

Muslim Tourism Promotion in Thailand: Investigation and Evaluation on Tourism Activities and Routes

Pimphun Sujarinphong *

Abstract

The study was designed to investigate the Muslim tourism routes and activities that promote lifestyles and present cultural identities connecting with religions to evaluate the potentials and capacity of the Muslim tourist market expansion in Thailand.

This research is a participatory action research (PAR) conducted in four regions of Thailand. Various methods of data collection, including document study, surveys, in-depth interviews, organizing forums for brainstorming, and experiment were employed.

The findings revealed the routes called “Andaman Way (of Life)” as the top and unique travel routes connecting Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket province, to promote Thailand as a non-Muslim but Halal-friendly destination.

* Assistant Professor, Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University,
e-mail: pimphun.su@ku.th

The routes connected the way of life of the Muslim communities, local cultural identities, and various patterns of tourism management such as health tourism, sports tourism, and others facilities e.g., Halal-friendly restaurants, hotels, and tourist attractions. The destinations which were organized on these routes ranked according to the potential assessment criteria in five areas: tourist attractions, accommodations, Halal restaurants, transportations, and other tourism attributes. The research team, together with the community and related agencies, conducted the action plan for marketing and public relations such as organizing meetings to promote and effectively support Muslim tourism. Furthermore, there was incorporation with government, experts, and related parties to create and prepare stunning visuals and interesting written contents into a video clip, travel guidebook, and e-guidebook which would be beneficial to promote tourism for Muslim travelers.

Keywords: Halal-friendly Destination; Muslim-friendly Places;

Muslim Tourism Promotion; Route Investigation and Evaluation

การส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวมุสลิม: การสำรวจและประเมินกิจกรรม และเส้นทางการท่องเที่ยวมุสลิม ในประเทศไทย

พิมพ์พรรณ สุจารินพงศ์^{*}

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้ถูกออกแบบเพื่อศึกษาเส้นทางการท่องเที่ยวของชาวมุสลิมและกิจกรรมเพื่อส่งเสริมวิถีชีวิตและแสดงอัตลักษณ์ทางวัฒนธรรมที่สามารถเชื่อมโยงศาสนาเข้ากับการท่องเที่ยว ประเมินศักยภาพและความสามารถในการรองรับการขยายตัวของตลาดนักท่องเที่ยวมุสลิมในประเทศไทย

การวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงปฏิบัติการแบบมีส่วนร่วม (PAR) ใน 4 ภูมิภาคของประเทศไทย (ภาคเหนือ ภาคกลาง ภาคตะวันออกเฉียงเหนือ และภาคใต้) นักวิจัยใช้วิธีการต่าง ๆ ในการรวบรวมข้อมูลรวมถึงการศึกษาเอกสารการสำรวจการสัมภาษณ์เชิงลึกการจัดเวทีเพื่อระดมความคิดและการดำเนินการทดลองตลอดจนการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการการจัดการการท่องเที่ยวที่ดำเนินการในพื้นที่เพื่อส่งเสริมเส้นทางการท่องเที่ยวของชาวมุสลิมและกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ

^{*} ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ประจำคณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ ติดต่ได้ที่: pimphun.su@ku.th

ผลการวิจัยพบว่า เส้นทาง “วิถีอันดามัน” ซึ่งเป็นเส้นทางเชื่อมโยงแหล่งท่องเที่ยวในจังหวัดกระบี่ จังหวัดพังงา และจังหวัดภูเก็ต และอื่นๆ ที่ครอบคลุมสิ่งอำนวยความสะดวกที่ได้มาตรฐานของฮาลาล เช่น ร้านอาหาร โรงแรม และสถานที่ท่องเที่ยว เส้นทางแหล่งท่องเที่ยวที่ได้คัดเลือกเพื่อส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวมุสลิมเหล่านี้ ได้รับการจัดอันดับตามเกณฑ์การประเมินศักยภาพใน 5 ด้าน ได้แก่ สถานที่ท่องเที่ยว โรงแรมที่พัก ร้านอาหารมาตรฐานฮาลาล การคมนาคมขนส่ง และคุณลักษณะการท่องเที่ยวด้านอื่นๆ ที่มิวิจัยร่วมกับชุมชนและหน่วยงานที่เกี่ยวข้องได้จัดทำแผนปฏิบัติการด้านการตลาดและการประชาสัมพันธ์ เช่น การจัดประชุมเพื่อส่งเสริมและสนับสนุนการท่องเที่ยวมุสลิมอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ นอกจากนี้ยังมีการรวมตัวกับภาครัฐผู้เชี่ยวชาญและผู้ที่เกี่ยวข้องเพื่อสร้างและเตรียมภาพที่สวยงามและเนื้อหาที่น่าสนใจลงในคลิปวิดีโอหนังสือแนะนำการเดินทางและหนังสือนำเที่ยวแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ ซึ่งจะเป็นในการพัฒนาศักยภาพการรองรับตลาดนักท่องเที่ยวมุสลิม เป็นการนำร่องและเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวสำหรับนักท่องเที่ยวชาวมุสลิมต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: แหล่งท่องเที่ยวที่เป็นมิตรต่อฮาลาล; สถานที่ที่เป็นมิตรกับมุสลิม;
การส่งเสริมการท่องเที่ยวมุสลิม; การสำรวจและการประเมินเส้นทาง

1. Introduction

Tourism is an important industry that has played significant roles in the social and economic development of Thailand and other countries worldwide. One of the attractive niche markets in tourism in which many countries are paying attention to promote their marketing strategies is so-called 'Halal tourism. According to the survey of Pew Research Center of the U.S. (2011), the world population of Muslims in 2010 was more than 1.6 billion, equivalent to a quarter of the world's population. In addition, it is expected that by 2030 the population of Muslim will increase to one third of the world population. Thus, this type of tourism is a fast-growing tourism market these days especially if there is efficient tourism management that meets the needs of Muslim tourists. In order words, the government and concerned businesses should place importance on service and travel experience from the beginning to the end. For example, from hotels/accommodations, travel, restaurants, recreation, and entertainment -- all activities and services should be arranged in order to impress the travelers' experience and support the behavior, interests, and daily basis of Muslims (such as Halal food, service providers' outfit, male/female separate pool, prayer rooms). However, the activities, facilities, or services must not be against Muslim religious principles.

According to the findings from Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) in 2019, among 130 FIPS countries, Thailand is currently ranked the 18th out of 48 organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries which are the most popular destinations for Muslim tourists from around the world.

However, if compared to 82 countries outside the OIC (non-OIC), Thailand is considered the second popular tourism destination after Singapore, followed by the United Kingdom, Japan, and Taiwan, respectively. These are the top 5 non-OIC countries that are attractive and friendly to Muslim travelers. The criteria used in the ranking are: accessibility, communication, facilities, service, and conducive environment for Muslim tourism. The report also states that the Muslim tourism market is growing rapidly. Therefore, the incomes from this market will be expected to be worth 6,900 trillion baht by 2020 and expected to be increased to 9,500 trillion baht within the next eight years or in 2026. (The Nation, 2018; Worrachaddejchai, D., 2019).

However, there are still some challenges in promoting Muslim tourism. Since Muslim travelers are quite different from the other type of tourists, therefore, some specific conditions and requirements such as clothing, food, accommodation, transportation, and shopping are necessities to them. Famous educators and researchers in the field of Halal tourism (Battour, M., & Ismail, M. N. 2016; Jafari & Scott, 2014), contributed perspectives on conceptual practices and aspects of halal tourism, and Muslim-traveler traits. Their studies provided insights into the halal elements and characteristics that must be met in “Sharia” or Islamic law. Muslim tourists are also concerned about the facilitation during their travels whether goods or services are wrong or against religious principles. For Muslim travelers, the must-have amenities and facilities in hotels include the Qibla sign (or the sign that indicating the direction of Mecca), the sign to the prayer room, the prayer mat, the Halal food, the restroom that has a hand-held bidet. Especially for strict religious Muslim travelers, it is necessary to stay in a Halal hotel that adheres to the rules of the Islamic religion, such as not

selling prohibited items such as pork or all kinds of alcoholic beverages. Besides, food and appliances provided for Muslims must come from Halal certified production facilities. Similarly, Islam, M., & Kähkönen, L. (2013) proposed that Muslim tourists had specific needs for receiving Halal-certified service and products which is fundamentals of the Muslim lifestyle. The hotel should also prepare a Muslim prayer calendar, cloth (or prayer pad) in the room, and direction sign indicating the west (which is the direction of Makkah), the noble Quran in Arabic - English (or Thai), Halal logo or symbol on packages of snacks in the mini-bar. Besides, the tour operator has to develop suitable tourism routes and provide facilities that can cater to the needs and lifestyles of a particular Muslim traveler, e.g., Halal hotels, restaurants, guest privacy recreation (separate recreational facilities for male and female i.e., swimming pool and spa room), mosques, Muslim sacred places, and religious specific spots near (or in) the tourist attractions. Service providers in the hotel and tourism business should arrange comfortable areas and prayer facilities to support Muslim's daily routine; nowadays, not many service providers of the tourism industry in Thailand are ready to support these requirements and lifestyles.

Concerning Muslim tourist behaviors, they mostly travel abroad with friends and family. The purposes of travel are for the family's holiday, business, and medical treatment (which takes approximately one week for a journey). In terms of expenditure, they tend to have high spending on travel. The popular Muslim tourist destinations are large cities like Bangkok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Pattaya, Ko Chang (Trat), Chiang Mai, Phuket, Phang Nga, and Krabi. Above all, the trendy types of tourists that we have to place importance on today is the modern Muslim tourists that are attractive,

motivated, knowledgeable, prospective, and technologically friendly consumer (tech-savvy). Apart from the modern Muslim travelers, another group of Muslims traveling abroad primarily for the religious - to perform an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca (or Makkah). This type of travelers usually visits Thailand before traveling to Saudi Arabia. From the behavior of all of the tourists mentioned above, these are the reasons why Thailand has a fast-growing number of Muslim tourists every year.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the Muslim tourism routes and activities that promote lifestyles and present cultural identities connecting with religions to evaluate the potentials and capacity of the Muslim tourist market expansion in Thailand.

2. Literature Reviews

As Muslim tourism is considered a niche market, there were fewer studies on this type of tourism than conventional or holistic tourism ones. The related literature reviews are:

Battour, M., Battor, and Ismail, M. (2012) studied the mediating role of Muslim tourists' satisfaction in Malaysia and showed that the positive motivation and satisfaction of the tourists were significantly related. It was also found that the satisfaction of tourists had a positive effect on loyalty to destinations. The most motivation factor attracting Muslim tourists are beautiful natural scenery or landscapes, spacious areas, clean, and places to browse for luxury and modern products.

Islam, M., & Käkkäinen, L. (2013) conducted the study entitled 'Islamic Tourism as Prosperous Phenomenon in Lapland'. The results of the study found that Muslim tourists had specific needs for receiving Halal-certified service which is deeply attached to the Muslim lifestyle. These tourists require Halal-certified service and trademark for food, separated spa room for women-only, separated swimming pools for men and women, and other amenities such as a prayer room in the hotel's guest rooms. However, there are not many studies on these topics. The study's recommendation was service providers should emphasis on increasing the potential and development of Lapland's tourism in attracting this group of tourists.

Klaewnarong, A. & Assarut, N. (2019) conducted the surveys with 319 Thai-Muslim Bangkok dwellers to examine the influence of Islamic religiosity on tourists' travel motivation, destination, satisfaction, and destination loyalty. The findings revealed that tranquility of mind, good infrastructure, diverse tourism attractions, cleanliness, and safety are the key influencing factors on tourist's travel decision. These factors also have positive effects on tourists' satisfaction and destination loyalty. This is in accordance with Thaothampitak, W. & Weeralit, N. (2008) whose study was 'Tourism Motivation and Satisfaction: The case study of Trang Province, Thailand'. The results found that a peaceful and restful atmosphere, security and safety, variety of outstanding scenery and attractions are the main factors affecting for tourists to revisit Trang province. Furthermore, Khamsamran, M. & Vanichkul, N. (2016) investigated factors influencing travel decision-making of Muslim tourists and revealed that marketing-mix influences travel decisions at a high level (\bar{X} = 3.84, S.D. = 0.97). In terms of Muslims' behavior, they prefers to visit to natural attractions (e.g., the sea,

waterfall, mountain, and island.) historical/archaeological sites, cultural/traditional attractions, recreational and educational spots, respectively. Sookhom, A., Krivart, K., and Tavarom, A. (2020) proposed in the study that Phuket province is rich in cultural, natural, recreational tourist destinations, it is one of the top 4 best destinations in terms of potential and readiness to support Halal tourism in Thailand. There are not only large Halal-certified hotels but also halal-friendly small-and-medium-sized hotels all over islands around Phuket.

The previous study indicated relations among tourists' personal factors, perceptions on service, revisit intention, and word-of mouth. Sangduang, T. & Rongchoung, J. (2017) examined that there were positive relationship among these factors: Muslims' tourist behaviors, perception on Halal-tourism-service level, revisit intention, and word-of mouth. Therefore, positive tourists' perception of Halal-friendly service management of attractions, accommodations, and restaurants could be one of the pull factors influencing tourists' revisiting and word-of-mouth marketing communication.

3. Methods

The research methodology is the participatory action research (PAR) which is divided into four phases as follows:

Phase 1: In this phase, the research team studied concepts and theories from secondary sources related to Muslim tourism including tourism trends and behaviors of Muslim travelers in four regions of Thailand, i.e.

Central, North, Northeast, and South, and 2) analyzed the potentials of each region by using SWOT analysis to identify weaknesses, strengths, threats, and opportunities for Muslim tourism development.

Phase 2: In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted in this phase. Firstly, the in-depth interviews were conducted to explore respondents' perspectives on current-situation analysis as well as the impacts on positive and negative effects toward Halal tourism in Thailand. There were 10 religious leaders in the community, experts, and executives in both public and private sectors; they are all related to Muslim tourism development. Secondly, four focus group discussions in four regions (i.e. Central, North, South, and Northeast) were organized. There were fifty people in each meeting. In total, there were 200 participants in the four regional group meetings. All participants in the focus group participate in studying and planning travel routes as well as activities for Muslim travelers. The travel routes are created through Muslim travelers' interests, behaviors, and the way of life showing the identities of Muslims in various perspectives (which can be linked to other religions, but not conflict or contrary to practices of other particular religions). Besides, the creation of these travel routes and tourism activities mainly focused on Halal tourism -- the target routes chosen for Muslim tourism must be in the province areas linked to the target provinces that already exist in other regions. Moreover, the target areas require to support the basic elements and facilities for Muslim travelers, i.e. popular or remarkable tourist attractions, hotels and accommodations, Halal restaurants, transportations, and other related tourism information.

Phase 3: This phase concentrated on selecting, adjusting, and developing the routes to be more appropriate and potential for attracting

Muslim travelers and promoting Halal tourism. The results from phase 2 were used as significant data for the development to obtain an ultimate route out of 4 tourism activity routes for Muslim travelers, with conditions according to the readiness of facilities for Muslim tourists. At least 35 representatives from government and private sectors related to tourism development went to the selected areas to explore and conduct a 2-day, 1-night Muslim travel route as well as to examine its potential for Halal tourism.

Phase 4: Organized a meeting to promote the Muslim tourism routes where Muslim tourism activities were organized for one day. The research team also invited representatives from various departments of the Royal Thai government, public and private sectors, and ready to prepare information for the public dissemination meeting for the Muslim tourists by producing the followings:

- 1) The video clip that contains the content of tourism promotion of Muslim groups, the length of the video clip is in between 5-10 minutes, was transferred to the 32 GB capacity flash drive in both Thai and English.
- 2) The book of the travel routes of Muslim groups that contain information derived from the group discussions and the routes survey. It was translated into both Thai and English, and it was created in the form of booklet and E-book.

4. Results

Based on the secondary sources as well as in-depth interview, the investigation of the top Muslim travel routes and activities that promote lifestyles and cultural identities are as follows:

The best routes for Muslim tourism in Thailand is so-called “Andaman Way (of Life)” as the top travel routes connecting Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket province, to promote Thailand as a non-Muslim but Halal-friendly destination. The routes connect the way of life of the Muslim communities, local cultural identities, and various patterns of tourism management such as health tourism, sports tourism, and others facilities. There are three days, two nights Muslim travel routes, including tourist attractions in Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket (See picture 1). The travel routes are so outstanding and interesting that can become the best of Muslim travel routes in Thailand since the tourists will be able to gain fabulous experience to learn and expose to the way of life of people in these areas. For example, Muslim community in Yao Yai Island area, with tourist management providing the various activities to the tourist to learn about extracting the Mardyard Oil and the herbal oil for treating fresh wounds, burns, and scalds. Also, in Yao Yai Island, there is a tourist promotion in water sports for tourists in line with Strategy 1 and the recommended actions from of Thailand’s tourism strategy and development roadmap towards 2021. (Office of Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017). The first strategy focuses on the development of goods, services, facilities, and creating a balance for Thai tourism through marketing); the recommended

actions are to promote and develop awareness as well as interest in sports and exercise at the local level to become more widespread and comprehensive. This refers to canoeing to see abundant mangrove forests, trekking on the nature study path, and rock climbing, etc. Afterwards, visit the religious place of worship, Khlong Haeng Mosque, and then dine at Pak Nam Seafood Restaurant where is the Muslim restaurant serving Thai food, seafood, and Halal food, beverage with atmosphere beside the Krabi estuary. Later, travel to the Emerald Pond, the popular tourist attraction in Krabi Province, and considered as one unseen places in Thailand. The emerald pond is the beautiful natural pond whose characteristic is limestone containing clear emerald green water. Afterwards, visit Wareerak Hot Spring Retreat where is the health resort that has cool and pleasant atmosphere located at Tom riverside. There is a full-service spa for tourists. This is in line with the national development strategy for being a medical hub 2017-2026 (B.E 2560-2569) that performs the activities in medical and wellness tourism. Next, have dinner at Kanabnam View Seafood, and stay the night at Aonang Princeville Villa Resort and Spa. In the morning, travel to Ban Na Tin, a small community where most people are Muslim. They have simple lifestyle, and the community is unique remarkably in teaching the most traditional Islam in the area. There is an outstanding local tradition and simple lifestyle based on the sufficiency economy philosophy. This is line with the strategy 2 of the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 4th Edition (2017-2021) on the development of personnel and network partners in all sectors in the tourism industry. Next, have lunch at Rabeab Kitchen Inter Buffet Halal Food where there is Halal food ready to serve. Next, travel to Gee-Or Shop, the center of souvenirs from Krabi Province. There are various products such as Tao-Sor sweet,

shrimp chili paste, squid sheets, Hokkien rice vermicelli, and Halal food. Next, depart to Krabi International Airport for travelling back.



Figure 1. The “Andaman way of life” routes are the best Muslim travel routes connecting Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket province, to promote Thailand as a non-Muslim but Halal-friendly destination

This study utilized the framework in creating an evaluation form to select the top Muslim tourism routes by considering, analyzing, and applying the rules to be suitable with the operational context of the project. The tourist experts improved and combined the main topics together again so that it became the criteria for selecting the top Muslim travel routes to be able to use as an instrument in assessing and selecting the top Muslim travel routes appropriately and truly effective. It can be divided into 5 criteria as follows:

1. Tourist attractions: The target tourism route area must cover various tourist attractions with diversity, and must be friendly to Muslims.

2. Accommodations: The target tourism route area must provide tourist services for Muslim tourists, with facilities that are not contrary to Islamic principles, provide Halal food and have religious ritual rooms.

3. Halal restaurants: The target tourism route area must have a halal restaurant with a clear Halal sign, including a variety of Halal food menu. The food must be prepared according to Halal principles, and the raw materials used for cooking must not be contrary to the principles of Halal production.

4. Convenience in Transport: The target tourism route area must have convenient routes to access various tourist destinations. The public transportation systems must be satisfied users' experience to travel to diverse tourist attractions and public relation signs must be provided for tourists to easily access tourist attraction routes.

5. Other tourism information: The target tourism route area must have public relations for tourism in various areas along the tourism routes. There must be a tourist service center to assist along the route.

According to the 5 criteria above, the project of tourism promotion of Muslim groups analyzed and selected the top Muslim travel routes, and the third route in the southern area, the top Halal-friendly travel routes in Thailand named "Andaman Way (of Life)", was selected. This route presents the tourism that connects 3 provinces; Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket.

Exploring and testing of Muslim travel routes is an important step of the study, as it is about bringing representatives; executives, experts, scholars, religious leaders, and the private sectors on Muslim travel, involved in the management of Muslim tourism in the area and other representatives

from the government to conduct the study and assess the potential of the mentioned tourist destinations that was selected as the top route for Muslim group tourism activities. The assessment results in various area revealed as follows:

1. Potential assessment results in tourist attractions: According to the potential assessment of the related government and private representatives that brought them to find the average of the potentiality in order to know the level of the potentiality of the tourist attractions along the routes of Muslim tourism in the area of tourist attractions, it found that the potentiality was at a high level with an average of 4.03. As for suggestions on tourist attraction management, it found that government agencies and the private sectors must pay attention to the facilities, and should not be contrary to Islamic principles which is beneficial to Muslim tourists. However, it must not excessively emphasize on developing facilities and the image of the Halal tourist. It should be done in the middle level so that it can provide the service and be the benefit to other tourist groups.

2. Potential assessment results in accommodations/hotels: For the potentiality of tourist attraction in the travel routes of Muslim group in the area of accommodations and hotels, it found that the potentiality was at a high level with an average of 4.25. As for the suggestions in the area of hotels and accommodations, it found that there are very few hotels and accommodations where can provide the full service to Muslim group. Mostly, the business operators will focus on the management that is able to support Muslim group, but it is not a full service, or it is the hotel that is friendly to Muslim group. Therefore, what should be developed is cleaning and providing the signage that includes the Arabic language for the accommodations and

hotels. This is the important issue to which the business operators should be attentive.

3 . Potential assessment results in Halal restaurants: For the potentiality of tourist attraction in the travel routes of Muslim group in the area of Halal restaurant, it found that the potentiality was at a high level with an average of 4.25. As For the suggestions in the area of Halal restaurant, it found that the business operators of Halal restaurant must request for Halal food standard certificate and show a clear Halal sign to the tourists in order to providing them accountability and confidence. However, the agencies who are responsible for licensing must track and monitor the business operators of the restaurant for the standard of the service based on the Halal standard continuously. If the business operators of the restaurant fail to control the service standard, there must be the consideration to deprive the certificate. Maintaining cleanliness of Halal restaurants and the dress code of the service staff is also an important issue to which business operators must pay attention.

4 . Potential assessment results in transport convenience: For the potentiality of tourist attraction in the travel routes of Muslim group in the area of transportation, it found that the potentiality was at a high level with an average of 4.10. For the suggestions in the area of transportation, it found that there should be the development of the fundamental structure of the transportation in the provinces to be beneficial to tourists when they travel, such as developing rest stops, where provide activities to support tourists, that connect various tourist destinations in order to connect to other provinces nearby. Moreover, there should be the improvement of landscape along the tourism routes within the provinces which reflects the identity of tourist

attractions, including the development and creation of publicity signs for travel information both in Thai and English language and Arabic language, as well as various digital signage media that possibly help attract the attention of tourists. This will facilitate the travel to more tourist destinations, spread periodically, and cover the main/secondary transportation routes within the province.

5 . Potential assessment result in tourist information: For the potentiality of tourist attraction in the travel routes of Muslim group in the area of tourist information, it found that the potentiality was at a high level with an average 3.98. For the suggestions in the area of tourist information, it found that the potentiality should be increased in providing security and tourist information to tourists, such as having a tourist service center, organizing staff for giving advice, taking care of tourists at various points, and developing young guides in tourist spots to train young people in presenting their local tourist attractions.

5. Conclusion

This study aims to promote tourism Muslim tourism effectively. The research focuses on the development of information about the facilities in major tourist attractions for Muslim tourists; and the creation of tourism routes to connect the various tourist attractions with information available to support the needs of tourists. The Muslim tourism routes will be further promoted and used in public relations in Thailand and Muslim countries. Moreover, this

study includes the creation and evaluation of new tourism routes that are adjunct from Muslim's favorite tourist destinations traditionally, which will help increase positive multiplier effects in Thailand's tourism industry. The positive impact can help economic growth, increase in jobs, and higher quality of life as well as health and well-being for locals and communities nearby, resulting in Economic increase sustainability.

The best travel routes named "Andaman Way (of Life)". These unique Halal friendly travel routes connected to three provinces (Krabi, Phang Nga, and Phuket) with the ways of life of the Muslim community. The characteristics of the tourist attractions that were organized in these routes have been ranked based on the criteria scores of the potential assessment in various areas. They were analyzed and evaluated by the experts who are expertise in various areas regarding tourism management of Muslim groups. From the selected tourist attractions in each province, there are different tourist attraction management in various areas to make the attraction, such as cultural tourist attractions, natural attractions, and local community tourist attractions.

After collecting data from a number of participants with insight knowledge of Halal-friendly tourism and Muslim attributes, the in-depth interview results were summarized and led to the stage of assessment and evaluation of the potential and readiness to support the Muslim tourists in Thailand. This stage also includes integrating the Halal-friendly tourism and supporting the growth of the tourism of Muslim travelers as follows:

1. The importance of tourism promotion of Muslim groups: Muslim ways of tourism (Halal Tourism) is considered the new topic, which is related to the tourism management in Thailand that will carry the policy in tourism

promotion to be able to meet the needs of Muslims. This is because there are a lot of tourists in this group, who have economic potential, and Halal tourism is growing and dramatically interesting as they are the top-ranking group who spend money the most in foreign tourism in the world. Thailand is the country that has ability in tourism industry, especially in airlines which are acceptable in the area of being the best in providing food that meets the needs of Muslim tourists even though Thailand is not a Muslim country. Moreover, the management of the Suvarnabhumi Airport has one of the friendliest Muslim atmosphere in the world. In addition, the government has adjusted the strategy of operating the spa and hotel business in a halal manner to support the tourism of Muslim groups according to the correct Islamic framework.

2. Factors promoting Muslim tourism: Deciding to choose Thailand as the tourist destination by Muslim tourists is specific and they have more special preferences than other groups. The main factors that affect the decision in traveling to Thailand are as follows:

Halal food: Halal food industry is one of the main important factors in Muslim consumer market. The growth of Halal food industry creates the trend of being healthy and more competition in well-known Halal product brands. Additionally, some brands have created sub-brands that serve Muslims with Halal certified food. These popular Halal certified foods will create the accessibility to various Halal foods across the world, and make the tourism of Muslim easier. Food, aside from being intended for consumption, is also a communication mark that promotes understanding of differences between cultures and people. It raises awareness of Halal food

and popular local food, and also reflects the diversity of the Muslim consumer market.

Accommodations and hotels: This is considered the important thing for supporting the Muslim tourist market. The accommodations and hotels need to consider the right Islamic principles, such as signs telling the direction for praying, pray rooms, a time table for praying, and the obvious separated Halal restaurant to create the confidence for them. Additionally, it can include other activities in the hotel, such as having no karaoke room in Halal restaurant, having separated pool or dividing time period for male and female tourists completely, etc. These things are the details needed to be considered at the accommodations and hotels for providing the service to the tourist groups as mentioned. Moreover, the cleanliness and safety should be emphasized due to the fact that cleanliness is related to religious practices. The area where Muslim tourists perform practice of praying must be clean. The dirt should not be left on the floor as the gesture to worship of the Allah's kindness will touch with the ground. (Ansorissunnah Royal Mosque, 1929)

The availability of places and tourist attractions: This factor is considered as the main factor in attracting the Muslim tourists' attention, such as the convenience of accessing to tourist attractions, the cleanliness of tourist attractions, the safety care for tourists, rules and regulations that create a clear understanding for tourists, places for praying in various points within the tourist attractions, etc. According to Klaewnarong, A. & Assarut, N. (2019), infrastructure, diverse tourist destinations, cleanliness, and safety are the factors affecting tourists' motivation and satisfaction. These crucial

factors also need to be considered because they can increase tourists' motivation to travel to that tourism spot. In other words,

3. Tourism management guidelines for Muslim travelers: According to the in-depth interview from related people in tourism promotion of Muslim groups, the opinions are as follows:

There should be collaboration of government and private sectors, including the related communities in order to sustainably proceed to manage the tourism of Muslim groups from overseas, and be in line with the real local condition as much as possible so that it can create the effectiveness in tourism promotion precisely.

There should be an ongoing public relations policy and true knowledge and understanding in tourism promotion of Muslim groups in order to create the impetus for tourism in Thailand that is sustainable and have more continuation than the past.

There should be marketing promotion to encourage tourists to know the travel route information that is friendly to Muslim groups by preparing a video to promote tourism routes in each region.

6. Recommendations for Muslim Tourism Development

Policy Recommendations:

It should encourage the collaboration from government sectors, private sectors, and tourism associations in various fields which are related to the tourist management of Muslim groups in the local areas so that there

will be a stronger guideline. Moreover, developing and creating the travel routes for Muslim groups must consider various factors related to the tourism that is not contrary to the religion, and be in line with the behaviors of Muslim tourists, such as Halal food, Halal restaurant, places for praying, mosques, hotels, accommodations, and facilities in tourist attractions. According to the mentioned factors, government sectors, private sectors, and business operators must have the preparation and standard in examining the service to be accurate based on the Islamic principles so that it can enhance the service and facilitate the tourists. Moreover, it is the creation of the travel routes that is interesting and impressive towards the tourists.

A clear master plan for tourism development for Muslim travelers should be developed by a person responsible for the project in responds to the tourism strategy of the group that covers various related issues. The plan also can be in conjunction with the provincial development plan that has the potential to support Muslim tourists.

Knowledge and understanding in tourism management of Muslim groups of business operators should be developed, such as hotels, accommodations, restaurants, tourist attractions within the area, and etc. It also includes the tourism personnel so that they will have the understanding that is in line with the behaviors of Muslim tourist as much as possible.

There should be a measurement and evaluation towards the project that responds to the tourism of Muslim groups in various areas in economic, social, and environment for being a guideline in improving the implementation of the mentioned project in the future for the most effective result.

Recommendations from implementation:

The implementation during that time cannot display the holistic image of all tourists as that time was a low season of tourism in the southern provinces. Therefore, the additional details of the decision-making factors in selecting the tourist attractions of the mentioned tourist groups cannot be analyzed as much.

The development of Muslim tourism personnel should be promoted for knowledge and understanding in tourism management of the mentioned form continuously by the experts in religious principles and tourism business management so that the most perfect combination and possibilities in business management can be generated.

The agencies which are responsible for the standard of Halal products and services need to be involved in every step of the mentioned process to build confidence among Muslim tourists correctly, and to be in accordance with religious principles effectively.

7. Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Sports. It was also supported by the Faculty of Management Sciences, Kasetsart University, Sriracha Campus.

References

- Battour, M., Battor, and Ismail, M. (2012). The Mediating Role if Tourist Satisfaction: A Study of Muslim Tourists in Malaysia. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 29(3), 279-297.
- Battour, M., & Ismail, M. N. (2016). Halal Tourism: Concepts, Practices, Challenges and Future. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 19, 150-154.
- Global Muslim Travel Index. (2019). *Top 10 Non-OIC Destinations*. Retrieved June 18, 2019, from <https://www.crescentrating.com/reports/global-muslim-travel-index-2019.html>
- Group of Bangkok Noi Mosque (Ansorissunnah Royal Mosque). (1929). *Islamic Prayer Methods*. Vol. 11. Al-Islah Bngkok Noi association. (in Thai).
- Islam, M., & Kähkönen, L. (2013). *Islamic Tourism as Prosperous Phenomenon in Lapland (Master's thesis)*. Lapland University of Applied Sciences.
- Jafari, J., & Scott, N. (2014). Muslim World and its Tourisms. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 44, 1-19.
- Khamsamran, M. & Vanichkul, N. (2016). Factors Influencing Travel Decision-Making of Muslims in Bangkok area. *Al-Hikmah Journal*, 6(12). 80-91, (In Thai)
- Klaewnarong, A. & Assarut, N. (2019). Influence of Islamic religiosity on travel Motivation, Destination, Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty. *Chulalongkorn Business Review* 41(4), 54-86. (in Thai).

- Office of Permanent Secretary Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2017). *The Second Thailand National Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021)*. (4th Edition). Roland Berger. Bangkok. Thailand
- Sangduang, T. & Rongchoung, J. (2017). Muslim Tourist's Perception on Level of Halal Tourism Service Management in Krabi and Phuket Province. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 13(1), 135-168. (in Thai)
- Sookhom, A., Krivart, K., and Tavarom, A. (2020). Potential and Readiness to Support the Halal Tourism of Main Travel Province in Thailand. *NRRU Community Research Journal*, 14(2), 233-244. (in Thai).
- Thaothampitak, W., & Weerakit, N. (2008). Tourist Motivation and Satisfaction: The Case Study of Trang Province, Thailand. The Nation. (2018). *Thailand among most 'Muslim-friendly'*. Retrieved April 24, 2019, from <https://www.nationthailand.com/noname/30344902>
- Pew Research Center. (2011). *The future of the global Muslim population: Projections for 2010-2030*. Retrieved March 6, 2020, from <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2011/01/FutureGlobalMuslimPopulation-WebPDF-Feb10.pdf>
- Worrachaddejchai, D. (2019). *Thailand Ready to tap busy Muslim Travel Market*. Retrieved June 24, 2019, from <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1696452/thailand-ready-to-tap-busy-muslim-travel-market#:~:text=The%20GMTI%202019%20shows%20that,130%20destinations%20for%20Muslims%20worldwide.>

Received: November 23, 2020

Revised: April 8, 2021

Accepted: May 20, 2021