

Halal Concept Package Tour Recommendation for Travel Agencies and Tour Operators: Example of Turkey**

* Cemil GÜNDÜZ ^a 

^a Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Niksar Vocational School Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Tokat/Turkey

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Abstract

This study aims to present a model for halal concept travel agencies operating in Turkey. In this study, data were collected using qualitative research techniques. In addition, corporate web pages of related agencies will be examined. Face to face meetings with tourism academicians, theologians and customers will be held. The data obtained from the interviews will be coded and themes will be created. Halal tourism has become a common concept in recent years. People who adopt a conservative lifestyle want to make their holidays within the framework of their beliefs. Although Halal tourism is the first concept that comes to mind with halal concept, travel agencies have started to create package tours according to the wishes of conservative customers in recent years. However, there is no generally accepted halal package tour standard in this area. As a result of the study, it is envisaged to present a model halal package tour model for travel agencies and academicians. The biggest limitation of this study is that there are not too many halal concept travel agencies in the field of travel.

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* Corresponding Author

E-mail: cemil.gunduz@gop.edu.tr (C. Gündüz)

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INTRODUCTION

The most important fields of activity of tour operators and travel agencies are; package tour production, management and marketing. Package tours, which are an important source of income for businesses; may differ depending on the destination, producer and production purpose (Demir, 2014, p.125). In this study, it will be focused on package tours that will appeal to the Muslim segment according to the production purpose. In recent years, many studies have been carried out in the field of halal tourism (El-Gohary, 2016; Rasul, 2019; Boğan, 2020; Buyruk and Aydemir, 2022). In all these studies, halal hotels were emphasized, but travel agencies were ignored. The most important aim of this study is to eliminate this deficiency in the halal travel market.

The common feature of the package tours that will be discussed in this study is that they appeal to a conservative and religious segment. The growth rate in the Muslim travel market has reached remarkable levels in recent years. The most important reason for this is the increase in the national income of countries with a Muslim population. As a result of these developments, tour operators and travel agencies have started to produce halal concept package tours for Muslim tourists. However, the most important problem here is that halal package tours do not have a common standard. From this point of view, the main purpose of the study is to present an exemplary package tour model for conservative tourists. In this context, first of all, the web pages of travel agencies that appeal to the conservative segment were examined, and then research questions were created for the addressees of the subject. In the application part of the research, these questions were asked to the participants and a model was tried to be put forward within the framework of the answers received.

Halal Tourism

The concept of halal: According to Mohsin et al. (2016, p. 137-143), it is an Arabic word that means allowed and no problem in doing it. Halal tourism is the name given to the concept in which devout tourists benefit from touristic products and services within the framework of their beliefs and values (Gündüz and Topaloğlu, 2021, p. 557). Along with the increase in the economic income levels of Muslim countries in recent years, there has been a parallel increase in the rate of participation in tourism. Along with this increase, tourism investors did not remain unresponsive to this demand and started to shift their investments in this direction rapidly. Thus, halal concept hotels and travel agencies began to emerge.

Halal tourism is not a new type of tourism, but a version of tourism activities organized according to Islamic principles. The concept that the concept of halal tourism is confused the most is faith tourism. However, halal tourism is not a branch or sub-branch of faith tourism. While there may be participation in faith tourism from other religions, halal tourism only caters to Muslim tourists. Jafari and Scot (2014, p. 1-19) stated that halal tourism is a newly recognized concept. It is understood from the recent publications that the interest in academic studies on the subject has increased. Since halal tourism is a very new concept, there is no common definition on which a consensus has been reached. However, in general, halal tourism; It is seen as the whole of touristic activities carried out by Muslim tourists in accordance with their beliefs and values.

Halal tourism is explained as tourism and hospitality activities produced together by the producer and the consumer in accordance with the teachings of the Islamic religion (Razzaq, Hall & Prayag, 2016, p. 92-97). In addition, halal tourism has a two-dimensional structure in which both producers and consumers play an active role.

In halal tourism, halal tourism activities will be successful if the producers produce products that comply with Islam, and if the consumers support the process by complying with these rules.

Although most of the investments made in the field of halal tourism are made in the accommodation sector, travel agencies and tour operators have also started to show interest in this issue in recent years. Although there are not enough halal concept travel agencies yet, the interest in this field is increasing day by day. Because the growth of the halal market worldwide encourages all investors. In addition, the establishment of the Halal Accreditation Agency (HAK, 2018) in Turkey and the establishment of the Halal Hotel Management (TSE, 2016) standard by the TSE are the biggest indicators of the state's interest in this issue (Gündüz & Topaloğlu, 2017, p. 906). Finally, the increase in the number of theses and scientific publications written in the field of Halal tourism is of great importance for this field.

Travel Agencies and Types

Before mentioning the concept of travel agency, it would be appropriate to mention the meaning and origin of the word travel. The word travel has passed into our language from Arabic; It is derived from the root “seyah” (TDK). It literally means to roam freely. Travel Agencies; They are commercial organizations that prepare and design tours in line with the wishes of consumers, and sell the products of transportation and accommodation businesses for profit (Hacıoğlu, 2000). Apart from these, one of the most important duties of travel agencies is to inform consumers about their destination.

Travel Agencies in our country are regulated according to the Travel Agencies and Travel Agencies Union Law No. 1618. According to article 3 of this law, they are legally divided into three groups (Resmî Gazete, 1972);

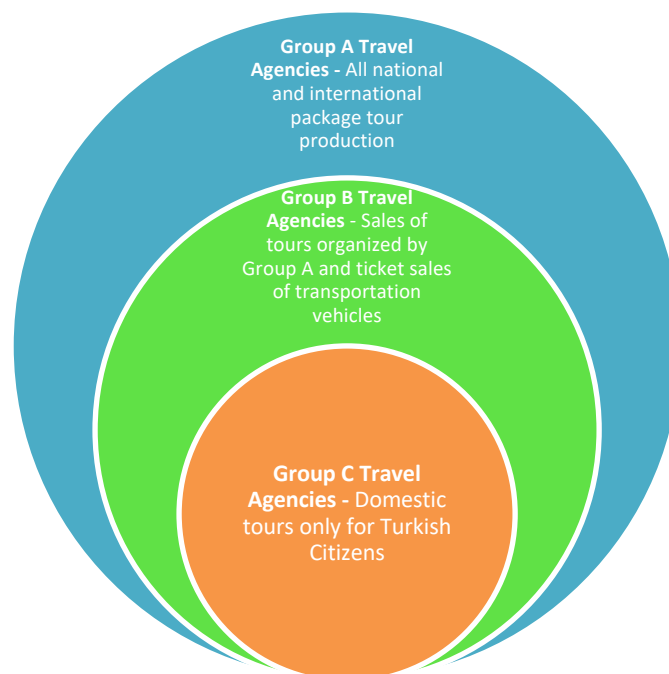


Figure 1. Legal Classification of Travel Agencies in Turkey

-Group A Travel Agencies: They can offer all travel agency services described in the fifth article of the Travel Agencies Regulation.

-Group B Travel Agencies: They provide ticket sales services for international air, land and sea transportation vehicles, as well as reservations and tickets for tours organized by (A) group travel agencies.

-Group C Travel Agencies: Domestic tours only for Turkish citizens; they promote, produce, market or sell.

Travel Agencies; they can also engage in additional commercial activities such as car rental, transfer, guidance, foreign exchange transactions, and souvenir sales. Especially in recent years, travel agencies play an important role in organizing congress and meeting organizations.

Package Tour Concept and Package Tour Design

The concept of package tour is the touristic products created by travel agencies that cover all touristic activities of a tourist such as accommodation, transportation, food and beverage. Today, package tours are prepared according to the taste and habits of the customer. These package tours are generally used by businesses that have adopted the all-inclusive system. Package tours, which are the driving force for large masses to participate in the tourism movement, have also been influential in the emergence of large tour operators (Batman et al., 2001, p.7). The first package tours were organized and sold in England by Thomas Cook in 1841. In these tours, only railway was used as a means of transportation and did not include accommodation service.

Another important development in package tours was the organization of steamship tours after the 1920s, and package tours became popular. Thomas Cook's other firsts; tour brochures, tour programs and vouchers. Until the middle of the 20th century, package tours could not reach the desired level due to negative factors such as inadequacy of transportation vehicles, inconvenience, high transportation fees, inadequacy of communication, inadequacies in the accommodation sector (İçöz, 2000, p.225). The content of the package tour; It can be classified in different ways according to the distance to the destination, the period to be visited, the method of application, and the type of tourism. As for the reasons why consumers turn to package tours today; they can be counted as being economical, providing confidence for the consumer, getting rid of the trouble of scheduling tours, saving time and professional guidance services. The advantages for travel agencies and tour operators are; high profit share, gaining competitive advantage, providing pre-financing, providing prestige, establishing new connections and increasing occupancy rates (Demir, 2014, p.132). In other words, package tours mean more than just making money for travel agencies and tour operators.

Producing a package tour and making it available to the consumer is a very long and laborious process. However, it makes it necessary to conduct systematic and programmed research. Package tours designed without definite demand carry a serious sales risk. To eliminate this risk, travel agencies and tour operators follow the package tour production process, which consists of five steps. In the package tour; transportation services, accommodation services, food and beverage services, social activities and transfer services.

Method

In this study, qualitative research methods were used. Qualitative research is a preferred type of research to gather in-depth information on the subject. In addition, ethnographic analysis method was preferred in the design of this research. Ethnographic analysis is a method used in social sciences and mainly in anthropology, and it is used to

define and analyse the culture, values or norms of interest. Participant observation technique can be used as a data collection tool in ethnographic analysis. In addition, it aims to describe the observed phenomenon or object by using semi-structured interview and daily conversation tools in this participation process. Because ethnography requires more time than other methods, the sample size of the population studied is generally small. As with the survey technique, it is not possible to generalize the results obtained to the whole population where the samples represent all of them. The main purpose of this method is to find the general, social and cultural characteristics of the private by using deep and well-structured study designs (Hammersley, 1992, p.195-203). The most important reason for choosing the ethnographic analysis method in this study is to see how the religious, cultural and economic characteristics of the participants (clergy, tourism academic and customer) shape the halal package tour model to be created as a result of the study.

In this study, semi-structured interview technique, one of the qualitative research methods, was applied. In the semi-structured interview, the basic lines of the interview are determined, but the exact order of the questions is not made. Because the flexibility to generate questions about the new information learned during the interview is the most preferred reason for this interview type. Semi-structured interviews are the type of interview in which some questions can be skipped depending on the situation, the order of questions can be changed according to the course of the conversation, and additional questions can be created at that moment (Yüksel & Yüksel, 2004, pp.100-107). The most important reason for choosing the semi-structured interview technique in this study is the flexibility of asking questions about new topics according to the course of the interview.

As seen in the literature part of the study, a package tour consists of five basic products. While preparing the interview questions, one question was created for each of these 5 products that are generally accepted in the literature. These are transportation services, accommodation services, food and beverage services, social activities and transfer services. Before the interview, a pilot study was conducted with a small number of participants for these questions, and feedback was received about the missing and incomprehensible points. Then, another question about the personnel was added due to the need felt during the interview. As a result, the research questions were arranged and finalized. Participants in this study were selected by stratified sampling method. In order to perform stratified sampling, first of all, the universe depending on a descriptive variable must be divided into two or more independent strata (Bernard, 2011, p. 195). In this context, interviews were held with tourism academics, theologians and customers who had stayed in halal-themed hotels before. In qualitative research, the repetition of the answers of the individuals participating in the study is taken as a criterion in determining the sufficient number of samples. Morgan and Morgan (2008, p. 71-99) state that there is no generally accepted formula for determining sample size in qualitative research, even though it is tried to reveal the formulas for determining the sample size in qualitative research based on quantitative designs. It is revealed that there is a cycle and, after a certain number of samples are discussed, the answers given by those who participated in the research before each new sample start to be repeated after a certain participant and similar answers are given. The data used in this article were collected for the 2nd International Halal Tourism Congress in January and February 2019.

Results

The following questions were asked to 22 people who participated in the research. While each question took approximately 2 minutes to be answered, each participant was interviewed for approximately 15 minutes. Before the

interview, the participants were given preliminary information about the content of the research and halal package tours. While most of the interviews were conducted by face-to-face interview method, a small number of participants who could not be reached and who were far away were interviewed over the phone. All conversations were audio recorded and later transcribed. After the questions seen in Table 1 were asked to the participants, the answers received were divided into appropriate categories and coded.

Table 1. Interview Questions

1	What are your expectations from the transportation services of a halal concept package tour?
2	What are your expectations from the food and beverage services of a halal concept package tour?
3	What are your expectations from the accommodation services of a halal concept package tour?
4	What are your expectations from the entertainment services of a halal concept package tour?
5	What are your expectations from the transfer and sightseeing programs of a halal concept package tour?
6	What are your expectations from the personnel involved in a halal concept package tour?

The answers given to the questions asked in Table 1 and their frequencies are given in the tables below (The people who participated in the interview are numbered with the letter "P"):

Table 2. Data on Transportation

What are your expectations from the transportation services of a halal concept package tour?	f
Taking a break at prayer times (land road)	P1,P3,P6,P11,P14,P19,P21,P22
Paying attention to the male-female seating plan (bus and plane)	P2,P7,P18,P22
No alcoholic beverage service (airplane)	P1,P2,P4,P6,P7,P11,P14,P20
Not offering pork products (bus and plane)	P3,P7,P11,P12,P19,P22
Taking a break at facilities with prayer rooms and ablution facilities (bus)	P8,P14,P20,P21
Personnel's attire in accordance with Islamic principles (airplane)	P1,P3,P6
Attention to family privacy in sleeper trains (railway)	P15
Having the Holy Quran to read during travel (plane and bus)	P3,P8,P17,P18
No loud music broadcast during travel (bus)	P4,P6,P10,P11,P17,P18
A set containing rosary, prayer rug and scarf should be distributed.	P2,P4
There must be a small prayer booth on board the aircraft.	P7

As seen in Table 2, the participants have 11 different views on the transportation services of halal package tours. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are related to prayer and eating and drinking while traveling. In addition, the expectations of the participants such as reciting the Qur'an and not playing loud music during the trip outweigh. Some of the participants' own statements regarding their expectations from transportation services in halal package tours are as follows; *"If traveling by bus, break times should be adjusted according to prayer times (P1)"*. *"Drinks and pork should not be served on international flights (P7)"*. *"The Holy Quran can be distributed to the passengers who request it during long journeys for them to read (P3)"*. *"A small prayer cabin should be built on airplanes by giving up a few seats (P7)"*.

Table 3. Data on Food and Beverage Services

What are your expectations from the food and beverage services of a halal concept package tour?	f
Pork and its products should not be used	P1,P2,P3,P6,P11,P14,P17,P22
Alcoholic beverages should not be served	P1,P2,P3,P6,P11,P12,P14,P17,P18,P20,P22
Additives that are not permissible in Islam should not be used.	P7,P14,P15

Table 3. Data on Food and Beverage Services (cont.)

Must have halal slaughter certificate	P4,P9,P16	3
Waste should be avoided	P1,P6,P10,P13,P14,P15,P21,P22	8
In Ramadan, food should be served at the time of iftar and sahur.	P6,P11,P19,P21	4
Surplus meals should be distributed to the points of need.	P4,P11	2
Hadith and verses should be written inside the hotel to prevent waste.	P3	1
Hygiene and cleaning rules should be explained to the kitchen staff.	P17	1

According to Table 3, it is seen that the participants have 9 different views regarding the expectations of halal package tours from food and beverage services. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are related to alcohol, pork and waste. In addition, the participants have expectations such as having halal slaughter certificate, serving iftar and sahur in Ramadan, and not using illegal additives in food. A few of the participants' own statements regarding their expectations from food and beverage services in halal package tours are as follows; *“Waste in food and drink should be avoided (P10)”*. *“Remaining meals in hotels should be sent to soup kitchens and shelters (P11)”*. *“Hygiene training should be given to the personnel working in the kitchen and their controls should be ensured (P17)”*.

Table 4. Data on Accommodation Services

What are your expectations from the accommodation services of a halal concept package tour?	f
Hotel pools should be separate for men and women.	9
There should be no alcohol in the mini bars in the hotel rooms	6
Hotel rooms should have soundproofing	2
There should be prayer mats and the Qur'an in the rooms.	
The hotel must have a mosque	12
There should be boards showing prayer times in the hotel.	6
Same-sex people should do spa services	3
TV broadcasts should be filtered for obscene content	2
Staff attire must be in accordance with Islam	3
The clothing of the guests in the common areas should be Islamic	1
Hotel should be open during Ramadan	2
Social events in the hotel must comply with Islamic rules.	3
There should be signs showing the Qibla direction in the rooms.	6
Attention should be paid to the waste of electricity and water	2

In Table 4, it is seen that the interviewees have 14 different opinions regarding the expectations of halal package tours from accommodation services. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are related to spa services, prayer rooms and prayer facilities. In addition, the expectations of the participants, such as the suitability of the staff's attire and the Islamic social activities in the hotel, also outweigh. Some of the statements of the participants regarding their expectations from accommodation services in halal package tours are as follows; *“The hotel should have a large mosque for daily prayers and Friday prayers (P21)”*. *“Hotel rooms should have an arrow pointing to the Qibla (P13)”*. *“An Islamic filter should be applied to television broadcasts in hotel rooms (P9)”*.

Table 5. Data on Entertainment Services

What are your expectations from the entertainment services of a halal concept package tour?		f
Dance performances against Islam should not be held in the hotel.	P1,P5,P12,P18,P21	5
Obscene magazines, newspapers and publications should not be inserted	P2,P11	2
Competitions and animation shows that do not comply with moral rules should not be held.	P18	1
The costumes of the animators must be in accordance with the religion of Islam.	P1,P6,P17	3
Alcohol should not be served at social events within the hotel.	P2,P4,P14	3
Activities should be in accordance with religious and national values	P11,P20	2
Gambling etc. games of chance should not be played.	P3,P4,P18	3
Activities to raise awareness about Islam should be done.	P6,P20	2

In Table 5, it is seen that the participants have 8 different opinions regarding the expectations of halal package tours from entertainment services. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are related to the content of animation shows and social programs. In addition, participants have expectations such as not playing games of chance and not receiving obscene publications. A few of the participants' own statements regarding their expectations from entertainment services in halal package tours are as follows; “*Non-halal dance performances should not be held in hotels under the name of Turkish night (P12)*”. “*Contests should be organized for children to increase their religious knowledge (P6)*”. “*The costumes of the animators working in the hotels should be in accordance with the halal concept of the hotel (P17)*”.

Table 6. Data on Transfer and Excursion Services

What are your expectations from the transfer and sightseeing programs of a halal concept package tour?		f
Spiritual environments must be visited	P2,P4,P7,P11,P15,P20	6
Prayer times must be observed in the itinerary	P1,P2,P7,P9,P10,P12,P13,P14,P17,P18,P21,P22	12
Halal food and beverage service should be provided during the trip	P3,P5,P9,P10,P11,P18	6
Do not go to alcoholic and obscene places	P1,P8,P15,P21	4
The religious knowledge of the guides should be sufficient	P9,P13	2
Pictures used in travel brochures must be in accordance with the halal concept.	P3	1

In Table 6, it is seen that the participants of the interview have 6 different opinions regarding the expectations of halal package tours from the transfer and sightseeing programs. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are about spiritual places to visit and prayers to be done during the trip. In addition, the expectations of the participants, such as the places where they will meet their food and beverage needs during the trip, offer halal products outweigh. Some of the statements of the participants regarding their expectations from transfer and sightseeing services in halal package tours are as follows; “*Mosques and tombs should be dominant among the places to visit (P15)*”. “*The pictures used in the brochures prepared for the promotion of the trip must comply with the halal concept (P3)*”. “*Guides who will participate in the trips should have basic religious knowledge (P9)*”.

Table 7. Data on the Personnel Taking Part in the Tour

What are your expectations from the personnel involved in a halal concept package tour?		f
Staff should pay attention to their clothing	P2,P3,P6,P11,P12,P17,P21	7
Staff must respect the religious sensitivities of the guests	P5,P6,P10,P11	4
Staff should pay attention to the limits of haram and halal	P3,P8	2
Should not have bad habits	P7	1

Table 7. Data on the Personnel Taking Part in the Tour (cont.)

The staff should make an effort to ensure that the guests can perform their prayers during the tour.	P14,P15	2
Staff should be trained on halal concept before hiring	P2,P9,P12,P18,P20,P22	6
Same-sex people should serve in private areas (spa, pool, etc.)	P4,P10,P14,P21	4

In Table 7, it is seen that the participants have 7 different opinions regarding their expectations from the personnel working in the halal package tour. When the answers with high frequency are examined, it is seen that the majority of these answers are related to the clothing and training of the personnel. In addition, the participants also have expectations such as paying attention to the haram and halal limits, serving same-sex people in private areas, and not employing personnel with bad habits. A few of the participants' own statements regarding their expectations from the staff involved in halal package tours are as follows; *“Personnel with bad habits such as alcohol and drugs should not be employed in the hotel (P7)”*. *“Staff must receive several weeks of religious training before being hired (P2)”*. *“In cases where guests cannot pray, staff should find a solution to this issue (P14)”*.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings obtained as a result of the study named "Halal Concept Package Tour Proposal for Travel Agencies and Tour Operators: Example of Turkey" are analysed and presented in this section. This study was prepared according to qualitative research methods. In the study, semi-structured interview technique was used as data collection technique. In this context, interviews were held with tourism academics, theologians and customers who had stayed in halal-themed hotels before. Although most of the interviews were conducted face to face, some of the participants were interviewed by phone due to distance and limited time. Participants were asked for their opinions on halal package tour services. 55 different answers were received in all categories from 6 questions directed to the participants. In the analysis of the data, the common answers received from the participants were coded and divided into various categories. Then, these data were converted into tables, and the number of times this answer was chosen by the participants and which participants gave this answer were entered in front of the answers.

When the findings are examined, the most common question asked in order to determine the expectations of a halal concept package tour from transportation services; Responses were received that taking a break during prayer times and not serving alcoholic beverages on planes. Following this, not serving pork products and not broadcasting loud music during travel are the other responses received the most. As it can be understood from here, it is important not to interrupt the prayers during transportation and to avoid eating activities contrary to Islam.

In the question asked in order to determine the expectations of a halal concept package tour from food and beverage services; the response was not to serve alcoholic beverages. The other most received answers are; not using pork and its products, avoiding waste, and serving food at the time of iftar and sahur in Ramadan. In other words, the most important issues in eating and drinking activities have been determined as the conformity of foodstuffs to Islam.

In the question asked in order to determine the expectations of a halal package tour from accommodation services; the answer was taken that there should be a masjid in the hotel. Participants who said that the hotel pools should be separate for men and women were included in the group. In addition, the participants who said that there should be

no alcohol in the mini bars in the hotel rooms and that there should be tables showing the prayer times in the hotel, and the participants who said that there should be signs showing the Qibla direction in the rooms are in the third group. In general, the participants give the most importance to places of worship and privacy in the category of accommodation services.

In the question asked in order to determine the expectations of the halal themed package tour from entertainment services; the answer that there should be no dance performances against Islam in the hotel came to the fore. After this, there are the participants who say that the costumes of the animators should comply with the religion of Islam, alcohol should not be served at social events in the hotel, and that gambling and similar games of chance should not be played within the hotel's borders. In the category of entertainment services, the point that the participants pay the most attention is generally; social activities did not contradict religious and national values.

The most common answer to the question asked to determine the expectations of a halal concept package tour from the transfer and sightseeing programs; it is observance of prayer times in the itinerary. Other options following this are; halal food and beverage service should be offered and spiritual environments should be visited. In this category, as in transportation services, the participants asked that their prayers not be interrupted during the travel program and transfer process.

In the last question, to find out what is expected from the staff working in a halal concept package tour, the most frequently asked question is; staff should pay attention to their clothing and training should be given about the halal concept before the staff is hired. In addition, the staff should respect the religious sensitivities of the guests and serve same-sex people in private areas (spa, pool, etc.).

Participants presented a total of 55 different suggestions to the questions asked about the Halal Concept Package Tour model. While the category with the highest number of suggestions is related to accommodation services; in this area, the participants made 14 suggestions. The option with the highest number of suggestions after accommodation services; It was about the transportation services of the package tour and a total of 11 suggestions were presented in this area. As for the food and beverage services of the package tour, 9 suggestions were made about the entertainment services, 6 related to the transfer and excursion programs and 7 related to the personnel.

In the light of the findings obtained from the research, some recommendations can be given to halal package tour organizers. First of all, the people participating in these tours want the breaks to be in harmony with the prayer times. In addition, loud music should not be broadcast during journeys and accommodation. Alcoholic beverages should not be served in the hotel and transportation vehicle. It is important to have a mosque for "daily and Friday prayers" in the hotel. Finally, it is important that the social activities organized during the tour do not contradict religious and national values and pay attention to the clothing of the personnel.

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