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**Touristic Valorization Of Specific Ramadan Traditions And The Development
Of Halal Tourism Through The Project „Visit Sarajevo: Feel The Spirit Of
Ramadan“**

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Professional paper

Abstract

The project „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“, which emerged as a result of cooperation between the Tourism Association of Sarajevo Canton and the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, aims to enhance the tourism potential of Sarajevo by focusing on specific Ramadan traditions and religious tourism. This initiative highlights the cultural richness and significance of Ramadan in Bosnia and Herzegovina, offering tourists an immersive experience of the city’s spiritual atmosphere during this holy month. Through a series of religious and cultural events and programs, the festival promotes the beauty of Ramadan and the tourism offerings of Sarajevo Canton, contributing to the development of specific forms of tourism and the promotion of Sarajevo as a halal-friendly tourist destination. Special emphasis is placed on specific Ramadan traditions in Sarajevo, such as Ramadan evenings, recitations of the Quran (mukabela), Tarawih prayers, Iftar gatherings, musical programs, and the unique post-Iftar atmosphere in the streets of the city. This ambiance attracts both Muslims and tourists of other religious backgrounds to experience the true spirit of Sarajevo. The Ottoman heritage and multi-religious history provide a rich environment for the tourism valorisation of Ramadan traditions, making Sarajevo a fascinating destination for all those interested in authentic Islamic culture that has been blended with other religions and influences for centuries. By promoting halal-friendly tourism, this project meets the needs of Muslim travellers seeking destinations that respect Islamic principles. Sarajevo’s rich Islamic heritage, with its mosques, cultural centres, and halal-certified establishments, creates an ideal environment for the development of this type of tourism. However, this project aims not only to promote religious tourism but also to preserve and present intangible cultural heritage, positioning Sarajevo as a key destination for Muslim travellers and other tourists interested in a deeper understanding of Ramadan and its significance in the heart of the Balkans.

Keywords: *halal-friendly tourism, valorisation, Ramadan, tradition, Muslim traveller*

Introduction

The concept of halal tourism encompasses travel experiences that comply with Islamic principles, including the provision of halal food, prayer facilities, family-oriented accommodations, and respect for cultural and religious sensitivities. As the number of Muslim travelers continues to grow and estimated to reach 230 million by 2028 (CrescentRating, 2023), destinations worldwide are increasingly adapting their services to meet the expectations of this market segment. This rise is fueled not only by demographic shifts but also by growing disposable incomes in Muslim-majority countries, a stronger emphasis on religious values, and increased connectivity and mobility. Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) Report recognises Bosnia and Herzegovina as a top non-OIC destination with prayer facilities. Sarajevo, with its Ottoman-era architecture, vibrant Islamic traditions, and diverse culinary heritage, is ideally positioned to offer authentic halal travel experiences. What sets Sarajevo apart is the seamless integration of Islamic lifestyle and European hospitality, creating a welcoming environment for Muslim travelers seeking spiritual enrichment, cultural engagement and comfort.

Sarajevo as a Halal-Friendly Tourism Destination

Sarajevo's identity is rooted in its multicultural and multireligious history, shaped by centuries of coexistence between Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, Jews, and others. The city hosts numerous mosques, Islamic schools (madrasas), and cultural institutions. Particularly notable is the Gazi Husrev-bey Mosque, one of the most prominent Ottoman complexes in the Balkans and a central spiritual hub during Ramadan. The city also boasts architectural landmarks like the Emperor's Mosque and Ferhadija Mosque, all of which contribute to the Islamic visual identity of Sarajevo's Old Town.

In the Global Muslim Travel Index, Sarajevo was ranked among the top 10 emerging halal destinations in Europe, recognized for its religious facilities, cultural relevance, safety and ease of access. Bosnia and Herzegovina is also one of the few European countries where

halal certification is well regulated by domestic institutions, including the Agency for Halal Quality Certification, which has been operational since 2006. The country's halal standards are recognized by many Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian countries, providing an additional layer of trust for travelers.

Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan

Launched by the Tourism Association of Sarajevo Canton (Sarajevo Canton Tourist Board), the „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“ project aims to promote Sarajevo as a destination that embraces spiritual reflection, community values, and traditional hospitality. The project includes a range of curated experiences aligned with Ramadan practices:

Public Iftars: Held at iconic locations such as Baščaršija Square and in front of the Gazi Husrev-bey Mosque, these communal meals are attended by hundreds of residents and tourists. The experience fosters a sense of unity and is often accompanied by traditional Bosnian music, such as sevdalinka or ilahije performances. These events serve not only as religious gatherings but also as community-building opportunities.

Cannon Firing Tradition: Special mention should be made of the nightly performance of the cannon shot from Yellow Fortress (Žuta tabija) an old Austro-Hungarian fort above the city, marking the time for iftar. This auditory tradition has become a photogenic tourist attraction in its own right.

Mukabela (Qur'anic recitations): Daily recitations of the Qur'an (mukabela) are conducted in major mosques throughout Sarajevo, especially at the Gazi Husrev-bey Mosque. These gatherings offer spiritual enrichment and a rare cultural insight for visitors. The recitations, performed by trained hafizes, preserve an oral tradition that dates back centuries, often drawing tourists who are interested in Islamic theology or sacred music. Mukabela recitations represent a deeply rooted tradition in Bosnian Islamic practice. Conducted by respected hafizes, these sessions attract not only the faithful but also tourists intrigued by the ambiance of collective Qur'anic recitation.

The Mukabela recitations held in the historic Gazi Husrev-beg Mosque are globally unique, representing a centuries-old spiritual tradition that continues to thrive in the heart of Sarajevo. These recitations offer visitors a deeply authentic and culturally enriching experience, providing insight into the profound religious heritage and communal spirit that characterize the month of Ramadan in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Tarawih Prayers and Community Activities: Additionally, evening prayers (tarawih) and other community activities, such as Quran competitions for youth, charity drives, suhoor gatherings, and Ramadan lectures, are frequently organized in collaboration with the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These events are often publicized through mosque networks and online platforms, encouraging tourist participation.

The Gazi Husrev-bey Mosque, in particular, becomes a focal point during Ramadan evenings, with visitors often observing or quietly participating in the spiritual rhythm of the city.

Ramadan Evenings: A series of cultural and artistic events, including performances of ilahije (religious songs), exhibitions of Islamic calligraphy, and lectures, organized in partnership with local cultural institutions such as the Gazi Husrev-bey Library and the Bosniak Institute. These evenings aim to present the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of Islamic culture in Bosnia.

Halal Food Experiences: Guided tours highlight Sarajevo's rich halal gastronomy, from traditional dishes like ćevapi, pite (pies) and dolmas to sweets such as baklava, hurmašica and tufahija. Local chefs offer cooking demonstrations, and visitors have opportunities to sample halal-certified products from local producers.

Significance and Impact

This strategic approach to halal tourism leverages Sarajevo's intangible cultural heritage to attract Muslim travelers seeking authenticity, spirituality, and safety. The „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“ project successfully

balances religious sensitivity with touristic curiosity, offering inclusive experiences for diverse visitor profiles. During Ramadan 2025, the Tourism Association of Sarajevo Canton reported a 16% increase in visitors from predominantly Muslim countries compared to the previous year, signaling the growing appeal of Sarajevo as a halal destination.

In addition to its economic benefits, the project contributes to intercultural dialogue, as non-Muslim visitors are often welcomed to observe and participate in various events. This openness strengthens Sarajevo's image as a tolerant and diverse city, building on its post-war efforts of reconciliation and cultural diplomacy.

Challenges in Halal Tourism Development in Sarajevo Canton

Despite its potential, Sarajevo faces several challenges in developing a comprehensive halal tourism infrastructure. While the foundations are strong, Sarajevo must address several issues to fully realize its potential as a year-round halal tourism hub:

Limited Certified Infrastructure: While many hotels and restaurants offer halal food, few have official certification, creating uncertainty for observant travelers. Many other objects claim to offer halal options, but few undergo formal certification. This lack of standardization may deter strict observers of Islamic dietary laws.

Visibility in Key Markets: Although Sarajevo enjoys popularity among travelers from Turkey and the Balkans, it is less visible in the UK, GCC and Southeast Asia, three regions that account for a significant portion of global halal travel spending.

Language and Cultural Gaps: While many locals speak English, there are tourists that face communication challenges. Arabic-speaking tourists, in particular, face limited signage and interpretation services, which can affect satisfaction and repeat visitation.

Lack of Technology Integration: There is a need for mobile apps and online platforms that provide real-time halal service information. Applications such as „Muslim Pro“ and „HalalTrip“ guide need to be developed in order to meet the needs

of Muslim travelers. However, Sarajevo lacks a centralized ecosystem to streamline halal travel information.

Seasonal Concentration: Ramadan tourism is highly seasonal, and efforts must be made to diversify halal offers throughout the year. Ramadan and Eid draw the most visitors, but halal tourism potential remains underutilized outside religious periods. There is a need to develop offers that appeal year-round.

Recommendations for Improvement

The „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“ project is steadily building a tradition and continues to improve in all aspects, from content development to promotional efforts. However, there remains significant room for further enhancement. To enhance its position as a leading halal destination, Sarajevo as destination, with the Tourism Association of Sarajevo Canton as the main implementing body, should consider the following:

Halal Certification and Training: Expand certification programs and provide hospitality training focused on halal standards. Workshops could be developed in partnership with the Agency for Halal Quality Certification and local universities.

Digital Tools: Create a dedicated halal tourism app featuring prayer times, mosque locations, halal restaurants, and event calendars. Integration with GPS, user reviews, and QR code access to local events would enhance usability. Build an interactive, multilingual halal travel app that offers prayer times, GPS navigation to mosques, halal food maps, event listings, and even audio guides for Islamic heritage sites.

Muslim Travel Show: Leverage the potential of the Muslim Travel Show. This event is held as part of the London Muslim Shopping Festival (which represents the largest event for Muslim travelers in Europe), where the Sarajevo Canton Tourist Board (Tourism Association of Sarajevo Canton) serves as a key partner.

Strategic Partnerships: Collaborate with airlines, travel agencies, and influencers in Muslim-majority countries. Sarajevo could also participate in international halal expos

and tourism fairs in Dubai, Jakarta, and Kuala Lumpur. Establish a dedicated presence at the Muslim Travel Show in London, Halal Expo Indonesia, and Arabian Travel Market. These platforms are ideal for building strategic partnerships and showcasing Sarajevo’s halal offerings.

Multilingual Promotion: Develop promotional materials in Arabic, Turkish, and Malay to attract travelers from key source markets. These should include video testimonials, social media campaigns, and influencer collaborations. Develop visual campaigns and video content, focusing on real experiences – iftars, mosque visits, cultural events and distribute via social media channels, embassies, and diaspora networks.

Cultural Sensitivity Education: Offer workshops for tourism staff to improve understanding of Muslim cultural and religious practices. Hotels and restaurants should be encouraged to provide qibla directions, prayer mats, and modest entertainment options. Partner with the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina to offer crash courses on Islamic etiquette, holiday significance, and service expectations for the Muslim market.

Spiritual Heritage Tours: Integrate visits to religious and historical landmarks, offering context about the Islamic history of the city, including stops at madrasas, waqf properties, Islamic cemeteries, but also at Orthodox church, Catholic cathedral and the Sarajevo Haggadah exhibit to illustrate interfaith harmony. Highlight Sarajevo’s inclusive identity.

Year-Round Offer Development: Introduce year-round halal tourism offers, such as wellness retreats, Islamic art tours, halal adventure sports, and Islamic finance conferences. Include packages for Islamic art workshops, halal spa retreats, sustainable ecotourism, and Muslim marriage or honeymoon packages in natural locations like the mountains of Bjelašnica or Igman.

Conclusion

While halal-friendly destinations are primarily designed with Muslim travelers in mind,

religious tourism and the exploration of diverse beliefs and cultural practices also appeal to tourists of all religious backgrounds. The growth of halal tourism plays a pivotal role in diversifying a destination's overall tourism portfolio, which is key to mitigating seasonality and reducing reliance on limited source markets. This niche sector stimulates investment in tourism infrastructure, fostering broader economic development and contributing to a more attractive and competitive business environment. In essence, halal tourism delivers substantial social and economic advantages by promoting inclusive travel experiences that honor cultural, religious, and lifestyle diversity, thereby supporting sustainable tourism development.

Sarajevo has the cultural depth, religious authenticity, and historical context to become a flagship halal tourism destination in Europe. Projects such as „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“ demonstrate the potential for integrating traditional religious practices with innovative tourism experiences. By addressing infrastructural and promotional challenges, Sarajevo can position itself at the forefront of the European halal tourism market, offering visitors not just a destination, but a meaningful spiritual journey.

This study affirms that halal tourism presents a significant opportunity for Sarajevo Canton to enhance its competitive standing as a tourist destination. By prioritizing the needs of Muslim travelers while simultaneously appealing to a wider audience interested in cultural and religious tourism, Sarajevo can diversify its offerings, minimize seasonal fluctuations, and attract meaningful investment in its tourism infrastructure. The findings underscore that Sarajevo's rich cultural and religious heritage – paired with its already existing halal-friendly services – positions the region strongly within the growing global halal tourism market.

To fully harness this potential, it is essential to raise awareness of the value and role of halal certification while developing a comprehensive and targeted promotional strategy. This strategy should clearly communicate the scope and quality of halal tourism options available

in Sarajevo Canton, offering practical and accessible information to prospective travelers. In an increasingly competitive tourism landscape, Sarajevo's unique selling point lies in its ability to combine Islamic spirituality with European accessibility. The next phase of development should focus on strategic investments, international cooperation, and sustainable practices to ensure long-term impact.

Moving forward, strategic efforts should concentrate on closing existing gaps in halal certification and elevating the overall visitor experience to meet the specific expectations of halal-conscious travelers. In conclusion, embracing the full potential of halal tourism can transform Sarajevo Canton into a year-round destination, driving economic progress, deepening intercultural understanding, and reinforcing the city's image as a European emblem of multiculturalism and religious coexistence.

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Turistička valorizacija specifičnih ramazanskih tradicija i razvoj halal turizma kroz projekat „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“

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Stručni rad

Sažetak

Projekat „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“, koji je nastao kao produkt saradnje između Turističke zajednice Kantona Sarajevo i Medžlisa Islamske zajednice Sarajevo, ima za cilj unapređenje turističkog potencijala Sarajeva kroz fokusiranje na specifične ramazanske tradicije i vjerski turizam. Ova inicijativa ističe kulturno bogatstvo i značaj ramazana u Bosni i Hercegovini, nudeći turistima imerzivno iskustvo duhovne atmosfere grada tokom ovog svetog mjeseca. Kroz niz vjersko-kulturnih sadržaja i programa, festival promoviše ramazanske ljepote i turističku ponudu Kantona Sarajevo, te doprinosi razvoju specifičnih oblika turizma i promociji Sarajeva kao halal-friendly turističke destinacije. Poseban akcenat stavljen je na specifične ramazanske tradicije u Sarajevu, ramazanske večeri, mukabele, teravih-namaze, pripremu tradicionalnih jela, zajedničke iftare i druženja, diskusije, muzičke programe, ali i na jedinstvenu atmosferu na ulicama grada, koja vlada nakon iftara i koja privlači podjednako turiste muslimane i turiste drugih religijskih opredjeljenja da osjete istinski duh Sarajeva. Otomanska baština grada i njegova multietnička i multireligijska historija pružaju bogat ambijent za turističku valorizaciju ramazanskih tradicija, čineći Sarajevo fascinantnom destinacijom za sve one koji su zainteresovani za autentičnu islamsku kulturu, koja se ovdje stoljećima spaja i isprepliće s drugim religijama i uticajima. Promovišući halal-friendly turizam, manifestacija „Visit Sarajevo: Feel the Spirit of Ramadan“ zadovoljava potrebe putnika muslimana koji tragaju za destinacijama koje poštuju islamske principe. Halal-friendly turizam uključuje dostupnost halal hrane, prostora za molitvu i različitih usluga koje su u skladu s vrijednostima i principima posjetilaca muslimana. Bogato islamsko naslijeđe Sarajeva, s njegovim džamijama, kulturnim centrima i halal-certifikovanim ustanovama i privrednim subjektima, stvara idealnu sredinu za razvoj ovog oblika turizma. Međutim, važno je naglasiti da ovaj projekat ima za cilj ne samo promociju vjerskog turizma, već i očuvanje i predstavljanje nematerijalne kulturne baštine i pozicioniranje Sarajeva kao ključne destinacije za putnike muslimane, ali i sve ostale turiste koji žele istinski razumjeti ramazana i njegovog značaj u srcu Balkana.

Ključne riječi: *halal-friendly turizam, valorizacija, ramazan, tradicija, putnici muslimani*