

From Application to Certification: Identifying Bottlenecks and Best Practices in the *Halal* Industry: A Case Study of Four Hotels in Klang Valley, Malaysia

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Abstract: As *halal* certification becomes a critical competitive asset for hotels targeting Muslim travelers, understanding the efficiency of its acquisition is paramount. Purpose: This research investigates the *halal* certification process for four hotels in Klang Valley (Hotel A, Hotel B, Hotel C, Hotel D), identifying key inefficiencies, bottlenecks, and best practices. Design/methodology/approach: A comparative case study analysis was conducted using chronological reports of *Halal* certification applications, evaluating timelines, rejection rates, audit outcomes, and compliance performance. Findings: Certification durations varied widely (162–561 days). The fastest cycle was Hotel A - 1st Additional Menu (162 days), while the slowest was Hotel C - Main Application (561 days). Primary delays were document rejections, audit-scheduling gaps, and post-audit certificate handovers (e.g., 153-day handover lag in Hotel C). Hotel A achieved zero NCs at audit; Hotel B showed rapid resubmission but had a long second additional-menu cycle; Hotel D completed its additional menu in 211 days. These results show that certification outcomes are shaped by both systemic inefficiencies and

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internal hotel preparedness. Originality/value: Unlike prior research that has focused primarily on food manufacturing and SMEs, this study provides rare empirical evidence from the hospitality sector, offering a comparative cross-case analysis under a unified regulatory framework. Importantly, it emphasizes the underexplored post-audit phase, where delays in certificate issuance significantly extend certification timelines. Theoretical contribution: By connecting empirical results to wider discussions on governance centralization, regulatory stringency, and digital system efficiency, this research advances both theoretical understanding and practical reforms in *halal* governance. Practical implications: Hotels should institutionalize taskforces, mock audits, and rapid resubmission SOPs. Policymakers should improve MYeHALAL responsiveness, automate audit scheduling, and digitize certificate handovers.

1. Introduction

The *halal* certification landscape in Malaysia is robust and multifaceted, driven by the need to ensure compliance with Muslim dietary guidelines as well as the economic opportunities presented by the global *halal* market. *Halal* certification is seen as a gateway to accessing the vast Muslim consumer market, enhancing business prospects and profitability (Mohamed Yunos *et al.*, 2014). The global market for *halal* goods, including pharmaceuticals, is rising, and Malaysia is establishing itself as a leader in this field (Latiff *et al.*, 2024). Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) encounter distinct obstacles, including financing issues, international trade barriers, and the need for innovative marketing strategies (Saima *et al.*, 2024). Despite these challenges, SMEs are encouraged to pursue *halal* certification to boost their market presence and consumer trust (Abdul Halim *et al.*, 2024; Saima *et al.*, 2024). Improving the MYeHALAL system and providing clear guidelines can streamline the certification procedure (Muhammad *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, fostering better collaboration between government bodies and industry stakeholders can improve the overall effectiveness as well as efficiency of the *halal* certification system (Rofaie *et al.*, 2024; Zailani *et al.*, 2017).

Core Problem Statement:

Despite the strategic significance of *halal* certification for competitiveness and market access, Malaysia's certification procedures are still ineffective, marked by drawn-out deadlines, bureaucratic hold-ups, and uneven results. For hotels, which operate in a service-intensive environment where quick certification is essential to seizing the expanding *halal* tourist market, this inefficiency is especially troublesome. There is a big knowledge vacuum about

the particular operational and regulatory difficulties faced by the hotel industry because previous research has mostly concentrated on food production and SMEs. Furthermore, previous studies as author knowledge have not taken into account the post-audit stage, when administrative delays, including delays in certificate transfer, prolong certification periods without providing sufficient justification or remedies. By examining the institutional and operational constraints in *halal* certification for hotels, this study fills these gaps by providing both empirical insights and workable solutions for process optimization.

1.1. Key Component of the Halal Certification System in Malaysia

The *halal* certification system in Malaysia is led by JAKIM and implemented with the State Islamic Religious Departments (e.g., JAIS). Key process requirements include appointing *halal* executives, maintaining training records, and complying with hygiene standards. The process is deliberately thorough to protect integrity.

1.1.1. Governing Bodies and Coordination

State level organizations are in charge of local implementations, whereas JAKIM is in charge of national standards. Coordination gaps may result from this dual structure, particularly in chain or multi-site activities. For instance, conflicting audit timelines and documents requirements may cause delays and administrative redundancy for hotels operating in many states (Adham *et al.*, 2022).

1.1.2. Certification Process Stages

Application submission, document review, audit scheduling, on-site, non-conformance resolution, and certificate issues are the many steps in the process. There are certain paperwork, costs and deadlines associated with each step. For example, audit scheduling may be postponed owing to auditor availability, and the document review step alone may take 30–90 days, thus increasing the entire duration (A Mohd Yunus *et al.*, 2025; JAKIM, 2014).

1.1.3. Digital Infrastructure (MYeHALAL)

In order to eliminate human interaction, track progress, and simplify applications, the MYeHALAL system was implemented. Its efficiency in cutting delays, however, is still inconsistent across industries. The certification process is prolonged by applicants' frequent experience with system outages, ambiguous rejection grounds, and a lack of automatic updates (Nordin *et al.*, 2022).

1.1.4. Compliance Requirements

In order to differentiate hospitality from manufacturing-based certification, hotels must adhere to *Shariah*-based standards in food handling, employee training, facility management, and supply chain verification. For instance, hotels have more complicated and customer-focused standards than those for packaged food manufacturers, such as providing prayer facilities, ensuring *sertu* (ritual cleaning) of kitchen equipment, and training employees in Islamic etiquette (Abdul Karim *et al.*, 2022; Razalli, 2019).

This study addresses gaps in understanding real world certification challenges by analyzing four hotels in Klang Valley:

Research Questions:

1. What are the institutional and operational factors that contribute to delays in *halal* certification for hotels?
2. How do hotels differ in compliance performance (e.g., Non Conformity (NC) rates, resubmission efficiency)?
3. What improvements can stakeholders adopt to optimize the process?

1.2. Novelty and Contribution

While prior research on *halal* certification has concentrated mainly on food manufacturing, SMEs, and supply chain processes, very few studies have provided empirical evidence of certification challenges in the hospitality sector. Even rarer are comparative investigations that trace certification journeys across multiple hotels under a unified regulatory framework. This study contributes new insights by documenting and comparing certification timelines, rejection events, and audit outcomes across four hotels in Klang Valley. Importantly, it highlights the often-overlooked post-audit stage, where certificate issuance delays (up to 153 days in one case) significantly extend the total certification duration. By linking these findings to ongoing theoretical debates on centralization versus decentralization, enforcement stringency versus flexibility, and efficiency versus transparency in digital systems, this study positions hotel certification as a critical test case for broader *halal* governance reforms.

1.3. Theoretical and Critical Perspectives

The *halal* certification landscape in Malaysia is defined by continuous debates that significantly influence the implementation, standardization, and perception of *halal* systems across industries. These discussions are especially relevant in the lodging and travel industries, in which the operational complexities of service-based environments often conflict with rigid regulatory frameworks. This section critically examines three significant theoretical tensions in the field and outlines the knowledge gaps this study helps address.

1.3.1. Centralization vs. Decentralization of Regulatory Authority

The debate over whether *halal* certification should be centrally managed or regionally delegated remains a central issue in the field. Advocates of centralized control, such as those under *halal* certification bodies, emphasize the importance of a unified standard to ensure brand credibility, international trust, and market competitiveness (Aliff *et al.*, 2015; Suhaiza *et al.*, 2010). In contrast, proponents of decentralization argue that state agencies (certification bodies) or private certification bodies can offer quicker responses, localized engagement, and tailored oversight (Sahira *et al.*, 2023). A third approach advocates for a hybrid governance structure, facilitated by digital systems such as MYeHALAL, which

allows for central standard enforcement while delegating procedural responsibilities to state-level bodies (Syarofi & Syam, 2025). However, the actual effectiveness of such coordination mechanisms, particularly in hospitality applications, remains empirically underexplored.

Research gap: Few studies have conducted comparative assessments of certification timelines and outcomes under centralized versus decentralized models in the hotel industry. This study addresses this issue by presenting case-based evidence across multiple properties under varying jurisdictional conditions.

1.3.2. Compliance Stringency vs. Contextual Flexibility

A second critical debate revolves around the interpretation and enforcement of *halal* compliance. Regulatory authorities maintain that stringent application of *halal* protocols—including *sertu* procedures, staff appointments, and ingredient verification—is non-negotiable for maintaining religious integrity (Idris, *et al.*, 2025). However, hospitality operators contend that these stringent requirements may not fully align with the dynamic and service-oriented nature of hotel operations (Aziz *et al.*, 2015).

Some researchers have proposed a risk-tiered certification model, which prioritizes strict oversight in high-risk food manufacturing contexts while allowing more flexibility in low-risk hospitality services (Umar & Parakkasi, 2025). This model may enable more efficient certification without compromising the integrity of the *halal* ecosystem.

Research gap: There is a lack of data linking differing enforcement approaches to operational outcomes, such as NC rates, audit performance, or certification turnaround times. This study contributes to the debate by analyzing how varying internal readiness and document practices impact audit and approval timelines.

1.3.3. System Efficiency vs. Governance Transparency

The third central tension concerns the role of digitalization and systemic transparency in improving certification processes. Proponents of efficiency-driven reform advocate for automating *halal* processes, including predictive audit scheduling, online documentation tools, and intelligent resubmission systems (Nordin *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, critics argue that the current digital ecosystem, particularly the MYeHALAL system, lacks transparency and usability, resulting in repeated rejections and uncertainty for applicants (A Mohd Yunos *et al.*, 2025).

A growing perspective supports co-design frameworks, whereby government regulators, hotel operators, *halal* executives, and system developers collaborate to enhance both transparency and efficiency (Nasri *et al.*, 2025). This is in line with wider appeals for participatory governance in *halal* certification.

Research gap: The existing literature rarely links system-level constraints (e.g., feedback loop deficiencies, unclear interfaces) to actual certification delays. The hotel-based process chronology offers empirical insight into how inefficiencies within MYeHALAL affect end-to-end certification durations.

1.4. Relevance to Tourism Management

In the context of tourism, *halal* certification goes beyond religious conformity to serve as a key competitive advantage in attracting Muslim travelers, enhancing market access, and achieving inclusion in global *halal* travel networks. For hotels, certification enhances brand trust, access to faith-based tour packages, and eligibility for governmental *halal* tourism support schemes. However, as this study demonstrates, the certification path is hindered by systemic, procedural, and institutional bottlenecks, particularly when balancing religious compliance with service delivery expectations.

2. Literature Review

The theoretical tensions surrounding centralization, stringency, and digital efficiency, as outlined in the introduction, do not exist in a vacuum. They are grounded in the practical realities and strategic imperatives of the worldwide *halal* market. The following review of literature contextualizes these debates by examining three critical areas: the strategic importance of *halal* certification as a market driver, the consumer preferences that give it value, and the operational challenges that hotels as the focal point of this study face in its implementation. This foundation is essential for understanding how the empirical outcomes of this case study add to resolving these ongoing practical and theoretical discussions.

2.1. The Strategic Importance of Halal Certification

Halal certification acts as a critical enabler of market expansion for businesses operating within Muslim-majority regions and beyond. It guarantees adherence to Islamic *Shariah* principles in production, handling, and service delivery (Latif, 2020). Malaysia, in particular, has positioned itself as a worldwide frontrunner in the *halal* economy, recognized for its well-structured and trustworthy certification framework under the auspices of JAKIM (Chaudry & Riaz, 2014). The global *halal* market is projected to grow to USD 3.2 trillion by 2028 (*Food Industry in Malaysia - Statistics & Facts* _ Statista, n.d.), underscores the strategic importance of robust certification systems in ensuring consumer trust, maintaining brand reputation, and gaining access to international markets.

This significance is especially pronounced in the hotel and tourism sector. Hotels serve as key access points to *halal* tourism networks, enhancing a country's attractiveness to Muslim travelers through faith-compliant services. Certified hotels enjoy higher visibility, consumer confidence, and eligibility for inclusion in state-supported *halal* tourism initiatives (Febriandika et al., 2023; Zailani et al., 2011). Therefore, *halal* certification is now viewed not just as a religious requirement but also as a commercial asset for hospitality operators.

2.2. Consumer Preferences and the Value of Religious Sensitivity

For Muslim travelers, the demand for *halal*-compliant hospitality extends beyond food into broader experiential dimensions. Studies have shown that religiously observant guests value features such as prayer facilities, gender-sensitive amenities, and staff trained in Islamic

etiquette (Abdul Karim et al., 2022; Pamukcu & Sariisik, 2021). The perceived religious integrity of hotel environments significantly contributes to feelings of comfort, safety, and satisfaction, influencing both customer loyalty and word-of-mouth promotion among establishments (Chikaputri *et al.*, 2023; Febriandika & Millatina, 2023).

Customer satisfaction in this context is often driven by service quality indicators that are closely aligned with Islamic principles. These include cleanliness, transparency in food sourcing, and the presence of religiously appropriate signage and communication (Febriandika & Millatina, 2023). Hotels that operationalize these expectations tend to perform better in the competitive *halal* tourism market.

2.3. Operational and Institutional Challenges in the Hotel Sector

Despite the strategic and experiential advantages, many hotel operators struggle with the practical demands of obtaining and maintaining *halal* certification. A consistent challenge is the lack of awareness and expertise among hotel management concerning the certification procedure and the associated documentation requirements (Abdul Karim et al., 2022; Razalli, 2019). Unlike food manufacturers, hotels often lack dedicated compliance teams and struggle to integrate *halal* principles into their dynamic service operations (Zailani et al., 2011).

Moreover, *Shariah*-compliant hotel operations demand alignment in physical infrastructure, supply chain sourcing, and employee training—all of which require investments that may not be feasible for smaller establishments (Karia & Fauzi, 2019). This is further complicated by the absence of clear, sector-specific guidelines tailored to the hospitality industry, leading to inconsistent interpretations and fragmented implementation (Alam *et al.*, 2023).

2.4. Process Complexity and Governance Constraints

The Malaysian *halal* certification process, overseen primarily by JAKIM, follows a multi-phase structure encompassing preparation, documentation, audit, and post-audit activities (Adham *et al.*, 2022; MPPHM, 2014). Although designed to preserve religious integrity, the process has been criticized for being overly complex and bureaucratic. Businesses frequently encounter bottlenecks at various stages, including audit scheduling, document verification, and post-approval certificate issuance (Muhammad *et al.*, 2020).

Digital platforms, such as MYeHALAL, were introduced to streamline applications and reduce turnaround times. However, operational deficiencies in system responsiveness, interface design, and feedback mechanisms often hinder rather than help applicants (A Mohd Yunos *et al.*, 2025; Nordin *et al.*, 2022). For hotel operators unfamiliar with the digital submission requirements, these issues can significantly prolong the certification timeline.

2.5. Synthesis of Literature: Agreements, Divergences, and Unresolved Issues

While the literature converges on the strategic value of *halal* certification for market access and consumer trust, scholars diverge on how best to implement certification in service-based sectors like hospitality. Table 1 synthesizes key debates and unresolved questions in the literature.

Table 1. Synthesis of Key Debates in *Halal* Certification Literature

Thematic Area	What Scholars Agree On	Where Findings Diverge	What Remains Unresolved
Governance & Centralization	Centralized standards (e.g., JAKIM) enhance credibility and international recognition (Majid <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Suhaiza <i>et al.</i> , 2010)	Some argue decentralization improves responsiveness (Sahira <i>et al.</i> , 2023), while others support hybrid digital models (Syarofi & Syam, 2025).	How to balance central control with local flexibility in multi-state hotel operations.
Compliance Stringency	Strict adherence to <i>halal</i> protocols is non-negotiable for religious integrity (Idris, <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	Hospitality scholars call for contextual flexibility (Aziz <i>et al.</i> , 2015); some propose risk-tiered models (Umar & Parakkasi, 2025).	Whether a differentiated compliance framework for hotels would compromise <i>halal</i> integrity or improve efficiency.
Digital System Efficiency	Digitalization (e.g., MYeHALAL) is essential for streamlining certification (Nordin <i>et al.</i> , 2022).	Critics highlight poor usability, lack of transparency, and system delays (A Mohd Yunus <i>et al.</i> , 2025).	How to redesign digital platforms to be both efficient and transparent, and whether automation can reduce human bottlenecks.
Sector-Specific Challenges	Hotels face unique operational challenges compared to manufacturers (Razalli, 2019; Zailani <i>et al.</i> , 2011).	Limited empirical studies focus on hospitality; most research is on SMEs and food production (Saima <i>et al.</i> , 2024).	How hotel-specific certification guidelines should be designed, and what best practices hotels can adopt to reduce delays.
Post-Audit Phase	The post-audit stage is often overlooked in certification studies.	Few studies measure certificate issuance delays; most focus on pre-audit preparation (Muhammad <i>et al.</i> , 2020).	Why post-audit delays occur, how they impact overall timelines, and what systemic reforms are needed to expedite certificate handover.

The literature constantly emphasizes how important *halal* certification is from both an economic and religious standpoint, especially when it comes to reaching the expanding Muslim tourism market. But there are still empirical gaps, particularly when it comes to the operational reality of the hotel industry. Scholars differ on the usefulness of existing digital systems like MYeHALAL and the amount of flexibility hotels should be given, despite their agreement on the necessity of digitization and consistent governance. Significantly, scholarly debate has mostly ignored the post-audit phase, where administrative delays can cause timetables to be extended by months. By offering cross-case empirical data from hotels, this study tackles these unsolved problems and closes the gap between theoretical discussions and real-world certification results.

2.6. Literature Gaps and the Relevance of This Study

Most existing research on *halal* certification has focused on food manufacturing and SMEs, leaving a substantial gap in understanding the hospitality sector's unique challenges. Furthermore, the post-audit phase of certification, a crucial but little-studied time when

certificate handovers may be considerably delayed has not received much attention. By offering unique empirical data from four hotels receiving *halal* certification under the same regulatory body, our study fills up these gaps. The paper provides theoretical insights and practical consequences for the promotion of *halal* certification and governance reform by linking real-world timetables and audit findings to more general governance challenges.

In doing so, it builds on and extends the existing literature by introducing cross-case comparisons, identifying best practices, and recommending structural improvements to both internal hotel processes and external regulatory systems.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research utilizes a comparative analysis of case studies (Yin, 2017) to explore the procedural dynamics of *halal* certification within the Malaysian hotel industry, with a particular emphasize on post-audit delays. The choice of a case-based design allows for an in-depth, context-sensitive understanding of how certification processes unfold in real-world institutional settings. Four hotels were purposively selected as bounded cases; each was at a different stage in the certification process but had already undergone the audit phase. This provided a coherent basis for comparison while ensuring it stayed consistent with the study's main focus.

3.2. Case Selection

This study focused on four hotels purposively selected to represent a spectrum of differing certification profiles and challenges, each operating under a shared cluster management structure:

- a. Hotel A was chosen as a case that encountered significant audit scheduling delays.
- b. Hotel B was selected to represent a profile of multiple rejection events but with the capacity for rapid internal resubmission.
- c. Hotel C was included as an example of the longest certification timeline, featuring significant post-audit handover delays.
- d. Hotel D was chosen to examine the process for an additional menu application characterized by efficient non-conformance (NC) handling.

These hotels were selected based on their operational diversity, geographical proximity within Klang Valley, and their active pursuit of *halal* certification under the authority of certification bodies between 2022 and 2024. This allowed for meaningful cross-case comparison while maintaining control over confounding regional policy differences. The choice of four hotels is consistent with the qualitative case study research premise of analytical sufficiency rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2017). In order to attain

theoretical saturation across important factors including timeline duration, rejection frequency, audit outcomes, and post-audit delays, these examples were selected. Understanding process variability within a single regulatory framework requires thorough cross-case comparison and pattern discovery, which is made possible by the study's inclusion of both high- and low-performing examples. A summary of their certification performance is presented in Table 1 in the Results section.

3.3. Data Collection

Data collection was conducted entirely through document-based methods. Following Bowen's (2009) framework for document analysis (Bowen, 2009), this study examined formal audit reports, non-conformity records, MYeHALAL system-generated timelines, email correspondences, and submission documents. These materials were collected directly from hotel management with full consent, as well as from publicly available regulatory guidelines (e.g., the Manual Procedure for Malaysia Halal Certification (MPPHM, 2014) provided by JAKIM). The following sources were reviewed:

- Application starts and end dates.
- Rejection notices and NC reports.
- Submission and resubmission logs.
- Field audit schedules and outcomes.
- Certificate issuance dates and acknowledgments.

All dates, durations, and decision points were chronologically coded into structured Excel sheets to reconstruct the full timeline for each hotel. The timelines served as a basis for identifying gaps between expected and actual processing durations.

Each hotel's certification journey was reconstructed using process-tracing techniques, guided by (Beach & Pedersen, 2012) methodological principles. Chronologies were developed to capture critical decision points, feedback loops, and waiting periods from application to current status. This enabled the identification of bottlenecks—particularly those emerging in the post-audit phase, such as certificate issuance delays, system silence, and approval backlog.

3.4. Data Analysis

The analysis emphasized both within-case process tracking and cross-case pattern recognition. Themes were derived inductively and refined deductively around three analytical dimensions: hotel-side procedural readiness, system-level inefficiencies, and governance tensions. By triangulating various types of documentary evidence, the study maintains both analytical depth and credibility of sources.

3.4.1. Timeline Mapping and Duration Analysis

The *halal* certification timelines across the four hotels varied substantially, ranging from 162–561 days. Hotel A - 1st Additional Menu (162 days) was shortest; Hotel C - Main Application (561 days) was longest. Hotel B's shortest cycle was 167 days, and its 2nd Additional Menu extended to 255 days. Hotel D faced two rejection events but showed reasonable responsiveness in addressing NC issues.

3.4.2. Comparative Performance Metrics

The following patterns were observed:

- **Hotel B** had the best resubmission speed and recovery from rejections.
- **Hotel A** achieved **zero NCs**, signaling strong internal compliance.
- **Hotel C** had the **highest number of rejection events (6)** and the longest additional menu delays.
- **Hotel D** handled its NCs with moderate efficiency but submitted only one application type.

These metrics enabled the recognition of patterns in compliance behavior and institutional responsiveness.

3.4.3. Root Cause Analysis

Key delay drivers included:

- Unclear feedback or late responses from the MYeHALAL system.
- Low staff competency in documentation preparation and compliance tracking.
- Audit scheduling delays are beyond the applicant's control.
- Post-approval issuance lags are particularly evident in Hotel C.

Findings were triangulated against documented challenges in the *halal* certification literature, including operational issues with MYeHALAL (Nordin *et al.*, 2022), manpower limitations (Aziz *et al.*, 2015), and regulatory inconsistency (A Mohd Yunus *et al.*, 2025). This improved the generalizability as well as the validity of the analysis.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

All data used were obtained from internal management records with institutional consent. No personally identifiable or guest-related data were involved. Findings were anonymized where necessary, and hotels were referred to by code (Hotel A–D) to maintain confidentiality while preserving analytical integrity. While each hotel is referred to using a coded label (Hotel A–

D), its actual names and identifying details have been withheld to preserve organizational confidentiality. This anonymization ensures that sensitive operational data such as audit outcomes, rejection histories, and process inefficiencies—can be critically analyzed without exposing individual establishments to reputational risk. This approach aligns with ethical research standards and encourages transparent data sharing by minimizing institutional exposure.

3.6. Study Limitations

This study has a number of shortcomings despite its merits. First, insights are restricted to documented events and correspondence due to the dependence on document-based data; unrecorded contacts, informal negotiations, or internal managerial conversations were not recorded. Second, geographical generalizability is limited by the concentration on four hotels in the Klang Valley; certification experiences could be different in other Malaysian states or in rural vs urban environments. Third, the research only looks at certification procedures from 2022 to 2024; any modifications to digital systems or changes to regulations beyond that time are not taken into account. Lastly, even though the instances were selected to reflect a variety of certification characteristics, statistical generalization is not possible due to the limited sample size. However, the cross-case comparison and analytical depth offer valuable insights into process inefficiencies and best practices applicable to other hospitality environments.

4. Results and Discussion

The evaluation of the *halal* certification process across the four case study hotels revealed considerable variability in efficiency and outcomes, with timelines ranging from 162 to 561 days. The comparative performance metrics for each hotel are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative Halal Certification Performance.

Hotel	Application Type	Total Duration (Days)	No. of Rejections	Key Strength
Hotel A	Main	236	1	Zero NCs; consistent submission
	1 st Add	162	0	
	2 nd Add	232	0	
Hotel B	Main	218	2	Fast resubmissions; good recovery
	1 st Add	167	0	
	2 nd Add	255	0	
Hotel C	Main	561	1	Longest delay; repeated rejections
	1 st Add	237	0	
	2 nd Add	226	2	

Hotel	Application Type	Total Duration (Days)	No. of Rejections	Key Strength
Hotel D	Main Only	211	1	Single submission, moderate delay

4.1. Certification Timeline Variability and Efficiency

Timelines varied 162–561 days across applications. Hotel A - 1st Additional (162) was shortest; Hotel C -Main (561) was longest, inflated by a 153-day certificate-handover lag. Hotel A recorded zero NCs at audit; Hotel B showed fast resubmissions but a longer 2nd Additional (255); Hotel D completed its additional menu in 211 days with quick NC closure.

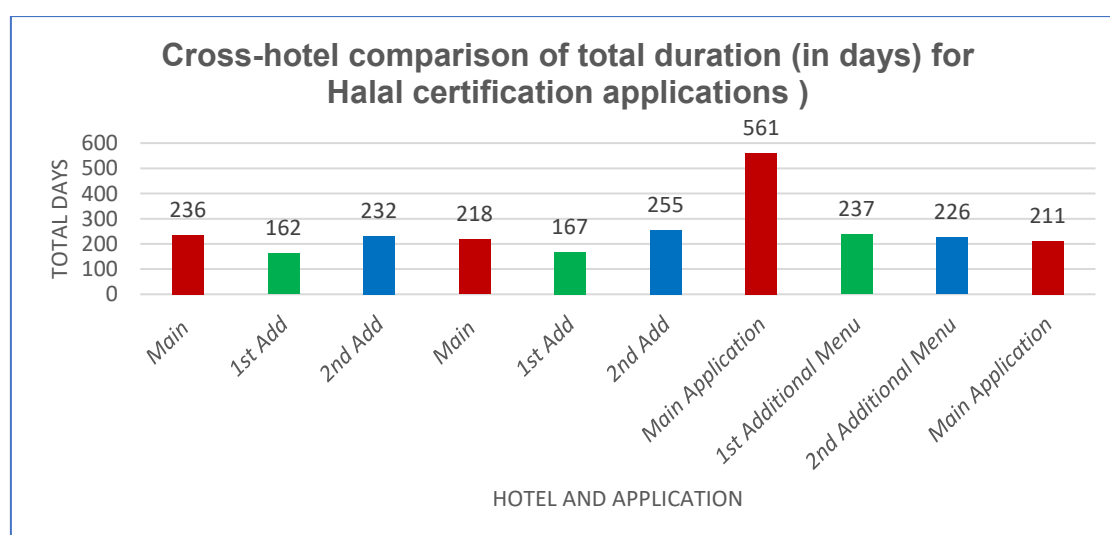


Figure 1. Cross-hotel comparison of total duration (in days) for *Halal* certification applications across Hotels A–D

Figure 1 presents a cross-hotel comparison of total certification durations. The results show clear variability, ranging from 162 days (Hotel A - 1st Additional Menu) to 561 days (Hotel C - Main Application). Hotel A demonstrated consistency, with its shortest cycle reflecting effective documentation and internal monitoring, while Hotel B achieved efficiency in its 1st Additional Menu Application (167 days) but extended to 255 days in its 2nd Additional Menu due to prolonged preparation. Hotel D completed its Additional Menu in 211 days, showing balanced efficiency with delays concentrated in preparation and payment stages. By contrast, Hotel C stood out as the slowest overall, which warrants further breakdown in Figure 2.

The large range of timings under a centralized regulatory system—from 162 to 561 days, indicates that applicants' experiences with governance efficiency are not consistent. This discrepancy highlights issues with decentralized implementation, including inconsistent processing rates at the state level and audit scheduling difficulties. Organizational readiness

can make up for regulatory inefficiencies, as demonstrated by the institutional mitigation of systematic delays by hotels with more robust internal compliance procedures (such as Hotel A).

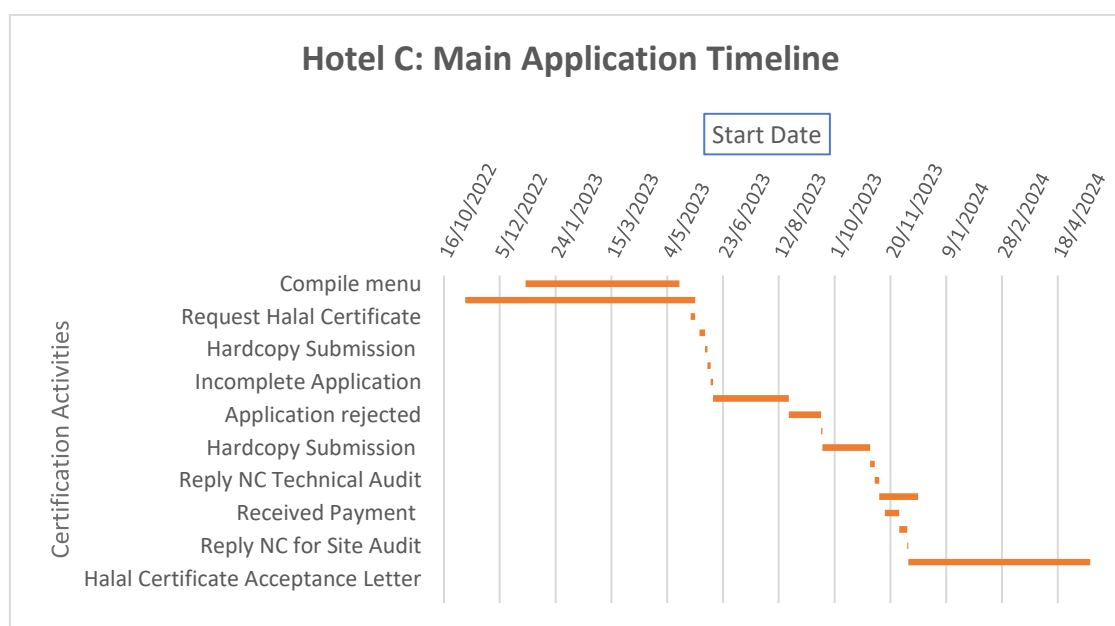


Figure 2. Illustrates the detailed timeline of Hotel C's main application, which took a total of 561 days.

A significant governance weakness in certificate administration is shown by Hotel C's 153-day post-audit transfer delay. This delay is a result of both procedural inefficiencies and a lack of openness and accountability in the post-approval stage. Hotels, particularly those with minimal administrative ability, are discouraged from obtaining certification by such delays, which erode confidence in the certification system. Collectively, the comparative results and the detailed Hotel C timeline highlight that delays in *halal* certification are not uniform, but arise from distinct phases such as preparation, submission, and certificate handover. The next section (4.2) explores these bottlenecks and efficiency points thematically across all four hotels.

4.2. Systemic Bottlenecks and Root Causes

A root cause analysis of the delays identified five major categories of bottlenecks: documentation quality, staff competency, feedback lag from the MYeHALAL system, audit scheduling inefficiencies, and delays in issuing the *halal* certificate. In particular, the feedback loop from the MYeHALAL system was frequently cited as a pain point, where unclear rejection reasons or delayed notifications created administrative confusion and slowed progress. This finding aligns with criticisms of Malaysia's *halal* digital infrastructure, particularly the limited interactivity and responsiveness of MYeHALAL, which have been

highlighted in previous studies (A Mohd Yunus *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, staff preparedness and internal knowledge of the *halal* requirements also played a critical role. As noted by (Salleh *et al.*, 2014), a lack of specialized training and understanding among *halal* executives and compliance teams often results in procedural oversights and documentation errors. The cases examined here confirm that hotels with internal training, pre-audit simulations, and clearer Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) experienced fewer disruptions.

4.2.1 Documentation Quality

Errors and incompleteness in submissions were frequent triggers of rejection. Hotel B's main application faced two rejections, while Hotel A's main submission was also rejected once. Hotel C's rejection–resubmission cycle created a gap of nearly one month, contributing to its long total duration. Conversely, Hotel A's 1-day resubmission demonstrates how thorough documentation preparation can reduce delays.

Documentation rejections highlight a systemic communication failure between regulators and applicants. Unclear submission guidelines and inconsistent feedback perpetuate cycles of rejection and resubmission, increasing administrative burden on both sides.

4.2.2 Staff Competency

Hotels with stronger internal teams responded faster to non-compliance (NC) findings. Hotel A replied to audit NCs within one day, and Hotel D typically resolved document NCs within 2–6 days, indicating staff readiness. In contrast, Hotel B's 28-day resubmission gap revealed weaknesses in internal follow-up mechanisms.

The disparity in response times reveals that internal capacity—not just regulatory requirements—shapes certification efficiency. Hotels that invest in *halal* training and dedicated compliance roles are better equipped to navigate bureaucratic hurdles.

4.2.3 Feedback Lag from MYeHALAL

The digital system was not always responsive. In Hotel A's and Hotel C's cases, the period between submission and official feedback extended to over two months, causing uncertainty. Such delays are consistent with broader critiques of MYeHALAL's limited interactivity.

Delayed digital feedback reflects a misalignment between system design and user needs. When digital platforms fail to provide timely, clear communication, they become a bottleneck rather than a solution, eroding confidence in e-governance initiatives.

4.2.4 Audit Scheduling Inefficiencies

Even after fees were paid, audits were not immediately scheduled. In Hotel A's main and 2nd Additional applications, there were gaps of 38–64 days, while Hotel D faced a 22-day delay. This reflects systemic inefficiencies in scheduling processes rather than hotel-side weaknesses.

Audit scheduling delays are often beyond the applicant's control and indicate resource constraints within regulatory bodies. This suggests that efficiency improvements require not just process digitization, but also strategic resource allocation and capacity building within certifying agencies.

4.2.5 Delays in Certificate Issuance

Hotel C's main application highlighted a unique bottleneck: a 153-day gap between approval and certificate handover. By contrast, Hotel D achieved same-day approval, certificate issuance, and acknowledgement, showing that streamlined post-audit administration can sharply reduce timelines.

Such extreme variability in post-audit processing underscores a lack of standardized operating procedures and accountability mechanisms in certificate administration. This phase remains a "black box" in *halal* governance, where delays accumulate without explanation or recourse.

Table 2 consolidates the comparative findings from the four hotels against systemic bottleneck categories. Documentation quality and MYeHALAL feedback delays were recurring bottlenecks for Hotels A and C, while Hotels B and C faced repeated rejections that extended timelines. Audit scheduling delays were evident in Hotels A and D, where gaps of 22–64 days occurred after payment. The most severe certificate issuance delay occurred in Hotel C (153 days), while Hotel D achieved same-day approval and handover. Efficiency points were visible across all hotels, particularly in rapid NC responses: Hotel A replied within one day, Hotel D within two to six days, and Hotels B and C typically within a week. Collectively, these cases illustrate that while systemic factors (e.g., MYeHALAL feedback, audit scheduling) contributed to delays, internal management practices (e.g., documentation readiness, staff competency) determined whether hotels could minimize or exacerbate these bottlenecks.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of *Halal* certification applications across Hotels A–D, showing total duration, bottlenecks, efficiency points, and key insights.

Hotel	Applications & Total Duration	Bottleneck Points	Efficiency Points & Key Insights
Hotel A	Main: 236 days; 1 st Add: 162 days; 2 nd Add: 232 days	- Documentation issues caused rejection in Main. - MYeHALAL feedback delays (~2 months). - Payment-to-audit gaps (38–64 days).	Efficiency: NC replies within 1 day; zero NC in 2nd Add Audit. Key Insight: Progressive learning cycle; 1st Add was shortest, 2nd Add demonstrated strongest audit compliance.

Hotel	Applications & Total Duration	Bottleneck Points	Efficiency Points & Key Insights
Hotel B	Main: 218 days; 1 st Add: 167 days; 2 nd Add: 255 days	- Two rejections in Main. - 28-day resubmission gap. - Long preparation for 2nd Add (128 days).	Efficiency: NC responses within 6–7 days; smooth post-audit approval. Key Insight: 1st Add was fastest (167 days), but 2nd Add slowed by prep delays.
Hotel C	Main: 561 days; 1 st Add: 237 days; 2 nd Add: 226 days	- Extremely long prep (207 days recipe). - Rejection–resubmission gap (~1 month). - MYeHALAL feedback delays (>2 months). - Certificate handover delay (153 days).	Efficiency: NC replies within 1–7 days; faster processing in additional menus. Key Insight: Worst performer in Main (561 days) but improved drastically in additional menus (cutting total duration by half).
Hotel D	Main Application 2024: 211 days	- Long preparation (75–93 days). - 24-day doc review delay. - Payment-to-audit gap (22 days).	Efficiency: Very fast resubmission (2 days); NC replies to same day–6 days; same-day approval & certificate. Key Insight: Balanced performance; overall faster than Hotel A Main and Hotel B 2nd Add.

The table reveals that bottlenecks are not evenly distributed across hotels or application types. While systemic issues like MYeHALAL delays and audit scheduling affect all hotels, internal management practices determine the severity of impact. This suggests that *halal* certification efficiency is a co-production between regulators and applicants, where preparedness, responsiveness, and organizational learning play decisive roles.

The systemic bottlenecks identified in this section demonstrate that *halal* certification delays arise from a combination of structural inefficiencies and internal management practices. While documentation quality, staff competency, and MYeHALAL responsiveness created recurring challenges, the case evidence also revealed that hotels which developed proactive strategies—such as faster NC responses, structured documentation systems, and pre-audit simulations—were able to mitigate many of these issues. These contrasting outcomes suggest that beyond systemic constraints, organizational practices can play a decisive role in shaping certification efficiency. Building on this insight, Section 4.3 underscores the best practices

observed across the four hotels, focusing on how internal management approaches and adaptive learning cycles contributed to improved outcomes.

4.3. Comparative Performance and Best Practices

Despite the systemic bottlenecks outlined in the previous section, the comparative analysis also revealed several best practices that enabled certain hotels to achieve shorter certification cycles or smoother audit outcomes. These practices were not uniform but context-specific, reflecting differences in documentation systems, staff preparedness, and managerial responsiveness.

Hotel A emerged as an exemplar of audit readiness and compliance efficiency, achieving zero NCs in its 2nd Additional Menu Application. Governance implication: Proactive internal monitoring can compensate for external inefficiencies, suggesting that certification success is as much about hotel-side preparedness as about regulatory design.

Hotel B demonstrated agility and resilience, resubmitting within a day after rejections. Institutional insight: Rapid corrective action reflects adaptive organizational behavior that can mitigate the impact of bureaucratic delays.

Hotel C, though slowest in its main application, showed significant improvement in later applications (226–237 days). Learning and governance: This improvement indicates that experience and iterative learning can reduce inefficiencies over time, pointing to the value of feedback loops and process familiarity.

Hotel D displayed balanced efficiency, particularly in post-audit synchronization. Systemic lesson: Same-day approval and issuance demonstrate that streamlined administrative workflows are achievable and should be standardized across the certification system.

Together, these examples suggest that best practices in *halal* certification are not universal but context specific. Hotels should tailor their strategies by drawing on the strengths of these exemplars: zero-NC compliance (Hotel A), rapid resubmission (Hotel B), organizational learning (Hotel C), and post-audit efficiency (Hotel D).

4.4. Broader Implications and Literature Alignment

The identification of best practices across the four hotels provides a foundation for developing practical guidelines and policy recommendations. Beyond applied relevance, these findings also reinforce and extend ongoing scholarly debates on inefficiencies in Malaysia's *halal* certification framework. A recurring critique in the literature is the bureaucratic rigidity and lack of transparency in audit scheduling and decision-making (Fully & David, 2020). The delays observed at Hotel C, particularly the 153-day post-audit certificate handover period, illustrate the real-world consequences of such systemic opacity.

This procedural gap remains underexplored in current research, which has largely emphasized pre-certification documentation and preparation rather than post-audit administration.

The research also adds to the increasing discourse on digitalization in *halal* certification. While the MYeHALAL system was designed to streamline processes, its operational limitations—lack of real-time feedback, absence of automated reminders, and weak case-tracking functionality—remain major obstacles (Qizam *et al.*, 2025). In practice, Hotels A and C both faced delays of more than two months in receiving system feedback, underscoring the gap between digital infrastructure design and user needs. Applicants must therefore not only navigate regulatory hurdles but also compensate for these technological shortcomings through internal monitoring, documentation readiness, and proactive follow-up.

The results support and broaden current scholarly discussions about the shortcomings of Malaysia's *halal* certification system. Hotel C's 153-day post-audit delay serves as an example of the practical effects of administrative backlog and systemic opacity, a stage that has received little attention in recent studies. Critiques of deficiencies in digital governance are confirmed by MYeHALAL's operational constraints, lack of real-time input, and poor tracking (A Mohd Yunos *et al.*, 2025). As a result, applicants must overcome both technological and regulatory obstacles, highlighting the necessity of human-centered digital redesign.

4.5. Practical Recommendations

Taken together, these findings suggest that Malaysia's *halal* certification research agenda should expand beyond pre-certification compliance toward examining system-level inefficiencies in audit scheduling, post-audit administration, and digital responsiveness. By linking case-level evidence with broader theoretical debates, this study offers both practical lessons for industry actors and new avenues for scholarly inquiry.

Third, the post-audit stage emerged in this study as a critical yet under-researched area. Future research should examine administrative workflows, certificate handover protocols, and applicant experiences during this phase, particularly in comparison with international *halal* certification systems. Such work would help identify whether these bottlenecks are uniquely Malaysian or part of broader structural challenges in *halal* assurance.

Finally, longitudinal research could track how organizational learning shapes certification efficiency over time. The marked improvement of Hotel C between its main and additional applications suggests that experience, training, and iterative feedback loops play an important role in reducing delays. Exploring these dynamics across larger samples would strengthen the evidence base for best practices in *halal* management systems.

5. Theoretical, Practical, and Policy Contributions

This research advances the *halal* certification literature in three keyways. Theoretically, it extends current debates by introducing rare empirical evidence on post-audit procedural delays, an underexplored yet crucial phase of the certification process. By doing so, it shifts the focus beyond pre-certification compliance and emphasizes how systemic inefficiencies in audit scheduling and certificate handover shape overall certification timelines. Practically, the study identifies hotel-level best practices such as mock audits, structured compliance taskforces, and rapid resubmission mechanisms that can serve as benchmarks for industry peers seeking to reduce delays and strengthen internal preparedness. At the policy level, the findings offer actionable recommendations for regulators, including the automation of audit scheduling, digitalization of certificate handovers, and enhancements to MYeHALAL's feedback and tracking mechanisms. Together, these contributions position this study not only as a diagnostic of certification bottlenecks in the hotel sector but also as a foundation for improving transparency, efficiency, and the global competitiveness of Malaysia's *halal* certification system.

The results from the four case hotels show that inconsistent organizational readiness and systemic governance deficiencies are the root causes of *halal* certification inefficiencies. The following suggestions, each explicitly supported by empirical data from this study, are ranked into short-, medium-, and long-term activities to comprehensively resolve these bottlenecks.

Reducing immediate, preventable delays should be the main goal of short-term operational improvements (0–6 months). Hotel A's zero-NC record and quick response to non-conformities show that hotels may set up specialized *halal* taskforces and run mock audits. Regulators should improve the MYeHALAL platform with a real-time "application health" dashboard to remove feedback lags, which exceeded two months in Hotels A and C, and require the use of standard submission templates to reduce documentation errors, which are a significant reason for rejection for Hotels B and C.

Procedural and digital constraints must be addressed via medium-term system enhancements (6–18 months). Reducing the 22–64 day post-payment gaps seen in Hotels A and D requires audit scheduling automation. Additionally, in order to avoid severe post-audit handover delays like Hotel C's 153-day lag, certificate issuing should be completely digitalized. In order to avoid the recurring rejection cycles observed in Hotels B and C, MYeHALAL's feedback systems must also be redesigned to offer precise, practical recommendations. Lastly, in order to make compliance requirements for hotel operations clear, JAKIM should create and publish sector-specific *halal* standards for the hospitality industry.

To improve system-wide efficiency and transparency, long-term (18+ months) policy and governance changes should focus on structural transformation. The enhanced speed seen in

Hotel C's subsequent applications supports the use of a risk-tiered certification methodology that concentrates strict monitoring on high-risk initial applications while simplifying low-risk procedures like extra menus. To lessen timing variability among areas, central and state-level entities must codify their coordination mechanisms. To overcome the staff competency gaps seen in situations like as Hotel B's 28-day resubmission delay, a nationally recognized Halal Executive training and certification program has to be initiated. Lastly, administrative silos would be eliminated and multi-agency verification would be streamlined by linking MYeHALAL with other government websites (such as tourism and municipal agencies).

By adopting this phased, evidence-based roadmap, stakeholders can transform Malaysia's *halal* certification system into one that is both rigorously compliant and efficiently administered, thereby strengthening the country's leadership in the global *halal* hospitality market.

6. Conclusion

This research conducted a critical analysis of the *halal* certification process across four Klang Valley hotels, revealing significant variability in total durations, which ranged from 162 to 561 days. Hotel A achieved zero NCs and the shortest cycle (162 days), Hotel B demonstrated agility through rapid resubmissions, Hotel C faced a unique 153-day post-audit handover delay, and Hotel D displayed balanced efficiency, completing certification in 211 days. These findings demonstrate that even under a centralized regulatory framework, hotel-level management practices play a decisive role in shaping certification outcomes, supporting a co-production model of regulatory efficiency where outcomes depend on the interplay between systemic design and organizational capacity.

Beyond operational insights, the study extends *halal* certification literature by exposing the underexplored issue of post-audit procedural delays, an area that has received little attention compared to pre-certification compliance. Theoretically, it advances *halal* governance debates by situating these inefficiencies within the centralization–digitalization–compliance trilemma, shifting scholarly attention from pre-certification compliance to systemic administrative bottlenecks. At the practical level, the research highlights the importance of forming dedicated *halal* taskforces, conducting internal mock audits, and ensuring rapid NC responses as strategies to minimize delays. At the policy level, it recommends a phased, evidence-based roadmap—from digitized feedback loops and automated audit scheduling to long-term structural reforms like risk-tiered certification models—to reduce uncertainty and improve transparency.

This study offers transferable insights for worldwide *halal* governance and tourist management, with ramifications that go well beyond Malaysia. The impediments that have been discovered, such as post-approval waits, audit scheduling gaps, and paperwork delays,

are not exclusive to Malaysia but rather represent global regulatory system issues, particularly in service-intensive industries like hospitality. The suggested hybrid governance model offers a scalable framework for other Muslim-majority countries and developing *halal* tourism destinations looking to expedite certification without sacrificing integrity. It strikes a balance between centralized standards and localized implementation through digital integration. Additionally, the focus on organizational learning and hotel-level readiness provides universal lessons for hospitality operators hoping to use *halal* certification as a competitive advantage in the expanding Islamic tourist sector.

Finally, the study points to directions for future research, including comparative studies across states and sectors, evaluations of digital certification platforms such as MYeHALAL, and investigations into how certification timeliness influences consumer trust and brand perception. By linking case-level evidence with broader theoretical and policy discussions, this research contributes both to scholarly inquiry and to the practical strengthening of *halal* governance. By emphasizing the systemic and organizational drivers of certification delays, this study offers actionable lessons for *halal* governance reforms in Muslim-majority regions and *halal* tourism destinations worldwide, underscoring that the credibility and competitiveness of any *halal* certification system rely on a dual approach: systemic reforms to enhance efficiency, and organizational strategies to foster preparedness and continuous learning.

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