

## Muslim Tourist Experiences and Return Intention in Hotels: A South African Study

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**Abstract:** This research endeavour locates the manifestation of Islam in the context of tourism, arguing for its viability as a significant component of an emerging global Islamic tourism market. By way of empirical research focused on Muslim tourists visiting Cape Town, this study presents a South African case study, with it arguing for the need to capitalise on the opportunities that the market represents. A mixed-methods research design was followed. The views of hoteliers were explored (qualitative) and 400 Muslim travellers of eight hotels successfully completed questionnaires (quantitative). Analysis of variance, correlation and regression analysis were performed to reach the objectives of the study. Prayer facilities highly influenced Muslim tourist experiences, whilst halal food highly influenced their return intentions to a hotel. The study provides hotel management with an improved understanding of the unique attributes that impact on Muslim tourist experiences and return intentions to South Africa.

**Keywords:** Muslim tourists; hotel attributes; return intentions; South Africa

**JEL Classification:** Z32

### 1. Introduction

The Muslim travel market, in recent time, has been recognised as an important research theme in the academic literature. (Battour et al., 2014; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Elaziz & Kurt, 2017) With a reported 6% growth rate per annum, the Muslim travel market is the fastest growing segment of tourism in the world, growing at double the global tourism growth rate. (Elaziz & Kurt, 2017) In 2015, for example, it was estimated that there were approximately 117 million Muslim international travellers. This is projected to grow to some 168 million by 2020, when the travel expenditure by Muslim travellers is expected to exceed US\$200 billion (Pew Research Center, 2015), and to US\$300 billion by 2026. Therefore, its importance as a vital niche market for the tourism sector and for destinations around the world is undeniable. It is, therefore, plausible that destination managers and planners

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should have tailor-made their tourism packages to satisfy the tourist market and to enhance their experiences.

Regrettably, despite the magnitude of growth of the Muslim traveller and the projected impacts mentioned above, Elaziz and Kurt (2017) argue that hotels have not yet customised their services to meet the needs of this growing market, despite them being considered to be one of the most important pull motivators for Muslim tourists. (Jafari & Sandikçi, 2015) In the extant literature, various scholars<sup>1</sup> posit that the presence, or the absence, of Islamic attributes in hotels significantly influences the Muslim travellers' experiences, and their intentions to revisit a destination.

Some recent research endeavours (Eid & El-Gohary, 2015; Jafari & Sandikçi, 2015; Battour & Ismail, 2016) affirm the influence of Islamic attributes on Muslim travellers' hotel experiences and levels of satisfaction. Within the aforementioned context, Alserhan (2012) emphasises the need for hoteliers to identify the religious attributes that influence Muslim travellers' experiences and return intentions to a destination. Although, according to Jafari and Sandikçi (2015), hoteliers acknowledge Muslim travellers as being a distinctive travel market, they are not clear on the attributes that influence such travellers' experiences and return intentions. The attributes, Battour and Ismail (2016) observe, are unique attributes derived from their religion that impact on their consumption experiences. Hassan (2015) suggests that such attributes are often reflected in their post-purchase behaviours when they evaluate a given hotel service. The author argues that, when evaluating hotel service, Muslim travellers do not just look at the white-linen service received, and at the bellboys who carry their luggage up to their room (Hassan, 2015), but they also consider their religious needs, because their religious routines require them to have a unique set of attributes, which significantly impact on their consumption experiences. (Namin, 2012) Therefore, the Muslim tourist evaluates not only the cognitive and affective components of hotel service, but also the religious attributes, which, in turn, affect their hotel experiences and return intentions. (Alserhan, 2012)

Despite an increase in the size of the Muslim travel market, there remains a paucity of research linking Muslim religion with consumer decision-making in relation to hotels. Most studies merely focus on halal certification, while other Islamic aspects of hotel operations still remain undiscovered. The absence of studies on the Muslim attributes influencing hotel selection justifies this lacuna. The current research endeavour addresses the gap concerned, and, in doing so, locates the manifestation of the Muslim market in the context of tourism, arguing for its viability as a significant component of an emerging global niche tourism market, with evidence from a developing economy like South Africa. Due to the increase in the number of Muslim tourists visiting South Africa and the importance of hotels to the tourism

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<sup>1</sup> See works by (Hashim et al., 2007; Namin, 2012; Mohsin & Mohammed, 2011; Putit et al., 2016).

industry, research within the context in question is necessary. In the current study, the terms “travellers” and “tourists” are used synonymously.

### **1.1. Study Context**

Over the last couple of decades, tourism has been recognised as playing a significant role in global and national economies. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2017) the travel and tourism industry generated 108 741 000 jobs directly in 2016 (3.6% of total employment) and supported 6 million net additional jobs. In total, travel and tourism generated US\$7.6 trillion (10.2% of global GDP) and 292 million jobs in 2016, equivalent to 1 in 10 jobs in the global economy. Tourism is predicted as supporting over 380 million jobs by 2027. (WTTC, 2017)

According to Lombard (2016), data from Statistics South Africa reports that the tourism industry in South Africa recorded growth of 6.6% between 2013 and 2014, exceeding the average global growth in the sector, whereas the direct gross domestic product (GDP) from tourism rose from 93.5 billion in 2012 to R103.6 billion in 2013. The industry contributed 9% to South Africa’s GDP in 2015, exceeding the global average growth in the sector, whereas in 2016, the tourism industry directly contributed R127 billion to South Africa’s GDP, being an increase of 7% from the previous year. (Lombard, 2016) Furthermore, the WTTC (2017) asserts that tourism directly employs more people than do the mining, communication services, automotive manufacturing and chemicals manufacturing sectors. To illustrate the point, of the total number employed in South Africa, including in both the formal and informal sectors, 1 in 25 individuals works in the tourism sector. (Lombard, 2016) To be precise, 4.5% of the total workforce were directly employed in the sector during 2014, being an increase from the 3.8% recorded for 2015. (Lombard, 2016)

Despite the above statistics reflecting tourism growth in South Africa, it is not possible to extract data for Islamic tourism in South Africa, given the uncoordinated state of Islamic tourism as a sector in the country, hence exclusive statistics pertaining to the market are not available. However, despite the lack of data, it can be assumed that the figures reflecting tourism growth in South Africa are inclusive of Islamic tourism. Needless to say, the growth and improvement in the tourism sector ipso facto includes the Islamic tourism market.

The current data available illuminates the fact that the Muslim travel market is also one of the fastest growing sectors of tourism in Western economies. In the USA, for example, Muslim tourism contributed US\$16 billion to US GDP in 2015, whereas the total spend on US GDP was US\$50.8 billion, accounting for more than 10% of total inbound tourism spend in the country. Muslim travel also supports more than 600 000 jobs in the USA, in terms of total employment. The Muslim travel market is also a key customer segment for the United Kingdom’s tourism industry, accounting for an estimated US\$3.3 billion spend in 2015. In Hong Kong, the outbound receipts from Muslim travellers amounted to US\$140 billion (11.6% of the

global market) in 2013. In China, the outbound receipts from Muslim travellers amounted to US\$121.8 billion in the same year. (Battour & Ismail, 2016)

Despite an increase in the number of Muslim travellers globally, hotels in South Africa have not been able to attract a substantial number of Muslim travellers, due to their failure to customise services to the faith-based needs of the segment. Consequently, it seems timely to consider the question of Muslims' particular requirements when selecting hotels.

## 2. Literature Review

Researchers have been reporting contradictory findings on the influence of Muslim tourist experiences and return intentions in hotels. Al-Qaradawi (1999) found the provision of Islamic entertainment to be the most important factor influencing Muslim travellers in making hotel choice. Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) found that Muslim tourists tended to choose hotels that prohibited alcohol consumption and gambling, because it is stated in many Quranic verses that alcohol is the mother of all evils. Putit et al. (2016) found that the availability of halal food is a crucial factor in influencing tourists in their hotel selection. The above was supported by Battour et al. (2012), who opined that, since Muslims have to follow a strict diet everywhere they go, the availability of, and the easy access to, halal food contributes to a stress-free holiday abroad. In another study, Khan et al. (2013) found that the availability of, and the easy access to, halal food was considered to be one of the most important factors influencing Muslim tourists to choose a particular hotel and destination. Shafaei and Mohamed (2013) found that access to halal food influences Muslim tourists' choice of hotels in Malaysia, while Battour et al. (2014) found that readily accessible halal food plays an important role in Muslim tourists' choice of hotels.

Timothy and Iverson (2006) contend that the Islamic dress code is a crucial factor in influencing tourists regarding their hotel selection, because the Shariah laws prohibit improper dressing. Zamani and Henderson (2010) also note that such dress code is a crucial factor in influencing the tourists' hotel selections, because, in Islam, both men and women are expected to dress simply, modestly and with dignity.

Al-Hamarneh and Steiner (2004) argue that a mosque is considered to be one of the most vital facilities for Muslims. Weidenfeld (2006) postulates that proximity to a mosque highly influences Muslim tourists' preferences when making hotel reservations, because a Muslim is expected to pray five times a day, including before dawn (Subuh), at noon (Zuhur), in the afternoon (Asar), after sunset (Maghrib), and in the evening (Isyak), respectively. The above is supported by Mohsin and Mohammed (2011), who found that Omani students were highly attracted by the availability of mosques when choosing a hotel. According to Kovjanic (2014), the provision of Qibla direction marks to Mecca, prayer mats and prayer beds are the

most important factors significantly influencing Muslim tourists' choice of hotels. Rahman (2014) mentions the following Islamic attributes, namely mosque accessibility, the availability of prayer facilities, and the placement of Qibla direction marks as significantly impacting positively on Muslim tourists' hotel experiences.

In a study by Samori and Abd Rahman (2013), the general Islamic morality-related practices in the hotel were found significantly to influence Muslim tourists' hotel choice. Battour et al. (2011) articulate how Islamic entertainments were considered to be the most important attribute significantly impacting on Muslim tourists' choice of hotels in Malaysia. Idris and Wahab (2015) found that the non-use of alcohol and related drinks that might lead to misconduct and fornication as the most important factor influencing Muslim tourists in terms of hotel selection. In another study, Hashim et al. (2007) found a positive relationship between Islamic moral values and Muslim tourists' hotel choices.

Furthermore, the link between Muslim travellers' hotel experiences and return intentions was unclear. Previous research studies (Idris & Wahab, 2015; Shafaei, 2015) noted that the availability and accessibility of halal food significantly influenced Muslim customers' return intentions in respect of hotels. Nonetheless, Samori and Abd Rahman (2013) note that general Islamic morality to be the most significant contributor to Muslim travellers' return intentions, whereas Zamani and Henderson (2010) found overall hotel experiences as being the most significant contributor to Muslim return intentions.

### 3. Methods

Selected hotels located within the City of Cape Town metropolitan municipality were the primary sites where the required data were collected to inform the current study objectives. Cape Town was selected as being an appropriate study site in which to conduct the case study, on the basis of the city's attractiveness and popularity as one of South Africa's premier tourism destinations, both nationally and internationally. The city boasts an array of hotels incorporating both local and international brands across various star grading. (Tourism Grading Council of South Africa [TGCSA], 2012)

The researchers conducted a desktop review to ascertain the hotels that claimed to provide facilities catering for Muslim guests. The current review was preceded by a validation exercise that involved the making of personal visits and telephone calls. The process assisted in identifying 51 hotels that could inform the study. The research then followed a mixed method approach, whereby, to ensure content-related validity, a tentative meeting (qualitative) was scheduled by the researchers with the selected hotel management. After the meeting, a research questionnaire (quantitative) was designed and distributed to hotel customers for data collection.

Two concerns raised by the hoteliers concerned were incorporated into the study. Such concerns were mainly linked to the previous visits that had been made by the guests, as well as the need to not inconvenience the guests upon checking out, which was deemed to be the most suitable time for administering the surveys.

A survey questionnaire comprised mainly of closed-ended questions was developed, based on the literature review in previous studies (Battour et al., 2011; 2014), with it being modified to suit the study objectives, and the local South African context. The main variables considered the sociodemographic variables of the respondents, as well as the Islamic attributes concerned. Such attributes were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1, least important, to 7, most important, in the importance part, and from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree, in the performance part. To capture the responses of a relatively wide range of respondents, the questionnaire was printed in three languages: English, Muslim, and Arabic. The surveys were administered by the researchers, with the assistance of the hotel staff during the guest check-out times. During such times, the purposive convenience sampling approach was used to target those Muslim guests who were willing to take part in the study.

A probability sampling technique was used for calculating the sample size taking into account each hotel's occupancy. The sample size was therefore calculated using the following formula:  $\text{Sample Size} = \frac{(Z\text{-score})^2 * \text{Std Dev} * (1 - \text{Std Dev})}{(\text{margin of error})}$ . With a proportional sample of 25% of each hotel's occupancy per day, a confidence level of 95%, margin of error at 6.5% and standard deviation being 0.5, it was insured that the sample would be large enough and this resulted in a sample size of at least 400 respondents. Prior to the data collection, the researchers approached the selected hotel management to take part in the study. Eight hotels were selected. After a data collection period that lasted over 16 weeks, 400 valid surveys were collected. The data obtained were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 23, which enabled the generation of both descriptive and bivariate statistics for the interpretation of the results.

A Cronbach's Alpha test was applied to test the reliability and internal consistency of experience and return intent scores. Descriptive statistics and an ANOVA test were applied to establish a relationship between the construct and reliability of the outcome. Regression and correlation analysis was conducted to explain the causal relationship between the factor coefficient and overall experience and return intent scores and to assess whether the independent variables had a significant influence on Muslim experiences and return intentions. To measure the goodness-of-fit of the regression model, the correlation coefficient ( $R$ ), coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) and " $t$ " ratio were examined. The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient index for the total index was high (0.876), with high reliability coefficients being calculated for halal food

(0.861), prayer facilities (0.851), Islamic entertainment (0.852), the Islamic dress code (0.857), the general Islamic morality (0.865), the overall Muslim traveller experiences (0.839), and the return intention (0.880).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The respondents' demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1 below. From the Table, 28% (n=114) of the respondents were found to be in the age group 25 to 34 years, whilst 46% (n=186) of the respondents used Muslim as their home language. The median age of the respondents was 34 years (interquartile range: 23–44 years). The Table further shows that the sample was dominated by the male respondents (74%), which is normal, because Islam prevents women from travelling on their own. Beyond Islamic men being allowed to travel alone, they also make all of the travel decisions, which might have explained the results obtained in the above regard.

Table 1 below reveals that the respondents' experience scores ranged from 4.05 (Islamic entertainment) to 4.26 (general Islamic morality), with 7 being the highest possible score. The Muslim travellers reported a low score in terms of the overall hotel experience (4.04), with them also reporting a low score for return intention (4.15). The standard deviations obtained ranged from 0.64 (return intention) to 0.77 (halal food).

**Table 1. Demographic information and overall means and standard deviations**

Demographic variables	n	%	Islamic attributes										Hotel experiences		Return intention		
			Halal food		Prayer facilities		Islamic entertainment		Islamic dress code		General Islamic morality		M	SD	M	SD	
			M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD					
Gender																	
Male	294	74	4.58	0.81	4.56	0.69	3.96	0.65	4.13	0.63	4.96	0.82	4.28	0.73	4.73	0.76	
Female	106	26	3.86	0.79	4.34	0.56	4.39	0.52	4.43	0.91	4.72	0.61	4.53	0.62	4.49	0.63	
Age																	
≤24	41	10	3.71	1.04	4.73	0.75	4.47	0.73	3.89	0.86	4.52	0.67	4.29	0.82	3.85	0.55	
25-34	114	28	3.95	0.80	3.53	0.57	4.64	0.91	4.18	0.63	4.55	0.55	4.83	0.66	4.27	0.60	
35-44	96	24	4.53	1.09	3.67	0.76	3.83	0.68	3.89	0.48	4.92	0.92	4.09	0.71	4.09	0.54	
45-54	71	18	3.86	0.83	3.86	0.54	3.73	0.57	4.53	0.59	4.87	0.78	4.33	0.52	4.54	0.79	
55-64	47	12	3.80	0.57	4.79	0.78	4.62	0.82	4.66	0.79	3.92	0.59	4.47	0.61	4.92	0.83	
≥65	31	8	4.08	0.61	3.80	0.56	3.98	0.76	3.90	0.60	4.09	1.03	4.53	0.92	4.35	0.59	
Education																	
No schooling	16	4	3.83	0.86	2.98	0.56	4.38	0.60	4.65	0.56	4.11	0.62	4.37	0.60	4.33	0.53	
Primary school	33	8	4.71	0.43	3.76	0.62	4.30	0.92	4.23	0.81	4.63	0.86	4.28	0.72	3.97	0.61	
High school	64	16	4.83	0.54	4.86	0.46	4.54	0.58	4.02	0.76	4.07	0.57	3.90	0.53	4.47	0.82	
Tertiary Diploma	125	31	4.46	0.71	3.94	0.51	3.91	0.70	3.81	0.58	4.62	0.71	4.34	0.51	4.01	0.74	
	94	24	3.86	0.99	3.61	0.63	3.72	0.63	4.30	0.92	4.70	0.80	3.62	0.64	3.93	0.55	
	68	17	3.97	1.05	3.50	0.68	4.06	0.58	4.11	0.78	4.02	0.66	4.10	0.71	4.22	0.46	

Tertiary Degree																	
Home language																	
Arabic	93	23	3.86	0.57	4.83	0.57	4.38	0.62	4.26	0.60	4.96	0.66	4.23	0.65	4.40	0.49	
English	55	14	4.60	0.76	3.83	0.86	3.80	0.56	3.92	0.73	3.91	0.78	3.79	0.43	4.63	0.52	
Bahasa	34	9	3.59	0.98	4.49	0.93	4.06	0.70	4.04	0.58	4.42	0.82	4.02	0.50	4.12	0.40	
Muslim	186	46	4.08	0.81	4.15	0.67	4.51	0.79	4.57	0.52	4.84	0.90	3.85	0.64	4.55	0.59	
Other	32	8	4.76	0.63	4.23	0.61	4.98	0.82	4.89	0.91	4.15	0.57	4.41	0.58	4.59	0.64	
Monthly income																	
≤R10 000	11	3	4.19	0.58	4.01	0.64	4.19	0.64	4.18	0.44	4.59	0.71	4.61	0.73	4.30	0.47	
R10 001 - R19 999	82	20	4.78	0.61	4.36	0.71	4.74	0.63	4.01	0.57	4.48	0.55	3.91	0.62	4.29	0.52	
≥R20 000	307	77	3.96	0.77	4.28	0.82	4.31	0.70	4.93	0.92	4.81	0.59	4.78	0.59	4.56	0.61	
Place of origin																	
Middle East	157	39	4.47	0.83	4.43	0.74	4.37	0.84	4.37	0.72	4.29	0.64	4.30	0.68	4.28	0.79	
Europe	43	11	4.65	0.61	3.29	0.93	3.28	0.55	3.20	0.53	3.35	1.03	3.57	0.95	3.49	0.92	
America	59	15	4.77	0.69	4.51	0.77	2.47	0.64	3.26	0.93	3.24	0.68	3.22	0.56	3.13	0.53	
Asia, Other	104	26	3.80	1.07	3.09	1.11	3.30	0.79	2.40	0.78	3.05	0.56	2.18	0.83	2.65	0.67	
All	37	9	3.98	0.65	4.15	0.53	2.51	0.61	4.18	0.66	2.18	0.81	2.33	0.70	3.01	1.05	
All	400	100	4.20	0.77	4.06	0.69	4.05	0.69	4.11	0.70	4.26	0.72	4.04	0.66	4.15	0.64	

**M=mean**

Table 1 further reveals that Muslim travellers with different demographic characteristics rated their experience in terms of the five Islamic attributes (halal food, prayer facilities, Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress code, and general Islamic morality) in the range of a somewhat very low experience score for general Islamic morality (2.18), to a low experience score for Islamic entertainment (4.98). Muslim travellers in the 25- to 34-year-old age group reported the highest overall experience score (4.83) whilst male respondents reported the highest score for return intention (4.73).

The correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used to investigate the relationship between the Muslim traveller experiences (dependent variable), the five Islamic attributes (independent variables), and the relationship of return intention (dependent variable) with the five Islamic attributes and the Muslim traveller experiences (independent variables). Table 2 below presents the correlation results of the Muslim traveller experiences and the return intention.



**Table 2. Correlation results of Muslim hotel experiences and return intention**

Variables	Muslim hotel experiences		Return intention	
	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance (p-value)
Halal food	0.68	<.0001*	0.79	<.0001
Prayer facilities	0.86	<.0001*	0.72	<.0001
Islamic entertainment	0.65	<.0001*	0.61	<.0001
Islamic dress code	0.56	<.0001*	0.56	<.0001
General Islamic morality	0.74	<.0001*	0.67	<.0001
Muslim hotel experiences	-	-	0.70	<.0001

Table 2 above shows the importance of the Islamic attributes of hotels for Muslim travellers. The Table shows that all five Islamic attributes showed a moderate to strong positive correlation ( $r > 0.5$ ) with Muslim traveller experiences. All five Islamic attributes had a significant correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) with Muslim traveller experiences. The strongest correlation with Muslim traveller experience was that of prayer facilities ( $r = 0.79$ ).

The results corroborate the findings by previous research scholars (Syed, 2001; Al-Hamarneh & Steiner, 2004; Mohsin, 2005; Weidenfeld, 2006; Mohsin & Mohammed, 2011; Battour & Ismail, 2014) who found out that prayer facilities highly impacted on Muslim travellers' hotel experiences. The above is not surprising, considering that their religion requires them to perform five daily prayers, although, while travelling, some of them might combine some prayers, and perform them three times a day. It is through prayer that Muslims connect to Allah, accessing strength, guidance and peace of mind. Therefore, the availability of prayer facilities in, or next to, a hotel plays an important factor in Muslim hotel choice.

A similar examination of the relationship between the six independent variables and the Muslim travellers' return intention showed that all the variables had a weak to moderate ( $r \leq 0.5$ ) positive correlation with return intention. The weakest correlations with Muslim traveller's return intention were calculated for Islamic dress code and general Islamic morality ( $r = 0.32$ ) attributes. All six independent variables had a significantly positive correlation ( $p < 0.05$ ) with Muslim travellers' return intention. Halal food had the strongest correlation with Muslim travellers' return intention ( $r = 0.50$ ), followed by that for halal food ( $r = 0.40$ ).

The results vindicate the findings by Putit et al. (2016) and Mohsin and Mohammed (2011), who found that the availability of halal food highly impacted on the Muslim tourists' return intentions. Battour et al. (2014) also found that readily accessible halal food played an important role in Muslim tourists' choice of hotels, because

food has a significant societal, historical and religious role in Muslim societies. Furthermore, the Muslim religion requires its followers to adhere to a strict diet everywhere they go. Therefore, the availability of, and easy access to, halal food contribute to a stress-free holiday abroad.

Full regression models were run for each of the two dependent variables. The first full model regressed the five Islamic attributes against Muslim tourist experiences, while the second full model regressed the five Islamic attributes and Muslim tourist experience against return intention. Table 3 below depicts both full regression models.

**Table 3. Regression results of Muslim hotel experiences and return intention**

Independent variable	Model 1. Muslim hotel experiences		Model 2. Return intention	
	t-value	p-value (p)	t-value	p-value (p)
Halal food	13.59	<.0001*	7.23	0.0189*
Prayer facilities	16.04	<.0001*	5.36	<.0001*
Islamic entertainment	8.37	<.0151*	3.79	0.2076
Islamic dress code	5.08	<.0001*	1.05	0.6495
General Islamic morality	11.61	<.0001*	2.83	0.3917
Muslim hotel experiences	-	-	3.97	0.0304*

\*Indicates a significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ )

The first full regression model showed that all five Islamic attributes were significantly related ( $p < 0.05$ ) to Muslim tourist experiences. The t-values in Table 3 indicate the relative impact of each attribute on Muslim tourist experiences. Prayer facilities ( $t=16.04$ ) were rated by the respondents as being the most important variable influencing Muslim tourist experiences, followed by halal food ( $t=13.59$ ), general Islamic morality ( $t=11.61$ ), Islamic entertainment ( $t=8.37$ ), and Islamic dress code ( $t=5.08$ ).

The results corroborate the findings by Rahman (2014) who noted that proximity to a mosque influences Muslim tourists' preferences when making hotel reservations. This IS also supported by Mohsin and Mohammed (2011) who found that Omani students were highly attracted by the availability of mosques. In another study, Syed (2001) also suggested that the availability of mosques at tourist destinations may increase satisfaction levels. According to Syed (2001), formal prayer reveals one of the most important aspects of worship. It reflects mankind's connection to Allah, through which one gathers strength, guidance and peace of mind. Muslims love visiting mosques. It's a feeling of serenity. It's a feeling of tranquillity. It's a chance to put your head down before your Creator.

However, a study conducted by Putit et al. (2016) found Halal food as the highest factor impacting on Muslim traveller's hotel experiences with prayer facilities ranking second. Some research endeavours (Battour et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2013; Shafaei & Mohammed, 2013; Battour et al., 2014) found that the availability and accessibility of Halal food significantly influenced Muslim tourist experiences in hotels. The model F-value was calculated at 29.46 ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The five Islamic attributes had a coefficient determination ( $R^2$ ) of 0.6781 and thus explained more than 67 per cent of the variability in Muslim customer experiences. This explanation of the variability in overall Muslim traveller's hotel experiences is high when compared to other studies. For example, the regression results of a study performed by Shafaei and Mohammed (2013) identified Halal food, prayer facilities, female swimming/spa/bathing time, female housekeeping, separate spa/pool/beach facilities, as significant factors ( $p < 0.05$ ) impacting on Muslim traveller's hotel experiences, which explained only 61 per cent of Muslim traveller's hotel experiences.

The second full regression model depicted in Table 3 showed that only halal food ( $p < 0.0189$ ), prayer facilities ( $p < 0.0001$ ) and customer experiences ( $p = 0.0304$ ) were significantly related ( $p < 0.05$ ) to Muslim travellers' return intention. The t-values of the second model indicated that respondents rated halal food ( $t = 7.23$ ) as the most important variable influencing their return intentions to a hotel, followed by prayer facilities ( $t = 5.36$ ). Previous research studies confirmed the important role of halal food (Battour et al., 2012; Khan et al., 2013; Shafaei & Mohammed, 2013; Battour et al., 2014) in Muslim travellers' return intention. While it is strange that Islamic dress code was found not to be a significant contributor to travellers' return intention, comparable studies by Shafaei, (2015); Idris and Wahab (2015) and Salleh et al. (2014) confirmed that Islamic dress code is not a significant contributor to Muslim travellers' return intention.

The model F-value was calculated at 31.78 ( $p < 0.0001$ ). The five Islamic attributes and Muslim traveller experiences had an  $R^2$  of 0.2690 per cent and thus explained just more than 26 per cent of the variability in Muslim travellers' return intention. The study results deviate from the regression results of studies performed by Samori and Abd Rahman (2013) and Zamani and Henderson (2010) that only identified reliability as a significant predictor ( $p < 0.05$ ) of Muslim travellers' return intention to a hotel, which explained only 23 per cent of travellers' return intention.

The impact of each Islamic attribute in influencing Muslim traveller experiences should not be overlooked. Samori and Rahman (2013), however, state that Muslim travellers usually evaluate the components of a hotel experience (e.g. halal food, prayer facilities, Islamic entertainment, Islamic dress code and general Islamic morality) in isolation. The above was demonstrated in the current study, when the

hotel guests gave the following feedback on their hotel experience: “[t]he hotel was beautiful, but the service was terrible.”

To determine whether there were any significant differences among the means of the eight hotels surveyed, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for the five religious attributes, for the Muslim hotel experiences, and for the return intention, in respect of individual hotels (Table 4).

**Table 4. ANOVA results for the five religious attributes, for the Muslim hotel experiences, and for return intention for the different hotels**

Source of variation	$\beta$ -value	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-value	Significance (p-value)
Halal food	0.109	21.37	4.31	3.62	0.0201*
Prayer facilities	0.482	23.10	3.64	3.74	0.0083*
Islamic entertainment	0.158	19.05	3.49	2.05	0.4126
Islamic dress code	0.347	26.18	4.55	2.59	0.1167
General Islamic morality	0.391	14.26	3.26	3.13	0.0149*
Muslim hotel experiences	0.293	2.38	2.17	0.60	0.5360
Return intention	0.176	6.17	1.46	0.47	0.2472

Table 4 shows that there were significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) among the means for the following Islamic attributes: halal food ( $p = 0.0201$ ); prayer facilities ( $p = 0.0083$ ); and general Islamic morality ( $p = 0.0149$ ). The above indicates that the Muslim hotel experiences were significantly influenced by the availability of halal food, by the prayer facilities available, and by the general Islamic morality practised.

## 5. Managerial Implications

The purpose of the current research endeavour was to determine the Muslim tourist experiences, and the return intention, in respect of hotels. The present study clearly indicates that all Islamic attributes are not equally important to Muslim hotel travellers. “Halal food”, “prayer facilities”, and “general Islamic morality” were found to be the most important attributes influencing Muslim tourist experiences in relation to hotels. However, of the three attributes, “prayer facilities” emerged as the best predictor of Muslim customer experiences, whereas ‘the availability of halal food’ emerged as the best predictor of Muslim tourist return intentions.

To improve Muslim tourist experiences, hotels should provide prayer facilities within the hotel premises or, alternatively, a designated prayer room, since Muslims are obliged to pray five times a day. However, should such prayer facilities not be available, hotels can paint an arrow pointing in the direction of Qibla against the

ceiling in each room, or else provide a sophisticated compass, since Muslims face towards Qibla in Mecca when praying. Hotels should also provide a list of mosques located close by.

Hotels could provide a designated floor, known as the “Islamic floor”, or at least a separate section in the hotel where rooms could be reserved for the Muslim guests. Such rooms should be supplied with a Quran, along with prayer dresses or garments for men and women to wear while praying. Furthermore, the rooms concerned should provide such unique amenities as prayer mats and timetables, as well as halal-certified shampoo, body lotion and soap containing no animal fat. Another important consideration for hoteliers in connection with such rooms would be the cleansing ritual referred to as Wudhu, which is performed before a Muslim performs their prayers. The above-mentioned ritual requires the rooms to have foot-washing facilities. Therefore, in the bathrooms involved, the hotels could install a dedicated ablution tap, or a special bidet, for ablution for ritual cleansing before praying purposes.

To improve the Muslim tourists’ return intention, the hotels concerned should train their restaurant and kitchen staff in connection with the preparation and presentation of halal food, since they deal directly with the food. Hotels need to educate their staff that the halal dishes that they serve belong to two different categories. One category consists of the whole restaurant being halal, with a halal kitchen. The other category consists of a non-halal restaurant being served from a halal-certified kitchen, specifically to meet the Muslim guests’ dietary requirements. In a halal restaurant, the training required would not be as extensive as in a non-halal restaurant, as, in the former case, all produce would be halal, and there would be no fear of contamination with non-halal items of food.

In the second category of restaurant, where a non-halal restaurant serves halal food from a halal-certified kitchen, hotels should provide more extensive training to their staff, as cross- contamination could take place if the staff are not adequately trained and educated in the process of storing halal and haram food items separately. Hotels should make staff aware that there should be separate utensils and cutlery in the restaurant for Muslim guests to use, since, in most hotel restaurants, all guests are served with the same crockery and cutlery, and there are no separate groups of tables for halal and non-halal clientele.

Furthermore, to improve the return intentions of the Muslim guests, hotels might provide a special option of Islamic halal food, for which they could retain an Islamic chef specifically for the room service provided, as Muslim guests generally prefer to dine in their own rooms. Having hotels with proper halal guarantees that are identifiable by Muslims would improve the latter’s food-related experiences. However, for hotels without restaurants, the management could provide a list of halal-certified restaurants located close by.

Finally, targeting the Muslim travel market should become part of the national tourism strategy. The National Department of Tourism, through the South African National Halal Authority, should spearhead the initiative by means of establishing a national certification programme for hotels to increase the number of hotels complying with Islamic standards. Currently, South Africa does not have a certification programme for accommodation that identifies Muslim-friendly hotels. Having such a programme in place would help to regulate the relevant standards, specifications and requirements, so as to ensure uniformity, which would thereby improve service in the Muslim-friendly hotels and which would, consequently, also improve the related Muslim tourist experiences and return intentions.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study provides hotel management with an improved understanding of the attributes that impact on Muslim tourist experiences and return intentions. The management concerned needs to be aware that, to improve the Muslim tourist experiences, they should provide “prayer facilities”, “halal food”, and “assurance” to appeal to such a niche market. The degree to which the related needs are met would be a deciding factor in terms of the level of friendliness that the hotel concerned is able to provide for their Muslim guests. Therefore, having an acceptable level of such attributes in hotels is integral to the sustained growth in number of the travellers involved visiting the establishments. It is, therefore, imperative for hoteliers to supply prayer facilities and halal food at their hotels, or at least within close vicinity to the establishments to cater for the faith-based needs of Muslim travellers. The above practice should lead to enhanced levels of tourist satisfaction, as well as fostering positive word of mouth, and encouraging multiple return visits. The results of the present study reveal that the Islam religion has a great influence on the hotel experience of Muslim tourists. The findings can help hotels to explore further ways of amplifying relational value, so as to establish sustainable relationships with their Muslim travellers, with the satisfaction of Muslim guests driving the demand for such hotels. The success of developing and marketing hotels to Muslim tourists must be guided by the adoption of Islamic attributes that significantly impact on Muslim tourist experiences. The above might also improve South Africa’s GMTI, and improve its ranking in the non-OIC destinations, so as to help make it become a preferred option among Muslim tourists.

## 7. References

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