

A survey on Japanese university students' awareness of halal food and international affairs – comparison between 2015 and 2020

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Received 2 April 2025
Revised 23 August 2025
18 September 2025
Accepted 18 September 2025

Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to clarify changes in the understanding of halal foods and international affairs in Japan from 2015 to 2020. Based on the results of this survey, the authors will extract variables for promoting awareness of halal foods in the future.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors conducted an Internet (Google) survey on tourism and halal-related initiatives implemented between 2012 and 2025. A field survey was conducted using self-administered questionnaires targeting university students in the Faculty of Pharmacy in 2015 (452 respondents) and 2020 (510 respondents). The comparison of results between 2015 and 2020 was performed using the chi-square test (IBM SPSS ver. 27.0).

Findings – Between 2012 and 2025, the Japanese Government implemented 24 measures. The halal-related measures were aimed at service providers, companies and government agencies rather than the general public. According to a questionnaire survey, around 90% of respondents were aware of Muslim dietary restrictions, but only around 30% of students were aware of the term “halal.” Awareness of prohibitions such as pork and alcohol increased over the five-year period, but awareness of details such as halal logos and slaughter methods remained low. Awareness of Japan’s tourism policies and its position in the international community was also low, with no progress made over the five-year period. Respondents desired neutral institutions or countries as sources of information on Islam and halal.



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Nutrition & Food Science
Emerald Publishing Limited
0034-6659
DOI 10.1108/NFS-03-2025-0112

Research limitations/implications – As this survey was conducted in 2015 and 2020, it does not accurately reflect the current situation following the subsiding of the Coronavirus pandemic. The number of foreign visitors to Japan for employment or tourism purposes is currently increasing. Consequently, a new survey is required to reflect the situation in 2025. Furthermore, the survey should not be limited to pharmacy students, but should be expanded to include respondents from other departments. To clarify the level of awareness of halal food among Japanese people, ongoing surveys are necessary.

Practical implications – This study reveals the current level of awareness of halal among Japanese people. As the number of foreign tourists and workers is expected to increase, continued surveys are important to support the development of the halal-related industry. The results indicate that Japanese people prefer receiving information from private third-party organizations, which would be a positive step for future outreach. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the government should also play a role in providing information to the general public.

Social implications – Between 2015 and 2020, it became clear that the awareness of halal and halal foods among Japanese people had not significantly improved. It was also revealed that young people in Japan lacked a sufficient understanding of their country's tourism policies and the global distribution of the world's population. As communication networks continue to develop and globalization progresses, greater attention must be paid to domestic and international circumstances. The Japanese Government also needs to provide the general public with information. The fact that these issues have been clearly identified is a significant social achievement.

Originality/value – This paper provides valuable and rare insights by comparing the perception of halal in Japan in 2015 and 2020. There have been few studies addressing how Japanese people perceive halal. This study reveals that the information provided by the Japanese Government to the general public is limited. As the number of foreign residents in Japan continues to increase, ongoing research is essential to avoid cultural misunderstandings. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of multicultural coexistence in Japan.

Keywords Japan, Halal food, Halal awareness, Japanese food culture

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In 2015, the Japan Tourism Agency (JTA) published its first guidebook for businesses such as restaurants and hotels, titled “Muslim Hospitality Guidebook” (2018 Revised Edition), marking the beginning of serious efforts to accommodate tourists from Islamic countries (JTA, 2018). In 2016, Japan was awarded the title of “World’s Best Non- OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation). Emerging Halal Destination” (Sukmayadi and Effendi, 2020). This award demonstrates that Japan has established the necessary infrastructure to accommodate Muslim tourists, indicating that its efforts have received recognition overseas. Since 2013, the Japan National Tourism Organization (JNTO) has provided information for Muslim tourists on its website under the name “Muslim Travelers.” This includes information on halal-compliant restaurants, accommodations and places of worship throughout the country. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Tokyo Olympics were held without spectators, resulting in a significant decline in tourism in both 2020 and 2021. However, as the pandemic subsided in 2023, the “Basic Plan for Promoting a Tourism-Oriented Nation,” which set targets to increase the number of foreign visitors to Japan from 18 million in 2020–40 million by 2030, was approved by the Cabinet. Since then, the number of foreign visitors to Japan has continued to increase, exceeding 36 million in 2024 (JNTO, 2025).

Since 2022, Japan has gradually relaxed its restrictions on accepting foreign workers. Notably, the number of immigrant workers from Indonesia has increased significantly, contributing to rapid growth in the Muslim population (Ratih *et al.*, 2021; Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2024). Using statistics on foreign residents published by the Ministry of Justice, Tanada (2024) estimated the Muslim population in Japan at the beginning of 2024 to be around 350,000, comprising 294,000 foreign Muslims and 54,000 Japanese Muslims; this

represents an increase of around 150,000 since 2020. In addition to immigrant workers from predominantly Muslim countries, the numbers of international students, Japanese converts to Islam, naturalized Japanese Muslims and second- and third-generation Muslims are also expected to increase in the future (Yamashita, 2022). As the Muslim population continues to grow, Japan is at a critical crossroads in 2025. The question is whether to view Muslims solely as a market for Muslim-related industries, or to pursue closer ties with Southeast Asian nations as Taiwan has done (Wardhani *et al.*, 2021). Now is the time for Japan to consider its approach deeply.

We have conducted two surveys on Japanese university students' perceptions of halal food as a response to Muslim tourists: one in 2015, immediately after the decision to hold the Tokyo Olympics, and another in 2020, just before the Olympics. This was because, following the registration of Japanese "*washoku*" (traditional cuisine) as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2013 (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2025), we speculated that foreign tourists visiting Japan were doing so with the purpose of experiencing Japanese cuisine.

This study analyzes the results of the two surveys with the following two objectives. The first is to compare the results of the two surveys conducted in 2015 and 2020 and examine the changes in Japanese people's awareness of halal food, and the second is to extract variables from the comparison of the results to investigate what specific preparations Japanese people should make and how they should approach the issue to accommodate Muslims in the future.

Literature review

Muslim travel

By the year 2100, it is estimated that Muslims will account for 35% of the global religious population (Pew Research Center, 2017). Alongside this demographic shift, the Muslim travel market has grown rapidly (Sulong *et al.*, 2020; Ekka, 2024).

In Islamic teachings, the Arabic term "halal" means "permissible" (Jafari and Scott, 2014; El-Gohary, 2016). According to El-Gohary, the concept of halal applies to all aspects of life and is not limited to food and drink. It encompasses a wide range of products and services that comply with Islamic law (Shari'a), including food and beverages, banking and finance, tourism, cosmetics, employment, travel and transportation.

The opposite of halal is "haram," referring to that which is forbidden, illegal or impermissible (Jafari and Scott, 2014; Pasha *et al.*, 2024). Travel by Muslims is referred to as halal tourism or Islamic tourism. These terms are commonly used by scholars and practitioners to describe the Muslim travel market (Yousaf and Xiucheng, 2018; Kurniawan and Jatmika, 2021). However, Battour and Ismail (2016) argue that these terms are not synonymous, and their definitions have been the subject of academic research (Boğan and Sarişik, 2019; Muslim, 2022).

Islamic tourism is considered travel undertaken with the intention of gaining God's approval and satisfaction (Bogan, 2017). According to Laderlah *et al.* (2011), the purpose of Islamic tourism must align with Islamic principles, being motivated by the desire to attain divine pleasure and spiritual restoration, and the actions involved must not contradict Islamic law. Conversely, El-Gohary (2016) questions whether a restaurant that sells alcohol can be considered halal, even if it holds halal certification. El-Gohary (2016, page:127) interprets halal tourism as:

'Halal tourism' as the main and only term to brand and describe tourism products and/or activities that have full compliance with the rules and guidance of the Halal concept and Islamic Shari'ah.

In other words, halal tourism is considered a more appropriate brand concept than Islamic tourism because it represents the Muslim travel market and encompasses a broader range of ideas (Battour and Ismail, 2016). Such distinctions have emerged as a result of the diverse interpretations of Islamic beliefs and cultural standards (Rasul, 2019).

Recent publications have used terms such as “Muslim-friendly” (Muslim, 2022; Kurniawan and Jatmika, 2021) and “halal-friendly” (Soonsan and Jumani, 2024) in article titles. However, to our knowledge, no studies have clearly defined either term. Muslim-friendly is interpreted as catering to the desires and needs of Muslim travelers (Kurniawan and Jatmika, 2021). It is also argued that services not fully compliant with Islamic principles may still be referred to as Muslim-friendly. Consequently, many tourist destinations have developed the concept of “Muslim-friendly tourism,” offering activities that softly apply Shari’a and Islamic customs (Hanafiah, 2020; Cuesta-Vali, 2020). Conversely, the proliferation of such terms has been identified as a source of confusion among tourism providers and travelers, particularly non-Muslims (Hanafiah, 2022).

Muslim tourists and related developments in Japan

In recent years, the number of Muslim tourists has been steadily increasing. According to the Mastercard-CrescentRating (2017), the number of international Muslim travelers in 2016 was estimated at 121 million. Although this figure temporarily declined in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mastercard-CrescentRating (2025) projects that it will rise to 176 million by 2024 and 245 million by 2030.

The primary driver of this growth is the global increase in the Muslim population, which is expected to grow from 2.19 billion in 2025–2.54 billion by 2035. Notably, a significant rise is observed among middle-aged individuals (ages 21–50 years), who represent a key demographic for economic activity and travel.

These statistics clearly indicate that Muslim tourists will become an increasingly attractive global market segment. The rise in Muslim travelers is also expected to boost demand for halal-related products. The halal business has the potential for further economic expansion by appealing to not only international tourists, but also domestic travelers and local residents (Rizki and Aminah, 2023).

In 2015, Japan was selected as the host country for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. To achieve this goal, Japan relaxed visa requirements for Indonesia and Malaysia, resulting in a significant increase in inbound tourists (Saville and Mahbubi, 2021; Takeshita, 2020). As part of these efforts, Japan promoted the establishment of halal restaurants and prayer rooms at airports. This led to Japan being awarded in 2016 the title of “Best Non-OIC Emerging Halal Destination” (Sukmayadi and Effendi, 2020).

In the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), which ranks destinations and accommodations for Muslim travelers, Japan ranked third among non-OIC countries in 2019 (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2019). The GMTI evaluation uses the Access, Communication, Environment and Service model to assess how welcoming a destination is to Muslim travelers. Japan received these high ratings as a result of its active efforts to accommodate Muslim tourists.

In 2023, Japan won “Sustainable Destination of the Year” and was ranked sixth among non-OIC countries in the GMTI (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2023). However, Japan’s ranking dropped to 14th in 2024, presumably due to the progress made by other countries.

Currently, the JTA and JNTO are taking the lead in promoting Muslim-friendly tourism. Progress is being made in the certification of halal products, which are essential for accommodating Muslim travelers. Japanese certification organizations have received mutual recognition from overseas certification organizations and are actively operating (Japan Halal Business Association, 2025). However, at present, there remains no unified national

certification authority. Halal certification involves significant costs, and the emergence of various consulting firms has led to concerns that the process of obtaining certification has become increasingly complex (Yamaguchi-Kurosaki, 2019).

Role of halal food in Muslim travel

In the tourism industry, culinary experiences are a crucial element and major source of motivation. Food often becomes a memorable part of the travel experience (Kunasegaran and Rasoolimanesh, 2019). Tourism centered around food is referred to as “food tourism,” defined by Hall and Sharples (2003) as follows:

Food tourism is the visitation to primary and secondary food producers, food festivals, restaurants and specific locations for which food tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of food are the primary motivating factor for travel.

The desire to experience the cuisine and food culture of a particular destination significantly influences the destination choice. Studies have shown that, for international visitors to Japan, food is a key factor in choosing a travel destination (Shugo, 2020; Okumuş *et al.*, 2020). A survey by the JTA found that “eating Japanese food” is one of the main reasons for inbound spending, highlighting the central role of food in tourism (JTA, 2024).

Interest in food is not unusual for Muslims. They consume “permissible food” (halal) in accordance with Islamic dietary laws. Their consumption behavior varies depending on their level of religious commitment (Jafari and Scott, 2014). Those with stronger religious awareness tend to pursue halal food consumption more earnestly (Hanafiah, 2020; Ratih *et al.*, 2021; Ashfahany *et al.*, 2024). Several studies on halal-friendly attributes in non-Muslim countries have identified food and beverages as key components (Han *et al.*, 2019; Al-Ansi and Han, 2019; Wibawa *et al.*, 2021; Soonsan and Jumani, 2024), indicating halal food’s significant role in tourism.

However, access to halal food is not always easy in non-Muslim countries (Rozaidah and Idris, 2024). For Muslims, finding halal food remains a significant concern. Muslim tourists often rely on information from friends to find halal food sources (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023). While the availability of halal food in Japan is gradually increasing (Yamaguchi-Kurosaki, 2019), these efforts are primarily concentrated in urban areas. In rural regions, access remains limited, making it challenging for restaurants to offer halal cuisine under current market conditions.

The expectations, mind-set, preparedness and perceptions of Muslim tourists regarding the services and products offered in halal tourism significantly influence their overall satisfaction with the travel experience (Said *et al.*, 2022). Halal-certified food and beverages attract Muslim travelers and contribute to shaping the destination’s image. The more positive the destination’s image, the stronger Muslim travelers’ intentions are to revisit and recommend it to others (Ratnasari *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to provide halal food to Muslim tourists.

Conversely, foods prohibited for Muslims are referred to as “haram” foods. These include pork, meat from animals that have not been slaughtered appropriately, alcohol, forbidden animals and blood (Pasha *et al.*, 2024). The main concerns for Muslims dining in Japan are pork, alcohol and meat from animals not slaughtered in alignment with Islamic practices. It has been noted that the first kanji characters that Muslims learn to recognize in Japan are “酒” (alcohol) and “豚肉” (pork) (Srifauzi and Surwandono, 2023), which indicates how deeply embedded these items are in Japanese food culture.

Relationship between Japanese food culture and halal food

One of the most significant recent developments in the history of Japanese food culture is the inscription of “*Washoku*: Traditional Dietary Cultures of the Japanese” on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list in 2013. In this context, the term “*washoku*” does not refer to specific dishes, but rather to a set of food practices rooted in the Japanese ethos of respecting nature. These practices embody:

- the use of diverse and fresh ingredients with an emphasis on their natural flavors;
- nutritional balance that supports a healthy diet;
- the expression of natural beauty and seasonal transitions; and
- a close association with annual events such as New Year celebrations (MAFF).

Since *washoku* was inscribed on UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage list, Japanese cuisine has received increased attention both domestically and internationally. Foreign tourists often look forward to eating Japanese food while visiting Japan, with sushi, sukiyaki and tempura frequently cited as their top expectations ([The Norinchukin Bank, 2023](#)). However, based on the interpretation of the *washoku* concept, these dishes are more appropriately categorized as Japanese food rather than *washoku*. Japanese food is a broader notion than *washoku*, encompassing not only traditional dishes, but also foreign cuisines adapted to Japanese taste.

The history and transformation of Japanese food culture have been extensively detailed by Naomichi Ishige, a pioneering cultural anthropologist in the field of food studies ([Ishige, 2019](#)). A major turning point in Japan’s culinary history occurred in the early first millennium BCE with the introduction of wet rice cultivation. This marked the beginning of a rice-centered dietary culture in Japan. Japanese side dishes were developed with the aim of complementing the natural flavor of plain-cooked rice and the taste of sake, which is made from rice. Carrying on this tradition, modern Japanese cuisine -*washoku*- typically consists of a meal centered around rice, accompanied by soup and side dishes.

In Japan, sake, which is made by fermenting rice, has a history of over 2000 years as a sacred beverage offered to the gods in Shinto rituals ([Bouzdine-Chameeva and Ninomiya, 2010](#)). Although sake consumption has fallen below that of beer and liqueurs in recent years, a certain amount is still consumed ([National Tax Agency, 2024](#)) and continues to be used in religious ceremonies. Furthermore, sake is used as a seasoning to mask the smell of fish and meat while enhancing their natural umami and sweetness. Thus, the long-standing relationship between sake and the Japanese people has played a pivotal role in shaping Japanese food culture. This relationship is also reflected in traditional Japanese seasonings: mirin, made by brewing rice, contains 4.9% alcohol and soy sauce, made by fermenting soybeans, contains 2.1% alcohol. Throughout Japan’s culinary history, alcohol, especially sake, has been widely accepted. These components are part of the culinary tradition and indispensable to the Japanese diet. It should be noted, however, that the alcohol content in seasonings is largely evaporated during the cooking process, so it is not considered alcohol consumption.

Following the introduction of Buddhism to Japan in the mid-sixth century, a ban on meat consumption was introduced, and eating meat was largely avoided for a long time. This significantly contributed to the development of Japan’s fish-based culinary culture, leading to dishes such as sushi, which involves eating raw fish. Following the establishment of the Meiji government, however, Western dietary practices centered around meat consumption were introduced and gradually integrated into Japanese food culture, resulting in the creation of various new dishes ([Ishige, 2019](#)). Today, beef, chicken and pork are the main types of meat consumed in Japan. The pork industry accounts for 19% of the total output of the

livestock sector (671.3 billion yen), making it one of the major livestock industries after dairy and beef production. Pork consumption exceeds 1.8 million tons annually across the country, second only to chicken (MAFF, 2022). Due to its affordability and high nutritional value, pork imports have also increased, and pork has become an indispensable part of the modern Japanese diet. However, while beef, chicken and pork are not considered haram themselves, the slaughtering methods commonly used in Japan do not conform to Islamic dietary laws. Consequently, halal meals must be sourced from specialized vendors that adhere to the relevant religious procedures.

Methods

Survey of government policies related to tourism and halal food

An online survey was conducted to investigate the Japanese Government's initiatives in this area. Google was used as the search engine. The target period for the search was from 2012 to 2025. The search terms used were "government," "tourism" and "initiatives" in Japanese. Site searches were then conducted on the websites of the MAFF, the JTA and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, looking for policies related to tourism and halal food.

Study participants

The participants of the present study were undergraduate students in the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences (School of Pharmacy, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences and Department of Clinical Dietetics and Human Nutrition) at Josai University. Surveys were conducted as follows in 2015 and 2019 using self-administered and unmarked questionnaires:

- The 2015 survey was conducted from December 2014 to January 2015. A total of 452 subjects (143 [31.6%] males, 309 [68.4%] females; valid response rate: 69.5%) were included in the analysis after excluding nonresponses, incorrect responses and international students.
- The 2020 survey was conducted from December 2019 to January 2020. A total of 510 subjects (183 [35.9%] males, 327 [64.1%] females; valid response rate: 71.4%) were included in the analysis after excluding nonresponses, incorrect responses and international students.

Survey contents

The survey contents were the same for both 2015 and 2020:

- Awareness of halal: Two binary (yes/no) question items asked about the awareness of halal (whether the respondents had heard of the term halal and whether they were aware that Muslims had some prohibitions on eating and drinking).
- Forbidden foods among Muslims: The questionnaires were also composed of multiple response question items about foods forbidden to Muslims, including 20 foods commonly eaten in Japan: meats (beef, chicken and pork), seafood (tuna, shrimp, eel, salmon and sashimi or raw fish), alcoholic beverages (beer, sake and whiskey), spices and condiments (wasabi, curry and chili pepper) and others (sweet sake, miso, mirin, natto, eggs, milk, dairy products, gelatin and pork gelatin).
- Prevalence and understanding of halal foods: Respondents unfamiliar with halal were asked to answer relevant questions after first reading the following explanatory text to ensure that they were informed: "'Halal' means 'what is permitted by God.' It

includes all the rules of the Islamic faith, including those of life. Halal food refers to food Muslims are allowed to eat. These foods do not contain any forbidden products or ingredients derived from them.” In addition, the questionnaire was composed of four items regarding the understanding of halal food: who consumes halal food, how halal meat is slaughtered, whether there is a halal certification body in Japan and whether the halal logo is confirmed by the purchaser. The questionnaire also included four items regarding the distribution of halal food: the current status of halal food in Japan and abroad, future prospects for distribution, the need for the distribution of halal food in Japan and the prospects for the export of halal food produced in Japan. The respondents were asked to answer all questions on a three-point Likert-type scale (know, do not know, no idea).

- Japanese law and the international situation: The questionnaire was also composed of four items on the understanding of Japanese law and the international situation in relation to Japan’s Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism, the target number of foreign visitors to Japan, whether the respondents knew the number of Muslims in the world and whether the respondents had friends who knew about Islam.
- Appropriate organization as sources of information on halal food: The respondents were asked to select one answer regarding institutions that would be suitable as a source of information on halal food in Japan. Six levels, from the company level (private institutions) to the country level (public institutions), were indicated, in addition to “no need to provide information.”

Statistical analysis

The results were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics Ver. 27.0 (IBM Japan, Tokyo, Japan). The χ^2 test was used to compare the results between 2015 and 2020, with the level of significance set to 5% (two-tailed test).

Ethical considerations

The protocol for the present study, including ethical considerations and the consideration of personal information, was approved by the Josai University Ethics Review Committee (2015 survey: Josai University Life Sciences Ethics Review Committee A28-3; 2020 survey: Josai University Ethics Review Committee on Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Human Medical Ethics-2019-23A). A survey request form was distributed to all potential participants who had contact information. The survey request form clearly stated the following three conditions:

- (1) the survey would be anonymous, and individuals would not be identified;
- (2) the survey would be voluntary; and
- (3) consent for the survey would be obtained upon collection of the survey form.

Results

Japanese Government initiatives related to tourism and halal

Table 1 summarizes the results of Internet searches on Japanese Government initiatives. These policies and initiatives are classified into two categories: those related to tourism in general and those related to halal.

Table 1. Japan's initiatives toward tourism and halal (2012–2025)

No.	Year	Government agency	Policy name	Overview	Category *
1	2012	Cabinet	The second basic plan for the promotion of a Tourism-Oriented nation	The goal is to reach 18 million inbound tourists to Japan by the year 2016 (2012–2016)	●
2	2013	Prime minister's office	Strategy for revitalizing Japan	Revised Edition: The goal is to increase the annual export value of agricultural, forestry and fishery products and food to ¥1 trillion by 2020, and to ¥5 trillion by 2030	◎
3	2014	MAFF	Survey project aimed at building a supply infrastructure for halal beef	Under the country- and item-specific export strategy for agricultural, forestry and fishery products and food, a target export value of ¥25 billion was set for beef. At the same time, detailed support measures were established for groups seeking to obtain Halal certification	◎
4	2014	Cabinet	Basic matters related to the production of halal beef involving the acceptance of foreign workers	In addition to expanding beef exports to Islamic countries, slaughterhouse operators are required to submit a business plan document to promote the domestic consumption of domestically produced beef among Muslim consumers	◎
5	2014	MAFF	Guidelines for Halal Food Export	Basic information such as the structure of Halal certification and differences in systems across countries has been compiled	◎
6	2015	JTA	Guidebook for Welcoming Muslim Visitors	To improve the environment in which Muslim travelers can stay in Japan comfortably and with peace of mind—without experiencing inconvenience due to religious or cultural practices—a collection of practical response measures and sample English phrases for handling inquiries has been compiled	◎
7	2015	MAFF	Case Studies of Halal Food Export Initiatives by Domestic Companies with Halal Certification	To serve as a reference for food businesses aiming to enter the Islamic market, case studies have been compiled of companies that have obtained Halal certification and have a track record in manufacturing and exporting Halal products	◎
8	2016	MAFF	Revised Edition of the Guidelines for Halal Food Export	In addition to basic information on Halal food, this document provides a clear summary of consultation services, support measures and other relevant resources	◎
9	2017	MAFF	Revised Edition of the Guidelines for Halal Food Export	Update information on differences in systems across countries, a list of domestic halal certification bodies and details for each domestic halal certification body	◎

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

No.	Year	Government agency	Policy name	Overview	Category *
10	2017	Cabinet JTA	Basic Plan for Promoting Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Country (Third Revised Edition)	In the 'Council for the Development of a Tourism Vision to Support the Future of Japan', the Basic Plan for Promoting Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Country was revised. It set targets of 40 million inbound tourists and ¥8 trillion in inbound travel consumption by 2020, and 60 million tourists and ¥15 trillion in consumption by 2030 (2017–2020)	●
11	2017	JTA	FY2017 MICE Promotion Policy	Business expenditures associated with hosting MICE events generate significant economic ripple effects, particularly in the regions where the events are held. Therefore, a strategic promotion policy for hosting MICE events is essential	●
12	2017	MIC	Survey Results on the Development of an Inclusive Environment for Foreign Nationals Requiring Religious Consideration — Focusing on Muslims	A survey report on businesses, universities and local governments with a high number of Muslims and others has been published to serve as a reference for future initiatives	◎
13	2018	JTA	Muslim Hospitality Guidebook (Revised Edition)	In 2015, a guidebook was published to support Muslim-friendly tourism. It was later revised and reissued with additional case studies and practical examples of how to welcome Muslim travelers	◎
14	2018	JTA	Comprehensive Strategy for Visit Japan Promotion	Promotional Strategy to Maximize Global Interest in Japan Driven by the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games and to Achieve the Goals of the Basic Plan for Promoting Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Nation (2018–2020)	●
15	2018	JTA	MICE Promotion Policy	Building on the current status and challenges of the 2017 promotion policy to expand the hosting and attraction of MICE events (2018–2020)	●
16	2019	MIC	Improving infrastructure and services to accommodate the dietary and religious needs of international students	A summary of initiatives by the seven national university corporations in Kyushu has been compiled, focusing on support for international students' daily lives, including the availability of halal food and the establishment of prayer spaces	◎
17	2020	MAFF	2020 Commissioned Project for Developing Export Infrastructure: Research and Promotion of Halal and Kosher Certification Systems	A study was conducted on the systems and procedures of destination countries required to obtain necessary import approvals, such as halal certification and sanitary permits and the conditions required within Japan for exporting halal food products. A similar scope of research was also applied to kosher certification	◎

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

No.	Year	Government agency	Policy name	Overview	Category *
18	2020	MIC	Results of a survey on the acceptance of foreign patients at medical institutions	In the context of enhancing the health-care environment for resident and visiting foreigners, this survey presents findings on innovative practices and challenges in accommodating foreign patients throughout each phase of their medical visit	
19	2022	JTA	Creating High-Value Inbound Tourism Hubs in Local Regions	Designated 14 regional model destinations and implemented measures to enhance visitor attraction	●
20	2022	JTA	Comprehensive Policy Package to Revitalize Inbound Tourism	To support the full-scale recovery of inbound tourism, Japan is implementing the “Tourism Relaunch Initiative,” which promotes the appeal of regions across the country to a global audience. This effort is aiming for the swift achievement of over ¥5 trillion in inbound consumption	●
21	2023	Cabinet	The Fourth Basic Plan for Promoting Japan as a Tourism-Oriented Nation	Reviving inbound tourism, revitalizing domestic travel and fostering sustainable, high-value regional destinations. The goal is to reach 6,000 million inbound tourists to Japan by the year 2030 (2023–2025)	●
22	2024	JTA	Establishment of the Headquarters for Eliminating Transportation Gaps by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism	The goal is to establish an environment in which local residents throughout Japan can reliably access taxis and similar services, and in which visitors can easily use such services at key transportation nodes	●
23	2025	Cabinet Secretariat	The 2025 World Exposition in Japan (Osaka–Kansai Expo)	Sustaining the Growth of Osaka, Kansai, and Japan Following the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games	●
24	2025	MAFF	Basic Information on Halal	Muslim population, religious composition in Asia, what halal means, the halal certification process and trends among Japanese companies	◎

Note(s): ●Initiatives toward overall tourism development, ◎ Initiatives toward halal-related project, MAFF : Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries MIC: Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications JTA : Japan Tourism Agency MICE : Meeting, Incentive Travel, Convention, Exhibition/Event
Source(s): Authors’ own work

In 2007, the Japanese Government enacted the Basic Law for the Promotion of Tourism, clearly positioning tourism as an important pillar of 21st-century Japanese policy for the first time. Based on this law, the Basic Plan for Tourism Promotion is implemented approximately every 5 years, setting targets such as the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan.

Halal-related policies received widespread praise prior to the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. However, since around 2022, when the pandemic began to subside, efforts have focused primarily on tourism as a whole. Additionally, while some policies include halal-related surveys, such information is often intended for businesses and administrative agencies.

Awareness of halal

Figures 1 and 2 show the results regarding the respondents’ halal awareness. About 35% of all respondents had heard of the term “halal” in both 2015 and 2020, with no difference between years. The proportion of all participants who responded “I know that Muslims have prohibitions on eating and drinking” significantly decreased, from 91.8% in 2015–87.3% in 2020 ($p < 0.02$).

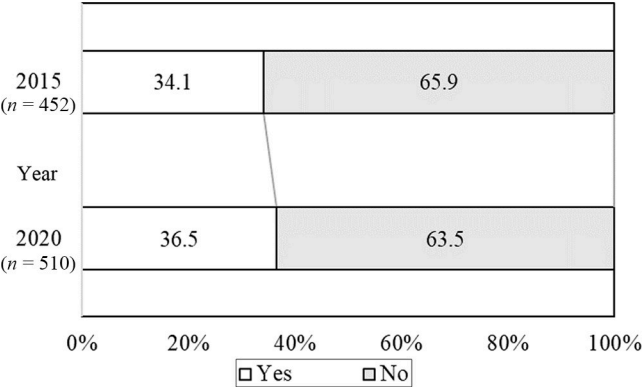


Figure 1. Comparison of the perception of the term “halal”: 2015 vs 2020
Source: Authors’ own work

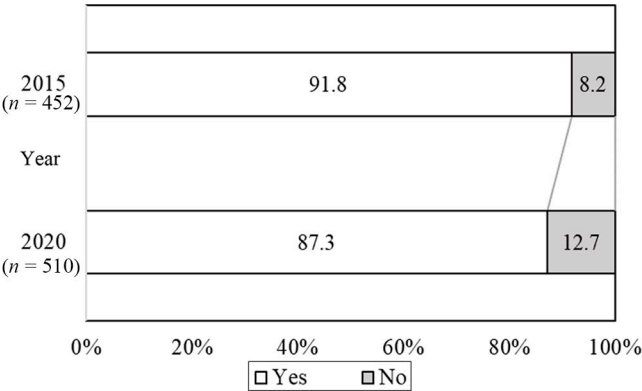


Figure 2. Comparison of knowledge regarding religious restrictions for Muslims: 2015 vs 2020
Source: Authors’ own work

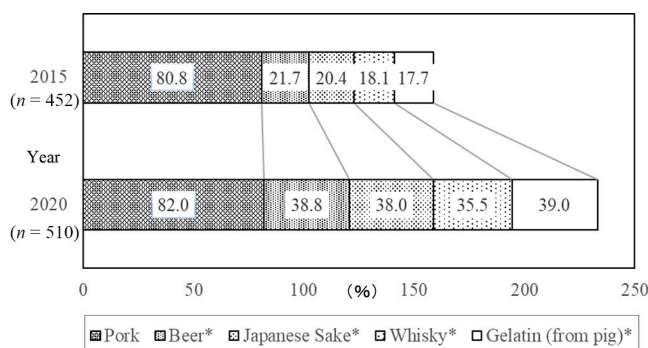


Figure 3. Comparison of perceived Muslim food prohibitions: 2015 vs 2020
Note(s): *Significant differences were found between 2015 and 2020 (χ^2 test) ($p < 0.01$)
Source: Authors' own work

Awareness of foods considered forbidden to Muslims

Figure 3 shows the results regarding knowledge of pork, alcohol and pork gelatin, which are prohibited for Muslims. The food with the highest number of affirmative responses was pork (contraindicated). In both years, > 80% of the respondents indicated that they thought pork was contraindicated. Alcoholic beverages (beer, sake and whiskey) were significantly more likely to be contraindicated in 2020 than in 2015 ($p < 0.001$). Pork gelatin (contraindicated) was also significantly more likely to be contraindicated in 2020 ($p < 0.001$).

For sashimi (raw fish), milk and eggs, which are not contraindicated, the number of respondents who thought they were contraindicated increased significantly in 2020 compared with 2015. In both years, around 55% of the respondents answered that beef was prohibited, and around 18% that chicken was prohibited. The 10 types of food with response rates of 10% or less in both the 2015 and 2020 surveys were: tuna, salmon, eel, shrimp, mirin, wasabi, curry, chili, miso and natto (These data are not shown).

Understanding of halal food

Figure 4 shows the results regarding the respondents' understanding of halal food. More than half of all respondents thought that halal food would be available to everyone in both 2015 and 2020. However, a significant decrease in those who knew that the slaughtering of animals is done according to Islamic methods was observed, from about 25% in 2015 to about 15% in 2020 ($p = 0.001$). A significant decrease was also seen in those who believed that Muslims check the halal certification mark before buying food, from 83% in 2015–69% in 2020 ($p < 0.001$). The proportion of those who were aware of the existence of halal certification organizations in Japan was low, at around 10% in both years.

Distribution of halal food

Table 2 shows the distribution of halal food in Japan. About half of the respondents answered that there was a need for distribution in both 2015 and 2020. The question of whether halal food products were currently distributed in Japan was only asked in 2020. Approximately 20% of the respondents indicated that halal food products were currently distributed in Japan. A significant increase was seen in the number of respondents who believed that halal food will be distributed in Japan, from 32% in 2015–40% in 2020 ($p = 0.020$). However, the

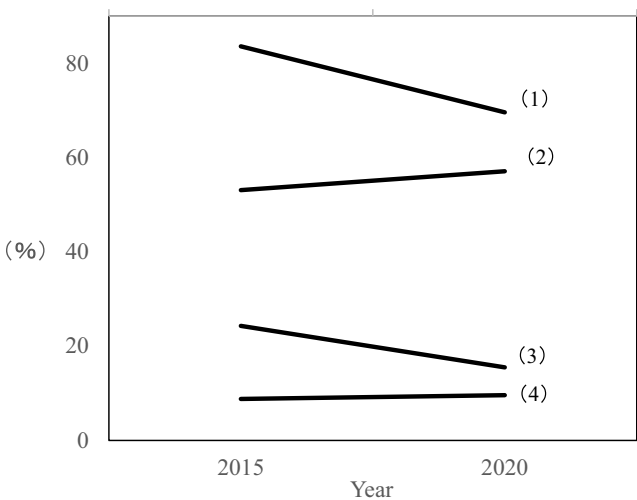


Figure 4. Changes in awareness and knowledge of halal food between 2015 and 2020

Note(s): The question items were as follows: 1) Do you think Muslims check the halal logo before purchasing food?; 2) Do you think all people can eat halal food?; 3) Do you know that slaughter is carried out according to the Islamic method?; and 4) Do you know there is the certification body of Halal in Japan?
Source: Authors' own work

Table 2. Distribution of halal food

Question	Item	2015 (n = 452)	2020 (n = 510)	No. (%) p-value
Do you think Halal food distribution is necessary in Japan?	Yes	227 (50.2)	263 (51.6)	0.68
	No	225 (49.8)	247 (48.4)	
Do you think halal food is currently distributed in Japan?	Yes	–	110 (21.6)	–
	No	–	400 (78.4)	
Do you think halal food will be distributed in Japan in the future?	Yes	148 (32.7)	204 (40.0)	0.02
	No	304 (67.3)	306 (60.0)	
Do you think Japanese Halal food products can be exported?	Yes	306 (67.7)	306 (60.0)	0.01
	No	146 (32.3)	204 (40.0)	

Source(s): Authors own work

likelihood of Japanese halal food products being exported to other countries decreased, from 67% in 2015–60% in 2020 ($p = 0.013$).

Japanese law and international understanding

Table 3 shows the results regarding awareness of Japanese laws related to tourism, goals for attracting tourists and the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism. The number of

Table 3. Understanding Japanese law and global affairs

Question	Item	2015 (<i>n</i> = 452)	2020 (<i>n</i> = 510)	No. (%) <i>p</i> -value
Do you know there is the Tourism Nation Promotion Basic Plan in Japan?	Yes	86 (19.0)	50 (9.8)	<0.01
	No	366 (81.0)	460 (90.2)	
Do you know the Target number of foreign visitors to Japan?	Yes	66 (14.6)	54 (10.6)	0.06
	No	386 (85.4)	456 (89.4)	
Do you know that 26% of the world's population will be Muslim by 2030?	Yes	19 (4.2)	24 (4.7)	0.71
	No	433 (95.8)	486 (95.3)	
Do you have an acquaintance who knows about Islam?	Yes	57 (12.6)	72 (14.1)	0.49
	No	395 (87.4)	438 (85.9)	

Source(s): Authors' own work

respondents who were aware of the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism decreased significantly, from 19% in 2015–9.8% in 2020 ($p < 0.001$). The number of respondents who were aware of the target number of inbound tourists was in the range of 10% in both years. Moreover, about 5% of the respondents in both years knew that the number of Muslims would increase to about 26% of the global population by 2030.

Institutions suitable for providing information on halal food products

Figures 5 shows the results regarding institutions suitable for providing information on halal food products. The results were similar in both 2015 and 2020. In both years, about 30% of all respondents indicated that a private third-party organization (e.g., a nonprofit organization [NPO]) would be suitable, while about 24% indicated that the government (national government) would be appropriate.

Discussion

The term “Muslim-friendly” is used in this section. This is based on the view that tourism in Japan, a non-Muslim country, should appropriately be referred to as “Muslim-friendly tourism”

**Figure 5.** Comparison of institutions providing halal food information: 2015 vs 2020

Source: Authors own work

because it addresses the dietary and overall lifestyle needs of Muslim tourists who require halal support. This term is also used in the GMTI ([Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2025](#)) and the Tokyo Muslim Travelers' Guide ([Tokyo Convention and Visitors Bureau, 2025](#)). However, when citing papers by other researchers, the terminology used follows that of the original sources.

In this study, a survey was conducted on Japanese undergraduate university students regarding their awareness of halal food and the current status of internationalization in Japan. The survey was conducted twice: once in 2015, when Tokyo was selected to host the Olympics, and again in 2020, just before the Olympics were held. Changes in awareness over the five-year period were then compared.

The results showed that the proportion of subjects who reported having heard the term “halal” remained relatively unchanged between the two surveys. This suggests that knowledge about halal had not become widely disseminated among the general public during that period.

In recent years, the growing Muslim population has made tourism an attractive market ([Sulong et al., 2020](#)). Ensuring halal quality for Muslim tourists has been identified as an important issue for business development, and Japan is perceived to be an attractive destination for Muslims because of its well-developed environment ([Nuraini and Sucipto, 2021](#); [Sukmayadi and Effendi, 2020](#)).

In 2013, JNTO began providing information on restaurants that serve halal food, and halal-compliant foods were served for the first time at Kansai International Airport ([Hariani, 2016](#)), which was considered to increase the opportunity for tourists to come into contact with halal-related information at tourist destinations. However, it has been reported that approximately 40% of the Japanese population is classified by the JTA as “zero tier,” meaning those who do not take a single trip throughout the year ([Nakamura, 2015](#)). Most Japanese people remain unaware of halal food unless they visit airports or tourist attractions, and this was reflected in the survey results.

On the other hand, > 87% of the respondents knew that Muslims had prohibitions on eating and drinking, even if they had never heard of the term “halal”; this was the same in both years. The reason for this was presumably due to the fact that students learn about religion in subjects such as world history and ethics in their compulsory education. In recent years, the number of children with foreign nationality has been increasing in compulsory education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2024), and thus, opportunities for exposure to different cultures, such as those in Muslim-majority countries, have increased.

In terms of prohibited foods in Islam, the largest percentage of respondents knew that pork was prohibited, and the percentage of respondents who said that gelatin derived from pork was also prohibited increased significantly between 2015 and 2020. The percentage of respondents who reported that alcoholic beverages (beer, sake and whiskey) were contraindicated also increased significantly from 2015 to 2020. This result indicates that the understanding of contraindicated foods in Islam advanced over the 5-year period. In both years, however, more than half of those surveyed indicated that beef is contraindicated, but it is not. It is speculated that this may have been confused with the Hindu prohibition of beef. In 2020, an increasing number of respondents mistakenly believed that foods such as chicken, sashimi (raw fish), milk, eggs and whale meat were prohibited. While understanding of prohibited foods has progressed, these results suggest that knowledge remains limited and people are generally unaware of the specifics.

The target audience included those who had never heard of the term “halal.” Therefore, the explanation of halal was given before asking questions about the understanding and distribution of halal food (please see the “Survey contents” section above).

More than half of all respondents in both years said that non-Muslims could eat halal food. However, the percentage of respondents who exclusively agreed that non-Muslims could not eat halal food did not change from year to year. In Islam, the methods of slaughtering animals are carried out according to a doctrinal method, and no other meat is allowed as halal food. The percentage of those who knew about this decreased from 2015 to 2020. This result indicates a lack of understanding about the details of halal food.

A halal logo is a mark that certifies a product is halal. It has been reported that Muslims consider the halal logo important and check it when purchasing goods (Sulong *et al.*, 2020). However, the percentage of Muslims who thought they would check the halal logo was about half in both years. This percentage dropped slightly in 2020. The impact of the halal logo on Muslims is significant, with Malaysian Muslims indicating that they would purchase a product if it had a logo, even if it was the halal logo of a Japanese certification organization (Terano and Mohamed, 2017). A survey of Indonesian consumers found broadly similar results (Ashfahany *et al.*, 2024). Currently, there are nine major halal certification organizations in Japan that have received mutual recognition from Southeast Asia and the Middle East (JHBA, September 17, 2025). However, the number of respondents who were aware of the existence of halal certification organizations in Japan was low in both years, suggesting that awareness of the halal logo is low.

In recent years, Japanese companies have been expanding their operations and exporting halal food products in anticipation of increased profitability (Terano and Mohamed, 2017). Globally, Malaysia, with its rapidly growing economy, aims to establish a halal distribution hub as a logistics hub. As national policy, the country has taken the initiative to operate a halal certification organization (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia [JAKIM]) and is promoting efforts to make its own halal certification a common standard in the Islamic world (Muhammad, 2009; Henderson, 2016). In Japan, although halal-related information has been covered on television and in print media, the awareness of halal was low among the participants in this study. This is related to the fact that only about half of the respondents in both surveys thought that the distribution of halal food in Japan was necessary or would increase in the future.

It has been speculated that the reason for the low awareness of halal in Japan may be a lack of sufficient information. In recent years, it has been reported that college students get their news through social media rather than newspapers or television (Nakanishi, 2017). However, news through social networking sites is structured in a filter bubble (Pariser, 2011), which skews exposure to information as a result of a bias that prioritizes information preferred by users (Bakshy *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, it was thought that in cases of a lack of interest, the participants did not have the opportunity to see or hear halal-related information, which kept their awareness low.

Although the Japanese Government has been promoting tourism and providing information related to halal businesses, these efforts have primarily targeted business providers (Table 1). As a result, the general public has few opportunities to learn about the lifestyles and practices of Muslims.

It was also considered that the attitudes of the Japanese people toward religion may have influenced the situation. According to the “Survey on Japanese National Character,” which is conducted by the Institute of Statistical Mathematics every 5 years, only 26% of respondents in 2018 stated that they had a personal religion (The Institute of Statistical Mathematics, 2021). Such results have led to the perception of Japanese people as nonreligious and being used as a sample group representing non-religiosity in comparative studies of religious attitudes (Lahav *et al.*, 2022). However, Yamashita (2022) reported that, in the 2013 edition of the same survey, 66% of respondents answered that “even without adhering to a specific

religion, religious attitudes and spirituality that are not bound by existing religions are important.” This suggests that Japanese people value spirituality even without a specific religious affiliation, and thus cannot be categorized as atheists. It is more accurate to say that, due to past incidents involving new religious movements in Japan, the public has developed a certain level of distrust toward religion, rather than being nonreligious. As [Yamashita \(2022\)](#) points out, Japanese views on religion are complex and sensitive. For this reason, the low awareness of halal may stem from Japanese people’s desire to maintain a certain distance from Islam, which may lead to ignorance and indifference.

The survey respondents indicated that the most appropriate source of halal information was a private, third-party organization (e.g., NPO Japan Halal Association). This result indicates a desire for accurate information from a neutral standpoint. Currently, there is no law or national organization that controls halal certification, and halal certification organizations are primarily composed of NPOs such as religious corporations and general incorporated associations. However, the government was the next most frequently mentioned source, indicating the respondents’ desire for information from highly trusted, authoritative institutions. These results were the same in both 2015 and 2020. At present, there are no laws or national institutions regulating halal certification. Therefore, it is hoped that private organizations will effectively convey accurate information about halal to the general public. Furthermore, if the government (national institutions) takes an active role in coordination, it could foster greater trust ([Srifauzi and Surwandono, 2023](#)) and ultimately help avoid unnecessary friction.

In Japan, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism has been formulated based on the Basic Law for the Promotion of Tourism enacted in 2006. At the time of the 2015 survey, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism (2nd stage) was in effect, and the target number of foreign visitors to Japan was 18 million. By contrast, at the time of the second survey in 2020, the Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism (3rd stage) was in effect and the target number of foreign visitors to Japan was 40 million. The participants in the present survey were not aware of the existence of these basic plans to promote tourism, and the percentage of those who were aware even decreased. In addition, more than 95% of the participants in both years did not know that the percentage of Muslims in the global population would increase. These results indicate that young people are not well informed about the policies of Japan or the international situation. On the other hand, although it was < 15% in both years, the percentage of participants who knew someone who knew about Islam increased slightly in both years. This could be due to the increase in the number of students from Muslim countries or in the number of foreigners around them during the 5-year period ([Tanada, 2024](#)).

At present, tourism in Japan has been further developed and the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan from all over the world, including Muslim-majority countries, is significantly increasing. Anticipating the economic impact of the tourism industry, the Japanese Government announced the Fourth Basic Plan for the Promotion of Tourism in 2023 ([JTA, 2024](#)). Within the plan, the government announced a target of 60 million inbound tourists by 2030.

Given the high proportion of Muslims in the Middle East, a future increase in inbound tourism from the region is anticipated. Tourists from Middle Eastern countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, tend to prioritize whether their travel destination aligns with Islamic values, with approximately half identifying this as a significant factor in their decision-making ([Salman and Hasim, 2012](#)). Destinations that offer high-quality Islamic environments are especially favored, and Malaysia serves as a notable example of a country that has successfully attracted tourists from the Middle East ([Battour and Ismail, 2016](#)).

Halal certification, which is highly valued by Muslim tourists, has been identified as a key determinant in attracting them, as it influences their behavioral intentions (Ariffin and Safar, 2025; Ratnasari *et al.*, 2021). Given that highly satisfied customers are more likely to repeat their consumption experiences, initiatives aimed at enhancing satisfaction and eliciting positive emotional responses are of critical importance (Foroughi *et al.*, 2019). Muslim tourists generally require three essential components: halal food, access to prayer facilities and language support. When these elements are provided in a Muslim-friendly manner, they contribute significantly to a comfortable and welcoming travel experience. Moreover, offering visual representations and detailed ingredient information when serving food is beneficial for not only Muslim tourists, but also other international visitors (Hasanah *et al.*, 2025). Muslim consumers tend to select halal food based on its perceived reliability, irrespective of price (Ariffin and Safar, 2025). Furthermore, it has been reported that they are willing to pay 1.4–1.5 times more if a restaurant includes a prayer room (Saville and Mahbubi, 2021). These findings clearly demonstrate that the provision of Muslim-friendly services can generate substantial economic value.

A Muslim-friendly tourist destination is characterized by its understanding of the religious values and specific needs of Muslim travelers, and its provision of appropriate products and services to accommodate these requirements (Han *et al.*, 2019). Specifically, such destinations ensure the availability of prayer facilities and halal food options, thereby addressing the fundamental needs of Muslim tourists during their journeys (Muslim, 2022). Nevertheless, the current distribution of halal products remains insufficient. As indicated by recent surveys, non-Muslim-majority countries such as Japan exhibit a notable lack of awareness and understanding regarding halal practices. The significance of halal certification is frequently underestimated (Takeshita, 2020; Hasanah *et al.*, 2025).

In Japan, governmental efforts to attract Muslim tourists and respond to the demand for halal products are primarily led by MAFF and the JTA (see Table 1). However, the actual implementation of halal certification is delegated to private-sector organizations. This fragmented approach has led to criticism that Japan's engagement with Muslim tourism is driven predominantly by economic motives, rather than a genuine commitment to fostering intercultural understanding and meaningful relationships with Muslim communities (Srifauzi and Surwandono, 2023).

Furthermore, Japan lacks a centralized governmental authority responsible for overseeing halal compliance. In the absence of such an institution, it is challenging to establish credibility and trust among Muslim populations (Rozaidah and Idris, 2024; Iklima *et al.*, 2021; Yamaguchi-Kurosaki, 2019).

To position itself effectively as a Muslim-friendly tourist destination, Japan must enhance its international communication strategies. Cuesta-Vali (2020) suggests that countries engaging proactively in global outreach tend to achieve higher rankings on the GMTI. The development of a comprehensive and strategically designed web platform is essential to promote Japan's appeal to Muslim travelers (Yousaf and Xiucheng, 2018). In addition to signage and labeling for halal products, the digitalization of such information – particularly through the use of QR codes – can significantly facilitate decision-making for Muslim consumers and expand their range of choices. The implementation of blockchain and other advanced digital technologies may further improve the transparency of halal supply chains (Ariffin and Safar, 2025) and mitigate language-related barriers. Muslims use the Internet and mobile applications to research tourist destinations, so there is a demand for these technologies. Several applications are currently available in Japan, but trust has been reported as a factor in their utilization (Berakon *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to develop and enhance the reliability of applications.

The dissemination of information through digital technologies benefits not only Muslim tourists, but also the growing Muslim population residing in Japan. Consistent distribution and quality assurance of halal food products in Japan are essential for the health and well-being of long-term Muslim residents and visitors. Increasing the availability and accessibility of halal food options can alleviate food-related stress and promote overall well-being (Gul and Begum, 2024). Furthermore, issues related to halal food extend to hospital meals (Kawakami *et al.*, 2022) and school lunches (Kurokawa and Kusakabe, 2021). Additionally, because Japan is prone to natural disasters, providing emergency food supplies for evacuation situations should be considered. Efforts to address these issues have only just begun.

When considering the Muslim tourism market, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of Islamic religion, rather than focusing only on halal food. Taking the religion and values of Muslims into account makes it possible to provide access to halal food and related information (Rizki and Aminah, 2023). Japanese tourist destinations that are serious about attracting Muslim tourists must comply with halal requirements and avoid cross-contamination between services. This could increase the acceptance of services among Muslims and potentially lead to educational and medical tourism in the future (Said *et al.*, 2022).

In the tourism industry, positive experiences that evoke emotions such as satisfaction and joy are important. Failing to offer halal products or related services can create a negative perception of tourism as a whole (Al-Ansi and Han, 2019). Failing to improve halal-related efforts can be perceived as ineffective management and low-quality service, which could damage the image of Japanese tourist destinations. Halal certification is not just about displaying a halal logo; it also certifies that no prohibited ingredients are present. This certification is not limited to food products. Halal certification efforts require collaboration with halal certification bodies (Ariffin and Safar, 2025), and a certification system must be established with a thorough understanding of halal (Hasanah *et al.*, 2025). To manage halal certification in a specialized and sustainable manner, a serious and legally sound design is necessary. It is time for the government to take the lead with a bottom-up approach.

This study does have some limitations. The first limitation is the timing of the survey. This was limited by the fact that it was conducted in 2015 and 2020; from 2024, the number of foreign nationals in Japan increased for not only tourism, but also employment purposes. Based on the results of this survey, it is clear that further research is necessary to examine Japan's future response to halal issues in detail. Second, the survey participants were limited to pharmacy students. This is because the pharmacy department had the largest number of Muslim international students enrolled at the university in 2015 and 2020. In the future, further clarification may be possible by expanding the scope of the survey beyond pharmacy students and conducting ongoing surveys on halal food awareness. This study investigated halal food and international circumstances. It is hoped that the results will serve as a reference for considering trends in social change in Japan.

Conclusion

Japan has a wealth of resources. These include its food culture, as exemplified by *washoku*; historical buildings based on Buddhism and Shintoism, Mount Fuji, hot springs and other natural resources. However, legal regulations related to tourism in Japan have not kept pace with development. The global weakening of the yen has exacerbated the problem of over tourism (Ishinabe, 2024). If Japan aims to attract overseas tourists in the future, it must stop exploiting tourism resources and offering discounts indiscriminately. Instead, it should focus on developing high-quality, thoughtful tourism services. It is also essential to disseminate

information about Japanese customs and culture. Foreign visitors can enjoy safe tourism in Japan by understanding and adhering to Japanese customs and rules. One of the many challenges to be addressed in the future is the joint public–private effort to obtain halal certification. True mutual understanding and respect will lead Japan, a country with a unique cultural and historical heritage, to a brighter future.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to express their deepest appreciation to all respondents who generously contributed their time and insights to this study.

Funding

This research was conducted without financial support from any public, commercial or non-profit funding agency.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors affirm that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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