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Advanced International Practices for Implementing Halal Tourism Standards in the Development of Pilgrimage Tourism

Azizova Saodat Khabibulloyevna*¹

1. Independent Researcher, Bukhara State University, Uzbekistan

* Correspondence: saodatazizova01@gmail.com

Abstract: Halal tourism has emerged as a significant sector in the global tourism industry, integrating ethical, cultural, and religious dimensions into travel experiences. Pilgrimage tourism, in particular, has gained momentum as Muslim travelers increasingly seek services aligned with Islamic values, supported by the activities of halal certification organizations worldwide. Despite the rapid growth of halal tourism, inconsistencies in certification systems, differences in Sharia interpretations, and the lack of a unified international standard remain unresolved challenges, limiting its sustainable development and international recognition. This study aims to analyze international practices in halal tourism certification, focusing on the experiences of leading countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, the UAE, Thailand, Canada, and the USA, and to propose recommendations for advancing halal tourism standards in Uzbekistan. The analysis revealed the activities of 85 organizations across 47 countries, including key bodies such as AHF (USA), JAKIM (Malaysia), CHB (Canada), and ESMA (UAE), highlighting their contributions to food, hospitality, pharmaceuticals, and logistics sectors. Comparative evaluation showed both opportunities and shortcomings, including issues of transparency, legal inconsistencies, and limited consumer awareness. This research provides a comprehensive examination of global halal certification systems, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and develops targeted recommendations for Uzbekistan to establish its own halal tourism model based on international best practices. Implementing scientifically grounded standards, transparent certification, and cross-national collaborations will not only strengthen consumer trust but also position Uzbekistan as a competitive destination in the global halal tourism market.

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1. Introduction

It is known that halal food products, which are an essential component of pilgrimage tourism, are produced in accordance with Islamic law. However, they must also comply with the requirements of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). Organizations that issue halal certificates should possess the technical capacity to ensure compliance with food safety standards alongside religious requirements. In this process, any food product, including the tools used in food processing and preparation, may be required to have a halal certificate. For example, activated charcoal is used as a purifying agent in the food industry and can also be evaluated for its halal status [1].

In contemporary academic discourse, the notion of “halal tourism” is increasingly recognized as an emerging paradigm within the broader framework of tourism studies. Historically, the designation “halal tourism” was more prevalent in both scholarly and industry-related contexts. The halal industry, encompassing all its integral sectors — including the halal travel and tourism segment — is committed to delivering products and services that are not only of superior quality but also aligned with principles of human well-being. The ethical foundations upheld by the halal industry, such as compassion towards animals, adherence to social responsibility, promotion of environmentally sustainable practices, preservation of natural resources, economic and social equity, and observance of moral standards, have collectively contributed to the acceptance of this concept as a lifestyle choice. Notably, these values have resonated beyond the Muslim consumer base, finding considerable appeal among non-Muslim audiences as well[2].

According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) data, the total number of Muslim travelers worldwide reached 140 million in 2023. Calculations suggest that this figure is expected to increase to 230 million by 2028, with the potential expenditure for these travels estimated to be around 225 billion dollars [3].

Literature review

On a global scale, pilgrimage tourism is increasingly becoming one of the most important social, economic, and cultural sectors for many countries and regions year by year. The theory of pilgrimage and tourism, interests, spiritual or cultural needs, religious motives, economic foundations of pilgrimage tourism, as well as issues of developing pilgrimage tourism in various regions have been extensively researched in the scientific works of foreign scholars such as R. Eid, M.M. Battour, H. El-Gohary, J. Jafari, J.C. Henderson and N. Scott, C.S. Abbate, R. Raj, I. Egresi, D.H. Olsen, K. Griffin, K.S. Taher, S. Bhardwaj, U.S. Mujtaba, and Y. Bilim[4].

2. Materials and Methods

The methodological foundation of this research is based on the findings of scholars such as R. Eid, M.M. Battour, H. El-Gohary, J. Jafari, J.C. Henderson and N. Scott, C.S. Abbate, R. Raj, I. Egresi, D.H. Olsen, K. Griffin, K.S. Taher, S. Bhardwaj, U.S. Mujtaba, and Y. Bilim. The study examined and categorized the activities of halal certification organizations in 47 countries worldwide. Additionally, it provides a scientific analysis of the priorities and main areas of activity of organizations including the American Halal Foundation (AHF), Halal Food Council USA (HFC-USA), the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), the Canadian Halal Bureau (CHB), and the Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA)[5].

3. Results

As a result of our research, we identified that there are 85 prestigious organizations worldwide providing halal certificates across 47 countries, refer to Table 1. Among these, it was found that 7 organizations in Australia, 6 in Japan, and 5 in China possess the authority to issue such certificates[6].

Table 1. Analysis of prestigious organizations issuing halal certificates in countries worldwide.

No.	Countries	Number of organizations	No.	Countries	Number of organizations
1	Australia	7	25	Morocco	1
2	Austria	1	26	Netherlands	3
3	Argentina	1	27	New Zealand	2
4	Bangladesh	1	28	Pakistan	2

5	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	29	Philippines	3
6	Brazil	3	30	Poland	2
7	Brunei	1	31	Portugal	1
8	Canada	2	32	Russia	2
9	Chinese	5	33	Singapore	1
10	Chile	1	34	South Africa	3
11	Egypt	1	35	South Korea	2
12	Germany	1	36	Spain	2
13	India	3	37	Sri Lanka	1
14	Indonesia	1	38	Switzerland	1
15	Iran	1	39	Taiwan	1
16	Ireland	1	40	Thailand	1
17	Italy	2	41	Tunisia	1
18	Japan	6	42	Turkey	2
19	Kazakhstan	2	43	Ukraine	1
20	Kenya	1	44	Great Britain	2
21	Saudi Arabia	1	45	USA	3
22	Lithuania	1	46	Uruguay	1
23	Maldives	1	47	Vietnamese	1
24	Mongolia	1			

Below, we will examine the experience of several of the world's most prestigious halal certification organizations, renowned for their strict adherence to the principles of integrity and their international recognition:

The American Halal Foundation (AHF) is a globally accredited halal certification organization established on December 19, 2017, operating in the United States with additional offices in Canada, China, and India. Halal certificates issued by AHF are widely recognized by over 2 billion Muslim consumers across more than 180 countries worldwide. AHF is a member of the World Halal Food Council.

The main advantages of the organization include customized halal certification solutions; integration with existing food safety and quality systems; strengthening customer confidence in markets while enhancing brand reputation in destinations; and a quick and efficient three-stage certification process[7].

The organization provides services in the fields of food production, food services (restaurants, public catering), beverages, cosmetics, nutraceuticals (biologically active supplements), pharmaceuticals (medicines), packaging industry, and chemical products[8].

In recent years, the demand for halal products in the United States has increased significantly, driven by the steady growth of the Muslim population and the rising interest in cuisines from various cultures. To meet this growing demand, numerous halal certification organizations have emerged in the country. The Halal Food Council USA (HFC-USA) is one of the leading organizations providing halal certification and plays a crucial role in ensuring products comply with halal requirements.

Thus, the prospect of certifying halal food products in the USA, while creating a number of challenges, also presents many favorable opportunities. Standardization, strengthening control measures, technological innovations, and increasing consumer awareness are crucial for ensuring a reliable and effective certification process. Business entities that can adapt to these changes will be able to reap significant benefits from the growing and expanding halal market. As halal certification organizations continually improve their practices and strive to enhance reliability, further growth and development of the industry are inevitable[9].

The Islamic Development Department of Malaysia (JAKIM) is the primary authorized state body for halal certification in the country. Established in 1997, it protects the interests of Muslim consumers by ensuring that products and services comply with Islamic dietary requirements. The organization's advantages are evident in its guarantee that products meet strict halal standards, its status as an internationally recognized institution, and its ability to enhance product competitiveness in the halal market, particularly in countries where Muslims constitute the majority of the population.

The Islamic Development Department of Malaysia provides services in the fields of food and beverages, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, and services (including restaurants, hotels, and others). Importantly, the organization continuously collaborates with international halal certification bodies, constantly improving certification processes and fighting against fraud and misconduct within these procedures[10].

The Canada Halal Bureau (CHB) is one of the leading halal certification organizations in Canada, offering swift and effective certification processes that assist businesses in operating in accordance with global halal standards. The organization's advantages include prompt responses to certification inquiries, no fees charged during the application completion process, assignment of a dedicated manager to each client, international recognition, and the ability to integrate with existing quality management systems. CHB provides services in the fields of food and beverages, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, packaging materials, and dietary supplements[11].

The Emirates Authority for Standardization and Metrology (ESMA) - the United Arab Emirates Halal Standards Agency - is the official halal certification and standardization organization of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It ensures products comply with Islamic standards both domestically and internationally. The halal certificate issued by ESMA is mandatory for all products sold in the UAE. This approach not only ensures the stability of the halal market in the UAE but also strengthens its recognition in international markets. The organization was formerly known as the UAE Standardization and Metrology Agency, established in 2001 by UAE Federal Law No. 28[12].

ESMA encompasses strategic sectors such as food and beverages, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, and logistics in its activities. This organization contributes significantly to the formation and coordination of unified halal standards in collaboration with international halal organizations - particularly the Institute of Standards and Metrology within the framework of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The Agency implements strictly defined standards for manufacturers and exporting companies seeking to obtain halal certification, conducts technical audits, oversees documentation processes, and carries out control measures[13].

On October 25, 2014, ESMA officially introduced the Halal National Mark ("National Halal Certification Mark") system. The organization confirms the reliability of products certified with the National Halal mark and provides quality assurance based on Islamic requirements for consumers. It is due to the effective activities of the ESMA organization that the UAE has become a leading participant in the global halal industry and is recognized as one of the foremost regions providing safe, halal, and reliable products for Muslim consumers. The organization consists of 4 blocks: metrology, standards, information and consulting center, and accreditation control, see Figure 1[14].

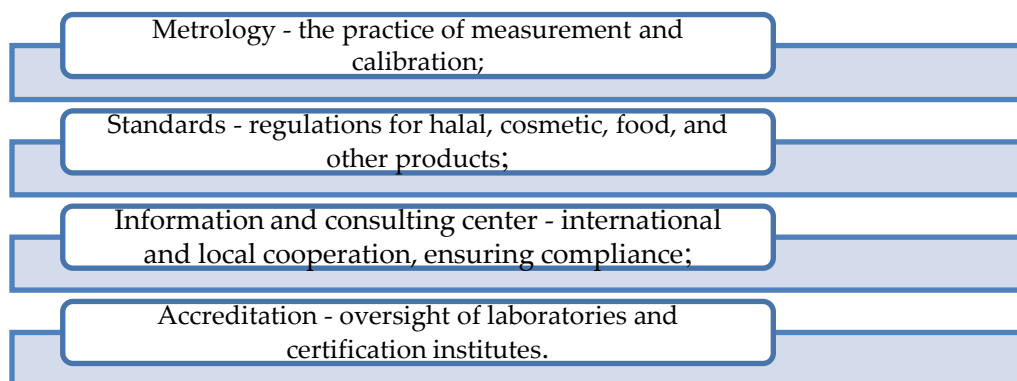


Figure 1. Key divisions of the ESMA organization.

Various Muslim countries have their own organizations and standards for halal certification, based on their geographical location and trading partners. These standards differ among ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries and Arab nations[15].

The challenge in implementing a global halal standard is primarily related to the recognition of standards and the varying definitions of fatwas in each country. For example, Brunei Darussalam refuses to consume meat from animals slaughtered using the stunning method (if it leads to unconsciousness). Some countries require animals to be anesthetized before putting them into a state of unconsciousness. Indonesia and Singapore, on the other hand, permit the slaughter of animals by stunning[16].

The reason for this is the different interpretation of the requirement that “the animal to be slaughtered must be alive”. There are scholars who interpret this as “alive, but not necessarily conscious”, while others interpret it differently. In some countries, the method of stunning is considered sufficiently painful and may lead to cessation of blood circulation and other consequences.

Another aspect of legal recognition of the Halal standard is the “Halal” certification in foreign countries. Differences in technology, regulation, processes, and auditing can affect variations in halal interpretation and the “Halal” certification standards in each country[17].

Japan has its own national halal certification organization - the Japan Halal Certification Promotion Organization (HCPO), which is engaged in promoting Islamic culture in the country. The main areas of activity of the organization, established on December 10, 2014, consist of the following:

- a. Halal certification of hotels and restaurants for Muslim guest visits.
- b. Providing assistance and advisory services to tourism destinations on hosting Muslim travelers.
- c. Promoting halal-certified products and services at local and international levels.
- d. Raising awareness among the local population through seminars, trainings, exhibitions, and publications on halal topics.
- e. Disseminating information through a dedicated website for Muslim consumers.
- f. Expanding external and internal partnerships, offering advice and support for halal business development.
- g. Providing consulting services for the export, import, and trade of halal products.
- h. Assisting with processes related to obtaining halal certification, including document preparation.

The headquarters of the Japan Halal Certification Development Organization is located at the Fuji-Kawaguchiko Mosque in Yamanashi Prefecture. The organization also has branches in Osaka and Ibaraki Prefectures. Throughout its operations, HCPO has established partnerships with international halal organizations such as Malaysia’s JAKIM, Indonesia’s MUI, and Singapore’s MUIS. In September 2022, it signed a memorandum of

cooperation with Nihon Muslim Co., Ltd., which is intended to further enhance the halal system[18].

In Japan, certain dining establishments, such as Momoya and Kagikake Chaya, not only serve halal food to customers but also provide separate rooms dedicated for prayer. Before embarking on a trip, it is recommended to research in advance about the available halal food options and places of worship at the destination.

Table 2 presents a structured overview of nine major organizations engaged in halal certification across the country, along with their international accreditation status. The Japan Halal Association (JHA) holds multiple accreditations, including JAKIM (Malaysia), MUI (Indonesia), MUIS (Singapore), ESMA (UAE), GAC (Persian Gulf), and Qatar, making it one of the most globally recognized entities. The Japan Islamic Trust (JIT) is accredited by JAKIM, ESMA, and Qatar, while the Japan Muslim Association (JMA) and Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA) are endorsed by JAKIM and MUI. The Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA) and Japan Halal Foundation (JHF) have JAKIM and Qatar accreditations, indicating regional recognition. The Prime Certification and Inspection Co., Ltd (PCIC) collaborates with ESMA and Qatar, focusing on inspection and certification. Additionally, the Islamic Center Japan (ICJ) operates under the authority of the Qatar Ministry of Health, while the Emirates Halal Center (EHC) – Japan Branch is accredited by Qatar and linked to the broader BAA network. Overall, the table highlights Japan's diverse institutional framework for halal certification, reflecting both domestic initiatives and strong international linkages with leading global halal authorities[19].

Table 2. Halal certification bodies in Japan.

No	Name of organization	Accreditation by internationally recognized organizations
1	Japan Halal Association (JHA)	JAKIM (Malaysia), MUI (Indonesia), MUIS (Singapore), ESMA (UAE), GAC (Persian Gulf), Qatar
2	Japan Islamic Trust (JIT)	JAKIM, ESMA, Qatar
3	Japan Muslim Association (JMA)	JAKIM, MUI
4	Muslim Professional Japan Association (MPJA)	JAKIM, MUI
5	Nippon Asia Halal Association (NAHA)	JAKIM, Qatar
6	Prime Certification and Inspection Co., Ltd (PCIC)	ESMA, Qatar
7	Japan Halal Foundation (JHF)	JAKIM, Qatar
8	Islamic Center Japan (ICJ)	Qatar Ministry of Health
9	Emirates Halal Center (EHC) – Japan Branch	Qatar (the BAA organization also operates in Japan)

Morocco is a country renowned for its rich history and diverse culture, embodying a unique harmony of Arab and European influences. As the majority of the population is Muslim, this country is considered an ideal destination for halal travel that aligns with Islamic values[20].

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is considered one of the world's most popular destinations for halal tourism travelers. This country is renowned for its luxurious lifestyle, modern architecture, and rich Islamic culture. It can be said that facilities for Muslim tourists are fully provided, especially in the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. As main attractions, Dubai is famous for its enormous shopping centers, modern skyscrapers, and vibrant nightlife. Additionally, there are numerous halal restaurants, offering tourists a

wide variety of choices. Abu Dhabi also has halal dining establishments widely spread throughout the city. The country has created the following amenities for halal travelers:

- a. in the UAE, almost all restaurants and hotels have halal certificates;
- b. places designated for prayer are widespread (including mosques, shopping centers, and hotels);
- c. a safe and prosperous environment conducive to family travel has been created.

Thailand, as one of the leading tourist destinations in Southeast Asia, is considered a country with significant potential in the field of halal tourism. In recent years, the growing number of Muslim tourists globally and the need to meet their religious requirements while traveling have increased the Thai government's focus on developing halal tourism infrastructure. In this process, reforming the halal certification system, introducing Islamic hotel and restaurant services, and creating convenient facilities for worship are playing crucial roles[21].

An important institutional foundation for the development of halal tourism in Thailand is the halal certification system issued by The Central Islamic Council of Thailand (CICOT). This body has the authority to certify halal products and services that comply with internationally recognized standards. It is also noteworthy that the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has developed specific programs to promote and advance halal tourism products.

Scientific research indicates that three main factors are influencing the development of halal tourism in Thailand: firstly, the international accreditation of national halal standards and certification systems; secondly, government policies aimed at creating a favorable environment for Muslims; and thirdly, the strengthening of Islamic tourism marketing and branding. According to reports from the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), Thailand is recognized as one of the top 20 countries for Muslim tourists. From this perspective, we believe that Thailand can establish a sustainable development model by offering competitive services, digital information platforms, and culturally appropriate services to further strengthen its position in the halal tourism market.

Table 3 presents a list of organizations that have not been granted halal certification authority by the Central Islamic Council of Thailand. Although these organizations engage in various activities related to Islamic or halal concepts, they do not possess officially authorized halal certification powers. Consequently, their certificates are not recognized in some halal tourism markets. According to 2024 data, the Central Islamic Council of Thailand has recognized a total of 146 organizations worldwide as entities authorized to issue halal certificates. Notably, among these organizations is the "Uzstandard" agency from our country.

Table 3. According to CICOT's interpretation, the list of organizations that do not have the authority for halal certification.

No.	Name of Organization	Country Name
1	Muslim Board of Great Britain	Great Britain
2	Halal Industry Development Corporation	Malaysia
3	Institute of Standards and Metrology of Islamic Countries (SMIIC)	Saudi Arabia
4	Organization for the Promotion and Development of Halal in Japan (JAHADep)	Japan
5	Muslim World League (Rabita al-Alam al-Islami)	Saudi Arabia
6	U.S. Halal Chamber of Commerce, Inc.	USA

We conducted an analysis of the main problems and shortcomings related to halal certification activities in countries worldwide at the international level, refer to Table 4. In

our opinion, the most significant issues in this field include: the lack of a unified international standard, an excessive number of certifying organizations, the proliferation of fake or illegal certificates, differences in Sharia interpretations, lack of transparency in the certification process, discrepancies between local legislation and halal requirements, insufficient monitoring in the halal network, the risk of corruption and conflicts of interest, inadequate consumer awareness, and insufficient application of technologies.

Table 4. Analysis of the main issues and shortcomings associated with Halal certification activities on an international scale.

No.	Problems or weaknesses	Note
1	The absence of a single international standard	Halal certificates are issued based on different approaches in various countries (for example, Malaysia - JAKIM, Indonesia - BPJPH, UAE - ESMA). This leads to a lack of mutual recognition and creates barriers to trade.
2	An excessive number of certifying organizations	In some countries, there are hundreds of private halal certification bodies, each with varying degrees of compliance and reliability. This situation leads to confusion and mistrust in the market.
3	The spread of counterfeit or unlawful certificates	The use of halal labels based on unregistered organizations or fake documents undermines consumer trust.
4	Differences in Islamic Legal Interpretations	Due to the existence of differing opinions in the interpretation of Islamic criteria, conflicting approaches arise regarding the "halal" status of products or services.
5	Lack of transparency in the certification process	Some organizations issue certificates without proper verification or based on superficial inspections, which negatively affects the overall reliability of the system.
6	Inconsistency between local legislation and legitimate demands	In some countries, there is no coordination between state standards and halal certification requirements, which leads to problems in trade and regulatory processes.
7	Monitoring on the Halal network is insufficient	It is not always possible to guarantee integrity throughout the product supply chain. This issue is particularly pronounced in products that have undergone multiple stages of processing.
8	Risk of corruption and conflicts of interest	Private organizations sometimes issue halal certificates for commercial purposes, which leads to violations of halal standards.
9	Consumer awareness is inadequate	In some markets, consumers lack sufficient knowledge about the differences between halal certificates or what they actually signify.
10	Insufficient utilization of technologies	Modern technologies (such as blockchain, QR codes, and mobile applications) have not been adequately implemented in the identification and verification of halal-certified products.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the complexity and diversity of halal certification practices across the globe, emphasizing both opportunities and challenges in the development of pilgrimage and halal tourism. The analysis demonstrated that while

countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, the UAE, and Thailand have made significant progress in establishing robust halal tourism standards, inconsistencies in certification systems, differing interpretations of Sharia, and the absence of a unified international framework remain persistent obstacles. The growing demand for halal-certified services, reflected in the rising number of Muslim travelers worldwide, underscores the urgency of harmonizing standards and enhancing transparency to build consumer trust. The comparison of various certification organizations also revealed innovative approaches, such as integration with food safety systems, use of technology, and international collaborations, which could serve as models for improving reliability and efficiency in other regions. Importantly, the study shows that beyond Muslim communities, the ethical and sustainable dimensions of halal tourism resonate with broader global audiences, reinforcing its potential as a universal lifestyle concept. Therefore, the advancement of halal tourism in Uzbekistan and other emerging destinations requires adopting best practices from successful countries, fostering international cooperation, and implementing transparent certification systems to ensure competitiveness and credibility in the global halal tourism market.

Suggestions

Foreign countries, particularly Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Thailand, Canada, the USA, and Indonesia, have gained considerable experience in developing halal tourism. Drawing from the experiences of these countries, the following scientific proposals and practical recommendations have been formulated for the development and enhancement of halal tourism standards in Uzbekistan:

- a. We believe that to establish the conceptual foundations of halal tourism, it is necessary to develop scientifically grounded approaches to its conceptual bases (jurisprudential, social, cultural, and economic) in order to form halal tourism as an independent sector in Uzbekistan. It is also advisable to develop a national classification that defines the types of halal tourism (family, religious pilgrimage, ecological, health-improving). The development of a "Halal Tourism Model" concept with the participation of local scientific institutions would also be a significant achievement in this area.
- b. When developing national halal tourism standards and improving existing ones, it is necessary to rely on international standards. It is recommended that the Uzbekistan Standardization Agency, the Committee on Religious Affairs, and the Tourism Committee collaborate to develop regulatory documents for halal hotel, catering, transport, and guide services, and maintain a list of accredited halal tourism institutions for certification.
- c. In developing halal tourism infrastructure, it is essential to prioritize the creation of a service complex that fully meets halal tourism requirements - including halal dining, prayer spaces, separate services for men and women, and the creation of a leisure environment in accordance with Sharia.
- d. In the process of implementing a certification and monitoring system, it is necessary to establish an evaluation and certification system for halal tourism facilities, which should be conducted by transparent and accredited organizations. As a practical recommendation, we propose creating a system for issuing a "Halal Tourism Facility" quality certificate and introducing training and certification programs on halal service provision for tourism agencies.
- e. It is necessary to implement scientific and practical projects in cooperation with countries experienced in halal tourism and to strengthen integration processes within the framework of international standards. It is recommended to sign memorandums of cooperation with organizations such as Malaysia's Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC), Indonesia's MUI, and Turkey's TSE, as well as to host international forums, exhibitions, and conferences on halal tourism in Uzbekistan.

5. Conclusion

The study highlights that the implementation of halal tourism standards is critical for the sustainable growth of pilgrimage tourism, as evidenced by global practices in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, the UAE, Thailand, Canada, and the USA. The analysis of 47 certification organizations across different regions reveals both the progress achieved and the persistent challenges, including the absence of unified international standards, differences in Sharia interpretations, and insufficient transparency in certification processes. Drawing lessons from successful international models, the research proposes scientifically grounded recommendations for Uzbekistan, emphasizing the need to establish a national framework for halal tourism, integrate international best practices into national standards, and develop infrastructure that aligns with Sharia principles. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of transparent certification systems, specialized training programs, and international collaboration to ensure reliable service delivery and consumer confidence. The findings affirm that adopting advanced practices will not only enhance Uzbekistan's competitiveness in the halal tourism market but also contribute to its global recognition as a destination for Muslim travelers.

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