

## Research on Halal Tourism in Indonesian Context: What Has Literature Told Us?

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### Abstract

*As an emerging field of research, halal tourism has been increasingly grabbing researchers' attention in the academic realm. Nonetheless, due to its novel nature, scientific inquiry on this topic in Indonesian context seems to hither to be more theoretical rather than empirical. By exploring insights from scientific publications on journals and proceedings dated from the last decade, we came up with a suggestion of calling for epitomes of more empirical evidence to develop body of knowledge on the topic. Current state of the art of research on halal tourism in Indonesia still mostly circulates around the concept of halal tourism which is not clear cut though some researchers attempted to investigate people's perceptions on the concept and practices through surveys and group discussions. This paper suggests more research devoted to empirical findings which seek for evidence on the elements of halal tourism that entail the people involved (guests and hosts), the destinations, and the travel management. All these elements are also linked to the need of investigating local and national policies pertinent to the topic.*

**Keywords:** *research, halal tourism, empirical, theoretical.*

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### INTRODUCTION

The emerging halal tourism concept and practices have attracted multitude stakeholders and has brought world's attention and recognition. Although relatively novel, the concept of halal tourism has been increasingly recognized by global hospitality enterprise and academic literature (Hall, Razak, & Prayag, 2020). The term halal itself is rooted from Islamic jurisprudence of halal and haram. Halal is referred to what is permissible to Muslims yet is not limited to food. The concept of halal tourism often interchangeably called sharia tourism is another form of hospitality which accommodates tourists' spirituality and/or religiosity needs in that any available goods and services are made to comply with the halal rules. Yan, Zahari, Ismail, and Zain (2017) further emphasizes the notion of halal tourism as a form of tourism which meets Islamic teachings and ethical codes (Sharia Compliance). This might include the behaviour of both the tourists and the hosts, the dress codes, the separation between male and female tourists, halal diets, and Islamic entertainment. The concept might also ground from Muslim tourists who feel at discomfort of alcoholic circumstance, nightclub exposing non-Islamic dress codes and behaviour. Nonetheless, it should be noted that distinction should be made between spiritual/religious tourism and halal tourism since spiritual tourism is intended for religious rituals/worship or for learning about Islam yet halal tourism may cover broader audiences and

destinations as not only does it attract Muslim travellers, but also the non-Muslim ones if packaged as a cultural heritage tour for non-Muslim (Winarti, 2017). In other words, halal tourism as the name implies, adapts the values of Islam, instead of the rituals or Islamic practices and can be applied to all types of destinations. This concept has been put into practices through halal certified restaurants, Islamic prayer facilities, Sharia Compliance Hotel (SCH), Muslim-friendly tourism environment, and many other promotions such as flyers, websites. The idea of halal tourism might also stem from the concept of hospitality which is sociocultural. By sociocultural we mean when hospitality is provided and received, respect should be apparent between hosts and the guests (Hall, Razak, & Prayag, 2020). Thus, there is a need of greater understanding on customers' religious requirement which in turn becomes parts of cultural understanding. Hall, Razak, & Prayag (2020) suggest that religious knowledge helps structure and inform several features of hospitality such as protection, reciprocity, and duties. With such massive number of Muslim populations across the globe, the need to expand halal tourism concept into broader scope of practices is now highly demanding. With the worth of \$140 billion expenditure, Muslim travel's market in 2013 contributes 13 % of the global travel market (Chandra, 2014). In 2018, the trend is rapidly growing and the global Muslim travellers contribute 23 % of the total global travellers (Khoiriati, Suharko, Krisnajaya, and Dinarto, 2018). In contrast, Awalia (2017) challenges the idea of halal tourism by asserting its absurd meaning if viewed from linguistic viewpoint. For her, the meaning of halal tourism might differ among individuals and if seen from Foucauldian post-modern theory, the term might be used as commodification to firm political stands of the local government under which the halal tourism is promoted. The term also appears to be quite contentious if seen from religious authorities and the study of tourism (Jaelani, 2016). The term might be released to public to as a jargon to gain more visitors and as a means of capitalism. Awalia (2017) also criticizes how the concept of halal tourism might stir conflicts among Lombok's racially and religiously heterogenous communities. Nonetheless, as exposed in the literature, halal tourism is not a new term and is promoted even in Muslim-minority countries such as Singapore, New Zealand, Thailand, and Philippines.

In the context of Indonesia, the growing attention to the body of knowledge on halal tourism has brought about its mark on education and hospitality services. In terms of education, a number of higher institutions are offering major in hospitality with a specialty in halal tourism. This is also in line with sociocultural background of Indonesians which are mostly Muslims. In addition, for international recognition, Indonesia won most of the awards (12 out of 16) on world halal tourism awards hosted in 2016 in Abu Dhabi. Since April to June 2014, rapidly growing number of visitors from middle east to Indonesia reached double digits (Chandra, 2014). Along with Turkey and Malaysia, Indonesia has been the leading country of halal tourism (Nursanti, 2013). Unfortunately, research on halal tourism in Indonesian context has been limited due to its novel nature and few numbers of experts in the aforementioned topic. Therefore, this paper aims to cast more light on the extent to which current state of the art on the research on halal tourism particularly in Indonesian context has expanded. This paper further attempts to synthesize the available aforementioned research undertaken within a

decade retrieved from journal articles and conference proceedings and draw conclusions on its prospects and future research directions.

## **RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESEARCH ON HALAL TOURISM IN INDONESIA**

Research on halal tourism in Indonesian context is either literary or empirical. Literary study on halal tourism mostly focuses on document data retrieved from the internet and secondary sources, while its empirical counterpart was undertaken by data garnered through surveys and group discussions.

### **RESEARCH ON LOCAL DESTINATION AREAS**

Research on local setting on the concept and practices on halal tourism has been carried out particularly in the local regions whose image is the centre of Islamic heritage such as Cirebon, Jakarta, and Lombok. A study by Jaelani (2016), for instance, accounts for the history of Islamic tourism in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia seen from economic perspective. His research investigates qualitative data garnered through interviews to several informants and group discussions. In the research, he identifies a number of tourist destinations in Cirebon which may promote Islamic vibe such as *keraton* (palaces), *makam* (tombs), and mosques. He also found that there was a decrease of foreign visitor numbers probably triggered by anti-alcoholic policies therefore asserts the need of strategic planning as well as continuous implementation and evaluation. This study seems to relate to halal tourism in some ways yet tend to focus on spiritual tourism. Another investigation was undertaken by Khoiriati, Suharko, Krisnajaya, and Dinarto (2018) whose aim was to discuss the debate on halal tourism concept as practiced in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. They see that halal tourism in Lombok tends to be about branding rather than values. Halal tourism is only used as label, jargon, or even cosmetics to attract more Muslim visitors and has not yet been devised to foster Islamic values. Perhaps, the scepticism showed in the literature is anchored from this phenomenon. Therefore, gearing halal tourism towards value-based tourism will require a comprehensive and applicable policies from at least local government. Khoiriati, et al (2018) suggest that halal tourism in Lombok has not been implemented seriously through the development of institutions, infrastructures and supporting facilities. In their discussion, Indonesia was also highlighted to have mediocre position in the market of halal tourism possibly due to low foreign language proficiency which implies low human resources. Furthermore, Suherlan's (2015) attempt for empirical research on halal tourism is of considerable significance. He carried out an investigation on how people in Jakarta perceive Islamic tourism. With 300 respondents he surveyed on the interest and performance of halal tourism in Jakarta, he concluded that on one part, some of the services indicated high interest yet low performance such as dining service. On the other hand, several variables boast an excellent level of perceptions. These entail the arrival of Muslim traveller, family-friendly destination, safe environment, ease of communication, and the like.

## RESEARCH ON NATIONAL TOURISM

At national area of research, the studies were focused on the explorations on the prospects and practices of halal tourism in Indonesia, its relationship with the local people and cultures of the tourist destination areas, and the relationships between halal tourism and elements of tourism marketing. The first study was by Widagdjo (2015), whose focus was on the analysis of halal tourism in Indonesian hospitality industry. He suggests that tourists from Middle East are of big prospects for Indonesian halal tourism as they visit Indonesia mostly with their families. In addition, the relationships and cooperation among local travel agents in Indonesia should also be improved and in the meantime Tourism Representative Office needs activating to provide and promote products and services of halal tourism. Another study by Jaelani (2017), compared the information on the development of halal tourism retrieved from printed and non-printed information as well as documentary data from government with the Islamic practices. He concluded that halal tourism is inseparable from religious practices of Indonesians thus contribute to the development of the community's economy. The aim of halal tourism in Indonesia is not simply to appeal foreign visitors but also to accommodate local tourists' needs who are mostly Muslims (Jaelani, 2017). What can be reflected from this inquiry is that the practices of halal tourism should take into account local cultures as religiosity goes hand-on-hand with them. In other words, research on halal tourism should consider the sociocultural background of people surrounding the tourists' destinations. In addition, another study by Ladiqi, Wardhani, Wekke, & Rahim (2018), aimed to examine the impact of globalization on the expansion of halal tourism in Indonesia. They suggest that globalization impact on halal tourism are twofold; it brings both opportunities and challenges. The opportunities meant are the number of Muslim populations in Indonesia, the supporting factors such as the availability of halal food. Besides, as a lucrative business, halal tourism might expand beyond national boundaries in the form of trans nationalization and sharia cosmopolitan that promotes inclusiveness or covers both Muslim and non-Muslim stakeholders. On the other hand, challenges come out when the concept is related to the global trend of ICT incorporation as well as the availability of infrastructure as well as halal tourism management. Another empirical research study was by Wardi, Abror, and Trinanda (2018) whose study was aimed to investigate the relationship among the attributes of halal tourism, tourists' satisfaction, and words of mouth (WoM). Using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) analysis, they examine the relationships among several variables such as Islamic facilities, halalness, general Islamic morality, and alcohol and gambling-free environment on tourists' satisfaction and Words of Mouth (WoM). WoM in this respect refers to oral recommendation communicated by tourists who experience halal tourism. Their findings showed significant relationship among variables except for the relationship between halalness and WoM. Although no significant relationship was identified between the two, it can be said that the relationship was indirect as it is mediated by tourists' satisfaction.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Overall, publications whose attention is on halal tourism particularly in Indonesian contexts seem to be an emerging field of research marked with relatively low amount of research undertaken to explore under the theme. Upon the research above, there seems to be less empirical research dedicated to halal tourism while most of the literature shows theoretical or at least non-empirical data-based accounts. The need to advance the study on halal tourism to the next level should therefore be carried out to fill the missing gaps. We might start to think of the topic under research beforehand. Tourism itself is a notion mostly emphasizing on several elements entailing people (Tourists and the hosts), the travelling, and the destinations. We also call for the expansion of research into more tourism spots including Shariah compliance hotels and other locations that promote halal tourism. Besides, research should also take into account how these elements form a nexus and is managed under policies pertinent to government or institutions. Take for example, research on how the attributes of halal tourism are implemented in particular tourism locus, how the host and guest perceive the term halal tourism itself, or perhaps an ethnographic approach to researching halal tourism as a social phenomenon that represents post-positivism paradigm. Yet, we also need to address and challenge the issue of halal tourism as branding or values by providing more empirical data from the field and the most appropriate approach to this might be case study research. The main feature of halal tourism is activities which are recreational and fosters Islamic values (Asih, 2015). Additionally, since research on halal tourism is limited in terms of amount, it is preferable for researchers to undertake a bottom-up approach to research to generate theory (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017) which later can be tested through a cycle of Inductive-deductive approach. In other words, halal tourism offers a vast space for empirical research on the field, yet more primary data are needed for the control and reliability.

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