

# Halal Tourism Strategy to Promote Sustainable Cultural Tourism in Thailand

Piyachat Puangniyom, Nantawan Swangcheng, and Tosaporn mahamud

**Abstract**—Tourism is considered as an important industry that provides a source of income to Thailand. This industry is currently a significant contributor to the economic and social development of the country. However, the tourism market situation is in a highly competitive environment and this makes differentiation essential in order to stay competitive. Thailand needs to adjust its direction in promoting tourism industry by using the distinctiveness of the country such as traveling to experience the rich culture and environment. The objective of this article is to propose a concept of developing cultural tourism guidelines and diversify its tourist visitors by attracting and having the Halal tourism market as one unique national brand identity for promoting sustainable tourism in the country.

The result of this study shows that to modify the foundation of Thailand's tourism development, it is essential to emphasize on unity and responsibility that must be shared by all sectors. There must be an active involvement and participation of all important agencies in launching strategies and working together to systematically drive in the same direction. Moreover, Halal tourism is a new business that could be initiated in order to cater to the unique needs of Muslim tourists when they are traveling away from home. Therefore, this makes the Halal tourism one of the important businesses and opportunities for promoting a sustainable cultural tourism in Thailand.

**Keywords**— sustainable tourism, halal tourism.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The number of tourists travelling to Thailand has grown rapidly from 336,000 foreigners in 1967 to 14 million foreigners in 2015. The average period these foreign tourists have stayed in Thailand was at 9.19 days. In 2007, the benefit received from the tourists was worth about 547,782 million baht. The World Tourism Organization reported twenty tourist destinations as the most visited places from international traveler votes in 2007 and Thailand was ranked 18<sup>th</sup> on the list with 14.5 million tourist visitors while France, a country of the same size as Thailand attracted the most, numbering to 82 million international tourist arrivals in the world.

Thus, tourism is considered as an important industry that brings a source of income to Thailand. This industry is currently a contributor to the economic and social development of the country. However, the tourism market situation is in a severe

competition and needs to adjust its direction to promote tourism industry by using the distinctiveness of the country, such as traveling to experience the rich culture and environment. The objective of this article is to propose a concept of developing sustainable cultural tourism guidelines for the promotion of the Thai tourism industry. There is a balance in economy and cultural dimension which would contribute to manage the development of a sustainable cultural tourism in today's society. Today's society is intensely aware of the importance of arts, culture, festivals, including traditional cultural heritage of local and village communities. Therefore, cultural tourism has become the center of the tourism industry in many countries such as in Europe and in Asia.

All countries have attempted to develop a cultural tourism within their countries. The objectives are to gain benefits and revenue that will contribute to the economic development of nations and regions. Cultural tourism is also an important instrument in preserving the Thai culture. Tourism brings in large amounts of income into a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services enjoyed by the tourists, accounting for 30% of the world's trade of services, and 6% of overall exports of goods and services. It also creates opportunities for employment in the service sector of the economy associated with tourism.

Currently, the cultural tourism development has increased attention due to the tourist attractions and cultural heritage of the country. Thailand has a unique character and profile of the cultural heritage from its long time history.

Halal Tourism has deemed to be one of the unique strategies to promote and develop Thailand's sustainable tourism since 2015. The factors for this strategy are related with demand and supply of Halal tourism. In 2014, Muslim tourism market valued 4.9 trillion Thai baht (\$145 billion) consisting of 108 million Muslim tourists and this can be counted as 10% of the overall tourism industry. In addition, it is anticipated that Muslim tourists will increase to 150 million by 2020 or equivalent to 11% of the overall tourism industry and projected to be worth 6.7 trillion Thai baht (\$200 billion). The Tourism Authority of Thailand predicts a huge growth in Muslim visitors from the year 2016 onwards – advantaging from the neighboring countries of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. Moreover, as considered to be one of the Muslim friendly countries, Thailand has the ability to cater Muslim travelers by providing Arabic-speaking staff, Halal food options, prayer facilities in the airport, Muslim-friendly hotels and restaurants, and tourist attractions.

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Therefore, this article will focus on academic, culture, and strategy for sustainable tourism development. Besides, it will indicate guidelines for the cultural tourism development of Thailand including the method to conserve the culture and tradition in order to achieve sustainable tourism. Lastly, it will demonstrate the Halal tourism strategy for promoting Thailand's sustainable tourism industry.

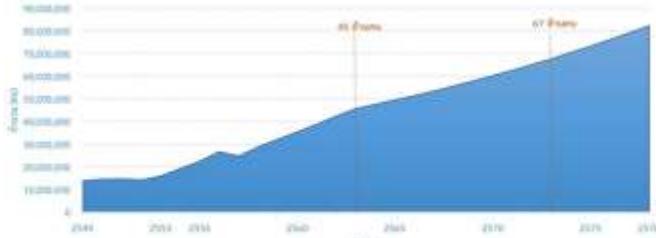


Fig. 1 Trends of the number of International tourists in Thailand, year 2549-2578 B.E.  
Sources: Ministry of Tourism, Thailand

## II. GUIDELINE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THAI TOURISM

It is essential to modify the foundation of Thailand's tourism development by emphasizing on unity and sharing responsibility by all sectors and agencies that play an important role in the development of tourism within the country such as the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Transport and Communication, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of education, Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, and the Ministry of Culture, etc.

The involvement and participation of the government, private sector, and the community sector is an important key to continue the concept of strategy development. There might be a difference of management structure of each individual policy and practice, but a plan for support is needed by all three parties. Initially, the community sector and private sector played an important role for the development, but natural resources are affected the most. Therefore, the participation of all sectors in defining strategies, working together to systematically drive in the same direction, and trusting each other is a must. This will result to a successful sustainable tourism development.

It is necessary to modify the concept of measuring the success by achievements quantitatively, such as number of tourists and tourism revenue. However, in the final end, there is a need to look at different dimensions, the balance of the economy, society, politics, and environment for the goal of a sustainable development.

Defining the strategy development, it will require market as a demand drive in order to target the plan clearly. The corresponding time of the development plan in the tourism industry is 2017. Otherwise, the marketing, production development, and service would be inconsistent to having the same direction. Therefore, it is a must to have a guideline for the development of the next level, and that is to develop products or travel destinations according to the tourism strategy of Thailand.

The strategy driven for Thai tourism needs to be in the long term supported by the cooperation of the central, the budget of the province, provincial administrative organization, and the supporting budget for tourism of Thailand in order to be consistent in the same direction.

Government policy, including the support of private sectors regarding creative tourism in Thailand relies on the quantitative method of a study which used questionnaires as a tool to 300 tourist respondents, including an in-depth interview of tourism entrepreneurs regarding creative tourism readiness. The selected target activity was Suthep Chinaware shop in Tambon Muang Kao, Muang district, Sukhothai province, which met the criteria of tourism activities. This data collection found that some of the tourists still do not understand the concept of creative tourism. There is a uniqueness of the event which is interesting for learning and expectations in economic matters rather than to look into matters of conservation.

The results of the study revealed that there are still gaps between creative tourism among tourists and shop owners in the activity recognition aspect. The availability of supporters such as government and private sectors to provide creative tourism has been planned in order to meet the strategy.



Fig. 2 shows the number of tourists, income from tourists, and average traveling expenses  
Ministry of Tourism, Thailand

## III. COMPETITIVE ISSUES ON CULTURAL TOURISM

According to Travel information in Figure 2, from year 2009 to 2014, tourism revenue increased in 2013 to 26,546,725 baht. The tourism competitiveness with neighboring countries such as Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam has been increasing and opened to International tourism in 1980. The places of attraction such as Angkor Wat, Luang Prabang, and Halong bay are competing with Thailand directly. Thailand has been dominating on tourism in Southeast Asia before and because of the competition from the countries mentioned, it is now necessary to plan and increase the tourism targets, such as golf tours during holidays, and tourism centers for Buddhism in the regions. From the lonely planet webpage, information reviewed that Thailand was number 2 on money worth spending on trips in 2010 from number 1 of Iceland which is facing subprime economy crisis. In addition, Bangkok was number 2 in attracting most of the tourists from the ranks of Master Card Corporation reviews in two consecutive years 2014-2015.

On the part of the traveling process, the tourism strategy started in 2015, with an important aim to achieve a quality tourist destination, increase number of tourists, increase average

expense cost per head and per day. It also aims to link the tourists within and between tourist groups and distribute tourist income towards the locals of the region and consider the impact of tourism to community, society, culture, and environment.

Halal Tourism is deemed to be one of the unique strategies to promote and develop Thailand's sustainable tourism since 2015. The factors for this strategy are related with demand and supply of Halal tourism

#### IV. THAILAND'S MUSLIM-FRIENDLY DESTINATION STRATEGY

The strategy to position Thailand as a Muslim-friendly destination was unveiled on June 5, 2016 at Thailand Travel Mart Plus, the country's most important annual B2B trade show. A total of 113 tour operators and media from Iran, Egypt, Kuwait, Tunisia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Oman, the UAE, Turkey, India and Singapore were invited to attend a day-long launch event. They were taken on tours in and around Bangkok as well as other provincial destinations. They also produced a number of collateral publications highlighting Halal restaurants in Thailand and Islamic attractions in the Southern Provinces. On June 22, 2016, it launched a new mobile app to be used as an offline/online guidebook for Muslim visitors.

Tourism Authority of Thailand is now directing its attention at the Islamic market. It is a continuation of what it does best – monitoring global travel trends, identifying new and emerging markets, and connecting consumers, buyers and media in markets with Thailand's diverse range of products and services. Over the years, it has followed that simple strategy well which is to tap the voluminous Middle East tourists.

##### *Understanding Cultural Halal Practice*

Halal Tourism is a new concept that involves tourism management to respond to the needs of the Muslim tourists. It concerns providing the service from starting point until the destination including accommodation, transportation, restaurant, recreation, entertainment which are in compliance with Islamic principles, as well as unique facilities such as a place to perform their daily prayers.

The definition of Halal Tourism is to prepare tour programs and places that are designed in accordance with the needs of the Muslim tourists. Tourism is a marketing effort to develop all the products to target at the Muslim customers even though there is no religious motivation within entrepreneurs.

Another definition of Halal Tourism is to focus on the importance of Muslim and non-Muslim tourists in an attempt to promote tourism among the Muslim, develop new tourist places, as well as build the strength of organizations and cooperation between government organizations in the Muslim world.

Halal Tourism is vitally important as can be seen in Turkey, Malaysia, and many other countries that put their efforts to attract Muslim tourists from around the world by offering services and facilities that are in compliance with Muslim belief. Service industry is a significant sector that helps promote Halal Tourism. For example, there are hotels or resorts that do not serve alcoholic drinks to Muslim customers. Instead, they serve Halal meals consisting of Halal meat and do not contain

anything which is considered to be unlawful according to Islamic principle. Other examples are spa and swimming pool that clearly separate male and female customers. For airlines in Islamic tourism industry, alcoholic drinks and any products containing pork are not served. Instead, they may provide religious channels as choices for passengers to view, as well as announcement of prayer times. The initiations for airlines in the Halal market include Halal meal, prayer time announcement, provision of the holy Quran in front of the seats, and separation of seats for male and female passengers.

##### *Factors Promoting Halal Tourism*

The consumer decision making process consists of 4 steps including motivation, decision making, get the services, and post-service evaluation respectively. However, this article will talk about decision making process of Muslim tourists.

The first step is motivation. It was analyzed that the Muslim has specific motivation which is to be good for their God. Travelling for Hajj and Umrah shows relationship between human being and their God, and also promotes brotherhood among the Muslim. The Halal Tourism is an activity rooted within Islamic principles. Original culture of Muslim encourages group travelling to areas far away.

Most of the Muslim tourists prefer to travel with their family, friends, and relatives. Muslim tourists are especially motivated to travel to the destinations which are suitable for travelling with their family. It is stated that 50% of Muslim tourists travel with their families. In addition, asserted that trading, health and recreation, learning and gaining knowledge, learning from savants, learning from other cultures, making Islamic culture known to others, and learning from past experiences are all motivations for travelling of the Muslims.

Apart from religious motivation, most of the Muslim tourists travel to visit their relatives and also travel for business, shopping, and recreation. However, due to appropriateness of dressing and behavior, not many Muslims choose to spend their long vacation on the beach.

Next step is to make decisions by keeping in mind Islamic principle as the basis for selection of places to travel. This explains that the Muslim tourists need such places that can respond to their religious needs as well as various requirements. Criteria for tourist places are availability of Mosque and facilities for praying in tourist places, prayer time announcement, Giblat indication (showing Mecca direction), taps for ablution (for cleaning some parts of the body before praying) in hotel restroom and in the parks, Halal meal and restaurants that serve Halal food, maintaining Islamic custom as well as Halal dressing in the hotel, and easy access to prayer facilities such as mosque and prayer room.

According to a report, non-Muslim countries which are destinations of Muslim tourists still have to improve for an easy access to prayer facility; prohibition of prostitution; information concerning prayer facilities and prayer time indication (i.e. at tourist information center, hotel, airport, parks); absence of alcoholic drinks in hotel room refrigerators; absence of advertising billboards that show women's obscene image; and

absence of gambling.

All the factors mentioned above have an effect on the third step that is to get the service. The consumption of products contains emotional elements (satisfaction), intangible elements (time spending, attempt, and feelings), and quality of the services. Having qualifications required by Islamic principle in tourist places will enhance overall satisfaction of Muslim tourists. Therefore, non-Muslim countries like Thailand can arrange Islamic facilities to attract Muslim tourists.

The last step is post-service evaluation. This step consists of value perception, satisfaction, and behavioral attitude (word of mouth, complaint, and tendency to repurchase by the tourists).

Among non-Muslim countries, Thailand is the second most favorable destination for Muslim tourists after Singapore. Singapore has the best Halal food service atmosphere among non-Muslim countries and as good as Muslim countries since there are more than 10,000 certified Halal food facilities and also easiest to access prayer facilities among non-Muslim countries. For Thailand, it is outstanding in airport facilities and service because in Suvarnabhumi International Airport there are prayer facilities and complete varieties of Halal food.

As a suggestion, tourism service quality management is a significant element of tourism industry promotion. Management should utilize all available resources to attract tourists as best as possible by making the tour compliance with Islamic principles. Halal tourism requires sustainable strategy and constant management as well as initiations to attract the tourists by keeping in mind the concept of customer satisfaction.

The designation of tour programs has to be aware of the culture of Muslim countries and management has to pay attention to Islamic architecture in hotels too. For airlines, Halal service is crucial (especially for flights going to Hajj and Umrah). For example, there should be Halal food menu, prayer time announcement during flights, preparation of the holy Quran, and Halal entertainment media.

Attraction of Muslim tourists will need more effort than emphasizing on communicating "Halal Tourism" in advertisements. There should be clear demonstration of how the places are appropriate for travelling according to Islamic principle. Informative Media can be applied as similarly suggested that although Halal tourism is glorious in such countries as Malaysia, tourists from the United Arab Emirates are not aware of the concept. Despite unawareness of Halal tourism, everyone prefers to stay in Halal hotels than in the usual ones. Meetings or seminars about Muslim-friendly services must be organized to enhance the awareness of every country. Once the awareness is in its place, Halal Tourism will consequently be famous.

However, we should understand religious tourism in a wider view. When religion is not a motivation for travelling, religious tourists should not be isolated from other tourists. Similarly, though Halal tourism is conducted according to the needs and necessity of Muslim tourists, the extra services are beneficial to non-Muslim tourists too since most tourists look for hygienic hotels, food and drinks. Hotels, therefore, should look into this

deeper than just Halal market. They may promote themselves as health oriented hotels.

Thus, this article recommends that Muslim tourists should not be treated as a separated demand in tourism industry. In tourist places, religious tourists should be sufficiently motivated to conduct their usual religious activities while travelling and not be differentiated from other regular tourists. In other words, non-Muslim countries do not have to follow strict religious principles, but they just need to provide facilities for tourists with different religions to travel freely and at the same time, they can perform their religious activities.

## V. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The expectation of tourism strategy will be seriously considered by focusing on the activities that need to be improved urgently in order to be a foundation for the development in the next phase, with a view of improving in order to become the country with quality tourism. Moreover, it needs all support from all levels of organizations such as the board of director of national tourism, provincial tourism development committee, and provincial tourism committee. It requires the cooperation of tourism organizations and related private sectors in order to mobilize resources and coordinate together to produce concrete achievements. Halal tourism is a new business that could be initiated in order to cater Muslim tourist needs when they are traveling away from home. This makes Halal tourism one of the important businesses and opportunities for Thailand Tourism Industry.

In conclusion, Islamic Tourism emphasizes on factors that relate to the Muslim tourists i.e. place, product (accommodation, food, and drinks), important dimensions (such as economy, culture, and religion), and service management (marketing and ethical aspects). Regardless of the fact that religious travelling is not a new matter since religion has long motivated people to travel in ancient times for example religious travelling of the Christians, the Muslims, and the Hindus, nowadays Halal Tourism becomes a new market in the tourism industry. Therefore, Halal products and services need to be developed in order to catch up with the dynamics and the emerging market and to boost the sustainable cultural tourism industry for Thailand.

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