESCO Global Geopark further enhances its appeal, combining environmental conservation with cultural and religious inclusivity. In contrast, Port Dickson's Muslim-friendly initiatives, while supported by national strategies through the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture (MOTAC) and the Islamic Tourism Centre, are relatively recent and more limited in scope (MOTAC, 2024). Although Port Dickson has been included in familiarisation trips and promotional campaigns, the integration of Muslim-friendly facilities such as *halal* food outlets, prayer spaces, and Muslim-friendly accommodations remains less comprehensive than in Langkawi. This gap suggests that Port Dickson must accelerate its efforts to achieve parity with more established destinations. Beyond Malaysia,

international comparisons can also provide valuable insights into how Port Dickson might further develop its Muslim-friendly tourism offerings.

Internationally, Phuket in Thailand offers an instructive comparison. Traditionally known for its vibrant nightlife and secular tourism appeal, Phuket has recently begun to tap into the Muslim travel market by introducing *halal*-certified hotels, Muslim-friendly tour packages, and prayer facilities, particularly in response to growing arrivals from Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Middle East (*HalalTrip*, 2025). However, Phuket's efforts are often seen as more commercially driven and less integrated into broader sustainability or community engagement frameworks. In this regard, Port Dickson has an opportunity to differentiate itself by embedding Muslim-friendly tourism within a holistic, sustainable development strategy that also prioritises environmental protection and local community benefits (Bernama, 2024). Despite these opportunities, Port Dickson must also address several persistent challenges to fully realise its potential as a leading Muslim-friendly coastal destination.

Despite these opportunities, Port Dickson faces several challenges. The destination must overcome legacy issues such as inconsistent environmental management, limited international branding, and the need for greater stakeholder coordination. Lessons from Langkawi and Phuket highlight the importance of not only providing physical infrastructure but also fostering a welcoming environment through staff training, community involvement, and targeted marketing. Ultimately, Port Dickson's success in the Muslim-friendly tourism segment will depend on its ability to learn from these benchmarks, address its current gaps, and position itself as a distinctive, sustainable, and inclusive coastal destination (Hanafiah et al., 2021; MOTAC, 2024; *HalalTrip*, 2025). With these comparative insights in mind, the following section explores the specific challenges and opportunities that Port Dickson faces in developing Muslim-friendly coastal tourism.

4.5 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVELOPING MUSLIM-FRIENDLY COASTAL TOURISM

As Malaysia continues to consolidate its position as a leading global destination for Islamic tourism, Port Dickson emerges as a significant case study for understanding the challenges and opportunities inherent in developing Muslim-friendly coastal tourism. The town's trajectory offers insights into how coastal destinations can strategically integrate Muslim-friendly principles into tourism planning and management while navigating environmental, infrastructural, and stakeholder-related complexities. Port Dickson's recent efforts to implement Muslim-friendly facilities illustrate both the progress made and the market demand for such offerings.

Port Dickson has implemented a range of Muslim-friendly facilities that reflect both cultural sensitivity and market demand. These include *halal*-certified dining establishments, gender-segregated swimming pools, dedicated prayer amenities, and a strict no-alcohol policy. Such provisions are further supported by targeted marketing campaigns and the integration of religious events into tourism calendars, effectively aligning tourism offerings with Muslim travellers' needs and preferences (Klana Beach Resort Port Dickson, 2025; Lexis Hibiscus Port Dickson, 2025; Grand Lexis Port Dickson, 2025; Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023; Mazlan et al., 2023). Collaboration with the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC) and the incorporation of ongoing research and visitor feedback have been instrumental in positioning Port Dickson as a model for Muslim-friendly tourism development in Malaysia. However, the expansion of tourism infrastructure and services has also brought environmental sustainability to the forefront of local challenges.

While these achievements underscore significant opportunities for market differentiation, recent studies reveal that environmental sustainability presents a pressing challenge. Chew et al. (2024) conducted a preliminary observational study across four key beaches, Pantai Cermin, Tanjung Biru, Teluk Kemang, and Pantai Purnama, identifying 14 outfalls, some of which discharged visibly dark water directly onto the beaches. The presence of plastic debris and signs of eutrophication in several outfalls point to underlying coastal water quality issues that risk undermining the tourist experience. The Department of Environment attributes these issues to land-based

sources, including agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, and untreated sewage. Coastal settlements and industrial activities contribute to increased suspended solids in the water, while rainfall and stormwater runoff accelerate pollutant inflow through drainage systems. In response to these environmental concerns, collaborative conservation initiatives have begun to emerge, linking tourism with ecological stewardship.

In response, there have been emerging efforts to integrate environmental conservation into tourism management. A notable initiative in August 2023 involved Tourism Malaysia's participation in turtle conservation programmes along Port Dickson's beaches. This initiative illustrates how environmental preservation and tourism can intersect productively, with conservation activities not only protect marine biodiversity but also offer educational experiences that enhance the destination's appeal to environmentally conscious travellers. Such initiatives also present opportunities to align sustainable practices with Muslim-friendly values, which emphasise environmental stewardship (*khalifah*) as part of religious duty. Nevertheless, the long-term success of these initiatives depends on effective collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the long-term viability of these initiatives depends on sustained, multi-stakeholder collaboration. Effective engagement among government bodies, tourism operators, environmental agencies, and local communities is essential to balance diverse interests, ranging from ecological protection to catering for the specific needs of Muslim visitors (Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia [MOTAC], 2024). Port Dickson's development strategy thus requires an integrative approach that merges environmental conservation principles with Muslim-friendly tourism standards, positioning the destination as a distinctive model among coastal competitors (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2024). Governance structures in accordance, play a pivotal role in ensuring that these integrative strategies are effectively implemented and monitored.

Recent literature has highlighted that sustainable tourism development must balance the preservation of natural resources with the facilitation of tourism growth (Chen & Muhammad, 2023). In this context, the Port Dickson Municipal Council (MPPD) plays a pivotal role in regulating tourism activities, maintaining environmental

quality standards, and ensuring that development aligns with both economic and sustainability objectives. Such governance structures are critical in operationalising policy goals and ensuring stakeholder accountability.

The assessment of Port Dickson's tourism success involves a blend of quantitative and qualitative indicators. Quantitatively, metrics such as annual tourist arrivals, average length of stay, hotel occupancy rates, and tourism-generated revenue offer a clear picture of economic performance (Tourism Malaysia, 2023). Qualitatively, visitor satisfaction surveys and repeat visitation rates serve as proxies for destination quality and brand loyalty (Amin et al., 2013). Further, the diversity and quality of tourism products, the effectiveness of marketing campaigns, and the degree of stakeholder collaboration are increasingly recognised as important measures (UNWTO, 2022). In recent years, the inclusion of sustainability-oriented indicators such as environmental conservation outcomes, community engagement, and adherence to Muslim-friendly tourism guidelines has become integral to evaluating long-term viability (Mazlan et al., 2023; Islamic Tourism Centre, 2023). Taken together, these factors present Port Dickson as a multifaceted destination with both significant strengths and ongoing challenges.

The synthesis of available literature presents Port Dickson as a multifaceted tourism destination that leverages its natural coastal environment, historical significance, and modern infrastructure. Its strategic advantages lie in its targeted provision of Muslim-friendly facilities, its capacity for event-based tourism, and its growing alignment with sustainability practices. However, its continued success will depend on addressing environmental challenges, managing coastal carrying capacity, and fostering a governance culture that prioritises both cultural sensitivity and ecological integrity. To conceptualise these interrelated dynamics, Figure 4.13 summarises the core challenges and opportunities facing Port Dickson's Muslim-friendly coastal tourism development. The figure outlines four core opportunity domains; Muslim-friendly infrastructure, targeted marketing, stakeholder collaboration, and environmental initiatives which set against four corresponding challenges such as coastal pollution, infrastructural strain, stakeholder coordination complexity, and balancing growth with sustainability. This integrated framework provides a basis for

understanding the destination's strategic positioning and will inform the analytical lens of this study in subsequent chapters.

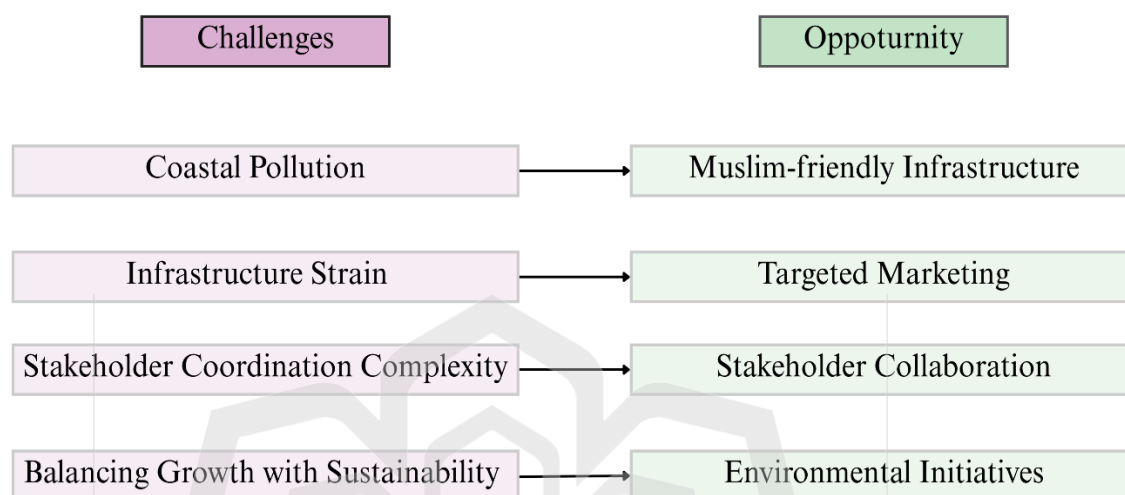


Figure 4.13 Challenges & Opportunities in Developing Muslim-friendly Coastal Tourism

Having outlined the main challenges and opportunities, the following conclusion synthesises the key findings of this chapter and highlights directions for future research. While Port Dickson has its own unique features such as its accessibility, established infrastructure, and proactive government support, many of the insights gained from this case study may be relevant to other coastal destinations with similar characteristics. The strategies and experiences observed here can offer useful guidance for locations aiming to develop Muslim-friendly tourism, especially in contexts where there is a focus on infrastructure development and cultural inclusivity. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that some findings may be shaped by local factors specific to Port Dickson. As with any case study, careful attention should be given when applying these conclusions to destinations with different social, economic, or environmental backgrounds (Yin, 2018; Hanafiah et al., 2021). This approach allows the research to contribute both to localised understanding and to broader discussions on Muslim-friendly tourism development. To provide a concise overview of the main reasons for selecting Port Dickson as the case study site, the following Table 4.3 summarizes the key factors

identified throughout this chapter. These criteria reflect both the unique attributes of Port Dickson and their relevance to the research focus on Muslim-friendly coastal tourism.

Table 4.3 Summary of Key Factors Supporting the Selection of Port Dickson as the Case Study Site

Criteria	Port Dickson's Attributes	Relevance to Research Focus
Strategic Location	Close to Kuala Lumpur and major highways; easy access for domestic and international tourists	Facilitates high tourist volume and diverse visitors
Established Infrastructure	Wide range of accommodations, transport, and public amenities	Supports study of tourist experiences and facilities
Muslim-friendly Initiatives	<i>Halal</i> -certified hotels, prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities	Directly aligns with focus on Muslim women's tourism
Government Support	Recognised in national tourism plans; ongoing investment in tourism development	Ensures sustainability and policy relevance
Cultural & Natural Assets	Beaches, mosques, eco-tourism sites, historical attractions	Enables exploration of both leisure and religious needs
Stakeholder Engagement	Active involvement of local authorities, businesses, and community groups	Provides access to multiple perspectives
Environmental Challenges	Facing issues of sustainability, pollution, and carrying capacity	Allows study of tourism-environment interactions

Criteria	Port Dickson's Attributes	Relevance to Research Focus
Comparative Value	Shares features with other Malaysian and regional coastal destinations	Offers lessons transferable to similar contexts

In addition to the summary table, a conceptual map (Figure 4.14) is presented below to visually synthesise the interrelated factors that make Port Dickson an ideal location for this research. This map highlights how strategic location, infrastructure, policy support, and other elements collectively contribute to the destination's suitability.

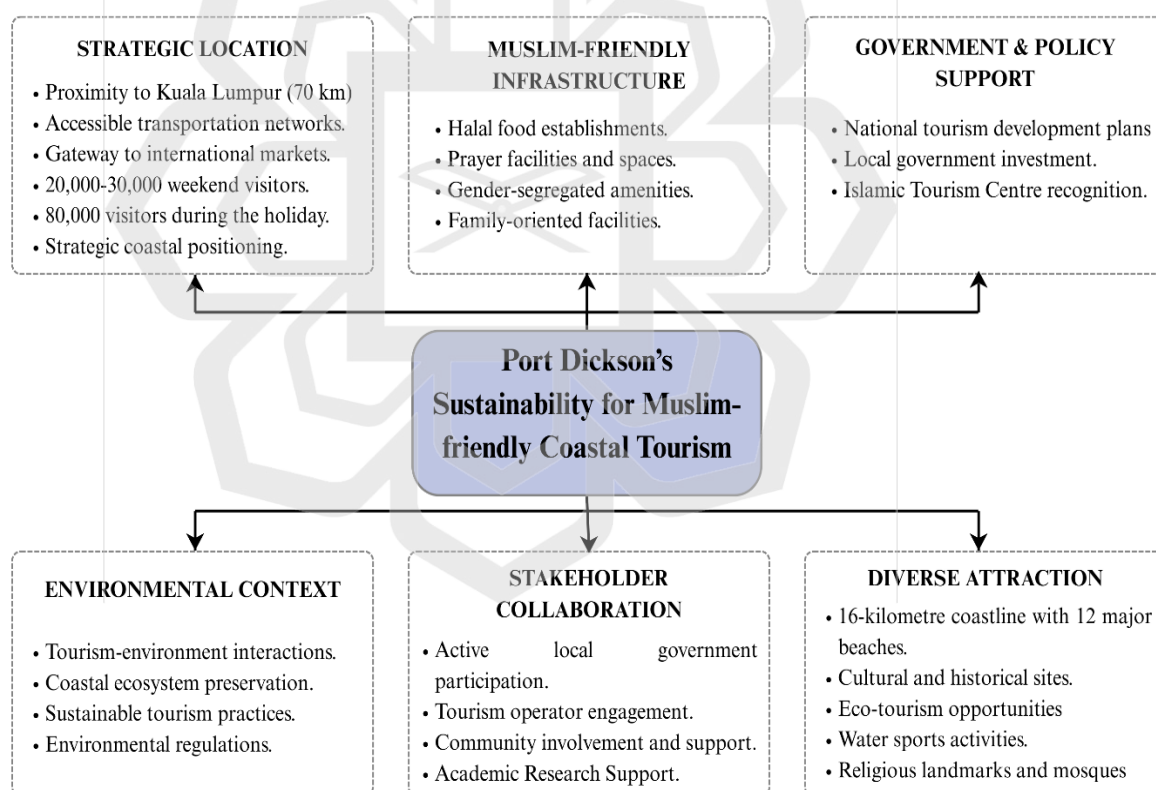


Figure 4.14 Conceptual Map of Port Dickson's Suitability for Muslim-friendly Coastal Tourism Research

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Port Dickson represents a significant coastal tourism destination in Malaysia with both environmental challenges and opportunities for inclusive tourism development. The area's natural beauty and tourism infrastructure attract diverse visitors, including Muslim women travellers whose experiences are shaped by unique religious and cultural factors.

As Malaysia continues to position itself as a leading Muslim-friendly tourism destination, understanding the specific needs and perceptions of Muslim women tourists becomes increasingly important. Future research should focus on how environmental conditions in coastal areas like Port Dickson affect the experiences of different tourist segments, particularly Muslim women, and how tourism development can balance economic benefits with environmental sustainability.

The tourist gaze theory provides a valuable framework for examining how tourists perceive and interact with destinations, but it must be expanded to account for the diverse perspectives of travellers from different cultural and religious backgrounds. By understanding the multifaceted nature of Muslim women's tourist experiences, destinations like Port Dickson can develop more inclusive and sustainable tourism strategies.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the key findings from interviews with tourists and stakeholders regarding Muslim women's tourism experiences at coastal destinations. The findings are organised according to the study's three research objectives and are presented through the lens of Tourist Gaze theory, which provides insights into how Muslim women construct their understanding of coastal destinations. This theoretical perspective helps categorise the experiences into self-oriented, destination-oriented, and social-oriented dimensions. The chapter first presents findings from tourist interviews, followed by stakeholder perspectives, with themes mapped to these research objectives. After analysing the transcribed interviews, a list of codes was recognised which were further grouped into sub-categories and finally into themes (see table 5.1 below). In total, fifteen (15) tourists were interviewed for this study and ten (10) stakeholders from various departments and agencies involved in the tourism industry particularly in Port Dickson (PD). Building on these thematic categories, the chapter goes beyond descriptive reporting by interpreting how the identified themes reflect deeper cultural, religious, and gendered dimensions of Muslim women's tourism experiences. The analysis focuses not only on what participants expressed, but also on why these patterns emerge and how they contribute to understanding the Muslim women tourist gaze in coastal contexts.

5.2 MUSLIM WOMEN AS A DISTINCT MARKET SEGMENT

This section addresses the research objectives by examining how Muslim women's distinct needs and preferences influence their behaviour towards coastal destinations. Table 5.1 in accordance, demonstrates the alignment between the research objectives and the dimensions of the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze (MWTG) conceptual

framework. The integration demonstrates how each objective is operationalised through relevant dimensions, themes, and codes. For example, behaviours of Muslim women tourists are linked to Tourist/Self-Oriented dimensions, such as religion and self-identity, which shape their preferences for *halal* facilities, privacy, and family-oriented recreational activities.

Table 5.1 Alignment of Research Objectives with the MWTG Conceptual Framework.

Objectives	Tourist Gaze Dimensions	Themes	Codes
To explore women's perceptions towards coastal destination	Tourist / Self-Oriented	Muslim-Friendly Environment	Privacy
			Safety
			Halal Food Availability
			Islamic Values & Culture
		Recreational Activities	Beach Activities
			Water Sports
			Camping
			Family Gatherings
To identify Muslim women's expectations towards coastal destination	Destination / Other-Oriented	Accessibility	Highway Connectivity
			Public Transport Availability
			Parking
		Facilities	Cleanliness
			Public Toilets
			Changing Rooms
			Prayer Facilities
	Tourist / Self-Oriented	Spiritual Experience	Divine Connection
			Gratitude
			Faith/Religious Conviction
			Self-reflection
			Spiritual Peace/Tranquillity

To determine the overall travel experiences of Muslim women in coastal destination	Destination / Other-Oriented;	Environmental Concerns	Clean Beach
			Preservation Efforts
			Greenery
	Social / Interpersonal- Oriented	Tourists' Perceptions	Relaxation
			Safety
			Moderate Expectations
			Potential Improvements
			Spiritual Contemplation
			Divine Appreciation

The survey data encompasses 15 tourists (T1-T15) interviewed across five different beach locations, revealing significant patterns in visitor demographics and travel behaviours (see Table 5.2). The age distribution ranges from 21 to 55 years, with most participants falling between 35-50 years old, suggesting these coastal destinations primarily attract middle-aged visitors rather than younger demographics. Geographically, domestic tourism dominates the sample, with Selangor state contributing the highest number of visitors (8 tourists, representing 53% of total), followed by Johor with 3 visitors. Other Malaysian states including Negeri Sembilan, Perak, and Terengganu each contributed single visitors, while one international tourist from Syria was also recorded. Among the five beach destinations studied, Pantai Tanjung Biru received the most visitors (4 tourists), while Pantai Teluk Kemang and both Pantai Batu 5 and Pantai Cahaya Negeri each attracted 3 visitors, with Pantai Dickson having only one recorded visitor.

Regarding travel motivations, the data shows that leisure purposes drive most visits, with 12 out of 15 tourists (80%) stating "Holiday" as their primary reason for travel. Two participants combined business activities with leisure, indicating "Holiday/Work" motivations, while family-oriented travel was evident in cases where visitors mentioned traveling "Holiday with siblings" or "Holiday with family." This pattern suggests these beach destinations function effectively as recreational venues that appeal particularly to domestic middle-aged tourists seeking relaxation experiences. The geographic concentration of visitors from Selangor indicates strong regional preference for these coastal areas, while the distribution across multiple beach locations

demonstrates varied tourist interests, though some destinations like Pantai Tanjung Biru show stronger drawing power compared to others in attracting visitors.

Table 5.2 The Profiles of Participants Interviewed

Tourist ID	Age	From	Interview Location	Travel Motivation
T1	37	Johor	Pantai Tanjung Gemok	Holiday
T2	48	Selangor	Pantai Tanjung Biru	Holiday with siblings
T3	41	Selangor	Pantai Tanjung Biru	Holiday
T4	44	Negeri Sembilan	Pantai Teluk Kemang	Holiday with family
T5	38	Selangor	Pantai Teluk Kemang	Holiday
T6	42	Selangor	Pantai Teluk Kemang	Holiday
T7	50	Johor	Pantai Batu 5	Holiday/Work
T8	45	Johor	Pantai Batu 5	Holiday
T9	55	Syria	Pantai Batu 5	Holiday
T10	37	Perak	Pantai Cahaya Negeri	Holiday
T11	35	Terengganu	Pantai Cahaya Negeri	Holiday
T12	27	Selangor	Pantai Cahaya Negeri	Holiday
T13	44	Selangor	Pantai Dickson	Holiday
T14	21	Selangor	Pantai Tanjung Biru	Holiday/Work
T15	23	Selangor	Pantai Tanjung Biru	Holiday

5.2.1 Muslim-Friendly Environment

This theme underscores how Port Dickson (PD) is perceived and experienced through a distinctly Muslim-friendly lens where privacy, safety, *halal* assurance, and cultural comfort shape what Muslim women value in a coastal holiday. According to respondents T1 and T11, the appeal of PD lies not only in proximity and natural ambience but also in the social environment “kampung vibes,” modest public comportment, and a relative absence of “extra sexy” attire making it acceptable for families and Muslim women to feel at ease. As highlighted by respondent T11,

"Actually yeah, when I go to PD, I feel still like nature of kampung (village). I think I'm safe. And I would say no extra sexy people. So, I think should be okay. Good exposure for the kids and here, the beach can be accepted from Muslim Women view."

Privacy is a key aspect of a Muslim-friendly environment. Many Muslim tourists, especially women and families, value spaces that allow them to enjoy recreational activities without compromising their cultural or religious modesty. As one of the respondents expressed (T5),

"For me, if they make the pool more enclosed, I would like that. I mean not too open, separated and sheltered. Have some distance between men and women."

This includes the provision of separate areas or time slots for women and children at beaches or water sports facilities, allowing them to engage freely in leisure activities.

"As women at the beach, our main concern is men's gazes. We want to feel safe and respected in that area."(T4)

Respondents T2 and T7 noted that women appreciate spatial arrangements that protect modesty without stigmatising participation. As observed by respondent T7, PD's beaches are often “*not the type that suddenly drop off*,” which makes mothers more confident to let children play near the water. Yet privacy extends beyond water

depth to bodily comfort and dignity: changing rooms that are sufficiently roomy and clean, and where women can prepare without feeling rushed or exposed, matter greatly (T2, T5, T4).

Both T7 and T11 emphasized that semi-enclosed or separated facilities can serve as a powerful signal that women's needs are intentionally accommodated. As specifically mentioned by respondent T11:

“Try to make partition whereby this area for women only... it can be an attraction for the niche market... like you go to Zumba, it's for women only. It's more comfortable, and if tourist [is] more comfortable, they will repeat.”

Respondents T2 and T5 underlined the value of designated activity zones. T2 suggested

“Women and kid's sections for water-based play, so women who want to swim or wade can do so more privately.”

She continued:

“Sometimes many women don't want to swim at the beach because they feel shy... even if there's a small fee, I think people would be willing to pay.”

Respondent T5 added that the predominance of male beach operators can create awkwardness for some activities (e.g., parasailing), proposing training and hiring more female operators and lifeguards to better serve Muslim women. Respondent T4 on the other hand, highlighted how private-beach hotels make privacy feasible in practice:

“If there's a private beach, gatherings like this become more meaningful because it's just among your group without mixing with outsiders.”

The same respondent stressed how a private, well-managed setting supports women's comfort: towels, nearby changing facilities, and reduced crowding translate into less exposure and more ease in movement.

According to respondents T2 and T11, privacy is also about emotional comfort, a setting where women are not constantly negotiating gaze or mixed-gender proximity enables relaxation and authentic enjoyment. Few other respondents spoke directly about this:

“I can be myself, more relaxed... I don’t get really have to act and be more attractive something that is not our culture.” (T11)

“The area isn’t too open. We also need to guard our interactions... and our clothing, right.” (T7)

“A private beach... aurat is preserved... rather than at a public place after you’ve been swimming, you have to walk... to get to the changing room.” (T4)

Safety is another critical component. Muslim tourists, like all visitors, prioritise destinations where they feel secure. security measures, such as patrolling personnel and well-lit public areas, contribute to this sense of safety. Both respondents (T3 and T10) emphasized safety as central ranging from protection from harassment to practical security measures like patrols, lighting, and CCTV. Respondent T3 called for stronger enforcement (e.g., on alcohol littering and respectful dress at public pools), deriving safety from social cues and rules that uphold public decency. A respondent from Selangor (T3) expressed:

“The authorities should conduct regular patrols and install CCTV in public areas.”

As highlighted by respondents T6 and T7, a sense of safety is tied to crowd type and density. T6 contrasted private or hotel managed beaches (calmer, fewer incidents) with crowded public stretches where theft or discomfort is more likely. Respondent T10 linked safety with social recognition and respect:

“As Muslims we feel safe. Praise be to God, the environment in Malaysia still respects Muslim women.”

Respondent T11 explicitly connected safety and comfort to engagement:

“If the place is safe and comfortable like prayers place comfortable with air-conditioning, good accessibility... Comfortable is very important in engaging the emotion of the women.”

Other selected verbatims mentioned about safety:

“It’s private here, so it feels a bit safer. If it’s public, there are many people, so it’s a bit less comfortable.” (T6)

A safe environment free from harassment or inappropriate behaviour ensures that visitors, particularly women and families, can relax and enjoy their holiday without worry.

"For me as a Muslim traveller, the priorities are security, safety, and ease of finding halal food. The ease of finding halal food is very important."

According to respondents T5 and T11, *halal* availability is a non-negotiable baseline. As T11 mentioned:

“For me as a Muslim traveller, easiness to find halal foods is very important.”

Respondent (T5) in parallel reinforced that day-trippers especially find *halal*, affordable lunch tricky, suggested for more Muslim-operated, clearly certified outlets near popular beaches.

Respondent T2 noted that:

“Halal per se is not usually a problem in PD but cleanliness and layout are waste management, orderly stalls, and avoiding overcrowded, cramped eateries are basic expectations”.

T10 observed encouraging examples of signage (“non-*halal*” markers) that help Muslim visitors navigate easily.

Respondent T4 highlighted price sensitivity and comparative value finding PD pricier than some East Coast alternatives suggesting curation and promotion of Negeri Sembilan local cuisines could both diversify and clarify the destination’s gastronomic identity for Muslim families. Other responses:

“For me as a Muslim traveller, easiness to find halal foods is very important... We cannot negotiate about this thing.” (T11)

“Especially for Muslim travellers, we want to find halal options... so far in PD it’s hard to find halal places with halal sign/logo [for day trip lunches].” (T5)

“There’s a sign saying non-halal... so we’re aware.” (T10)

“Ensuring food is halal is a compulsory act in Islam, so it’s very important for us to ensure what we consume is halal, even while on vacation.” (T8)

The availability of *halal* food is an indispensable element of a Muslim-friendly environment. Muslim women tourists expect *halal*-certified restaurants and eateries offering a variety of local and international cuisines. One respondent noted,

“So far if choosing, it's not like some places that are Chinese dominated. Like this beach has fewer Chinese, so it's okay.” (T13)

Halal food access intersects with facilities planning. While many respondents felt *halal* food is generally available in PD (T2, T4, T11), several cited limited variety, price concerns, and spatial clustering away from beaches (T5, T7, T9). As highlighted by respondents T5 and T11, curating more Muslim-owned F&B options nearer to the waterfront coupled with improved seating, shade, and waste management would strengthen PD’s positioning for Muslim families and day-trippers.

Clear labelling and certification help build trust, ensuring that Muslim visitors can dine without concern about the permissibility of their meals. From the interviews also show Muslim women frequently discuss how Islamic values and cultural considerations influence their experience and comfort level at coastal destinations, particularly around modesty in dress and behaviour, gender segregation preferences, *halal* food availability, prayer facilities, cultural respect and understanding. These Islamic values and cultural aspects directly relate to creating a Muslim-friendly environment that makes Muslim women tourists feel comfortable and welcome. For example:

"As Muslims, we should educate children from an early stage. It's about comfort - being able to be ourselves, more relaxed, not having to act differently or be more attractive in ways that don't align with our culture."(T14)

"As a Muslim woman, we want something in very comfort zone. Comfortable is very important in engaging the emotion of the women."(T15)

Respondents consistently contrasted PD's social atmosphere with more international beaches (e.g., Batu Ferringhi, Pantai Chenang), noting fewer revealing outfits and a predominance of local Malay/Muslim visitors. Respondent T11 captured this succinctly:

"No extra sexy people... good exposure for the kids... can be accepted as [a] Muslim woman."

Respondents T1, T3, T7, and T10 described PD's "*kampung*" feel and family orientation as a key comfort factor. T11 further linked this to identity affirmation being in a place that does not challenge one's religious norms allows

"Being oneself" without adopting behaviours that feel "not our culture."

PD's environment invites a way of seeing and experiencing that affirms Muslim women's self-understanding and values.

"I can be myself, more relaxed... not have to act... something that is not our culture." (T11)

"I feel still like nature of kampung (village). I think I'm safe... Good exposure for the kids... accepted from Muslim women view." (T1)

In short, a Muslim-friendly environment at PD involves a holistic approach that addresses the unique needs and expectations of Muslim tourists. As respondent T10 summarised,

"As Muslim women, our expectation when going to a place is that we want to feel safe, no religious racism, not places that don't allow Muslims to enter, we also want the same freedom rights."

By prioritizing privacy, ensuring safety, and providing *halal* dining options, PD can strengthen its appeal as a welcoming and inclusive destination for Muslim travellers while contributing to the growth of *halal* tourism. Below are practical implications suggested by respondents for a stronger Muslim-friendly PD:

- Spatial privacy and women-forward design:
 - Women and kids water zones; semi-enclosed pools or scheduled women only hours (T2, T11).
 - Changing facilities that are spacious, clean, and adjacent to wudhu and surau, with practical amenities (hooks, counters, mirrors) (T2, T4, T5).
 - Increase visible female staff in beach operations and safety roles (T5).
- Safety and comfort:
 - Patrols, CCTV, well-lit paths and nodes; maintain open sightlines, avoid hidden pockets in landscape (T2, T3, T11).
 - Clear codes of conduct and gentle enforcement (e.g., pool attire, alcohol waste) to preserve family comfort (T3).

- *Halal*, prayer, and wayfinding:
 - More Muslim operated, *halal*-certified eateries near beachheads; clear *halal*/non-*halal* labelling; highlight Negeri Sembilan specialties to sharpen identity (T4, T5, T10, T11).
 - Small, well-kept surau at key public beaches; air-conditioned prayer rooms where feasible (T4, T5, T11).
- Islamic value and culture:
 - Strengthen the “Muslim-friendly, family-friendly, *kampung-calm*” identity with curated products: culture-based programs, crafts, night markets, and gentle nature activities (T11).
 - Promote women friendly features as a niche draw; communicate them clearly in destination marketing (T11).

The findings indicate that Port Dickson’s (PD) emphasis on privacy, safety, and the provision of *halal* dining options significantly enhances its attractiveness to Muslim travellers. This is best understood through the lens of Urry’s tourist gaze theory, which posits that tourists’ experiences and perceptions of destinations are shaped by their cultural backgrounds, expectations, and social identities. Participants in this study consistently highlighted the importance of privacy and safety, particularly in accommodation and recreational spaces, as essential factors influencing their choice of destination. The availability of *halal*-certified food outlets was also identified as a critical determinant of destination selection and overall satisfaction. These elements collectively contribute to a sense of comfort and belonging, allowing Muslim tourists to engage with the destination without compromising their religious or cultural values.

By prioritising these aspects, PD actively constructs a specific tourist gaze for Muslim travellers. The destination is not merely a passive backdrop but is instead curated to align with the religious and cultural expectations of its visitors. This tailored environment enables Muslim tourists to perceive and experience PD through a lens that affirms their identity and values, thereby fostering a more inclusive and welcoming atmosphere. Furthermore, the deliberate incorporation of *halal* tourism principles into PD’s tourism offerings demonstrates an understanding of the diverse gazes through which destinations are viewed. This approach not only enhances the appeal of PD

among Muslim travellers but also contributes to the broader growth of *halal* tourism by positioning the destination as responsive to the needs of this market segment.

In summary, the results suggest that PD's strategies in privacy, safety, and *halal* provisions are instrumental in shaping the tourist gaze of Muslim travellers. This alignment between destination attributes and tourist expectations is central to PD's emerging reputation as an inclusive and attractive destination within the *halal* tourism sector. The emphasis on Muslim-friendly environments reflects the central role of religious values in shaping how Muslim women interpret tourism spaces. This suggests that the tourist gaze in this context is not solely driven by visual appeal or leisure motivation but is mediated by moral and cultural considerations. The importance placed on privacy and safety indicates that Muslim women engage with coastal environments through a lens of comfort and appropriateness, rather than unrestricted leisure. This highlights a divergence from conventional tourist gaze assumptions, where freedom and visual consumption are often prioritised.

5.2.2 Recreational Activities

Recreational activities are a vital aspect of the tourism experience at PD, serving as a key driver for attracting visitors and enhancing their overall enjoyment. PD's reputation as a coastal destination is built on a wide range of engaging and family-friendly activities that cater to diverse preferences and age groups. Beach activities are among the most popular recreational options at PD. As T7 noted,

"So far, I'm satisfied. In terms of swimming there's no problem, in terms of safety it's still OK. The beach position is not the steep kind."

The beach setting in PD is consistently described as calm, accessible, and safe for families. According to respondent T7, *"the beach position is not the steep kind,"* enabling parents to feel comfortable letting their children play in the water. Similarly, respondent T3 emphasized *"PD's comparatively gentle waves on the west coast, noting that the waves aren't strong"*, which contributes to a more relaxed experience than some east-coast beaches.

According to respondent T6,

“The natural ambiance such as waves, sea breeze, and open horizon facilitates relaxation and contributes to emotional well-being”.

T6 later associated frequent beach visits with “grounding and earthing,” reporting perceived health benefits and reduced illness in the household.

The pristine beaches of PD at the same time provide an ideal setting for relaxation, sunbathing, and beach games such as volleyball or Frisbee. Families, in particular, value the opportunity to build sandcastles with children, take leisurely walks along the shore, or simply sit by the water and enjoy the soothing sound of waves. As one tourist expressed,

"My life isn't always with the sea, but my husband's life can't be separated from the sea. Here just hearing the waves already makes me feel so peaceful." (T7)

Water sports represent a more adventurous dimension of recreation at PD. As respondent T7 enthusiastic shared,

"Yes, like when we went to Langkawi, we did island hopping. We'll look for snorkelling too. We'll try to find some sea activities."

Activities like banana boat rides, jet skiing, and kayaking are readily available, offering excitement and a closer connection to the sea. These water-based experiences attract thrill-seekers and are particularly appealing to younger tourists and groups looking for dynamic and interactive ways to engage with the coastal environment.

According to respondent T2, “such activities meet tourists’ desire for adventure and attachment with nature.” Respondent T5 added that “guided boat trips can be informative and very family oriented, with activity hubs near hotels enhancing convenience.”

Camping by the beach adds another layer to PD's recreational offerings. As one regular visitor described,

"Most of the time we go camping, just one night. Previously we still camped the whole day from morning to evening." (T9)

Camping is a recurring activity, often for one night at a time, combining beach access with low-cost outdoor leisure. According to T8:

"The feeling of campsite at the beach is distinct and keeps visitors returning due to proximity and atmosphere"

Visitors who enjoy connecting with nature often choose to set up tents along the coastline, spending evenings by the campfire and waking up to the calming sight of the ocean. These outdoor experiences naturally complement another key aspect of PD's appeal, its role as a gathering place for families. In parallel, the family gatherings activities are a significant part of PD's recreational culture. One visitor captured this sentiment perfectly:

"The real purpose of coming here is to be with family. When we sit by the sea it automatically becomes peaceful. How can you be stressed when sitting by the sea?"

Respondents T3 and T10 noted that PD facilitates social gatherings such as birthday celebrations, family get-togethers, and picnics which is supported by open areas, pop-up stalls, and improved amenities (toilets, benches, food kiosks). As observed by respondents T6 and T7, families often organize simple barbecues and sit together by the water, using the beach as a stage for family time and intergenerational bonding.

In other words, many visitors use the destination as a setting for family reunions, picnics, or birthday celebrations. The availability of open spaces, picnic areas, and barbecue facilities supports these gatherings, making PD a favoured spot for socialising

and creating meaningful shared experiences. The family-friendly atmosphere is further enhanced by the cultural environment, as T5 noted:

“Such rituals at the shore, sharing meals, watching kids at play, celebrating small milestones can create memorable experiences and deepen emotional attachments.

As specifically mentioned by T3,

“Beach days culminate in “recharge mood” and “healing the soul, mind, and emotions”

In summary, recreational activities at PD provide diverse opportunities for relaxation, adventure, and social connection. From serene beach outings to adrenaline-pumping water sports and community-oriented gatherings, these activities cater to a broad audience, ensuring that PD remains an appealing destination for tourists seeking both leisure and memorable experiences. The selective engagement in recreational activities demonstrates how Muslim women negotiate between leisure and religious expectations, adapting their participation based on context. This reflects an adaptive rather than restrictive Muslim women tourist gaze, where participation occurs within acceptable boundaries. Such behaviour challenges stereotypes that portray Muslim women as passive tourists, instead highlighting their active role in shaping their tourism experiences.

The range of recreational activities available in PD from tranquil beach experiences to high-energy water sports and community-based events, offers tourists a spectrum of opportunities for relaxation, adventure, and social engagement. This diversity not only caters to varying preferences but also plays a significant role in shaping the ways in which visitors perceive and experience the destination. These patterns of selective participation can be further understood through the lens of Tourist Gaze theory. Drawing on Urry’s theory, these findings suggest that the recreational landscape of PD is actively constructed to appeal to multiple tourist gazes. The “gaze” of each tourist is informed by their individual motivations, cultural backgrounds, and expectations. For instance, some visitors may be drawn to the peacefulness of the

beaches, seeking a restorative escape, while others may be motivated by the excitement of water sports or the desire for social interaction through communal gatherings. By offering such a wide array of activities, PD enables tourists to engage with the destination in ways that resonate with their personal and cultural frameworks.

Moreover, the intentional curation of diverse recreational experiences allows PD to accommodate and even shape the expectations of different tourist segments. This not only enhances the overall appeal of the destination but also reinforces its capacity to provide meaningful and memorable experiences. In this way, PD's recreational offerings do not merely serve as attractions; they function as key elements in the construction of the tourist gaze, mediating how visitors see, interpret, and value their time in the destination. Thus, the findings underscore that the diversity of recreational activities in PD is instrumental in shaping the tourist gaze, ensuring that the destination remains relevant and attractive to a broad and heterogeneous tourist population.

5.2.3 Accessibility

The theme of accessibility encompasses several vital aspects of ensuring that tourists can conveniently reach and enjoy their destinations. First, the availability of highway connectivity plays a significant role. According to respondents T3, T6, T7, and T10, accessibility is a pivotal factor shaping the convenience, comfort, and overall appeal of Port Dickson (PD) as a short-haul coastal destination. Three interlinked elements emerge repeatedly: highway/road connectivity to PD, intra-destination mobility and route options, and the adequacy of public transport and ancillary facilities (notably parking and prayer/changing spaces). Together, these define how easily tourists can reach, navigate, and enjoy PD. As respondent T3 noted,

"It's nice that there are many road networks. There's even a highway."

Another participant (T9) emphasised and quantified the trip:

"The accessibility by road is good... so far so good. There's a highway that goes straight to the beach."

"Yes, I took only one hour and 15 minutes to arrive."

The highways mentioned provide a seamless and efficient route to Port Dickson (PD), with one tourist (T7) confirming, in addition, the variety of route options was highlighted by T7 who stated,

"There are many options - you can take the highway, use internal roads, or drive along the coastal road."

This infrastructure is particularly important for families and day-trippers who prioritise short, convenient getaways over long-distance travel, as reflected in the comment by,

"We prefer to just relax, if we travel too far it will cost more money."

T10 reinforced this assessment, explaining that,

"Compared to other destinations like Morib or Pangkor before the WCE, PD now offers easy access and is more attractive because with highway facilities in place, it becomes even more attractive for tourists to come."

Another critical component of accessibility is the availability of public transportation. As highlighted by respondents T5 and T2, PD is primarily a self-drive destination. T5 stated plainly:

"If you have a private car, it's convenient. Because there's no public transport facility. If you're a tourist, you should go with an agent or use services like Grab or car rental."

In contrast, T2 perceived PD as *"It's quite convenient; there are many public transport options and so on,"* likely reflecting an expectation rather than lived experience and underscoring a perception gap. Overall, most respondents align with T5's view that public transport is limited for tourists.

Although PD is primarily accessed by private vehicles, the inclusion of efficient and affordable public transport options could expand the destination's appeal to tourists without access to personal cars. Enhanced public transportation connectivity would make it easier for local and international visitors to plan trips without logistical challenges. The improved accessibility and relevant facilities have notably impacted tourism, as one respondent observed,

"Port Dickson (PD) has become more attractive to tourists now that there's a highway."

Parking facilities are also crucial for visitors who rely on personal vehicles. Tourists expect well-organised and sufficiently available parking spaces near beaches, attractions, and accommodations. Properly maintained parking infrastructure minimises stress and contributes to a positive start to the tourist experience, ensuring that families, especially those travelling with children or elderly members, can enjoy a hassle-free visit. As respondent T8 observed that:

"Some beachfront segments remain chaos when crowded due to limited space, I would like to suggest the need to extend or rebalance high-pressure areas especially parking areas."

In short, this demonstrates that while highway access has improved significantly and made PD more accessible for private vehicle users, there are still gaps in public transportation infrastructure. In other words, the respondent supports that good accessibility, particularly through highways, has made PD an attractive destination for short trips from urban areas such as Klang Valley and Kuala Lumpur, while also highlighting the need for better public transportation options. In summary, accessibility in the context of PD involves a well-integrated network of highways, public transportation systems, and parking facilities. These elements collectively ensure that the destination remains easy to reach, navigate, and enjoy, reinforcing its appeal as a convenient coastal retreat for both local and regional travellers.

The findings reveal that while the development of highway infrastructure has substantially enhanced PD's accessibility for private vehicle users, particularly those

traveling from urban centres such as Klang Valley and Kuala Lumpur, there remain notable shortages in public transportation options. Respondents emphasised that this improved highway access has positioned PD as an attractive and convenient destination for short getaways yet also underscored the ongoing need for a more robust and integrated public transport system.

Relating these findings to Urry's tourist gaze theory, accessibility emerges as a critical factor in shaping the ways in which tourists perceive and engage with PD. The ease of access afforded by highways enables a particular tourist gaze, one characterised by spontaneity, flexibility, and the ability to embark on short, leisure-driven trips. This gaze is especially prevalent among urban dwellers seeking quick escapes from city life, for whom convenience and travel time are significant considerations. Conversely, the limitations in public transportation may restrict the gaze of other potential visitors, such as those without access to private vehicles, thereby influencing who is able to experience the destination and how. Furthermore, the tourist experience in PD is directly mediated by the quality and integration of its transportation infrastructure. A well-connected network of highways, public transport, and parking facilities not only facilitates physical access but also shapes the overall sense of ease, comfort, and enjoyment associated with the destination. When accessibility is seamless, tourists are more likely to perceive PD as a welcoming and hassle-free retreat, which in turn enhances their satisfaction and likelihood of return.

Thus, the findings suggest that accessibility is not merely a logistical concern but a fundamental component in the construction of the tourist gaze and the shaping of tourist experiences in PD. By addressing both private and public transportation needs, PD can broaden its appeal and ensure that a diverse range of tourists are able to access, navigate, and fully enjoy the destination.

5.2.4 Facilities

Facilities are a cornerstone of a satisfying tourist experience, and their adequacy can significantly influence perceptions of a destination. At PD, the provision of clean and well-maintained facilities is essential to ensuring a comfortable and enjoyable stay for visitors. As respondent T3 noted,

"When we first went to PD before, it wasn't very user-friendly. For example, there was a lack of public toilets. But that was then. Nowadays there have been many changes and additions of toilets, changing rooms, seating areas, shops/food stalls. The facilities have improved."

Cleanliness is a fundamental expectation. As T10 observed,

"It used to be quite dirty but since it became a municipality, there have been many cleaning works done, and many trash bins have been provided."

In other words, signalling visible municipal commitment to cleanliness and user comfort. Cleanliness basically is a fundamental expectation. As observed by respondents T2 and T8, litter and moderate hygiene remain uneven across sites, with popular public beaches tending to be more congested and less tidy. Respondent T8 noted:

"Cleanliness is still moderate... need improvements,"

While a foreign visitor (T9) recalled:

"Rubbish is everywhere and insufficient lighting in some areas."

Both T2 and T8 emphasized the need for more frequent cleaning, well-distributed bins, and community-based awareness campaigns. As specifically mentioned by respondent T8: *"Self-awareness, campaign... volunteers,"* citing Penang's volunteerism as a positive model.

Tourists prioritise visiting destinations where public spaces, especially beaches, are free from litter and pollutants. A clean environment not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the destination but also reflects positively on the local authorities' commitment to maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

Public toilets and changing rooms are repeatedly cited as crucial, especially for day-trippers without hotel access. Respondents T2, T3, T4, and T5 stressed that accessible, clean, and properly functioning toilets improve comfort and dignity, with particular importance for Muslim women managing modesty requirements. In other words, well-maintained restrooms improve the overall tourist experience and are especially important for families with young children, elderly visitors, and people with disabilities. Changing rooms are similarly vital, particularly for beach destinations like PD. Women often seek more enclosed or segregated spaces to change, shower, and prepare, ideally integrated with ablution areas. As respondent T4 noted,

"For someone like me, I prefer if they make the area more enclosed. I mean somewhat separated or sheltered... because we need to maintain proper social boundaries/limits..."

Respondent T4 added that changing areas

"Should be more proper, not just makeshift ones."

Respondent T5 added a practical expectation: *"Please clean the toilet frequently,"* given that many public toilets are paid facilities.

As observed by respondents T11, a women and children only zone for aquatic activities and changing would serve a clear niche:

"If they can provide, one side for women and kids. More privacy area and try to make partition whereby this area for women only. Activities such as boating, yachting, focus this area for women."

Dedicated spaces where visitors can change clothes comfortably and privately are necessary to support activities such as swimming and other water sports. For Muslim travellers, the availability of proper prayer facilities is an important consideration. As one respondent pointed out with another noted,

"For prayer places, we go to the mosque. Prayer rooms are quite difficult to find because there aren't many. We need to go to nearby housing areas." (T4)

Prayer facilities matter. Respondents T4, T5, T8, and T11 pointed to gaps in easily accessible surau near the seafront. As noted by respondents T8:

"Prayer rooms are quite difficult to find because there aren't many. because there aren't many. We need to go to nearby housing areas."

T11 also emphasised:

"For me as a Muslim traveller, easiness to find halal foods is very important... the security, safety and then... prayers place comfortable with air conditioning and good accessibility."

Both T5 and T8 suggested building small, well-maintained surau close to high-use beach segments so day-trippers can pray without returning to hotels or traveling uphill to distant mosques. As emphasized by T11:

"Comfortable is very important in engaging the emotion of the women."

Well-planned, Muslim-friendly facilities such as clean, private, proximate, and safe, do not simply meet basic needs; they materially shape emotional connection, repeat intention, and PD's competitive identity as a coastal destination for Muslim women travellers and families. The theme of facilities at PD highlights the importance of basic but essential amenities that support a convenient and comfortable tourist experience. From cleanliness and sanitation to culturally sensitive provisions like prayer rooms, the adequacy of these facilities directly impacts the destination's reputation and

visitor satisfaction. In other words, the theme of facilities at PD underscores the pivotal role those essential amenities in shaping the overall tourist experience.

These elements are not merely supportive amenities but are integral to how Muslim women evaluate and engage with a destination. From a tourist gaze perspective, such facilities contribute to the perceived suitability of a destination, influencing whether it is seen as welcoming or restrictive. According to Urry's tourist gaze theory, the way tourists perceive and interpret a destination is influenced by the physical and cultural environment that is presented to them. The presence of well-maintained and inclusive facilities not only meets the practical needs of diverse visitors but also actively constructs a particular gaze through which the destination is viewed.

When PD provides clean, accessible, and culturally appropriate facilities, it signals attentiveness to the expectations and values of its visitors. This, in turn, shapes a tourist gaze characterised by comfort, respect, and inclusivity. Tourists are more likely to perceive PD as a welcoming and accommodating destination, which enhances their sense of belonging and satisfaction. Conversely, inadequate facilities may lead to a negative gaze, where the destination is seen as neglectful or unwelcoming, ultimately impacting its reputation and appeal. Thus, the adequacy and quality of facilities at PD are not merely functional considerations; they are integral to the construction of the tourist gaze, influencing how visitors see, experience, and remember the destination.

5.2.5 Spiritual Experience

According to respondents across the sample, the coastal environment of Port Dickson (PD) facilitated a strong sense of divine connection, with many participants describing feeling closer to Allah through observing and experiencing His creation. As highlighted by respondents T3, T6, T7, T8 and T10, the expansive ocean view, the sound of waves, sea breeze, and the horizon "without end" prompted reflection on God's greatness and one's place in creation. Respondents T3 noted that:

"Being by the sea naturally quieted the mind and oriented the heart toward gratitude, humility, and remembrance."

As participant T3 noted,

"When we sit with nature, we feel more peaceful...when we see the sunset, we feel grateful to Allah. Because these are things we don't get to see every day."

The beach environment at the same time, evoked strong feelings of gratitude among participants. Many expressed thankfulness for Allah's creation and blessings while experiencing the coastal area. Respondent T3 shared,

"We can enjoy Allah's creation. We can observe the wave movements, sound of beach waters, and reflect on Allah's greatness"

Respondents described the beach as a setting that inspires *shukr* (gratitude). Both T3 and T8 emphasized that witnessing sunrise and sunset evoked gratitude for Allah's blessings. Participant T7 articulated this succinctly:

"Return to nature's law. Hearing the waves, gentle breeze brings tranquillity, framing the coastal sensory experience as a subtle but constant dhikr that re-centres the self toward the Creator."

Thus, it can be seen that the coastal destination reinforced participants' religious convictions and Islamic practices. Several respondents noted that the environment itself served as a reminder to uphold their religious obligations, even while traveling. This aspect can be further understood through the lens of Urry's tourist gaze theory, which posits that tourists' experiences are shaped not only by their own cultural backgrounds and expectations, but also by the cues and symbols present in the destination.

In this context, the presence of Islamic symbols, facilities such as prayer rooms, and an environment that respects religious norms actively constructs a particular tourist gaze for Muslim visitors. The destination becomes more than just a site of leisure; it is experienced as a space that affirms and supports religious identity. This tailored gaze allows Muslim tourists to see PD as a place where their faith is acknowledged and facilitated, reinforcing their sense of belonging and comfort. As a result, the tourist gaze

in PD is shaped not only by the physical landscape but also by the cultural and religious atmosphere, which together encourage the maintenance of religious practices during travel. As participant T3 stated,

"I can relate this to combining and shortening prayers as taught in Islam. When we travel, we teach this to our children, so they learn from early on. There's no excuse not to pray wherever you are."

Participants also linked the spiritual tenor of PD with family bonding and intergenerational learning. Both T3 and T6 emphasized that beach trips become opportunities to strengthen *ukhuwah* and teach children religious concessions and obligations in travel. The spiritual experience was thus social and pedagogical, not purely individual. Respondents T8 described:

"The beach as a setting where happiness and calm coexist. Children's joy catalyses parental gratitude, and the parent's inner calm anchors family dynamics."

As a result, respondent T6 confirmed:

"The spiritual benefits reverberate beyond the beach day into work productivity, emotional regulation, and family cohesion."

Both T3 and T10 emphasized that even leisure travel can be a form of *tarbiah* an occasion to embody and teach faith in lived contexts. As T10 put it, "*As Muslims, we feel at ease and secure and we seek equal rights and freedoms*", suggesting that PD's prevailing norms and Muslim-majority environment enable the maintenance of religious routines without friction.

The beach environment provided space for introspection and self-reflection. Participants described how the coastal setting helped them contemplate their lives and relationship with God. Respondent T6 reflected:

"While watching sunrise or sunset, we think about our past sins and draw closer to the Creator."

Respondent T8 similarly framed the coastal experience as emotionally recalibrating: *"there's nothing else to think"*, making space for clarity, repentance, and renewal. This introspective quality was intertwined with an affective sense of *sakinah* (tranquillity). Thus, it is apparent that coastal environment created a sense of spiritual peace and tranquillity for most respondents. Many described feeling calm and at peace while at the beach. As T1 noted an immediate calm by the sea:

"When we sit by the sea it automatically becomes peaceful. How can one be stressed sitting by the sea?"

Respondent T2 connected the affective calm to a spiritual pedagogy: *"appreciating nature makes us close to God,"* while T5 added that seeing the natural seascape inspires praise for the Creator's artistry. This finding reveals that coastal tourism experiences at Port Dickson facilitate meaningful spiritual connections for Muslim women tourists. The natural coastal environment serves as a powerful medium for strengthening divine consciousness, fostering gratitude, reinforcing religious convictions, enabling self-reflection, and cultivating spiritual peace.

This phenomenon can be further understood through the lens of Urry's tourist gaze theory, which emphasises that tourists' perceptions and experiences are shaped by their cultural backgrounds, expectations, and the symbolic landscapes they encounter. For Muslim women, the coastal setting of Port Dickson is not merely a backdrop for leisure, but an environment imbued with spiritual significance. The tranquil seascapes, rhythmic sounds of the waves, and expansive horizons collectively create a sensory and emotional context that encourages contemplation and a heightened awareness of the divine. As observed by respondents T3, the environment:

"Reminds travellers to uphold obligations even while away from home; travel becomes a lived lesson in devotion, flexibility, and consistency."

Moreover, the presence of culturally and religiously sensitive amenities such as prayer facilities and modest recreational spaces further shapes the tourist gaze, allowing Muslim women to engage with the destination in ways that align with their faith and values. This alignment between the environment and the tourists' spiritual needs transforms the act of travel into an opportunity for religious fulfilment and personal growth. The gaze, in this context, is not only directed outward toward the scenic beauty of the coast, but also inward, facilitating moments of introspection and spiritual renewal.

In sum, as highlighted by respondents T3, T6, T7, T8, and T10, the coastal setting facilitated remembrance of Allah and gratitude through sensory engagement with nature. According to respondents T2 and T11, destination cues such as modest social norms and accessible worship spaces shape a Muslim-friendly tourist gaze that affirms religious identity. Thus, the findings suggest that Port Dickson's coastal environment, when experienced through the lens of the tourist gaze, becomes a site where spiritual and religious identities are both expressed and reinforced. The destination's ability to support these deeper connections enhances its appeal among Muslim women tourists, positioning it as a place where leisure and spirituality can coexist harmoniously.

The emergence of spiritual experience as a theme suggests that coastal tourism for Muslim women extends beyond leisure to include moments of reflection and connection with the natural environment. This aligns with the Islamic concepts of *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection), where nature is seen as a means of appreciating divine creation. This finding introduces an important dimension to the tourist gaze, where the act of viewing is not only visual but also spiritual. It supports the argument that the Muslim women tourist gaze incorporates elements of inner reflection, distinguishing it from conventional interpretations of tourism experiences.

5.2.6 Environmental Concerns

The theme of environmental concerns at Port Dickson (PD) reflects the growing importance of sustainable tourism and the need to balance development with the preservation of natural ecosystems. As highlighted by respondents T5:

"Because we can't develop too much infrastructure in the coastal area. We're afraid we'll disturb the ecosystem. We should keep the natural infrastructure."

Both T5 and T10 stressed that any upgrades to visitor facilities should be guided by the need to protect coastal ecology. According to respondents T10:

"The west coast's vulnerability to erosion requires careful landscape choices, plant trees that can prevent erosion... make the landscape attractive while providing shade"

"Avoid excessive hardening of the shoreline so that "we want the beach to remain in its natural state."

Clean beaches are a fundamental aspect of environmental stewardship.

"It used to be quite dirty, but since it became a municipality, there have been many cleaning works done, and many trash bins have been provided."
(T10)

"Cleanliness is still moderate... need improvements... start from cleanliness." (T8)

Both T2 and T9 emphasized that perceived cleanliness strongly shapes visitor experience and destination image, with T2 calling for authorities to *"Make sure the place is clean to convey positive vibes"* and T9 recalling, *"last time when I went, rubbish is everywhere... no light and rubbish is too much."*

Visitors expect litter-free, well-maintained coastlines where they can relax and engage in recreational activities. However, there are also positive experiences, other respondents emphasised:

"Beautiful. Satisfying. Clean. No garbage." (T1)

"Amazing... beautiful, clean, tranquil." (T3)

This observation not only reflects their satisfaction with the current state of the beach but also highlights the importance of maintaining these pristine conditions. The recognition of cleanliness as a key factor in their enjoyment of the coastal environment naturally leads to considerations of environmental preservation. Preservation efforts in parallel focus on protecting PD's natural environment from the adverse effects of human activity. As one respondent noted,

"If we want to compare with other countries, we don't need to look far, take Samila Beach, Thailand for example, actually our beach is more beautiful. In terms of natural beauty. Because in Malaysia, whether it's the east coast beaches, Johor, or even other beautiful beaches, we want to maintain the beach view as it is." (T7)

As noted, T8 proposed self-awareness and volunteer campaigns, while T5 emphasized routine maintenance of paid public toilets. One respondent summed it up: *"We need everyone's cooperation to maintain the beach ecosystem"* (T10). Specifically, T9 and T10 highlighted that providing bins, adequate lighting, and basic amenities such as clean changing rooms and toilets are simple yet critical measures to prevent littering and encourage environmentally responsible use.

This appreciation for preservation extends to the value placed on green spaces, with participants recognising how preserved natural vegetation contributes to the area's appeal. One respondent emphasised which demonstrating how well-maintained greenery enhances visitors' experience.

"Many trees, shaded areas, pleasing to the eyes." (T6)

The presence of greenery and landscape enhancement not only provides practical benefits like shade but also serves as a dual role in improving PD's environmental quality and aesthetic appeal. One respondent suggested,

"...I can see they've done some landscaping, but it needs to be enhanced further. Especially planting trees that can prevent erosion and make the landscape attractive while providing shade for visitors." (T12)

Another noted,

"When going to the beach, our expectation is to have more sand than reclaimed rocks. So, we want the beach to remain in its natural state. Because we all know the west coast is vulnerable to erosion." (T2)

"We can't develop too much infrastructure in the coastal area, we're afraid we'll disturb the ecosystem." (T3)

Environmental concerns at PD emphasise the need for a sustainable approach to tourism development. By addressing issues such as beach cleanliness, implementing conservation measures, and enhancing greenery, PD not only preserves its natural assets but also actively constructs a positive and sustainable image as a coastal destination. These environmental initiatives contribute to the formation of a destination identity that is associated with health, beauty, and ecological responsibility.

According to Urry's tourist gaze theory, the way tourists perceive and experience a destination is shaped by the images and identities that are projected and encountered during their visit. For Muslim women tourists, the visible commitment to environmental stewardship reinforces the perception of PD as a place that values both natural beauty and the well-being of its visitors. Clean beaches, lush greenery, and conservation efforts become integral elements of the destination's identity, shaping the expectations and experiences of tourists even before their arrival.

"A clean environment helps us maintain our spiritual state while enjoying the beach" (S15)

This cultivated image not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of PD but also aligns with broader values such as cleanliness, purity, and respect for creation, values

that may hold particular significance for Muslim women travellers. As a result, the tourist gaze is directed not only at the scenic qualities of the coast but also at the ethical and responsible management of the environment. This dual focus strengthens the emotional and moral connection visitors feel toward the destination, increasing their satisfaction and likelihood of return.

All statements underscore that PD's environmental image is co-produced by municipal action, business practices, and visitor responsibility. Environmental concerns at PD therefore emphasize a sustainable approach that integrates:

- Consistent cleanliness and waste systems across all popular stretches (T8, T9, T10).
- Nature-first coastal management, prioritizing sandy beaches and soft, green solutions to erosion (T3, T10).
- Tree canopy and landscape enhancements that provide shade, identity, and ecological function (T4, T10).
- Modest, well-placed amenities, clean toilets, changing rooms, bins, lighting that deter littering and improve comfort without overbuilding (T5, T9, T10).
- Community-based programming and low-impact cultural products that add value without ecological costs (T11, T8).

In accordance, environmental concerns expressed by participants indicate a sense of responsibility towards nature, which may be influenced by Islamic teachings on stewardship (*khalifah*). This suggests that environmental awareness is not only an aesthetic preference but also a moral consideration, further shaping how destinations are perceived and valued. In summary, environmental management practices in PD play a crucial role in shaping the destination's image and identity, which in turn influence the tourist gaze. By presenting itself as a clean, green, and sustainable coastal retreat, PD appeals to the values and expectations of its visitors, particularly Muslim women, and secures its reputation as a desirable destination for current and future generations.

5.2.7 Tourists' Perceptions

Tourists' perceptions of Port Dickson (PD) reveal a nuanced blend of appreciation and critique, shedding light on both its enduring appeal and the areas that would benefit from targeted improvements. As highlighted by respondents T1 and T11, PD is often experienced as simple, peaceful, and convenient particularly for short, restorative escapes from the Klang Valley, yet its positioning and distinctive offerings remain unclear to some.

According to respondent T11:

"Visitors recognize PD's calming seascape and family-friendly ambience",

T11 stated candidly, *"I don't see what product in PD is exactly... the awareness is light,"* while T4 felt that PD can seem "flat, crowded, and not well developed" compared to Batu Ferringhi or Kuantan. As T4 and T8 observed, the same attributes proximity, calm waters, everyday accessibility, satisfy some gazes while leaving others underwhelmed. Destinations are therefore not merely consumed but interpreted; PD's identity is read through varied expectations and cultural lenses. This underscores the need for a clearer destination identity and stronger promotion. As T1 emphasised:

"For me, I think the positioning of PD doesn't really capture my heart... I don't see exactly what product PD offers."

While some visitors note PD's lack of distinctive attractions, others appreciate its core appeal as a peaceful retreat. These contrasting perceptions reflect how PD's simple, tranquil atmosphere can be viewed as either a limitation or an asset, with one visitor positively describing it as,

"Great, peaceful, not chaotic."

Another participant (T3) observed,

“Just hearing the waves here already makes me feel so peaceful.”

This sense of calm underpins many short stays; visitors come to relax, attach with nature, and heal, often prioritizing family time, simple beach activities, and the pleasure of watching children play (T2, T3, T5, T6, T8). For many Muslim women, the coast becomes a space of spiritual contemplation and divine appreciation:

“We can enjoy Allah’s creation... reflect on Allah’s greatness,” as T6 described.

These perceptions, encompassing a blend of positive experiences and constructive critiques, reflect both the unique offerings of Port Dickson (PD) and areas for improvement. Specifically, the contrasting views on PD's simple and tranquil atmosphere perceived by some as a limitation and by others as a significant asset which are highly consistent with the nuances of Urry's tourist gaze theory.

The tourist gaze is not uniform, it is inherently diverse and subjective, shaped by individual expectations, cultural backgrounds, and prior experiences. What one tourist seeks in a destination, another may find lacking. This divergence in perception highlights how the same objective features of a destination can be interpreted differently based on the individual's "gaze." Destinations, therefore, are not simply consumed as they are, but are actively interpreted and given meaning by the tourist. PD's identity as a "simple, tranquil" coastal retreat thus becomes a contested space within the tourist gaze, simultaneously attracting and potentially deterring different segments of visitors. This dynamic interplay between destination characteristics and varied tourist gazes is a fundamental aspect of how tourism experiences are constructed and evaluated.

The sound of waves and the coastal breeze offer a reprieve from the stresses of urban life. This sense of peace makes PD particularly attractive to families, individuals seeking to "heal" in nature, and those desiring a quick escape from the bustling Klang Valley. The opportunity to connect with nature enhances the destination's appeal, providing a stark contrast to the fast-paced environments most visitors come from.

Safety is another critical aspect of tourists' perceptions. Many visitors express feeling secure at PD, which is especially important for families with children and Muslim women travellers, helped in part by the predominance of local Malaysian visitors and the relative absence of “half-naked” beachwear compared to more internationalized resorts (T2, T4, T8, T11). As T1 noted:

"Actually yeah, when I go to PD... I think I'm safe."

The perceived safety extends to interactions with other tourists and the overall environment, contributing to a welcoming atmosphere. However, the availability of visible security measures, such as patrols and well-lit areas, plays a vital role in reinforcing this sense of safety.

Safety and social comfort emerge as significant positives. Respondents T2 and T8 noted that Muslim travellers are more comfortable when attire norms are broadly aligned with local culture, making PD “Muslim-friendly” in social vibe even where facilities are imperfect. Still, visible security and well-lit public spaces matter. T3 suggested patrols and CCTV at public beaches, and T6 flagged crowd-related concerns (e.g., petty crime, *mat rempit* on weekends), indicating the need for consistent safety signalling and environmental design that enhances perceived security.

While PD is praised for its accessibility and proximity to major cities, expectations about development and facilities are moderate but convergent.

“PD meets the basics yet could do more.” (T14)

Infrastructure and image definitely matter. Both T8 and T10 emphasized cleanliness as a baseline expectation and T9, a foreign visitor, reinforced this with a negative memory of rubbish and poor lighting in some areas. T10 recognized recent improvements such as more public toilets, benches, landscaping, upgraded gateways and landscape identity elements to differentiate PD. Respondents T4 and T8 called for stronger destination branding and productisation signature food trails, culture-craft experiences, curated coastal walks, and event programming so the “PD product” becomes legible, discoverable, and repeatable.

Potential improvements emerge as a common theme. Tourists often envision PD as a destination with untapped potential, suggesting the addition of unique attractions such as observation towers, better signage, expanded recreational facilities, and thematic landscaping. As respondent T10 suggested:

"Maybe they could build an observation tower... I can see they've done some landscaping, but it needs to be enhanced further. Especially planting trees that can prevent erosion and make the landscape attractive while providing shade for visitors."

Such enhancements, they believe, could elevate PD's standing among Malaysia's top coastal destinations and attract a wider range of visitors, including international tourists. The coastal environment also emerges as a powerful setting for spiritual contemplation among Muslim women tourists. The natural seaside setting facilitates deep reflection and spiritual connection, creating opportunities for inner peace and self-reflection. As one participant expressed,

"When we sit with nature, we feel more peaceful." (T8)

This spiritual contemplation often leads to deeper religious reflection, as one respondent shared:

"While watching sunrise or sunset, we think about our past sins and draw closer to the Creator." (T2)

The findings also reveal that the coastal setting evokes a profound sense of divine appreciation among participants. The natural beauty and vastness of the ocean prompt reflection on Allah's creation and power. As one respondent articulated,

"We can enjoy Allah's creation. We can observe the wave movements, sound of beach waters, and reflect on Allah's greatness." (T3)

This divine appreciation extends to feelings of gratitude and humility, with another participant T6 expressing,

" When we see the waves moving, we feel Allah's greatness and power. We feel small when we see those big waves. "

Such expressions demonstrate that gazing upon nature becomes an act of worship and moral reflection, merging leisure with religious devotion. The intersection of spiritual contemplation and divine appreciation appears to create a meaningful spiritual experience for Muslim women tourists, allowing them to strengthen their faith while enjoying recreational activities. The coastal environment serves not just as a leisure destination, but as a space for spiritual engagement and divine connection. This is evidenced by participant (T12) who reflected,

"When we sit with nature, we feel closer to Allah. Like we are part of His creation."

Tourists' perceptions of PD highlight its strengths as a relaxing and safe coastal getaway while acknowledging areas where enhancements could elevate its appeal. As respondent T10 summarised,

"We need cooperation from all communities to maintain the ecosystem at the beach."

In summary, tourists' perceptions of PD highlight potential improvements such:

- Product development: observation/view towers, shaded coastal promenades, culture-and-craft programming, family-focused zones, and occasional women-and-children activity areas (T10, T11, T2).
- Service upgrades: frequent cleaning, more changing rooms, near-beach surau, seating and shade, better signage and lighting (T2, T5, T8, T10).
- Branding and marketing: clearer positioning and promotion of PD's unique mix of ease, serenity, and Muslim-friendly social comfort (T4, T11).

The overall perception of coastal destinations as peaceful and safe reflects the importance of emotional and psychological comfort in shaping tourism experiences. This indicates that the tourist gaze is influenced by affective responses, where feelings of tranquillity and security enhance the overall evaluation of the destination. These perceptions underline the need for strategic development that balances infrastructure improvements with the preservation of PD's natural charm, ensuring the destination continues to meet and exceed visitor expectations. In short, the tourist perspective analysis reveals several key considerations that influence Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. To provide a complete understanding, the following section examines how industry stakeholders perceive and respond to these needs.

The analysis towards the end revealed six key themes (Figure 5.1) that shape their engagement with these locations: (i) Muslim Friendly Environment; (ii) Recreational Activities; (iii) Accessibility; (iv) Facilities; (v) Environmental Concerns; and (vi) Tourists' Perceptions. In accordance, the research also reveals that Muslim women constitute a significant and growing market segment in tourism.

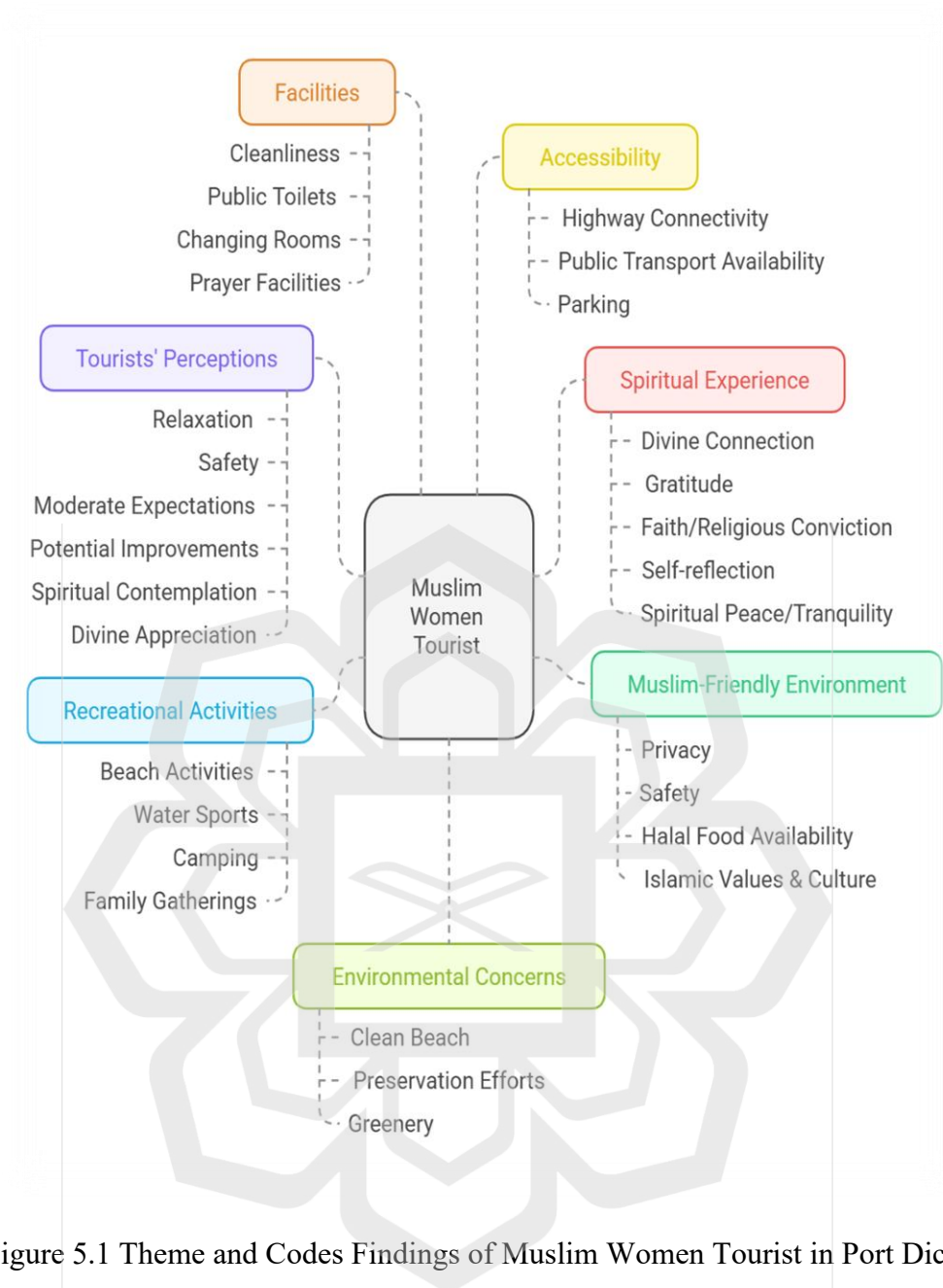


Figure 5.1 Theme and Codes Findings of Muslim Women Tourist in Port Dickson

5.3 STAKEHOLDERS PERSPECTIVES

While the previous section examined tourist perspectives, this section analyses stakeholder views to provide a complementary understanding of how the industry perceives and responds to Muslim women tourists' needs. This analysis contributes to all three research objectives. Table 5.3 presents the profiles of stakeholders interviewed for this study.

Table 5.3 The Profiles of Stakeholders Interviewed

Stakeholder ID	Gender	Position/Role	Organisation/Type
S1	Female	Tourism Officer	Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)
S2	Female	Tourism Officer	Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)
S3	Female	Tourism Officer	Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC)
S4	Male	Tourism Officer	Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, Malaysia
S5	Female	Tourism Officer	Port Dickson Municipal Council
S6	Female	Owner	Travel Agency
S7	Female	Owner	Private Homestay (Airbnb)
S8	Female	Manager	Travel Agency
S9	Male	Community Leader	Port Dickson Council Member
S10	Male	Manager	Tourism Product Operator

Findings from these discussions revealed three main themes: (i) Tourism and Muslim Women; (ii) Port Dickson as a Coastal Destination; and (iii) Muslim-Friendly Tourism Initiatives. In accordance, the stakeholder interviews reinforced this understanding, revealing that Muslim women constitute an increasingly important market segment in tourism, one that merits specific attention in destination development and management.

"The gender ratio is approximately 60/40, with women making up 60% of religious tourism participants. For instance, in Umrah packages, 60% are women. Typically, there would be one or two male companions accompanying groups of four to ten women travellers."

In accordance, industry stakeholders recognise their purchasing power and influence on travel decisions, noting that Muslim women often serve as key decision-makers in travel planning and destination selection. As one stakeholder emphasised,

"Female tourists tend to be more focused on shopping activities. Their attraction and influence in encouraging their friends to travel is more effective than our promotional efforts."

This insight reveals two crucial aspects of Muslim women's influence in tourism: they are not only valuable consumers who contribute directly to the local economy through their spending patterns, but they also serve as trusted voices whose travel recommendations carry substantial weight within their social networks.

5.3.1 Tourism and Muslim Women

The theme Tourism and Muslim Women highlight the increasing significance of Muslim women as a growing market segment in the global tourism industry. These demographic unique needs and preferences are reshaping how destinations, including Malaysia and specifically coastal areas like Port Dickson, cater to travellers. The discussion around this theme revolves around four interconnected sub-themes: market potential, infrastructure and facilities, cultural sensitivities, and economic impact. Evidence is drawn from industry/government stakeholders (S1–S10), with verbatim quotes retained in Malay where appropriate and translated into English.

The market potential for tourism targeting Muslim women is steadily increasing as this group becomes more active in travel decisions. Women are often the primary decision-makers for family trips and personal travel, influencing choices related to destinations, accommodations, and activities. As noted by S3,

"Women always be decision maker in term of selection of the menu when to go, what to eat and then what to buy." She continued *"Women often come as a package with their families,"* meaning that attracting women spurs broader family travel.

The growing awareness among Muslim women of travel opportunities that cater specifically to their needs is driving demand for more niche tourism packages. For instance, they often seek environments where their cultural and religious values are respected, such as modest dress codes, privacy in facilities, and *halal*-certified restaurants and Islamic amenities. According to respondent S8, “*The number of women is rising rapidly. They want this niche,*” pointing to a clear and expanding niche for women-only or women-centred travel programs.

She elaborates that PajelinTrip, run “*by women for women,*” sees strong interest from Malay/Muslim clients yet remains attractive to non-Muslims, demonstrating crossover appeal where Islamic values (modesty, care, trust) translate into a generalized promise of safety and comfort. S8 continued emphasised, “*Trust and comfort... they want to know who they are travelling with,*” indicating that participants often hold positive expectation and perception about both the organizer and the destination, which encourages their willingness to join. This reflects a broader preference for reliable organizers, transparent itineraries, and clear communication, including details such as prayer times, *halal* food availability, and attire guidelines.

Both S3 and S4 emphasized that women influence key choices destinations, activities, and on-the-ground spending. As S8 put it,

“Organised women-only camping or coastal retreats, can see ‘crazy’ demand, signalling willingness-to-pay for value propositions centred on privacy, modesty, and safety.”

Safety protocols extend beyond spatial segregation. S8’s standard operating procedures (SOPs) emphasise prevention and care: “*We don’t allow clients to go out alone at night; hiking must be in pairs or more; travel insurance and emergency contacts are mandatory.*” These are not merely women’s preferences; they are professional risk mitigations that build trust for all Muslim travellers.

To capitalise on this potential, infrastructure and facilities must align with the specific requirements of Muslim women travellers. This includes offering prayer facilities that are easily accessible, accommodations that are *halal*-certified, and modest

arrangements for recreational activities. Hotels, resorts, and tourism operators that implement these measures not only cater to the needs of this demographic but also stand out in a competitive market. As highlighted by an industry expert (S4),

“Muslim women are the significant stakeholders who play a vital role in terms of their contributions to the industry”

As respondent from Islamic Tourism Centre (S1) emphasised,

“...prayer spaces, dining areas, tourist spots, and shopping areas. Hotels also need to particularly consider women's needs.”

Stakeholder S1 summarised the core:

“The needs are, firstly prayer spaces, secondly toilets... Another is preparation areas, such as changing rooms.”

Respondent S1 and S5 (officer from Port Dickson Municipal Council) also referenced evolving norms, and policy supports women only coaches in transport, circulars urging hotels to provide worship facilities, and emergent practices of gender-separating recreational spaces.

“Swimming pools for men and women are being separated.” (S1)

“Swimming pool facilities are split [between genders]. That's very common now. That is one of the factors they upgrade specifically to attract more Muslim tourists.” (S5)

Additionally, infrastructure improvements such as women-only swimming pools, wellness areas, or prayer rooms add significant value and cater to the expectations of these travellers which plays a crucial role in shaping and mediating the tourist gaze. According to Urry's tourist gaze theory, the experiences and perceptions of tourists are not formed in isolation but are actively constructed through the material and symbolic environments provided by destinations. The supply side determines what is made

visible, accessible, and meaningful to visitors, thereby influencing how they see, interpret, and engage with a place.

By offering facilities that align with the cultural, religious, and personal expectations of specific traveller groups such as Muslim women and destinations like PD are not only responding to demand but are also actively curating the types of experiences and gazes that are possible. These infrastructure enhancements signal inclusivity and attentiveness, allowing tourists to feel acknowledged and accommodated. In turn, this shapes a tourist gaze that is more likely to be positive, comfortable, and affirming, as visitors see their needs and identities reflected in the destination's offerings.

Cultural sensitivities play a crucial role in shaping the experiences of Muslim women tourists. As emphasised,

"Privacy. Women need privacy. When they go out wearing hijab properly and need to pray in public spaces, they need privacy." (S1)

"Women need privacy... if you have a designated area for women, women would certainly like it. Your place will surely grow." (S8)

These travellers value destinations that respect their cultural norms, including privacy, gender segregation in public spaces, and modesty in clothing and behaviour. Activities designed with these considerations, such as women-only adventure sports, secluded beach areas, and private retreats which allow Muslim women to participate fully in travel experiences without compromising their religious principles. This sensitivity also extends to how destinations market themselves, ensuring imagery and messaging align with the values of the target demographic. This strategic alignment is crucial for effectively matching and guiding the tourist gaze.

Drawing on Urry's tourist gaze theory, marketing materials (brochures, websites, advertisements) serve as powerful pre-visit shapers of perception. They construct an initial "gaze" even before the tourist arrives, setting expectations and framing how the destination should be seen and experienced. When a destination like

PD uses imagery and language that resonate with the values of Muslim women travellers for instance, showcasing modest recreational activities, family-friendly environments, or serene natural settings, it is actively cultivating a specific gaze. This pre-emptive shaping ensures that the destination is perceived as desirable and appropriate, directly appealing to the cultural and religious lens through which these travellers view potential leisure spaces.

Therefore, effective marketing is not just about attracting visitors; it is about creating a coherent and appealing image that anticipates and aligns with the desired tourist gaze, thereby enhancing the likelihood of a positive and fulfilling experience upon arrival. This extends to various aspects of travel, with one participant (S6) noting that,

"It's the same for women actually. Truly, what's more concerning now is that Muslim women hold the most power, things that need to be emphasised especially regarding modesty/covering the aurat"

The economic impact of Muslim women tourists is another critical aspect of this theme. Their travel activities contribute significantly to the local and national economies of host destinations, as highlighted by S10 (Tourism Product Operator):

"Overall, yes. Contributing to Muslim women's travel. So, they are a group that contributes to the tourism industry itself."

Furthermore, the variety of options available enhances their economic participation,

"Because they have many preferred options. It provides variety. Because there are upgraded facilities and everything. So, it gives them many options for their buying power." (S10)

Spending on accommodations, shopping, dining, and activities generates revenue that supports local businesses and creates job opportunities. As observed by S4, marketing should prime an inclusive yet modest gaze:

“Showcase modest recreational activities, family-friendly settings, and serene nature; avoid imagery that alienates hijab-wearing women.”

Additionally, the rise of Muslim women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry, such as those running travel agencies, lodging services, or *halal* dining establishments which adds another layer of economic value. These entrepreneurs often design packages and services tailored to the preferences of Muslim women, reinforcing the growth of this market. Tourism Officer S3 describe how local businesses benefit when planners involve communities: *“parking concessions with villagers, local stalls integrated into events, and caretakers employed from nearby kampungs”*. S4 on the other hand, gives a concrete practice from Janda Baik, paying locals for parking space, enabling a coffee vendor to capture visitor flows, arguing PD should replicate respectful engagement and resource management that channels tourism rents to residents rather than bypassing them.

Overall, the interdependence of these sub-themes creates a dynamic framework where market potential fuels the demand for appropriate infrastructure and cultural sensitivity, which in turn drives economic benefits. Destinations that prioritise these factors are better positioned to attract and retain Muslim women tourists, ensuring their relevance and competitiveness in a rapidly evolving industry. From the perspective of the Tourist Gaze, these infrastructures function as “signs” of the place which are visible and symbolic markers that reflect inclusivity, *halal* compliance, and cultural sensitivity. For Muslim women travellers, such signs shape not only how a destination is consumed but also how it is imagined, valued, and remembered. For example, a coastal resort with designated family areas, women-only beaches, and privacy screens communicates both safety and respect for Muslim values, whereas a similar beach without these features signals exclusionary practices and may discourage visitation. In this way, infrastructure and cultural amenities extend beyond utility which they serve as powerful semiotic cues that affirm identity and belonging within tourism spaces. This approach not only

supports inclusivity but also aligns with broader efforts to make tourism more accessible and welcoming to diverse populations.

5.3.2 Port Dickson as a Coastal Destination

The theme of Port Dickson as a Coastal Destination examines the potential, challenges, and contributions of Port Dickson as a prominent tourism hub, particularly for Muslim-friendly tourism. This theme is intricately tied to its strategic location, challenges in tourism development, attraction variability, and economic contributions to the local and regional economy. Each sub-theme contributes to a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and limitations that Port Dickson faces as a competitive coastal destination.

As highlighted by stakeholders and tourists alike, PD's strategic location remains one of its most enduring advantages, given its proximity to the Klang Valley and major highways. According to respondents S4 and S9, quick access enables frequent short breaks, family daytrips, and return visits without heavy planning.

"Port Dickson's location itself is very strategic, close to KL, just a few hours' drive from KL and Selangor. It's very well-known - everyone knows where Port Dickson is." (S1)

"Port Dickson's location itself is very strategic, close to KL ... everyone knows where Port Dickson is. This position feeds a steady domestic flow while also making PD a logical first stop for inbound visitors transiting through KLIA." (S4)

This geographic advantage makes it an appealing destination for both domestic and international tourists who seek a coastal retreat without requiring extensive travel. Its accessibility also positions it as an ideal destination for short-term trips, particularly for families and individuals looking for relaxation and leisure. From the perspective of the MWTG conceptual framework, this reflects the Destination-Oriented dimension, where ease of access and spatial connectivity strongly shape Muslim women tourists'

willingness and ability to include Port Dickson in their travel choices. Despite its advantageous location, Port Dickson faces challenges in tourism development. As S7 (private homestay owner) noted:

"There is competition from nearby areas. For example, Bagan Lalang in Sepang has become another choice for many people."

Competition from nearby coastal areas, such as Bagan Lalang and Desaru, poses a significant threat, as these locations are increasingly attracting tourists with innovative attractions and well-developed facilities. For example, Desaru has gained attention for its integrated resorts and family-friendly entertainment options, which provide a more comprehensive experience than what is currently available in Port Dickson.

"Previously, Singaporeans would come directly to Port Dickson to enjoy the beach, but now Johor has developed Desaru with Desaru Golf... that's also a challenge to tourism product development in Port Dickson." (S2)

Furthermore, inadequate promotional efforts and the lack of a coordinated tourism strategy have limited Port Dickson's ability to fully capitalise on its natural and cultural assets. While it remains a popular choice for beachgoers, it risks losing its competitive edge without targeted development initiatives. Regarding attraction variability, stakeholders identified limitations,

"The challenge is the lack of tourism products. For example, tourism products in PD are just the military museum, army museum, that's all that's available." (S3)

"Scuba diving? Many of the corals are already dead ... it would be better to organise a beach-cleaning activity and learn about the landscape and history instead" (S4)

Respondents S4 on the other hand, noted the practical gaps at PD's beaches especially mixed-gender public toilets and insufficient privacy for hijab-wearing women needing to change or pray. S4 contrasted with Turkey where "women's toilets

are secluded and discrete”, suggesting design principles PD could adapt shielded entries, women only zones, and dedicated powder rooms to enhance discretion and dignity. S3 queried:

“Why can a beach have toilets but no prayer room? ... surely beaches can also have surau.”

This call to normalise prayer facilities at nature sites mirrors tourists lived constraints; absent nearby surau, women truncate stays to meet prayer obligations.

Even though its beaches are undoubtedly a major draw, there is a noticeable lack of diverse attractions that could cater to a broader range of interests and preferences. Unlike other destinations that offer a combination of cultural, historical, and recreational activities, Port Dickson has yet to fully leverage its potential beyond its coastal appeal. This limitation directly intersects with the Social/Interpersonal-Oriented dimension of the MWTG, highlighting how tourists’ expectations, perceptions, and desires influence their decisions and repeat visitation. A lack of attraction variability curtails the ability of Muslim women travellers, in particular, to satisfy both leisure and cultural motivations while ensuring modesty and family inclusivity. Owner of private homestay (S7) noted,

"Besides the beach, there's nothing else. Some people might go for the beach but some people maybe not."

Both T3 and T7 emphasized that without decisive curation and reinvestment, PD risks reputational drift.

“Port Dickson, there is no new attraction. The major attraction is still missing” (S7).

As specifically mentioned by stakeholder S6, even formerly high-traffic nodes for example area Teluk Kemang suffer from deferred maintenance and dated offers. Port Dickson has yet to fully leverage its potential beyond its coastal appeal. Thus, visitors who are not particularly drawn to beach activities may find the options in Port

Dickson somewhat limited, which can impact its ability to attract repeat visitors or appeal to niche markets, such as eco-tourism or adventure tourism enthusiasts. PD Tourism Officer (S5) noted that PD functions as a practical and familiar “*coastal escape*” that is close enough to feel easy but far enough to feel different. As observed by stakeholder S1:

“Upscale properties such as Lexis Hibiscus have amplified this transit-and-stay logic by drawing international media and positioning PD as a recognizable landmark destination.”

Despite these challenges, Port Dickson makes notable economic contributions, particularly to the local community and hospitality sector. The tourism industry in Port Dickson supports a wide range of employment opportunities, from hotel and resort staff to vendors and service providers who benefit from the influx of tourists. As S5 explained:

“Its role in local development is very significant because there are many resorts, from 5-star to budget, so it helps the community develop their lifestyle, to support their daily lives. In terms of economic development, it helps the local people.”

This economic activity not only sustains local livelihoods but also contributes to regional growth by fostering entrepreneurship and investment in tourism-related ventures. Furthermore, as a destination that attracts both domestic and international travellers, Port Dickson plays a key role in promoting Malaysia as a Muslim-friendly tourism hub. The development of *halal*-certified accommodations, dining options, and facilities tailored to Muslim tourists resonate strongly with the Self-Oriented dimension of the MWTG, where religion and self-identity influence preferences for *halal* compliance, safe and private facilities, and family-friendly environments. In this context, Port Dickson’s economic contributions are not simply numerical but are embedded in how the destination positions itself as a space where Muslim women’s cultural and religious needs can be met.

PD can be more than the nearest beach. As specifically mentioned by S7, “*what people picture when they say PD*” should be curated anew. If PD invests in women-centred privacy, worship ease, cleanliness, and coherent identity, it will not only retain its loyal domestic base but also advance Malaysia’s stature as a leading Muslim-friendly coastal destination.

The following pathways were articulated by stakeholders during interviews:

- 1) Women-designated micro-zones and time windows - Blocked or screened beach segments during set hours for women-only activities (e.g., surf-skate, paddle, swim classes). (S1)
- 2) Women-led instruction and staff presence, male security at a distance for emergencies (S8).
- 3) Facility and cleanliness standardisation - Modular women’s changing suites with hair-drying stations; increased bins; anti-litter enforcement; organised hawker lines with color-coded canopies; transparent pricing (S3, S8, S7).
- 4) Heritage-nature programming – Story linked hiking at Tanjung Tuan, guided marine clean-ups and learning stations; photography routes; ethical seafood corridors (S8, S7).
- 5) Identity and cadence - A “Muslim-Friendly Coastal PD” brand with annual calendar (revived Pesta PD; women’s coastal wellness weekend; modest surf festival); signature landmarks to stabilize narrative (S7).
- 6) Community-first engagement - Formalize community roles (parking management, micro vending, caretaking). “*Santuni* local” to protect social license (S4).

In summary, while Port Dickson benefits from its strategic location and contributes significantly to the local economy, it faces critical challenges in terms of competition, attraction diversity, and promotional efforts. To fully realise its potential as a coastal destination, strategic investments in tourism infrastructure, the diversification of attractions, and innovative marketing campaigns will be essential. By addressing these issues through the lens of the Muslim Women’s Tourist Gaze framework, Port Dickson could further solidify its status as a leading destination for Muslim-friendly tourism and beyond.

5.3.3 Muslim-Friendly Tourism Initiatives

The theme of Muslim-Friendly Tourism Initiatives delves into the efforts, strategies, and services designed to cater specifically to Muslim tourists, with a particular emphasis on addressing their religious, cultural, and social needs. This theme encompasses four key sub-themes: *halal* facilities, safety and privacy, exclusive activities for women, and healing and wellness packages. Together, these sub-themes provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how tourism can be tailored to meet the unique requirements of Muslim travellers while simultaneously promoting inclusivity and diversity in the tourism sector.

A central element of this theme is the provision of *halal* facilities, which form the foundation of Muslim-friendly tourism. For many Muslim travellers, access to *halal*-certified food and beverages is not just a preference but a necessity. Restaurants, cafes, and hotels that offer *halal*-certified dining options gain a significant advantage in attracting Muslim tourists. As highlighted by respondents S1 and S4, Malaysia's baseline provision of *halal* food is strong; the persistent gap in PD is not food per se but prayer space and ancillary facilities at coastal sites. Respondent S1 emphasized that, in Malaysia,

"Food is not an issue... But the issue is prayer facilities".

She elaborated that while malls, aquatics centres, and even petrol stations increasingly provide surau, beaches are falling behind.

"Since the beach is a public natural resource, why not provide a place to pray?"

(S1)

"Prayer spaces, dining areas, tourist spots, and shopping areas. Women are quite particular/selective in their choice of hotels as well." (S3)

Both S1 and S3 pointed to the cultural normalisation of prayer timing for Muslim visitors, which requires design solutions on-site: convenient, clean surau; ablution-friendly toilets; and modest changing rooms. As specifically mentioned by respondent S1:

“Women’s core needs include a prayer space, secondly toilets, and one more an area for preparation, like a changing room”

Evidence of Syariah aligned hospitality was also cited in mainstream offerings. According to respondent S1, Lexis Hibiscus succeeds partly because *“Because they offer Muslim-friendly amenities and every room comes with a private pool”*, aiding privacy and movement. She further referenced the role of Islamic institutions in accommodation provision as indicative of institutional commitment to Muslim-friendly hospitality.

“Klana Resort Port Dickson... owned by Majlis Agama Islam Negeri Sembilan”
(S1)

Aligning with tourists’ perceptions, stakeholders observed that Islamic architecture and religious monuments are pull factors for international markets. As respondent S1 explained *“Chinese tourists are very attracted to the architecture of Malaysian mosques”*, reinforcing *halal*-religious ambience as marketable identity assets.

In short, integrating surau, ablution friendly facilities, modest changing spaces, and *halal* certified kitchens into coastal and hospitality footprints is a necessary baseline. As observed by respondents S1 and S4, the dependable availability and clear signposting of these facilities engender trust, reduces planning friction for women, and enhances destination competitiveness.

This demonstrating how institutions are also implementing Muslim-friendly initiatives which provided accommodations that adhere to *Syariah* compliance, such as providing *halal*-certified kitchens and amenities, are increasingly sought after by Muslim travellers. These facilities not only enhance the travel experience for Muslims

but also demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity by recognising and accommodating religious dietary laws. By integrating *halal* options into tourism offerings, destinations become more appealing to this growing market segment, fostering a sense of trust and cultural respect.

Safety and privacy emerged as pivotal concerns for Muslim women across interviews, echoing the tourist dataset. Stakeholders repeatedly recommended designated women-only zones and operational practices that protect modesty while enabling full participation. Both S8 and S1 emphasized privacy as an enabling condition for women to enjoy coastal activities.

"Privacy. Women need privacy. When they go out wearing hijab properly and need to pray in public spaces, they need privacy. If you have a designated area for women, women will like it. Your place will definitely see a surge in visitors."
(S8)

S1 verified this trajectory, noting that gender-separated facilities are becoming more common:

"Having separate swimming pools for men and women is considered a factor that can attract more Muslim tourists."

Many Muslim tourists value destinations that provide private spaces and segregated facilities, such as women-only swimming pools, prayer rooms, or designated areas for relaxation. These measures are especially important for female travellers who may prioritise modesty and personal safety during their journeys. For instance, hotels that offer gender-segregated recreational areas or exclusive accommodations for women contribute to a sense of comfort and security, enabling Muslim women to fully enjoy their travel experiences.

"Swimming pool facilities are split [between genders]. That's very common now. That is one of the factors they upgrade specifically to attract more Muslim tourists." (S5)

Privacy considerations extend beyond physical spaces to include safety measures such as secure transportation options and culturally sensitive tour guides who understand and respect Muslim norms and values.

"I really want to have a private beach, private areas for women. If you have these facilities, it will boost the place. Women sometimes want to wear swimwear. They want to embrace themselves."(S8)

The theme also highlights the growing demand for exclusive activities for women, which cater specifically to the preferences and needs of Muslim female travellers.

"We have a team of Muslim female divers... focusing exclusively on Muslim women" (S2)

Women-only adventure sports, such as scuba diving, hiking, or fitness retreats, are becoming increasingly popular as they allow Muslim women to participate in recreational activities while maintaining their privacy and adhering to religious guidelines. These activities provide a space where women can bond, explore, and enjoy new experiences without compromising their cultural or religious values. Similarly, private retreats and group tours designed exclusively for women are gaining traction, offering tailored itineraries that prioritise comfort, modesty, and relaxation. As S1 continued,

"The initiative facilitates greater accessibility for Muslim women, with the prospect of designated watercraft allocation for female Muslim practitioners, thereby maintaining appropriate standards of Islamic modest dress requirements (aurat)."

These initiatives demonstrate the importance of addressing the specific needs of female travellers and ensuring that tourism experiences are inclusive and empowering. Finally, the integration of healing and wellness packages into Muslim-friendly tourism underscores the sector's commitment to holistic travel experiences that cater to both physical and spiritual well-being. These packages often combine elements of faith-based learning, personal development, and relaxation, making them particularly

appealing to Muslim travellers who value a balance between leisure and self-improvement. Coastal destinations, for instance, have begun offering wellness retreats that include Islamic teachings, mindfulness sessions, and fitness programs designed for Muslim participants. As S3 noted, this is an emerging trend,

"They have packages where they go to coastal areas... It's not a very cheap package, quite pricey. They package the coastal destination with educational sessions. This means there are sessions about learning about faith, inner being, self-awareness and things like that."

Such initiatives not only attract tourists seeking meaningful experiences but also promote the idea of travel as a journey of self-discovery and rejuvenation. Within the context of the Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze, these experiences extend beyond leisure to encompass dimensions of faith, identity, and interpersonal connections. By providing safe, *halal*-compliant, and women-exclusive activities, these initiatives allow Muslim women to engage in spaces where modesty, privacy, and religious obligations are preserved. This reflects the Self-Oriented dimension of the gaze, where religion and self-identity shape the meanings attached to travel, as well as the Social/Interpersonal dimension, where engagement with hosts, facilities, and other visitors reinforces a sense of belonging and respect. In doing so, Muslim-friendly tourism initiatives not only facilitate recreation but also foster spiritual reflection, cultural expression, and emotional well-being, creating a holistic and meaningful tourism experience.

The theme of Muslim-Friendly Tourism Initiatives highlights the growing recognition of the Muslim travel market as a significant and valuable demographic in the global tourism industry. By addressing the need for *halal* facilities, prioritising safety and privacy, offering exclusive activities for women, and incorporating healing and wellness packages, destinations can create a welcoming and inclusive environment for Muslim travellers. These initiatives not only enhance the travel experience for Muslims but also contribute to the broader goals of diversity, inclusivity, and cultural exchange in tourism. As the demand for Muslim-friendly tourism continues to rise, investing in these initiatives will be crucial for destinations looking to attract and retain this important market segment.

Thus, Figure 5.2 illustrates the theme and code findings derived from stakeholder perspectives in relation to Muslim women's tourism experiences and the case of Port Dickson as a coastal destination. The analysis reveals three interlinked thematic areas. First, Tourism and Muslim Women highlight the market potential and economic impact of attracting this growing segment, while also emphasising the importance of infrastructure, facilities, and sensitivity to cultural and religious values. Second, Muslim-Friendly Tourism Initiatives focus on the provision of *halal* facilities, safety and privacy measures, exclusive activities designed for women, and wellness-oriented offerings, which collectively address the distinctive needs of Muslim women tourists. Finally, Port Dickson as a Coastal Destination represents the contextual dimension, where stakeholders recognise both opportunities and challenges. While Port Dickson benefits from its strategic location and diverse attractions, issues such as sustainability, infrastructure limitations, and tourism development pressures remain central concerns. Taken together, the figure demonstrates how stakeholder insights converge on the necessity of integrating Muslim-friendly initiatives within the broader tourism development agenda of Port Dickson, thereby creating an inclusive environment that aligns with both market demand and community values.

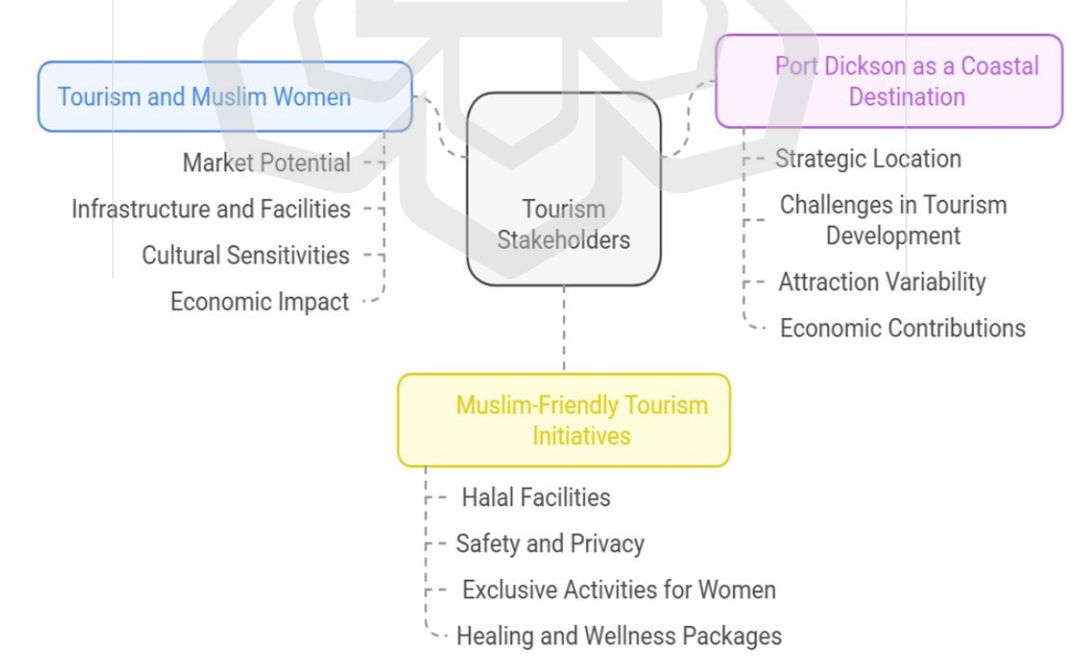


Figure 5.2 Theme and Code Findings of Stakeholders

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has presented findings that address the study's three research objectives through analysis of both tourist and stakeholder perspectives. Regarding the first objective of exploring behaviours, the findings reveal that Muslim women's approach to coastal destinations is shaped by considerations of Muslim-friendly environments, recreational preferences, and accessibility. The second objective of identifying experiences was addressed through analysis of facilities, spiritual experiences, and environmental concerns. Finally, the tourist gaze objective was illuminated through examination of tourists' perceptions and stakeholder understanding of Muslim women's unique viewpoints. These findings provide a foundation for the detailed discussion presented in the next chapter.

In summary, the findings reveal that Muslim women's tourism experiences are shaped by a complex interplay of religious values, cultural expectations, and environmental factors. The themes identified in this chapter demonstrate that the tourist gaze in this context is multidimensional, encompassing not only visual and recreational aspects but also moral, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. These insights deepen the understanding of Muslim women's perspectives and will be further interpreted in the next chapter in relation to existing theories, contributing to the development of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze framework.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a comprehensive discussion of the research findings presented in Chapter 5, analysing them in relation to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. The discussion is organised according to the study's three research objectives: (1) exploring Muslim women's behaviours towards coastal destinations, (2) identifying Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations, and (3) determining the tourist gaze of Muslim women in coastal destinations. Each section critically examines the findings while situating them within broader academic discourse on Muslim women's tourism experiences.

6.2 MUSLIM WOMEN'S BEHAVIOURS TOWARDS COASTAL DESTINATIONS

The findings reveal several key behavioural patterns among Muslim women tourists at coastal destinations, particularly concerning their preferences for Muslim-friendly environments and recreational activities. These behaviours align with existing literature on Islamic tourism, such as Battour et al. (2011), who emphasised that Islamic attributes in tourism destinations significantly influence Muslim tourists' decision-making processes. Drawing primarily on interviews capturing tourist experiences and stakeholder perspectives, the analysis is supported by limited, and non-systematic observations used solely to contextualise interview insights. The analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how Muslim women engage with coastal destinations, highlighting the complex interplay between religious values, cultural preferences, and leisure activities. This multifaceted examination reveals how tourist attributes such as

culture and activities shape Muslim women's tourism behaviours while also illuminating the industry's response to their unique needs.

6.2.1 Preference for Muslim-Friendly Environments

The study's findings demonstrate that Muslim women strongly prioritise destinations that provide Muslim-friendly environments. This preference manifests through several key aspects such as the importance of privacy and safety. These aspects emerged as a crucial factor influencing destination choice and behaviour. Participants consistently expressed their desire for spaces that allow them to maintain their religious modesty while engaging in recreational activities.

This aligns with previous research by Battour et al., (2020) who found that privacy considerations significantly impact Muslim women's tourism decisions. While privacy and safety are valued by many tourist segments, for Muslim women these needs are rooted in religious obligations rather than personal preference alone. Unlike general female or family tourists who may prioritise comfort or general safety, Muslim women often require gender-segregated facilities, modest attire accommodations, and prayer-friendly environments as part of fulfilling faith-based obligations (Battour et al., 2018; Stephenson, 2014). These religiously informed expectations make the need for privacy and modesty more pronounced and non-negotiable in comparison to other segments. Therefore, destinations that overlook these elements risk alienating a growing and influential market within the global Muslim travel segment.

Building upon these privacy concerns, the findings regarding safety considerations align with Stephenson's (2014) research on Islamic tourism, which emphasises how security and cultural sensitivity are interconnected for Muslim women travellers. The participants' appreciation of environments that "respect Muslim women" reflects broader patterns identified by Zamani-Farahani and Henderson (2010) regarding the importance of cultural compatibility in Islamic tourism.

In addition to privacy and safety, the availability of *halal* food and prayer facilities emerged as non-negotiable requirements. This finding supports existing

literature suggesting that religious obligations continue to shape Muslim tourists' behaviour even during leisure travel (Carballo, Leon & Carballo, 2024). The presence of clearly labelled *halal* establishments and accessible prayer rooms not only facilitates religious observance but also creates a welcoming atmosphere that encourages Muslim women to fully engage with the destination.

Expanding on the significance of *halal* amenities, the importance of *halal* food availability emerged as a crucial factor, with participants noting it as a "very important" consideration during a stay in Port Dickson. This corresponds with studies by Mohsin et al. (2016) who identified *halal* food as one of the primary determinants of Muslim tourists' destination selection. The preference for destinations with readily available *halal* options demonstrates what Eid and El-Gohary (2015) term as "Islamic religiosity" influencing consumer behaviour in tourism contexts.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that Muslim women's engagement with coastal destinations is deeply influenced by Islamic values and cultural considerations. As evidenced by participants' responses, the need for environments that respect religious identity extends beyond physical infrastructure to encompass broader social and cultural dimensions. This aligns with recent research by Alam et al., (2024) on Muslim-friendly tourism development and cultural sensitivity in destination management.

Following this cultural perspective, the study demonstrates how cultural compatibility shapes visitor experiences, from modest dress considerations to gender-appropriate spaces. As one participant noted, "As Muslims, we should educate children from an early stage... being able to be ourselves, not having to act differently." These findings support Hassan and Hall's (2022) research emphasising the importance of cultural compatibility in destination choice, while extending previous work by Battour et al. (2020) on Islamic tourism preferences.

The findings presented in the previous chapter demonstrates that Muslim women's preference for Muslim-friendly environments encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions: privacy and safety considerations, *halal* food availability, prayer facilities, and broader cultural compatibility. These findings align with and extend existing literature, particularly Battour et al. (2020) and Henderson (2016), while

highlighting how religious and cultural values fundamentally shape Muslim women's destination choices and experiences. This understanding is crucial for destination managers and tourism providers seeking to effectively serve this growing market segment.

Beyond aligning with previous literature, the current study provides a fresh perspective by situating Muslim women's preferences within the framework of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze, which is deeply rooted in religious consciousness and cultural interpretation. Unlike conventional tourist gaze theory that focuses on visual pleasure or aesthetic appreciation, Muslim women's gaze toward coastal destinations is shaped by a moral and spiritual lens. Participants in this study demonstrated an active process of interpreting tourism spaces based on cues such as modesty protection, gender segregation, and visible Islamic symbols. Their preference for Muslim-friendly environments reflects more than a need for physical comfort; it reveals a spiritually guided gaze that actively seeks affirmation of Islamic values in public recreational settings. This interpretive gaze is not merely about what is seen, but how what is seen aligns with faith-based expectations and the ability to maintain religious identity while engaging in leisure. In this sense, the study adds to the literature by highlighting how the Muslim women tourist gaze transforms the destination from a neutral leisure space into a morally navigated environment, where privacy, safety, and religious compliance are non-negotiable markers of acceptability.

6.2.2 Engagement in Recreational Activities

While maintaining Islamic values and principles in a Muslim-friendly environment, visitors can still enjoy a wide range of Islamic-compliant recreational activities that cater to both spiritual fulfilment and entertainment needs. The findings reveal three main patterns of recreational engagement: beach activities, water sports participation, and family-oriented activities such as camping. These patterns demonstrate the complex interplay between religious observance and leisure pursuits, highlighting how Muslim women navigate and negotiate their recreational choices within the framework of their faith and cultural values.

Beach activities form a core component of Muslim women's coastal tourism experience, within certain cultural and religious parameters. As one participant noted, "So far, I'm satisfied. In terms of swimming there's no problem, in terms of safety it's still OK." This suggests that when appropriate conditions are met, Muslim women actively engage in activities, supporting Zamani-Farahani and Henderson's (2010) assertion that Islamic principles can be compatible with leisure activities when properly accommodated. Research by Battour and Ismail (2016) supports this perspective, noting that destinations can successfully attract Muslim tourists when they provide appropriate facilities and services that respect religious requirements.

The observed behavioural patterns in beach activities illustrate a wider trend in Muslim-friendly tourism, where tourists deliberately choose destinations that enable them to fulfil their religious duties while engaging in leisure activities (Yusof, Shariff, & Omar, 2019). This aligns with existing research highlighting the connection between Islamic values and beach-based recreation. Participants' ability to enjoy beach activities while adhering to modest dress codes exemplifies the balance between religious obligations and tourist experiences, as discussed by Jafari and Scott (2014).

Water sports participation emerged as an area where Muslim women show significant interest but face certain limitations. As evidenced by one participant's comment about seeking "snorkelling" and "sea activities," participation is often contingent on the availability of appropriate facilities and arrangements that respect religious requirements. Recent studies support this, with the Muslimah Sports Association's (2023) report finding that swimming was the most desired activity among British Muslim women yet also presented the greatest challenges in finding 'comfortable environments' (p. 18). The study by Abdulwasi et al. (2018) highlights how creating culturally sensitive and religiously appropriate environments is crucial for increasing Muslim women's participation in physical activities, including water sports.

This finding contributes to the growing body of literature on adventure tourism in Islamic contexts and suggests that providers need to consider specific adaptations to accommodate Muslim women's needs. The preference for more enclosed or private areas for swimming activities supports Henderson's (2016) findings on the importance of gender-segregated facilities in Muslim-friendly tourism. Recent research by

OurSwimStory (2023) further emphasises that while Muslim women express strong interest in aquatic activities, the lack of gender-segregated facilities and appropriate modest swimwear options continue to be significant barriers to participation.

Family-oriented activities featured prominently in the findings, with participants often approaching coastal tourism within a family context. This aligns with Islamic values emphasising family bonds and collective experiences, as noted in recent studies (Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2011). The popularity of family activities such as camping, evidenced by statements like "The real purpose of coming here is to be with family," supports Khoo-Lattimore and Yang's (2023) research on how Islamic values influence travel patterns, particularly the emphasis on family togetherness. The study found that coastal destinations serve as important spaces for family bonding and social interaction, with facilities like picnic areas and barbecue spots being particularly valued.

These findings extend the understanding of Muslim women's recreational engagement in coastal tourism by highlighting the interplay between religious requirements, facility availability, and activity preferences. This also challenges some assumptions in existing literature about limited participation in active tourism by Muslim women while emphasising the importance of appropriate facilities and services that accommodate religious and cultural needs. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge about Muslim women's leisure practices and provides valuable insights for tourism providers seeking to develop more inclusive and culturally sensitive recreational offerings.

The engagement of Muslim women in recreational activities, as found in this study, introduces a nuanced layer to the existing discourse through the lens of the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze. Rather than simply participating or refraining from coastal activities, Muslim women exhibit a selective and evaluative gaze that actively negotiates between religious obligation and recreational desire. The decision to engage in beach or water-based activities is preceded by an assessment of spatial appropriateness, including the visibility of others, gender composition of the area, and availability of modest facilities. This behaviour reflects an embodied tourist gaze, one that is internalised through religious discipline and externalised through cautious participation. This contrasts with other tourist segments where recreational involvement

is typically framed around individual freedom or thrill-seeking motivations. This study reveals that Muslim women's recreational gaze is dynamic and adaptive which they do not reject tourism activities outright but rather recalibrate their involvement based on the degree to which the environment aligns with their religious and cultural sensibilities. This contributes a novel perspective to the literature by emphasising that recreational tourism, when viewed through a faith-driven gaze, becomes a space of negotiation, not restriction.

6.2.3 Stakeholder Understanding and Response

From the stakeholders' perspective, this section examines their understanding and response towards Muslim women's travel behaviour and preferences in coastal tourism, revealing four key aspects: market significance, cultural considerations, infrastructure and facilities, and economic impact.

Findings indicate that Muslim women represent a significant and growing segment in Malaysia's coastal tourism sectors. While some reports suggest increasing female participation, there is no official data confirming a specific gender ratio in religious tourism. Instead, research highlights the expanding role and empowerment of Muslim women in tourism, particularly in Malaysia and Southeast Asia (Muslimin, 2017). This demographic shift aligns with contemporary research on Islamic tourism dynamics, which emphasises women (Muslim in particular) is increasing economic agency in travel decisions (Yang, Khoo-Lattimore, & Arcodia, 2018). Stakeholder perspectives highlight Muslim women's role as primary decision-makers in travel planning, particularly regarding destination selection, accommodation preferences, and activity choices. This influence extends beyond individual choices to broader social networks, as evidenced by their significant economic contribution of US\$80 billion annually to the global tourism economy (MasterCard & Crescent Rating, 2020) as well as by stakeholders noting that "their attraction and influence in encouraging their friends to travel is more effective than our promotional efforts".

While stakeholders recognise Muslim women's growing market presence and decision-making power, they also acknowledge that meeting their specific cultural and

religious needs is paramount for destination success. Cultural sensitivities emerge as crucial factors shaping Muslim women's travel behaviours, with stakeholders emphasising the importance of privacy, modesty, and religious accommodation in destination choice. Earlier influential work by Han et al. (2019) demonstrate how Muslim women actively seek environments that respect their cultural norms, particularly regarding gender segregation in recreational spaces and *halal* facilities availability. One stakeholder observed that "Muslim women hold the most power, things that need to be emphasised especially regarding modesty/covering the *aurat*" reinforces contemporary research on the intersection of religious values and tourism preferences. This has led to the implementation of gender-segregated facilities and women-only activities, reflecting destination adaptation strategies to meet these specific needs. Such adaptations not only accommodate religious requirements but also shape the "tourist gaze" (Urry & Larsen, 2011), as destinations are curated to align with the expectations and cultural sensitivities of Muslim women travellers. This, in turn, influences how both hosts and visitors perceive and experience the tourism environment.

These cultural considerations have driven significant changes in tourism infrastructure and facilities development, particularly in coastal destinations. Stakeholders consistently emphasise that appropriate infrastructure is critical for attracting and retaining Muslim women tourists. As a result, the development of prayer rooms, gender-segregated beaches, private swimming pools, and family-friendly recreational spaces has become a priority. Recent infrastructure assessments highlight how destinations are investing in purpose-built facilities that specifically cater to Muslim women's needs, such as modest changing rooms, women-only spa facilities, and *halal*-certified restaurants (Rahman et al., 2021).

Understanding this market segment is essential, as it has direct implications for destination planning, branding, and marketing. Destinations that recognise and respond to the unique preferences and requirements of Muslim women are better positioned to create compelling value propositions and differentiate themselves in a competitive tourism landscape. These adaptations are not merely practical responses to religious and cultural requirements; they also actively shape the "tourist gaze" (Urry & Larsen, 2011). By curating spaces that foreground privacy, modesty, and religious observance,

destinations influence what is seen, experienced, and valued by both Muslim and non-Muslim visitors. For Muslim women, such facilities foster a sense of comfort, belonging, and agency, enabling fuller participation in leisure and tourism activities without compromising their values.

Furthermore, the intentional design of these spaces' signals to the global tourism market that the destination is inclusive and responsive to diverse needs, thereby broadening its appeal. As one stakeholder noted, "Having the right facilities isn't just an option anymore, it's essential for attracting this market segment." This adaptation of tourism infrastructure aligns with contemporary research on Muslim-friendly destination development (COMCEC, 2015). In this context, the tourist gaze is shaped not only by the physical amenities provided but also by how destinations communicate their cultural sensitivity and hospitality. Ultimately, this dynamic interplay between infrastructure, cultural values, and visitor perception underscores the evolving nature of tourism in multicultural societies.

These investments in specialised infrastructure and facilities have significantly influenced the economic dynamics of coastal tourism destinations. The economic impact of Muslim women's travel behaviours demonstrates significant market influence, characterised by preferences for comprehensive *halal* tourism packages and specialised facilities. Recent market analyses (Jafari et al., 2023) indicate that this consumer behaviour contributes substantially to local economies through direct spending and influence on others' travel decisions. The stakeholder observation that "they have many preferred options...so it gives them many options for their buying power" aligns with contemporary research on Islamic tourism behaviour patterns (Al-Khalifa & Scott, 2023). This economic influence has catalysed market developments, evidenced by the emergence of specialised facilities and services catering to Muslim women travellers, supporting recent findings on religious tourism market segmentation (Sumardi et al., 2025).

As infrastructure and services expand in response to these economic influences, the nature of the Muslim women tourist gaze is also subject to transformation. Where previously their gaze may have been constrained by limited availability of faith-sensitive services, the increasing presence of gender-segregated recreation zones, *halal*

dining establishments, and facilities for prayer allows for a shift from a restrictive gaze marked by caution, negotiation, and avoidance of certain activities to a more expansive gaze characterised by curiosity, participation, and greater engagement with coastal attractions. This reflects Urry & Larsen's (2011) point that the gaze evolves alongside changing social and material conditions.

Furthermore, as Muslim women gain increased visibility and market recognition, their gaze incorporates a stronger sense of agency and choice. Enhanced buying power and diverse tourism products enable them to construct recreational experiences that are not only compliant with religious principles but also align with personal leisure aspirations. Over time, this may encourage a more cosmopolitan orientation of the gaze, wherein Muslim women negotiate both global lifestyle trends and Islamic values when engaging with destinations. In this way, the evolving gaze illustrates a dynamic interplay between economic influence, cultural identity, and spatial practices in coastal tourism.

In addressing the first objective, stakeholders' perspectives reveal four critical insights about Muslim women in coastal tourism: their emergence as influential decision-makers in travel planning, the fundamental importance of cultural and religious accommodation in destination choice, the necessity of appropriate infrastructure and facilities development, and their substantial economic impact on the tourism market. These findings highlight the need for destinations to develop more targeted strategies that address both the practical and cultural needs of Muslim women travellers while recognising their growing influence in the tourism sector. The stakeholders' observations also emphasise the evolving nature of this market segment, suggesting that continued adaptation of facilities, services, and infrastructure, along with responsiveness to Muslim women's needs, will be crucial for future tourism development.

The study's examination of stakeholder perspectives reveals a significant shift in how the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze is increasingly acknowledged and operationalised in tourism planning. A novel insight offered by this research is the concept of a reverse or reflective gaze wherein stakeholders are not only observing tourists but are themselves observed, evaluated, and indirectly guided by the

expectations of Muslim women tourists. This reverse gaze results in proactive adjustments to service offerings and infrastructure, such as the provision of women-only facilities, modest swimming options, and culturally respectful signage. Unlike previous studies that position stakeholders as passive providers, this study shows that Muslim women's expectations create a feedback loop, influencing how tourism products are designed and delivered. The power of the Muslim women tourist gaze lies in its ability to subtly direct economic and spatial changes, as stakeholders respond not only to spoken needs but to anticipated interpretations of space by these travellers. Thus, the study offers a new dimension by suggesting that the gaze of Muslim women travellers acts as a structuring force within the supply side of tourism, shaping destinations from within.

6.3 MUSLIM WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE AT COASTAL DESTINATIONS

The second research objective focused on understanding Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations. The findings reveal a complex interplay between accessibility considerations, physical facilities, and spiritual experiences that shape these experiences. The analysis demonstrates how Muslim women's engagement with coastal destinations extends beyond mere leisure activities to encompass deeper spiritual and emotional connections. Tourism stakeholders also demonstrated varying levels of awareness regarding Muslim women's needs, highlighting potential gaps between tourist expectations and industry understanding. This multifaceted examination provides crucial insights into how destination attributes and facilities influence Muslim women's tourism experiences while also illuminating areas where industry responses could be better aligned with visitor needs.

6.3.1 Accessibility Considerations

The findings reveal that accessibility plays a crucial role in shaping Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations. This aligns with previous research by Henderson (2016), who emphasised that transportation infrastructure and accessibility significantly influence tourism destination choice among Muslim travellers. The analysis of Muslim

women's experiences reveals three critical accessibility challenges at coastal destinations. First, while highway connectivity generally supports convenient access, its benefits are primarily limited to private vehicle users. Second, the inadequate public transportation infrastructure creates significant barriers, particularly for women travelling independently or without male companions. Third, parking facilities and their proximity to essential amenities emerge as crucial factors affecting overall satisfaction and religious observance.

Highway connectivity emerges as a critical determinant in Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences, particularly influencing their destination selection and travel planning. The study reveals that well-developed highway networks significantly enhance destination accessibility, as evidenced by one participant's observation that it takes "only one hour and 15 minutes to arrive" through multiple route options. This finding aligns with seminal studies by Khadaroo and Seetanah (2007) on transportation infrastructure's role in tourism development.

The availability of direct highway access not only facilitates easier travel but also enables Muslim women to better plan their journeys around prayer times and meal schedules (CrescentRating, 2024).). Furthermore, improved highway connectivity supports the growing trend of family-oriented coastal tourism among Muslim women, as noted by Ibrahim and Mohsin (2023), who emphasise how efficient road networks contribute to positive travel experiences, particularly for those travelling with children or elderly family members.

While highway infrastructure facilitates convenient access for private vehicle users, the study reveals significant challenges regarding public transportation options. To note, Muslim women's experiences in coastal destinations are significantly influenced by transportation accessibility, with public transport infrastructure emerging as a critical factor in their travel decisions. This study revealed substantial challenges in this area, as evidenced by one participant's observation that "If you have a private car, it's convenient. Because there's no public transport facility." This limitation aligns with recent research by Khadaroo and Seetanah (2007) on mobility constraints in tourism destinations.

Although alternative solutions such as ride-hailing services and car rentals provide temporary remedies, the absence of reliable public transportation creates barriers to independent mobility, particularly affecting women travelling without male companions (Yang et al., 2018). This constraint significantly shapes Muslim women's tourism experiences by limiting their autonomy, flexibility, and sense of security during travel. For those travelling alone or in female-only groups, the lack of accessible and culturally appropriate transportation contributes to greater dependence on private arrangements, which may not align with their financial capacity or religious expectations regarding modesty and safety. Furthermore, this limitation may discourage spontaneous travel, reduce participation in peripheral tourism activities, and increase logistical stress, ultimately diminishing the overall quality and inclusivity of their travel experiences. These findings extend Mazumdar and Mazumdar's (2002) earlier work on Muslim-friendly destination development by illustrating how transportation infrastructure gaps are not merely technical oversights but can significantly also impact Muslim women's destination choices, length of stay, and overall travel experiences. This underscores the importance of integrated and inclusive transportation planning in coastal tourism development to ensure accessibility for all, regardless of gender or travel group composition.

Beyond transportation access, the availability and organisation of parking facilities represent another crucial dimension of accessibility that shapes Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. Parking infrastructure as stated, emerges as a crucial determinant in shaping Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. The study reveals that well-organised parking facilities significantly influence destination choice and satisfaction levels, especially for family groups travelling with children or elderly members. As one participant noted, "Convenient parking is essential for us, especially when carrying prayer items and managing children." This statement highlights the practical challenges faced by Muslim families, where travel often involves bringing additional items such as prayer mats, garments for modesty, and food for young children or elderly relatives. For Muslim women in particular, convenient parking enables easier access to nearby prayer spaces or rest areas without compromising privacy or safety. Inadequate parking infrastructure can cause stress, delays, and discomfort, particularly when travelling with vulnerable family members, which directly affects the overall

perception of the destination. This finding aligns with recent research by COMCEC (2015) on Muslim-friendly destination infrastructure requirements.

The proximity and adequacy of parking facilities to prayer rooms, recreational areas, and dining establishments particularly affect Muslim women's mobility and comfort levels (Islam & Ashton, 2024). This extends beyond mere convenience, as proper parking infrastructure enables Muslim women to maintain modesty and religious obligations while transitioning between activities. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure, highlighting the intersection between practical facilities and religious considerations in destination development.

This study further extends the understanding of Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences by introducing the concept of a mobility-based tourist gaze, which expands beyond the destination to include access routes, transportation modes, and the spatial logic of movement. Muslim women do not passively receive accessibility conditions; rather, they actively interpret them in relation to religious obligations such as prayer timing, modesty, and family management. For instance, participants' emphasis on proximity of parking to prayer spaces and recreational zones reveals an interpretive process that integrates logistical convenience with spiritual continuity. This gaze incorporates an anticipatory dimension, where destinations are evaluated based on how well the entire journey from departure to arrival accommodates religious needs. The gaze becomes an evaluative tool for spatial integrity, where infrastructure and mobility are scrutinised through the lenses of ease, dignity, and religious observance. Such interpretation is largely absent in general tourism literature, and this study provides a new theoretical lens by showing how the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze applies not only to the destination but to the entire experience of access, movement, and religious feasibility across the tourism journey.

Thus, these findings highlight the need for more comprehensive and inclusive transportation planning that considers the specific needs of Muslim women travellers. Future destination development should address these accessibility gaps through integrated infrastructure solutions that support both practical mobility needs and religious requirements. This would not only enhance Muslim women's travel

experiences but also contribute to the destination's appeal and competitiveness in the growing Islamic tourism market.

6.3.2 Role of Facilities in Shaping Experiences

The study revealed that facilities play a crucial role in shaping Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations, with cleanliness, amenities, and prayer facilities emerging as key considerations. Cleanliness and facility maintenance emerge as critical determinants shaping Muslim women's experiences at coastal destinations, with significant implications for destination satisfaction and revisit intentions. The study reveals a notable transformation in destination quality, as evidenced by participants' observations of improvement from "quite dirty" conditions to enhanced cleanliness standards following municipal management intervention. This finding aligns with recent research by Rahman and Abdullah (2023) on the correlation between destination maintenance and Islamic tourism satisfaction levels.

From the perspective of the Tourist Gaze (Urry, 1990), such infrastructural improvements directly influence how Muslim women perceive, engage with, and evaluate the destination. The cleanliness and organisation of a place contribute to the visual consumption of the environment central to the Tourist Gaze, where physical surroundings either affirm or conflict with tourists' cultural and religious expectations. For Muslim women, the gaze is not only shaped by aesthetic appeal but also by religious sensitivity, where the sight of clean, modest, and well-maintained facilities aligns with their need for spiritual and physical comfort. In this sense, cleanliness serves as both a visual and symbolic cue, reinforcing perceptions of respect, safety, and dignity which are the critical aspects of the Muslim women tourist gaze.

Moreover, this positive visual and sensory experience reflects the broader Islamic principle of *mizan* (balance), which calls for harmony between human activity and the environment. A well-maintained coastal setting demonstrates that the destination honours both natural beauty and the spiritual well-being of its visitors, particularly those who value modesty, cleanliness (*taharah*), and order as part of their faith. This alignment fosters emotional responses such as tranquillity (*sakinah*), trust,

and inner peace, enhancing not only destination satisfaction but also deeper spiritual engagement with the space. Therefore, destination cleanliness is not merely a practical factor, but a central part of a faith-informed tourist gaze, making it a powerful enabler of meaningful, repeatable, and value-aligned travel experiences for Muslim women.

Building on this relationship between environmental aesthetics and spiritual well-being, the practical implementation of cleanliness through structured facility management, plays a critical role in operationalising these values within the physical tourism landscape. The implementation of comprehensive waste management infrastructure, particularly the strategic placement of waste receptacles and regular maintenance schedules, demonstrates how fundamental facility management influences overall visitor experiences. Recent studies by CrescentRating (2025) also emphasise that cleanliness standards particularly affect Muslim women's perception of destination quality, given its significance in Islamic principles of purity (*taharah*). While cleanliness is universally valued across cultures as a basic expectation in tourism, its meaning and priority vary depending on cultural, spiritual, and personal norms. In many Western and non-Muslim Asian tourism contexts, cleanliness is often associated with hygiene, aesthetics, and general comfort. It is typically framed within the context of health standards, customer satisfaction, or service quality, reflecting a largely secular and utilitarian rationale.

However, for Muslim women travellers, cleanliness is more than a matter of convenience or hygiene. It is a deeply rooted religious obligation tied to the Islamic principle of *taharah* (purity). This concept governs not only physical cleanliness but also spiritual readiness for key religious acts such as prayer (*salat*), ablution (*wudu*), and even dietary practices. Thus, the availability of clean facilities such as toilets, changing rooms, and prayer spaces is not just a preference but a prerequisite for fulfilling daily religious duties, particularly in public or recreational settings.

This spiritual dimension adds a moral and emotional weight to the Muslim women tourist gaze. Unclean facilities do not merely diminish destination satisfaction. It may obstruct worship, evoke discomfort, and signal a lack of inclusivity or respect for Islamic values. As such, cleanliness becomes a marker of religious accommodation and a key element in the perceived Muslim-friendliness of a destination.

In contrast, many secular tourist paradigms may overlook these ritualistic needs, prioritising physical cleanliness for efficiency, aesthetic enjoyment, or environmental sustainability without recognising its faith-based importance. This difference highlights the need for gender-sensitive and religion-aware planning in coastal tourism, especially when targeting the growing segment of Muslim women travellers. In short, the provision of well-maintained public amenities, including toilets and changing facilities, emerges as crucial for supporting Muslim women's comfort and religious observance during coastal activities.

The development of private, gender-segregated changing facilities that align with Islamic principles of modesty represents a critical advancement in destination infrastructure. As noted by Ibrahim and Mohsin (2023), the preference for "more enclosed" and "separated or sheltered" spaces reflects the intersection between religious requirements and facility design in coastal tourism settings. This finding extends current understanding of how religious and cultural considerations should inform the development of tourism infrastructure, particularly in destinations seeking to attract Muslim women travellers.

Prayer facilities on the other hand, emerge as a fundamental determinant in shaping Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences, with both availability and quality significantly influencing their satisfaction levels. The study reveals critical gaps in religious facility provision, as evidenced by participants' observations that "Prayer rooms are quite difficult to find," highlighting infrastructure inadequacies that affect Muslim women's ability to fulfil their religious obligations. This finding aligns with recent research by Rahman and El-Gohary (2023) on essential religious facilities in Islamic tourism destinations.

For Muslim travellers, destinations are often interpreted through the lens of religious practice. The absence of prayer spaces may lead visitors to perceive the location as incomplete or inconvenient, shaping their gaze toward one of constraint and negotiation. Instead of freely engaging with recreational settings, they may become preoccupied with finding private areas to perform prayers or may even avoid extended stays. In contrast, destinations with well-integrated mosques or accessible prayer facilities foster a sense of ease and reassurance. When the obligation of worship can be

performed without difficulty, the gaze becomes more relaxed and open, enabling Muslim women to fully appreciate leisure and natural surroundings without the stress of religious disruption.

This contrast demonstrates how the gaze is not only about viewing landscapes but also about interpreting spatial environments through faith and obligation. In contexts where prayer spaces are provided, coastal destinations are seen as more welcoming and accommodating, encouraging deeper spiritual and recreational engagement. Conversely, in places where such facilities are absent, the gaze may shift to one of limitation, creating an implicit boundary around what Muslim women can comfortably experience. Over time, this directly influences perceptions of destination attractiveness, loyalty, and the likelihood of recommendation to others.

The quality dimension of prayer facilities extends beyond mere presence, with participants emphasising the need for "comfortable" prayer spaces "with air conditioning and good accessibility." This requirement for well-designed and maintained facilities encompasses multiple elements, including cleanliness, proper ventilation, and adequate ablution areas. Recent studies by CrescentRating (2024) emphasise how the quality of prayer facilities directly influences destination choice and length of stay among Muslim women travellers. Furthermore, the provision of women-only prayer spaces with enhanced privacy features emerges as particularly significant in coastal settings, where the integration of religious practices with beach activities requires careful consideration. Such facilities do more than meet basic religious requirements; they actively shape how destinations are perceived and experienced.

Where appropriate facilities are available, Muslim women are likely to view the destination as inclusive, respectful, and accommodating, which fosters comfort and trust. This positive framing enables a more expansive gaze, allowing women to appreciate natural and recreational spaces without anxiety about fulfilling religious duties. Conversely, the absence or poor quality of such facilities produces a more constrained gaze, whereby the destination can be seen as incomplete, less welcoming, or even exclusionary. This not only limits participation in certain activities but also affects broader destination image, ultimately influencing loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendations.

The proximity and accessibility of prayer facilities to other amenities, such as clean toilets and changing rooms, also plays a crucial role in creating positive experiences. This finding extends Han et al., (2019) work on Muslim-friendly destination development by highlighting how the strategic placement and design of prayer facilities can significantly enhance Muslim women's comfort and religious observance during coastal leisure activities.

6.3.3 Spiritual Dimensions of Coastal Tourism

The intersection between physical cleanliness and spiritual experience emerges as a distinctive feature of Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. While adequate facilities and cleanliness standards primarily serve practical needs, they simultaneously facilitate spiritual well-being and religious observance. This connection is particularly evident in participants' emphasis on the relationship between clean environments and their ability to maintain spiritual purity, as one participant noted, "A clean environment helps us maintain our spiritual state while enjoying the beach". The findings in short, reveal that coastal destinations facilitate profound spiritual experiences for Muslim women, encompassing divine connection, gratitude, faith and self-reflection as well as spiritual peace.

The coastal environment emerges as a significant facilitator of divine connection and spiritual reflection among Muslim women tourists. The study reveals how natural coastal settings create unique opportunities for spiritual contemplation, as evidenced by participants' observations that "When we sit with nature, we feel more peaceful...when we see the sunset, we feel grateful to Allah." This finding aligns with Jafari and Scott (2014) on the spiritual dimensions of Islamic tourism experiences.

While Urry's foundational tourist gaze framework underscores the socially organised and visually mediated nature of tourism, much less attention has been paid to the role of spirituality in shaping how destinations are perceived and experienced. Recognising the spiritual tourist gaze has important implications. It shows how tourism cannot be understood solely as leisure or consumption but must also be considered a space of spiritual practice and renewal. It also highlights the need for destination design

and management to preserve environments that facilitate reflection and religious connection, ensuring that natural features such as sunsets, seascapes, and tranquil spaces are valued not only for aesthetic appeal but also for their spiritual resonance. In this way, the findings contribute to broadening the theoretical scope of the tourist gaze, particularly within faith-oriented tourism contexts.

The intersection between natural landscapes and spiritual connection demonstrates how coastal destinations also serve dual purposes as both recreational spaces and venues for religious reflection. As Jafari and Scott (2014) note, this natural-spiritual connection aligns with Islamic principles of finding divine signs (*ayat*) in nature, suggesting that coastal destinations hold particular significance for Muslim women seeking both leisure and spiritual fulfilment; see also Heintzman (2010).

The coastal environment emerges as a powerful catalyst for religious reflection and expressions of gratitude among Muslim women tourists. The study reveals how natural coastal elements inspire profound spiritual contemplation, as evidenced by participants' expressions of thankfulness for "Allah's creation" and opportunities to "observe the wave movements." This finding aligns with recent research by Charan, Zezhuang, and JinHao (2024) on the relationship between natural environments and spiritual experiences in Islamic tourism contexts.

This insight suggests that protecting the natural qualities of coastal destinations is integral not only for ecological sustainability but also for maintaining their role in facilitating faith-based tourism experiences. For Muslim women, the connection to nature is intertwined with recognition of divine creation; thus, environmental degradation such as polluted beaches, overdevelopment, or decline in scenic quality has direct implications for their spiritual engagement. In this sense, sustainable coastal management practices, including preservation of marine ecosystems, regulation of development activities, and maintenance of clean recreational spaces, are not only environmental imperatives but also culturally and religiously meaningful considerations.

Developing coastal destinations in ways that respect and sustain natural landscapes ensures that spaces remain conducive to both leisure and spiritual reflection. This resonates with the principle of *khalifah* (stewardship) within Islam, which

emphasises human responsibility in protecting the natural environment (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Integrating sustainability measures such as eco-friendly infrastructure, conservation of scenic elements, and limiting overcrowding would therefore enhance the destination's ability to offer both physical and spiritual value to Muslim women tourists. Ultimately, the preservation of coastal environments is central to supporting a spiritual dimension of the tourist gaze, highlighting how sustainable development and religious experiences are mutually reinforcing in the context of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism.

The manifestation of gratitude through nature observation demonstrates how coastal destinations facilitate deeper religious connections beyond mere recreational purposes. As noted by Muslim (2018), this interaction between natural landscapes and spiritual gratitude reflects fundamental Islamic principles of appreciating divine creation, suggesting that coastal settings provide unique opportunities for Muslim women to enhance their spiritual connection through environmental engagement.

The coastal environment emerges as a significant facilitator of spiritual peace and tranquillity among Muslim women tourists. The study reveals how natural seaside settings create profound experiences of inner peace, as evidenced by participants' observations that "When we sit by the sea it automatically becomes peaceful." This finding aligns with Charan et al. (2024) again, on the therapeutic dimensions of Islamic tourism experiences, particularly in natural settings.

The intersection between leisure activities and spiritual reflection demonstrates how coastal destinations serve as venues for meaningful religious experiences, even in predominantly secular contexts. As noted by Hakim, Hafidzah, Susanto, and Savitri (2025), this dual functionality of destination environments enables Muslim women to engage in both recreational activities and spiritual contemplation, enhancing their overall tourism experience. The natural elements of coastal settings, particularly the rhythmic waves and expansive views, facilitate deeper connections with divine creation, contributing to existing literature on how environmental features influence religious tourism experiences.

6.3.4 Stakeholder Understanding and Response

The findings reveal that Muslim women's experiences at Port Dickson are significantly shaped by its strategic location and accessibility, supporting Henderson's (2016) framework on destination attractiveness factors for Muslim tourists. Stakeholders emphasise that Port Dickson's proximity to major urban centres like Kuala Lumpur and accessibility via highways creates positive experiences for Muslim women travellers, as evidenced by the statement "Port Dickson's location itself is very strategic, close to KL, just a few hours' drive from KL and Selangor." This aligns with Timothy and Olsen's (2020) argument that accessibility is a crucial factor in Muslim-friendly destination development. However, the experiences are tempered by infrastructure limitations, particularly in public transportation, which affects the overall travel experience for Muslim women who may prefer or require alternative transportation options, suggesting a gap between theoretical frameworks of Muslim-friendly tourism and practical implementation.

The experiences with facilities and infrastructure reveal a complex interplay between expectations and reality, as highlighted in the stakeholder perspectives. The presence of Muslim-friendly facilities, such as gender-segregated swimming pools and prayer spaces, enhances positive experiences, supporting Eid and El-Gohary's (2014) findings on the importance of Islamic attributes in tourism satisfaction. This is evidenced by stakeholder observations like "Swimming pool facilities are split [between genders]. That's very common now." However, the findings also indicate challenges in facility maintenance and availability, particularly regarding privacy needs and modesty requirements. This aligns with Battour et al.'s (2020) research on the critical role of Islamic facilities in shaping Muslim tourists' experiences, while also highlighting the ongoing challenges in meeting these needs consistently.

The analysis of experiences with various attractions reveals significant limitations in Port Dickson's tourism offerings, as stakeholders note "*The challenge is the lack of tourism products. For example, tourism products in PD are just the military museum, army museum, that's all that's available.*" This finding contrasts with Ryan's (1998) tourist motivation theory, which emphasizes that tourists' motivations evolve with travel experience, leading them to seek a wider variety of attractions and

experiences to satisfy increasingly complex personal and psychological needs. The stakeholder perspective that "*Besides the beach, there's nothing else*" indicates a critical gap between the theoretical understanding of Muslim women's tourism needs and the actual tourism product development. This limitation is particularly significant when considered against Jafari and Scott's (2014) framework of Islamic tourism development, which emphasises the need for varied attractions that cater to different interests while maintaining religious and cultural sensitivity. The findings suggest that while Port Dickson's coastal appeal remains strong, the lack of diverse attractions impacts Muslim women's overall experience and may affect their likelihood of return visits or extended stays, highlighting the need for strategic development of culturally appropriate and diverse tourism offerings. The perspectives of tourism stakeholders align with tourist experiences to some extent. While stakeholders emphasise the need for diversification as a strategy to sustain competitiveness, Muslim women visitors also voiced feelings of limited variety, which reduced the depth of engagement and influenced intentions regarding repeat visits. This overlap suggests that both groups recognise a gap in Port Dickson's current offerings, though articulated from different vantage points with one being managerial and market-oriented, the other experiential and personal.

The findings reveal that Muslim women's experiences with *halal* facilities at coastal destinations are fundamentally shaped by the availability and quality of *Syariah* compliant amenities, supporting Eid and El-Gohary's (2015) framework on Islamic attributes in tourism satisfaction. This aligns with Henderson's (2016) observation that holistic *halal* facilities are crucial for positive Muslim tourist experiences. However, the findings also indicate that while basic *halal* facilities are generally available, there is still room for improvement in terms of integration and accessibility, particularly in public spaces and recreational areas, suggesting a gap between theoretical frameworks of Muslim-friendly tourism and practical implementation.

Stakeholder narratives suggest that establishments such as Klana Resort Port Dickson, operated under Majlis Agama Islam Negeri Sembilan, strive to implement comprehensive *halal*-compliant amenities covering food, accommodation, and prayer facilities. These initiatives reflect international best practices designed to appeal not only to domestic but also to international Muslim women travellers. However, fieldwork findings indicate limited international representation among actual visitors,

suggesting that while such facilities strengthen the destination's potential global appeal, their effectiveness in attracting international Muslim women is contingent on broader factors including destination branding, market visibility, and accessibility.

Safety and privacy experiences emerge as critical factors in shaping Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences, with stakeholders emphasising the transformative impact of gender-segregated facilities. The stakeholder observation that "If you have a designated area for women, women will definitely like it. Your place will definitely see a surge in visitors" supports Stephenson's (2014) argument about the importance of privacy in Islamic tourism. The implementation of gender-segregated swimming pools and private beach areas demonstrates how destinations are evolving to meet these needs, though stakeholders note ongoing demands for more comprehensive privacy solutions, particularly in outdoor recreational spaces. This aligns with Timothy and Olsen's (2021) analysis of religious tourism adaptation strategies, while also highlighting the practical challenges of implementing theoretical frameworks in coastal settings.

The integration of exclusive women's activities and wellness experiences represents an innovative approach to Muslim women's tourism, as evidenced by initiatives like female-only diving teams and specialised wellness retreats. The stakeholder insight that "They package the coastal destination with educational sessions... about learning about faith, inner being, self-awareness" aligns with Wilson's (2012) framework on the evolution of Islamic tourism products. These experiences demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of Muslim women's desire for both physical and spiritual fulfilment in their travel experiences, supporting Jafari and Scott's (2014) integrated approach to Islamic tourism development. The findings suggest that these specialised activities and wellness packages create unique value propositions that go beyond basic religious compliance to offer transformative experiences, though stakeholders note that such premium offerings often come at higher price points, potentially limiting accessibility. This observation extends existing theoretical frameworks by highlighting the intersection of spiritual needs, gender-specific requirements, and economic considerations in Muslim women's tourism experiences.

In summary, accessibility emerges as a crucial determinant in shaping Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences and destination choices. The study identifies that

convenient access and efficient transportation infrastructure significantly influence destination selection, supporting Islam & Ashton (2024) research on Muslim-friendly destination development. Participants' emphasis on comfortable driving distances and highway connectivity reflects the practical considerations that shape their travel decisions. The research also reveals specific infrastructure requirements, particularly regarding transportation and parking facilities. The preference for private vehicle access, as highlighted by participants, demonstrates the intersection between religious observance and practical mobility needs. This finding extends current understanding of how transportation infrastructure influences Muslim women's ability to access and enjoy coastal destinations while maintaining religious comfort.

Furthermore, the availability of well-organised parking facilities, especially for family groups, emerges as a critical factor in destination satisfaction. Recent studies by Hanafiah et al. (2021) emphasise how practical amenities such as convenient parking contribute to the overall quality of Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. This finding highlights the importance of comprehensive infrastructure planning in developing Muslim-friendly coastal destinations.

6.4 THE TOURIST GAZE OF MUSLIM WOMEN AT COASTAL DESTINATIONS

This section discusses the findings related to the third research objective: determining the tourist gaze of Muslim women in coastal destinations, specifically focusing on Port Dickson. The analysis reveals how religious and cultural perspectives shape Muslim women's tourist gaze, with the discussion centring on two primary themes that emerged from the findings: Environmental Concerns and Tourists' Perceptions. In short, the study revealed that Muslim women's tourist gaze is shaped by complex perceptions that encompass both physical and spiritual dimensions of coastal destinations.

6.4.1 Environmental Awareness and Concerns

The findings reveal that environmental concerns significantly shape Muslim women's tourist gaze at coastal destinations. While this resonates with Urry's (2002) notion that the tourist gaze is socially organised and influenced by contextual conditions, the current study indicates that for Muslim women, perceptions of environmental quality operate as more than background factors. Instead, environmental stewardship emerges as a central component of their tourist gaze, directly guiding destination choice, satisfaction, and the willingness to revisit.

The cleanliness of beaches emerged as a fundamental aspect of how Muslim women perceive and evaluate coastal destinations. As evidenced in the findings, the transformation of PD's cleanliness following municipal management demonstrates the impact of environmental maintenance on visitor perceptions. The observation that "It used to be quite dirty, but since it became a municipality, there have been many cleaning works done, and many trash bins have been provided" suggests environmental quality directly impacted overall experience satisfaction. This finding aligns with Henderson's (2016) research on Islamic tourism, which emphasises how environmental cleanliness affects Muslim tourists' destination choices and experiences. The provision of adequate waste management infrastructure, such as strategically placed trash bins, shows how practical environmental solutions can enhance the tourist gaze and overall destination appeal. This demonstrates the important relationship between environmental factors and visitors' overall tourism experience.

Next, the study revealed strong appreciation for environmental preservation among Muslim women tourists. The sentiment that "we can't develop too much infrastructure in the coastal area. We're afraid we'll disturb the ecosystem" demonstrates an environmentally conscious tourist gaze that values natural preservation over excessive development. This environmental awareness extends to comparisons with other destinations, as evidenced by the observation that "If we want to compare with other countries... actually our beach is more beautiful. In terms of natural beauty... we want to maintain the beach view as it is." This finding supports Stephenson's (2014) research on how environmental preservation influences Islamic tourism experiences and perceptions. As the desire for balance between development and natural

preservation emerged as a key theme, the study revealed significant environmental awareness among Muslim women tourists. Participants demonstrated strong concern for environmental preservation and cleanliness. This finding aligns with Islamic principles of environmental stewardship while adding to literature on sustainable tourism. On the other hand, this suggests that Muslim women tourists value environmental sustainability alongside modern amenities.

The presence of natural vegetation and greenery emerged as another significant factor in shaping Muslim women's tourist gaze. The appreciation for "Many trees, shaded areas, pleasing to the eyes" demonstrates how natural landscape elements contribute to positive destination perceptions. This aligns with Din's (1989) early work on Islamic tourism, which highlighted the importance of natural aesthetics in Muslim tourists' experiences. This also reveals a sophisticated understanding of landscape management, with participants noting the need for "planting trees that can prevent erosion and make the landscape attractive while providing shade for visitors." In other words, this suggests that Muslim women's tourist gaze encompasses both aesthetic and functional aspects of environmental management.

6.4.2 Tourists' Perceptions

While environmental concerns highlight the physical and ecological aspects of Port Dickson's coastal landscape, tourists' perceptions and their distinctive tourist gaze reveal how these environmental elements combine with religious and cultural factors to shape Muslim women's overall visitor experience and their unique way of seeing and interpreting the destination. In accordance, the analysis of Muslim women's tourist experiences reveals an intricate relationship between faith-based values and destination perception. Research shows that Muslim women's tourist gaze at coastal destinations is influenced by a complex interplay of religious and cultural factors, encompassing both physical and spiritual dimensions of their travel experience. This finding provides a crucial foundation for understanding how religious identity shapes tourist perceptions and subsequent behaviour patterns at leisure destinations. The following discussion explores these perceptual dynamics in detail, highlighting the unique characteristics that define Muslim women's tourist gaze.

The findings indicate that Muslim women's tourist gaze is influenced by their perception of a destination's distinct identity and offerings. The observation that "the positioning of PD doesn't really capture my heart... I don't see exactly what product PD offers" reveals how destination positioning affects visitor perceptions. This supports MacCannell's (1976) theory of tourist authenticity seeking and the importance of clear destination identity. However, the study also found that some visitors appreciate PD's simple, tranquil atmosphere, describing it as "Great, peaceful, not chaotic." This duality in perception demonstrates how different aspects of the tourist gaze can lead to varying interpretations of the same destination features.

Building upon these perceptual elements, the findings further reveal that safety and comfort significantly influence Muslim women's tourist gaze. The observation that "Actually yeah, when I go to PD... I think I'm safe" demonstrates how security perceptions shape destination experiences. This supports Henderson's (2016) research on the importance of safety in Islamic tourism. The emphasis on safety extends beyond physical security to include cultural and religious comfort, aligning with recent studies by Rahman et al. (2022) on Muslim-friendly tourism development.

While these aspects of identity and safety form the foundation of visitor experience, the research also reveals a complex interplay between moderate expectations and aspirations for improvement among Muslim women tourists. While visitors' express satisfaction with basic amenities and natural attractions, they also identify opportunities for enhancement, such as the suggestion for "an observation tower" and improved landscaping that could "prevent erosion and make the landscape attractive." This balanced perspective aligns with Kim and Stepchenkova's (2023) findings on tourist destination image formation and expectations. The desire for improvements while maintaining the destination's peaceful character reflects what Eid and El-Gohary (2015) describe as the evolving nature of Muslim-friendly tourism, where traditional values meet modern amenities. Notably, the emphasis on relaxation emerges as a central theme, with respondents highlighting how "hearing the waves already makes me feel so peaceful," indicating the importance of maintaining natural elements while pursuing development initiatives.

6.4.2.1 Tourist Perception: Spiritual and Divine Dimensions

While above perceptions form the foundation of visitors' experiences, the coastal setting also emerges as a powerful environment for spiritual engagement among Muslim women tourists. The analysis reveals a profound spiritual dimension in Muslim women's tourist gaze at coastal destinations, characterised by deep contemplative experiences and divine appreciation. The finding that "When we sit with nature, we feel more peaceful" demonstrates how natural coastal settings facilitate spiritual connections, supporting Jafari and Scott's (2014) concept of religious consciousness in tourism experiences. This spiritual dimension extends beyond mere physical observation, encompassing what Timothy and Olsen (2021) describe as a transformative religious experience in natural settings.

The coastal environment emerges as a powerful catalyst for spiritual meditation and divine connection, creating what Rahman et al. (2023) term as "sacred spaces in secular settings." Participants consistently described how seaside environments enhanced their spiritual reflection, exemplified by statements like "While watching sunrise or sunset, we think about our past sins and draw closer to the Creator." This finding aligns with recent research by Hassan and Hall (2022) on Islamic tourism experiences, which emphasises how natural environments can strengthen religious contemplation and spiritual awareness.

While these insights support earlier work on the spiritual dimensions of Islamic tourism, they also reveal a key point of departure from Urry's (2002) tourist gaze and other Western or non-Muslim conceptualisations. In much of the existing literature, natural landscapes such as coastlines or sunsets are primarily discussed for their aesthetic, leisure, or restorative value, often framed within secular ideals of beauty and escape. In contrast, findings from this research show that Muslim women interpret coastal environments through a lens of religious meaning, where natural features are perceived as signs of divine creation and prompts for moral reflection. Thus, rather than being consumed purely as scenery, these landscapes are experienced as mediators of gratitude, repentance, and spiritual renewal. This introduces a distinct faith-inflected dimension to the tourist gaze, extending beyond the visual and sensory emphases

commonly found in Western accounts and highlighting the integration of spirituality, morality, and religious obligation within tourism experiences.

Muslim women's perception of natural coastal elements as divine manifestations represents a unique aspect of their tourist gaze. The observation of natural phenomena such as waves, sunsets, and ocean horizons triggers what Abd Wahab, Ab Hamid, Hashim, Meerangani, Abdul Hamid, and Atan (2023) identify as *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection) in Islamic tourism contexts. As one participant noted, "When we see the waves moving, we feel Allah's greatness and power," demonstrating how physical observations transform into spiritual experiences through religious consciousness.

This perspective significantly extends Urry's (1990, 2002) classic tourist gaze theory. Urry's framework emphasises that the gaze is socially organised, mediated by institutions, and oriented around the visual consumption of landscapes, often highlighting novelty, pleasure, or escape. Even with later refinements (Urry & Larsen, 2011) that consider emotion, embodiment, and multi-sensory experience, the framework remains predominantly secular, focusing on how tourists consume rather than spiritually interpret environments. In contrast, the Muslim women's gaze identified in this research reveals that landscapes are not consumed as mere scenery; they are interpreted as divine signs *ayat* that provoke spiritual introspection, moral accountability, and religious gratitude.

By integrating *tafakkur* and *tadabbur* into the analysis, the study introduces a spiritual-tourist gaze that is absent from Urry's Western-centric framework. While Urry explains how tourists "see" places through cultural frames, Muslim women's coastal gaze shows how religious worldviews inflect and reframe the act of seeing, where gazing upon waves or sunsets becomes an act of worship and remembrance. This not only challenges the secular assumptions of the tourist gaze but also broadens its conceptual scope to include the ways religion and spirituality mediate tourism experiences. In doing so, the findings contribute to a more plural understanding of the tourist gaze, one that is capable of accommodating diverse faith-based interpretations of natural settings.

The findings also reveal how spiritual contemplation at coastal destinations fosters environmental stewardship through a religious lens. Participants frequently connected their appreciation of natural beauty with Islamic principles of environmental responsibility, supporting Kim and Stepchenkova's (2019) research on the relationship between religious values and environmental attitudes in tourism settings. This connection between spiritual appreciation and environmental consciousness adds a crucial dimension to understanding how Muslim women's tourist gaze influences their interaction with and responsibility toward natural environments.

The collective aspect of spiritual experiences emerges as another significant finding, with participants emphasising how sharing moments of divine appreciation with family and friends enhances both spiritual and social dimensions of their coastal visits. This aligns with Henderson's (2021) research on communal aspects of Islamic tourism while adding specific insights about shared spiritual experiences in coastal settings. The emphasis on collective spiritual experiences demonstrates how Muslim women's tourist gaze encompasses both individual contemplation and shared religious appreciation, creating what Gohary, Shah, Hosseini, Chan, and Madani (2022) describe as communal spaces of spiritual significance.

This multifaceted understanding of spiritual contemplation and divine appreciation in Muslim women's tourist gaze provides valuable insights for destination managers and tourism planners. It suggests the importance of preserving natural coastal environments not only for their aesthetic value but also for their role in facilitating meaningful spiritual experiences for Muslim visitors. As coastal destinations continue to develop, maintaining this balance between development and spiritual significance will be crucial for sustaining their appeal to the growing Muslim women's tourism market.

6.5 SYNTHESISING THE FINDINGS

This section synthesises the findings from the preceding discussion by drawing together the key themes that emerged from Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences. Rather than revisiting every point in detail, it highlights the interconnections across behaviours,

experiences, and the tourist gaze, showing how these dimensions overlap and complement one another. In doing so, this synthesis provides a holistic understanding of how religious values, cultural preferences, and leisure practices converge, and prepares the ground for the conclusions that follow.

The discussion reveals that Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences are shaped by a complex interplay of practical, cultural, and spiritual considerations. The findings demonstrate that accessibility, facilities, recreational activities and Muslim-friendly environments form the foundational elements of destination appeal. This is evidenced by the emphasis on efficient transportation infrastructure, well-maintained amenities, and culturally sensitive spaces that accommodate religious practices (Henderson, 2016; Rahman & Abdullah, 2023). The research particularly highlights how these elements contribute to creating an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere that aligns with Islamic values while facilitating meaningful tourism experiences.

The analysis of environmental concerns reveals a sophisticated understanding of sustainable tourism development in Muslim-friendly destinations. As demonstrated by the findings, Muslim women actively engage in diverse coastal recreational activities while maintaining strong environmental awareness and spiritual connections to natural settings (Jafari & Scott, 2014). This dual focus on recreation and environmental stewardship reflects a broader trend in Islamic tourism, where religious values inform both leisure practices and conservation attitudes.

Stakeholder perspectives provide crucial insights into the evolving nature of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism, particularly regarding market dynamics and development strategies. The research indicates that successful destination management requires a balanced approach that addresses both practical infrastructure needs and spiritual aspirations while maintaining environmental and cultural integrity (Timothy & Olsen, 2023). This is particularly evident in the implementation of specialised facilities and services that cater to Muslim women's specific needs while contributing to broader destination appeal.

The tourist gaze of Muslim women at coastal destinations emerges as distinctively characterised by the integration of religious consciousness with leisure

experiences. The findings reveal how natural coastal elements facilitate spiritual reflection and divine appreciation, supporting recent research on religious tourism experiences in modern settings (Hassan & Hall, 2022). This unique perspective influences not only individual experiences but also shapes collective attitudes toward environmental preservation and sustainable tourism practices.

The interconnected nature of these themes - from accessibility and facilities to spiritual experiences and environmental concerns, underscores the need for comprehensive and integrated approaches to coastal tourism development. The research demonstrates that successful Muslim-friendly destinations must address multiple dimensions simultaneously, ensuring that practical amenities support religious observance while maintaining environmental quality and cultural sensitivity (Sumardi et al., 2025; Al-Khalifa & Scott, 2023). This holistic understanding provides valuable insights for destination managers and policymakers seeking to enhance the appeal and sustainability of coastal destinations for Muslim women tourists.

6.6 TOWARDS THE CONCLUSIONS

Building on the synthesised discussion, this section moves towards the study's overall conclusions. It distils the broader contributions of the research by situating the findings within academic discourse on Muslim-friendly tourism, and by identifying their significance for both theory and practice. In doing so, it frames the key takeaways of the study and sets the stage for the formal conclusions, recommendations, and future research directions that follow.

This research has contributed to the growing body of knowledge regarding Muslim women's coastal tourism experiences, particularly in the context of Port Dickson, Malaysia. Through a comprehensive analysis of tourist experiences and stakeholder perspectives, the study has illuminated the complex interplay between religious obligations, leisure preferences, and destination attributes that shape Muslim women's tourist gaze. The findings reveal how coastal destinations can effectively accommodate Islamic principles while maintaining their recreational appeal, demonstrating the potential for inclusive tourism development that respects religious

and cultural sensitivities. This chapter presents the key conclusions drawn from the research findings and discussion, along with recommendations for various stakeholders and suggestions for future research. The conclusions and recommendations are structured to address both the immediate practical needs of destination managers and policymakers, as well as the broader implications for the development of Muslim-friendly coastal tourism in similar contexts globally.

6.7 FROM FINDINGS TO IMPLICATIONS

This section consolidates the major findings of the study and highlights their broader implications. By drawing together the evidence presented in previous sections, it clarifies how Muslim women's behaviours, experiences, and tourist gaze collectively shape their engagement with coastal destinations. These insights provide a foundation not only for understanding this tourism segment in greater depth but also for informing destination planning, management, and policy in Muslim-friendly coastal tourism.

1. Infrastructure-Mediated Gaze

Muslim women's behaviour at coastal destinations is significantly influenced by the availability of Muslim-friendly facilities and environments, while still maintaining strong interest in recreational activities. The findings reveal that the tourist gaze of Muslim women is socially organised and framed through infrastructural provisions, such as *halal* dining options, prayer facilities, and gender-segregated spaces. These institutional arrangements constitute the conditions that enable Muslim women to perceive and experience coastal destinations as legitimate leisure spaces where religious adherence can be preserved. The institutional arrangements and spatial provisions also frame the conditions under which the gaze is enacted, reinforcing Urry's notion that the tourist gaze is not natural but socially organised. Consequently, destinations that integrate such facilities not only legitimise Muslim women's presence but also facilitate fuller participation in a wide range of recreational activities. This infrastructural mediation directly shapes destination choice, activity engagement, and the duration of

stay, underscoring the inseparability of religious requirements and coastal tourism behaviour.

2. Spiritual-Contemplative Gaze

The quality of accessibility and physical facilities, combined with opportunities for spiritual connection, plays a pivotal role in shaping Muslim women's tourism experiences. Importantly, their gaze is not confined to visual consumption but extends into spiritual contemplation of nature as a divine creation. Coastal landscapes serve as both leisure spaces and sites of spiritual reflection, creating a dual engagement that enhances the overall tourism experience. This supports later refinements of the tourist gaze, which highlight its affective, multi-sensorial, and emotional dimensions. For Muslim women, functional amenities such as transportation systems and prayer rooms act as enablers that free them to connect more deeply with the destination's spiritual qualities. Tourism spaces that successfully integrate practical and spiritual elements thus produce more meaningful and fulfilling experiences, reinforcing that the tourist gaze for these demographic carries both functional and contemplative dimensions.

3. Religiously and Culturally Informed Gaze

The study further demonstrates that Muslim women's tourist gaze is uniquely informed by their religious and cultural perspectives, creating distinct patterns of engagement with coastal destinations. Their perception of coastal landscapes is filtered through Islamic principles of modesty, family orientation, and environmental stewardship. This gaze contributes to specific spatial practices and recreational choices, such as a preference for privacy-enhanced leisure zones, modest swimwear spaces, family-oriented activities, and destinations that facilitate religious observance. These preferences challenge conventional, often Western-centric interpretations of coastal tourism and instead highlight that the gaze is plural, context-specific, and embedded in cultural and religious worldviews. In this sense, Muslim women reconfigure coastal leisure environments into culturally resonant and spiritually meaningful spaces.

6.7.1 Synthesis

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that Muslim women's tourist gaze is multidimensional mediated by infrastructural arrangements, enriched through spiritual reflection, and deeply informed by cultural and religious values. Their gaze challenges dominant assumptions of coastal tourism as secular, self-indulgent, and primarily visual, pointing instead to experiences that are integrative, faith-sensitive, and identity-driven.

While the findings align with the established foundations of tourist gaze theory, this study also extends the framework by explicitly integrating religion and cultural identity as central analytical dimensions. Conventional applications of the gaze emphasise visual consumption, institutional mediation, and socio-cultural context, yet often overlook how faith-based values and modesty norm's structure tourism behaviour. By revealing how Muslim women negotiate coastal tourism through infrastructure, spirituality, and religiously informed interpretations, this study contributes to a more holistic understanding of the gaze. It advances the theory by broadening its applicability beyond Western and secular contexts, positioning religion as a crucial factor in shaping alternative ways of seeing, experiencing, and engaging with destinations.

The synthesis further highlights that Muslim women's tourism experiences are shaped through the dynamic interaction of religious values, cultural norms, environmental context, and individual agency. This interplay underscores the need to move beyond single-dimensional interpretations of the tourist gaze, recognising it as an integrative construct that encompasses emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions. Such a perspective offers a more nuanced understanding of how Muslim women engage with and interpret coastal tourism environments.

6.8 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution by extending the concept of the tourist gaze beyond its predominantly Western and secular foundations. It introduces the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze, which conceptualises tourism experiences as shaped

by the intersection of religion, gender, and environment. Drawing on qualitative evidence from Muslim women's coastal travel, the study extends existing frameworks, addresses gaps in the study of religion and gender in tourism, and refines understanding of the tourist gaze. Unlike conventional models that prioritise visual consumption and leisure, this framework incorporates moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, offering a more context-sensitive and inclusive perspective. In doing so, the study also contributes to the discourse on Islamic tourism by demonstrating how leisure spaces, particularly coastal environments, can function simultaneously as sites of recreation and spiritual reflection.

Most significantly, these contributions are anchored in a critical extension of Urry's (1990, 2002) concept of the tourist gaze. While Urry explained how tourism perceptions are socially organised and culturally mediated, his theory has been shaped largely by Western and secular assumptions where landscapes are consumed visually for novelty, escape, and aesthetics. Even later refinements by Urry & Larsen (2011), which emphasised multi-sensorial and emotional aspects of tourism, remain primarily grounded in secular interpretations of leisure. By contrast, the present research shows that for Muslim women, coastal environments are not simply scenic spaces but are perceived through a lens of religious consciousness, cultural values, and gendered expectations.

Based on the findings, this study proposes the *Muslim Women Tourist Gaze* as a new theoretical framework (Figure 6.1). This gaze integrates religious, cultural, gendered, and environmental influences into the experience of coastal tourism, thereby extending Urry's visual and performative theory into contexts where faith and cultural identity are central. Four key influences are shown to shape this gaze:

1. Religious principles – Islamic values such as modesty, cleanliness, and worship structure how Muslim women interact with destinations. Central to this is the incorporation of *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection), where natural landscapes are interpreted as signs of divine creation that prompt gratitude, moral awareness, and spiritual connection.

2. Cultural norms – Expectations regarding privacy, gender roles, and modest recreational practices influence spatial use and the appeal of facilities such as women-only spaces and *halal*-certified establishments.
3. Gendered experiences – Considerations of safety, autonomy, and decision-making shape behaviour, reflecting the intersection of gender identity with travel and leisure choices.
4. Tourism environment – The aesthetics of the natural environment, availability of facilities and infrastructures, and the quality of environmental management all play a role in structuring satisfaction and engagement.

Within this broader framework, a distinct conceptual dimension emerges as one of the study's most original contributions: the *Spiritual Tourist Gaze*. This gaze describes how Muslim women view and interpret natural environments not only as leisure settings but as catalysts for religious contemplation and divine remembrance. Participants consistently described coastal experiences such as observing waves, sunsets, or horizons not simply as visually pleasing but as spiritually meaningful encounters that reinforced awareness of Allah's greatness.

The *Spiritual Tourist Gaze* diverges sharply from Urry's secular theorisation. Where Urry highlights aesthetics, novelty, and consumption patterns, the present study emphasises spirituality, morality, and faith as central mediators of the gaze. This demonstrates that the tourist gaze is not universal but culturally and religiously plural. Specifically, the findings reveal that Muslim women tourists construct spiritual reflections in physical and natural settings, where everyday leisure landscapes such as beaches or sunsets acquire religious significance through acts of *tafakkur* and *tadabbur*. In this way, the framework expands the boundaries of the tourist gaze, integrating religion and spirituality as fundamental components of tourism perception dimensions that remain largely unaddressed in prior theorisation.

Beyond this spiritual extension, the study contributes to broader debates at the intersection of gender, religion, and tourism. Previous work has focused heavily on infrastructure development and community participation in Muslim-friendly destinations, but little attention has been paid to the situated experiences of Muslim women as independent travellers and decision-makers. By foregrounding their

perspectives, the *Muslim Women Tourist Gaze* challenges dominant coastal tourism narratives that overlook female religious subjectivities. It demonstrates that women's travel behaviours reflect complex negotiations between leisure desires, cultural values, and religious obligations, producing distinct forms of engagement that cannot be captured by gender-neutral or secular theories alone.

In sum, the *Muslim Women Tourist Gaze* framework offers a theoretical advancement that adapts and extends Urry's gaze to account for Islamic principles, gendered expectations, and cultural norms. Within this framework, the *Spiritual Tourist Gaze* emerges as a critical new dimension, showing how religious faith transforms physical observation into spiritual reflection and moral accountability. By integrating spirituality, modesty, and sustainability with leisure and aesthetics, the framework provides a more inclusive lens for analysing tourism experiences in faith-based contexts. This contribution not only broadens the theoretical application of the tourist gaze but also situates Muslim women's travel behaviour as a significant site for rethinking how religion and gender reshape contemporary tourism theory.

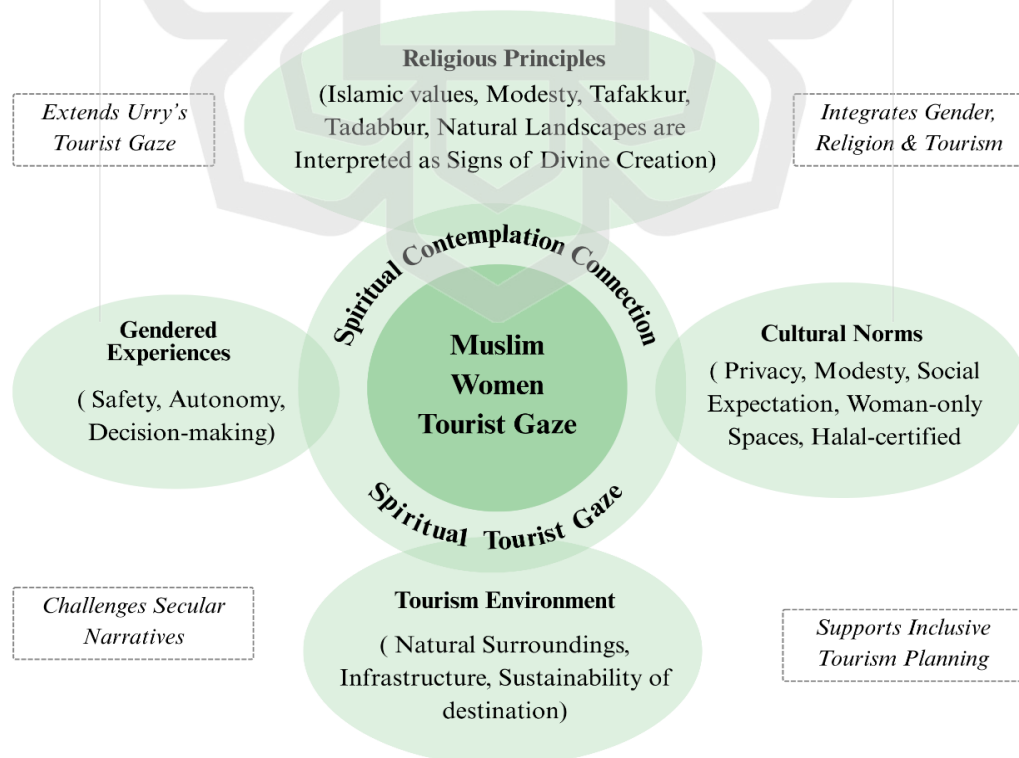


Figure 6.1 Muslim Women Tourist Gaze Framework

This framework also advances tourism theory by extending Urry's gaze to incorporate religion and gender, challenging secular tourism narratives, and offering a more inclusive lens for understanding diverse tourist experiences. By highlighting the importance of faith and identity in shaping destination engagement, the Muslim Women Tourist Gaze underscores the need for gender-sensitive infrastructure and culturally appropriate facilities. It also provides practical insights for policymakers and destination managers seeking to develop Muslim-friendly coastal tourism that is both inclusive and sustainable.

By presenting the **Muslim Women Tourist Gaze Framework**, this research provides a novel contribution to tourism studies, bridging the gap between religious tourism, feminist geography, and sustainable tourism development. It redefines how Muslim women engage with and interpret coastal environments, emphasising that their tourist gaze is not passive but an active, negotiated, and multi-dimensional experience shaped by faith, identity, and sociocultural expectations.

6.9 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building on the findings of this study, several practical implications emerge for tourism planners and stakeholders in developing more inclusive coastal tourism environments. Key considerations include the provision of privacy-oriented facilities, accessible prayer spaces, and culturally sensitive recreational options that align with Muslim women's needs. These recommendations are directly informed by the identified themes and highlight the importance of incorporating user-centred perspectives into tourism planning and development. These implications can be further translated into specific recommendations for key tourism stakeholders, including destination managers, tourism operators, policy makers, and destination marketers.

1. Destination managers should prioritise the development of Muslim-friendly facilities while maintaining environmental quality.
2. Tourism operators can enhance their services by better understanding and accommodating Muslim women's needs.

3. Policy makers should consider religious and cultural requirements in tourism development planning.
4. Destination marketers must strategically position and promote Muslim-friendly tourism through branding initiatives and targeted campaigns.

6.9.1 Recommendations

For destination managers, implementing a holistic approach to Muslim-friendly tourism infrastructure is paramount. This encompasses developing comprehensive facilities that adhere to Islamic principles, including prayer rooms equipped with proper ablution facilities, *halal*-certified dining establishments, and gender-segregated amenities. The creation of privacy-enhanced recreational zones, such as separate swimming pools and beach areas, would address the modesty requirements of Muslim travellers while ensuring their comfort and enjoyment. Furthermore, maintaining exemplary standards of cleanliness and environmental stewardship not only aligns with Islamic teachings of cleanliness (*taharah*) but also appeals to the growing segment of environmentally conscious Muslim travellers. These strategic improvements would significantly enhance the destination's appeal to the Muslim tourism market while fostering sustainable tourism practices.

Tourism operators on the other hand, must prioritise the development of culturally competent service delivery systems through comprehensive staff training programs that enhance understanding of Islamic practices and cultural sensitivities. Implementing specialised tour packages designed specifically for Muslim women travellers, incorporating activities that respect religious obligations and cultural preferences, would address an underserved yet growing market segment. Additionally, establishing clear and accessible communication channels regarding available Muslim-friendly facilities and services through multiple platforms is essential for managing expectations and enhancing guest satisfaction. This strategic approach would not only improve service quality but also create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for Muslim tourists, potentially leading to increased market share and customer loyalty.

Policy makers in parallel play a pivotal role in establishing comprehensive regulatory frameworks for Muslim-friendly tourism development through evidence-based guidelines and standards. By implementing strategic infrastructure improvements, including enhanced transportation networks and accessible religious facilities, authorities can create a more welcoming environment for Muslim tourists while benefiting the broader tourism ecosystem. Furthermore, the integration of sustainable tourism practices into policy frameworks not only addresses environmental concerns but also aligns with Islamic principles of environmental stewardship (*khalifah*). This multifaceted approach to policy development would foster long-term growth in the Muslim tourism sector while ensuring the preservation of natural and cultural resources for future generations.

Destination marketers equally hold a critical responsibility in positioning Muslim-friendly tourism within global and regional markets. Establishing a distinctive brand identity that emphasises inclusivity, cultural respect, and adherence to Islamic values, alongside the promotion of cultural and natural assets, is vital for destination competitiveness. A transparent communication strategy that highlights available Muslim-friendly facilities, such as *halal*-certified dining options, prayer rooms, and gender-segregated amenities, and quality and clean natural environments should be disseminated consistently through official tourism websites, applications, and targeted social media campaigns. Collaborations with *halal*-certification bodies sustainability recognitions and partnerships with Muslim travel influencers further reinforce brand credibility and trust.

Furthermore, employing storytelling techniques that showcase authentic Muslim traveller experiences fosters trust and emotional connection with potential visitors. Branding efforts should also highlight sustainability initiatives, given their alignment with both environmental stewardship and Islamic values. Co-branding strategies that integrate Muslim-friendly offerings with broader destination themes including wellness, eco-tourism, and cultural immersion create a strong and differentiated value proposition. Participation in Islamic tourism fairs, international travel exhibitions, and targeted digital promotions provides visibility, while data-driven approaches such as multilingual content, customised packages, and campaigns directed specifically at Muslim women travellers strengthen engagement. Ultimately, cultivating

a credible, trustworthy, and consistent destination brand for Muslim-friendly tourism is essential to attracting first-time visitors, encouraging repeat travel, and generating positive word-of-mouth within the global Muslim travel community.

6.10 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research directions should consider expanding both the methodological and theoretical scope to address these limitations. In addition to employing mixed method approaches to validate and extend the proposed framework, future studies could explore Muslim women's tourism experiences across diverse geographical contexts, including comparisons between coastal and non-coastal destinations. Comparative analyses between Muslim and non-Muslim women tourists may also provide valuable insights into the diversity of tourist gaze perspectives. Furthermore, the economic dimensions of Muslim-friendly tourism warrant closer examination, particularly in understanding how Muslim women's preferences influence spending patterns and destination loyalty. Incorporating more intersectional approaches that consider factors such as age, marital status, and nationality alongside religious values could further enhance theoretical depth and generate more nuanced, practical recommendations for tourism planners. Collectively, such multi-dimensional research would better capture the complexity of Muslim women's tourism experiences and contribute to more inclusive and effective destination development strategies.

6.11 CONCLUSION

This research has made significant theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding the complexities of Muslim women's tourism experiences through the lens of tourist gaze theory at coastal destinations. The findings have advanced the theoretical understanding of how religious identity and gender intersect to create a distinct Muslim female tourist gaze, challenging and expanding upon traditional Western-centric conceptualisations of tourist experiences. Moreover, the study has revealed the intricate interplay between religious observance, cultural requirements, and

tourism practices, demonstrating how Muslim women tourists actively negotiate and construct their tourism experiences within secular spaces.

In other words, this study advances tourism theory by introducing the *Muslim Women Tourist Gaze*, a framework that extends Urry's tourist gaze to incorporate the religious, cultural, gendered, and environmental influences shaping Muslim women's coastal travel experiences. A key originality lies in the identification of the *Spiritual Tourist Gaze*, where natural elements such as sunsets and waves are understood through *tafakkur* (contemplation) and *tadabbur* (reflection), transforming leisure spaces into sites of spiritual and moral reflection. Unlike Urry's primarily secular and consumption-oriented gaze, this framework demonstrates how faith-based values and gender-specific considerations fundamentally reframe the ways tourists perceive and engage with destinations. Collectively, these contributions broaden the scope of the tourist gaze, offering a more inclusive and plural account of tourism experiences in Islamic and gendered contexts.

The empirical findings provide substantial practical implications for destination management, highlighting the critical need for a nuanced approach that balances religious accommodation with environmental sustainability and recreational diversity. As the global Muslim tourism market continues to expand, these insights become increasingly vital for strategic destination development. This research not only contributes to the growing body of knowledge in Islamic tourism but also opens new theoretical perspectives on gender, religion, and tourism intersectionality. The findings establish a robust foundation for future research trajectories while offering evidence-based recommendations for tourism stakeholders to develop more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and sustainable tourism practices that acknowledge and cater to the distinct needs of Muslim women tourists. This integrated approach, combining ecological responsibility with cultural sensitivity, could serve as a model for understanding how Muslim women's unique tourism requirements can be effectively addressed across diverse coastal destinations, ultimately contributing to more equitable and sustainable tourism development that recognises the agency and preferences of this important market segment.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (TOURIST)

Tourists Interview Questions

Section A: For interviewer

1. Date and time of interview: _____
2. Name of the respondent / interviewee: _____

Section B: Muslim Women Tourist as a Market Segment

1. How do you know about this place? Is it different from other popular coastal destination that you have been before?
2. How long do you plan to stay?
3. What is the purpose of your visit this time?
4. What brought you here on this trip?
5. What motivated you to visit this destination?
6. What kind of tourism activities have you engaged (done while you were here) in Port Dickson? Please explain what you like about these activities.
7. What is/are your top priority on the attributes of a place when choosing a tourism destination?
8. What are your perceptions of this coastal destination?
9. Explain, in general what is your overall perception of destination/coastal area?
10. What were your expectations for the experience of being in a coastal area?
11. Did the site live up to your expectations as a Muslim woman? Explain why or why not?
12. How do you perceive your travel experience of the coastal area?
13. Do you think the coastal landscape here is properly developed and could encourage tourism development? If yes, why? If no, why, and what needs to be done and changed?

Section C: Destination Factors

1. What is your reaction towards the coastal area and place as a whole?
2. How is the accessibility of the area?
3. For your perspective, how is the image of the destination?
4. Has the coastal destination experience met your expectation as a Muslim woman? Explain why/why not.
5. In your opinion, how does this appeal for you as a Muslim woman?
6. Is the experience that you get is what you expected? Explain (Explore Muslim religion and culture in more depth).
7. Do you have any memorable experience here? What and why? (characteristic)
8. How do you see in the future of tourism in this coastal area for Muslim women? Give your opinions, perceptions, and suggestions.
9. How do you describe the scenery of the coastal area? What words would you use to describe it?
10. Do you as a Muslim have any concerns or points to make about this coastal area? As a Woman?

Section C: Muslim Women Tourist Gaze

1. Can you explain what are the elements or aspects of this place which distinguish it from other elements or aspects encounters in your everyday life?
2. What are main differences between your expectations and actual experience of coastal destination?
3. What are the most appealing travel experiences to you as a Muslim woman? Explain why.
4. What are the benefits to you as a Muslim gained from your experiences? Explain why. As a Woman?
5. How does religion and culture influence your travel experience?
6. Did your experience any emotional relationship with the place?
7. If the experience were the same as the spiritual, would this indicate that experience is the ultimate meaning of travel by Muslim women?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (STAKEHOLDER)

Interview Questions

For interviewer

1. Date and time of interview:
2. Name of the respondent / interviewee:
3. Agency:

Section A: For the respondent / interviewee:

1. What is your current position?
2. What are your responsibilities?
3. For how many years have you been in this position?

Section B: Muslim Women Tourist as a Market Segment

1. Can you provide data on the number of Muslim women tourists visiting coastal destinations (monthly) in 2022, 2023 and 2024, including the overall percentage of Muslim tourists and female Muslim tourists? (if any)
2. In what ways do you believe the Muslim women market segment benefits the tourism industry?
3. What initiatives have you undertaken to enhance tourism activities specifically for Muslim women in the area?
4. How do you envision the future of Muslim tourism and its impact on coastal destinations?
5. What specific attractions or activities in coastal destinations do Muslim women tourists express the most interest in?
6. What are the potential demands or needs of Muslim women tourists during their travel?
7. Do you believe it's necessary to consider the behaviour of Muslim women tourists in tourism planning? If so, why?
8. How are Muslim women tourists involved in the planning, decision-making, and development of tourism in your area? What challenges have you faced, and can you share any success stories related to this involvement?

9. How is the revenue generated from tourism utilized to enhance the overall tourist experience and specifically improve the experience for Muslim women tourists?
10. Could you provide examples of specific improvements made to cater to the needs of Muslim women tourists?
11. How do you perceive the relationship between Muslim women tourists and industry players/government concerning the development of tourism?

Section C: Destination Factors

1. How does tourism impact Port Dickson, considering both physical development and social factors?
2. What significant benefits can tourism bring to the Port Dickson area, particularly concerning social and economic aspects?
3. What are the challenges affecting the development of tourism in Port Dickson?
4. What plans are in place to enhance the physical infrastructure and environment of tourism destinations in Port Dickson?
5. Can you share details about local economic development programs related to tourism in Port Dickson and outline future plans? (if any)
6. What strategies can be employed to promote tourism in Port Dickson, focusing on attracting Muslim women visitors?
7. What are the top tourist attractions in Port Dickson, and are there any attractions specifically catering to Muslim tourists?
8. What specific tourism products and services are tailored to attract Muslim women tourists to Port Dickson, and how are these promoted?
9. How can tourist access to natural resources be improved to enhance their experience in Port Dickson, especially for Muslim women?
10. How do local communities perceive the impact of tourism on arrivals, particularly focusing on Muslim visitors, and what efforts are made to engage with them?

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION (EXAMPLE)

 الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA Kampus Puncak Jalil, Kuala Lumpur	LEADING THE WAY EDUCATION AND INNOVATION FOR A BETTER WORLD SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTION OF THE YEAR
Our Reference: IIUM/306/1/2	Date: 5th February 2024
Majlis Perbandaran Port Dickson KM1, Jalan Pantai 71009 Port Dickson Negeri Sembilan Darul Khusus (up: Puan Nurwajihah binti Mohd)	
Assalamu'alaikum wrt. wbt.	
Dear Sir,	
REQUEST PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA AND INTERVIEW FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES	
May this letter reach you while you are in the best of health by the grace of Allah S.W.T.	
This is to certify that the following student is a postgraduate student from Kuliyah of Architecture & Environmental Design (KAED) and she is currently carrying out his research work :-	
Name of Student :	Asra Zaliza Asbollah
Matric No/Programme :	G2116630 / Doctor of Philosophy (Built Environment)
Email/HP No :	asra.zaliza@iium.edu.my / 0172088334
Title of Research :	Interpreting Women's Tourist Gaze on The Coastal Landscapes of Peninsular Malaysia
We highly appreciate if your good office could provide assistance to the above student. The data collected by the student will be strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes. We look forward to your positive feedback.	
Your cooperation and consideration are highly appreciated.	
Thank you. Wassalam.	
 ASSOC. PROF. Ts. Dr. NURUL HAMIRUDDIN SALLEH Deputy Dean (Postgraduate, Responsible Research and Innovation) Kuliyah of Architecture & Environmental Design International Islamic University Malaysia	
c.c :	Assoc. Prof. LAr. Dr. Khalilah Bt. Zakariya – Main Supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mazlina Binti Mansor – Co-Supervisor
AKG/2024 KULIYAH OF ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN (KAED) International Islamic University Malaysia, Gombak Campus, Jalan Gombak, 63100 Kuala Lumpur Mailing Address: Kuliyah of Architecture and Environmental Design, P.O. Box 10, 50728 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (Company No: 181561-P) Tel: +603 4421 8227 (Ext. 5231/5253/3766) Fax: +603 4421 4864 Email: kaed@iium.edu.my www.iium.edu.my/kaed       	

APPENDIX D: PUBLICATIONS

Published:

1. Asbollah, A. Z., Zakariya, K., & Mansor, M. (2024). Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze: A Comprehensive Systematic Review. *Social and Management Research Journal*, 21(1), 27-38.
2. Asbollah, A. Z., Zakariya, K., Mansor, M., & Amit, H. (2024, July 27–28). Unveiling Muslim women's touristic perspectives in coastal area: A pilot study through the lens of the tourist gaze theory. Paper presented at the 8th International Conference on Social Sciences, Humanities and Technology (ICSSHET 2024), Thailand.

Manuscript under review:

1. Asbollah, A. Z., Zakariya, K., Mansor, M., & Amit, H. (2025). Coastal tourism through a Muslim women's gaze: Insights from Malaysia. *Planning Malaysia*

Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze: A Comprehensive Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines the overlooked experiences of Muslim tourists in particular women within tourism studies, focusing on their perspectives through the "tourist gaze." It explores the cultural, religious, and gendered encounters of Muslim women in tourism, addressing the challenges and opportunities influenced by their beliefs and contexts. Despite their increasing presence, there's a lack of comprehensive understanding of how Muslim women perceive tourist spaces. Employing a systematic approach, the review synthesizes existing literature, using keywords to identify relevant studies and applying stringent criteria for selection. Through rigorous analysis, key themes emerge, including religious observance, cultural identity, gender roles, empowerment, and challenges. The review sheds light on how Muslim women's gaze is shaped by faith, cultural practices, and societal expectations, influencing their interactions with tourist destinations and other tourists.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a notable surge in academic interest towards examining tourism through diverse cultural and gender lenses. Within this discourse, the exploration of the Muslim women tourist gaze has emerged as a crucial area of investigation, shedding light on the distinctive experiences, perspectives, and motivations of Muslim women travellers across different global destinations. This paper aims to delve into the phenomenon of the "tourist gaze," a concept popularized by John Urry, which pertains to how tourists perceive and interpret the places they visit. While extensively studied in Western tourism contexts, there remains a dearth of research focusing on the tourist gaze among Muslim women travellers (Asbollah & Said, 2019).

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UNVEILING MUSLIM WOMEN'S TOURISTIC PERSPECTIVES IN COASTAL AREA: A PILOT STUDY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE TOURIST GAZE THEORY

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Abstract: *This pilot study employs John Urry's theory of gaze to explore the perceptions, behaviors, and preferences of Muslim women tourists regarding the coastal destination of Port Dickson (PD), Malaysia. Through detailed interviews with a Muslim woman and a tourism industry professional, the study examines key factors influencing Muslim women travelers, including cleanliness, privacy, safety, quality of nature, and the importance of Islamic-friendly activities and amenities. The findings reveal a need for PD to become more accommodating by offering facilities that ensure privacy, gender-segregated spaces, enhanced safety measures, and respect for Muslim culture. Additionally, the study highlights the economic and social impacts of travel, the role of travel agents, and the potential future of Muslim tourism. Overall, the study underscores the significance of addressing the specific needs of Muslim women to enhance their travel experiences and suggests potential improvements for PD to better serve this market segment, all viewed through the lens of Urry's tourist gaze theory.*

Keywords: *Muslim Women Tourists, Tourist Gaze Theory, Coastal Destination.*

Introduction

The concept of the tourist gaze, introduced by John Urry in the early 1990s, has become a pivotal analytical tool in understanding how tourism shapes and is shaped by perceptions and behaviors. Urry's framework primarily reflects Western perspectives, often overlooking the diversity of tourist experiences shaped by cultural, religious, and gendered identities (Asbollah, 2013). Tourism, encompassing activities such as shopping, visiting sacred sites, and engaging in recreational activities, is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by social, cultural and economic factors (UNWTO, 2021). In Malaysia, where Muslims form the largest religious group (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), understanding the tourist gaze through the lens of Muslim women provides critical insights into how cultural and gender identities influence tourism experiences. Thus, this study aims to challenge this Western-centric view by examining the tourist gaze from the perspective of Muslim women, a group whose travel behaviors and perceptions have been under-researched.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the tourist gaze as interpreted by Muslim women, particularly in coastal destinations. By focusing on this group, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the tourist gaze that incorporates non-Western,

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COASTAL TOURISM THROUGH A MUSLIM WOMEN'S GAZE: INSIGHTS FROM MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Tourism is not only a movement of people but also a socially constructed way of seeing shaped by culture, religion, and gender. Coastal tourism is often associated with open bodily display and carefree leisure, which may conflict with Muslim women's expectations of modesty, safety, and family orientation. While Malaysia positions itself as a leading Muslim-friendly destination, limited research has centred Muslim women's voices in beach-based tourism. This study addresses this gap by applying and extending Urry's tourist gaze theory through the development of a Muslim Women's Tourist Gaze Framework (MWTG). Using a qualitative, interpretive single-case design, Port Dickson (PD) was studied through 25 semi-structured interviews with Muslim women tourists and key stakeholders, supported by on-site observations. Thematic analysis revealed that women's coastal experiences are organized around three interlinked logics: (1) ethical-spiritual, viewing nature as a site of gratitude and reflection; (2) family-collective, prioritizing safety, modesty, and kinship roles; and (3) environmental stewardship, valuing cleanliness and preservation. Findings extend the tourist gaze beyond Eurocentric assumptions by embedding faith, family, and ecological care into coastal leisure. Practically, the study highlights the importance of modesty-supportive infrastructure, halal assurance, and sustainability in strengthening Malaysia's coastal tourism appeal.

Keywords: tourist gaze, Muslim women, Islamic tourism, coastal tourism, Port Dickson, Malaysia

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APPENDIX E:
OVERVIEW OF TOURIST ACTIVITIES IN PORT DICKSON



