

Research Paper

Halal Food in Muslim Minority Tourism Destinations: Perspective of Toraja, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Despite growing scholarly interest in halal tourism, there is still a gap on the study on the availability of halal food in areas where Muslims are not the dominant demographic. This has become an unresolved problem in the Indonesian tourism sector. Therefore, this current research examined the availability of halal food and the potential for developing halal cuisine in Tana Toraja, Indonesia. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation from four informants consisting of the Tourism officers, the Indonesian Ulema Council, food sellers, and visitors. The data were analyzed through a process of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that Toraja, as a Muslim minority region, has limited access to halal food. Furthermore, the research identified a significant opportunity and potential for halal cuisine development through collaboration among stakeholders. Consequently, it is imperative that the government and tourism managers prioritize the availability of halal food in Tana Toraja.

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Introduction

The topic of halal tourism is a compelling issue that continues to grow and develop among Muslim visitors (Biancone et al., 2019). According to Belopilskaya et al. (2020), there are approximately 156 million Muslim visitors from diverse nations with a business value of US\$ 220 billion in 2020. Similarly, halal tourism is progressing in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Brunei, Malaysia (Mastercard-Crescent Rating,

2018). The satisfaction of Muslim visitors during their travels is largely determined by halal food (Hall, 2003). Halal food in the concept of halal tourism is measured by cleanliness and safety (Ambali & Bakar 2014), and its availability determines the market share of the halal tourism industry (Battour et al., 2011). Despite its importance, the availability of halal food is often reported as a critical issue by Muslim visitors, particularly in non-Muslim countries (Bon & Hussain, 2010).

Despite Indonesia being a predominantly Muslim country, certain tourism destinations such as Tana Toraja are not considered halal-friendly. Tana Toraja Regency has great potential for tourism development in Indonesia, contributing significantly to the social and economic progress of the local community. Research conducted by Wijhah et al. (2023); Kristianti and Bala (2019); Pudissing (2018) indicate that the tourism sector can increase Toraja's Local Own-Source Revenue (PAD). However, the satisfaction and loyalty of Muslim visitors remain a critical issue for tourism managers in Tana Toraja Regency. Visitors to Tana Toraja Regency often encounter problems such as safety, quality of halal food, and limited availability of worship facilities (Putra et al., 2021).

In the context of Toraja tourism, it was found that there are still many restaurants or food stalls that do not guarantee halal quality. The research conducted by Putra (2021) discovered that the food stalls in Pong Torra do not have halal certification from LPPOM MUI. Additionally, Ibrahim and Damayanti (2021) found that visitors face challenges in locating halal products and food in Toraja. Previous studies have demonstrated that the availability of halal food and other halal products in Toraja is very limited due to its Muslim minority status.

Numerous past researchers have conducted investigations into the halal tourism industry. A study conducted by Han et al. (2019) identify the essential aspects that should be taken into account in halal tourism, such as the social atmosphere, local inhabitants, halal sustenance and beverages, and halal amenities. Furthermore, the study is supported by the findings of Jia and Chaozhi (2020) that halal food, access to water, and prayer facilities are important factors for Muslim visitors. Similarly, Al-Ansi and Han (2019) show that halal-friendly destination performances determine the attitude of Muslim visitors in making return visits. Additionally, Jeaheng et al. (2019) indicate that Muslim visitors require halal services, facilities, food and drink, and equal customer service. Correspondingly, Rahman et al. (2020) state that halal products and services affect visitor satisfaction.

Suhartanto et al. (2021) elucidate that visitor loyalty hinges on halal experience, experience quality, perceived value, and satisfaction. Abror et al. (2019) contend that visitor satisfaction is influenced by halal tourism and customer involvement. This study explores halal tourism from multiple angles, including halal food, visitor satisfaction, and behavior patterns of Muslim travelers. Previous investigations have predominantly focused on satisfaction, loyalty, and the impact of halal tourism. However, there is a dearth of research that specifically examines halal food in the tourism industry in Muslim minority regions.

Previous studies have primarily adopted a quantitative approach to investigate the factors influencing the advancement of halal tourism, with a focus on satisfaction, loyalty, and related aspects. Nonetheless, research on the development of halal cuisine in the tourism industry remains scarce. Consequently, this study introduces a novel perspective by highlighting the aspects of halal cuisine development specifically in Muslim minority

regions, using a qualitative approach that involves collaborating with local governments, traditional leaders, and religious authorities. Previous studies have empirically shown important aspects that must be considered in halal tourism, such as the social environment, halal food and beverages, halal facilities, worship facilities, halal-friendly environments, and customer equality, to create visitor satisfaction and loyalty to the destination (Rahman et al., 2020; Suhartanto et al., 2021). Therefore, this study applies the previous findings to the context of halal cuisine development specifically and proposes that the growth of halal food tourism can cater to the requirements of Muslim travelers and foster repeat visits.

Despite the growing interest in halal tourism, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the development of halal cuisine in non-Muslim majority regions. In general, research on halal tourism is generally carried out in Muslim-majority areas (Dumman, 2011; Henderson, 2016; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010; Zailani, 2011) and is exclusively focused on the Islamic perspectives of tourism (El-Gohary, 2016). Based on the identification of existing research gaps, this research examined the development of halal cuisine in Toraja. The rationale for selecting Toraja as the research site is based on two factors. Firstly, Toraja has a substantial potential market for both domestic and international tourism. Secondly, the district comprises a Muslim minority, while most visitors are Muslims. This study aims to provide theoretical insights into the development of halal cuisine in the halal tourism industry in Muslim minority regions. Additionally, this research offers practical implications for tourism managers in developing sustainable strategies.

Method

Research Design

This study analyzed the potential for developing halal food availability to accommodate the needs of Muslim visitors in Toraja. To achieve this goal, this study used a qualitative descriptive method for describing the phenomenon of halal tourism, especially in the development of halal cuisine for Muslim visitors in Toraja Regency.

Participants

The present research employed both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was gathered through interviews and observations directly from informants, while secondary data was collected through a thorough review of literature from books, journals, and other related sources. These data sets serve as the foundation for studying the development of halal cuisine within the tourism industry in Toraja. Additionally, researchers conducted direct observations of visitor destinations to gather information regarding the availability of halal food, which was then used as a basis for conducting interviews with four informants. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants who meet certain criteria, such as having extensive knowledge of the research topic, having long and intensive experience within the research location, and having sufficient free time to provide accurate information. [Table 1](#) provides information on the informants and their position.

Table 1. List of Informants

Informant	Position
RN	Head of the Tourism Office
ZM	Chairman of MUI
PW	Muslim visitors
RP	SMEs

Data Collection

Efforts to maintain the credibility and validity of the data were carried out by researchers through triangulation in data collection. The results of the interviews were compared with secondary data. This activity included interviewing the tourism agency, the head of the MUI, Muslim visitors, and MSME actors for approximately 30 minutes for each informant. Furthermore, the results of observations were compared with the results of interviews. Direct observation was carried out to ensure the availability of halal food and halal services.

Data Analysis

The stage of data analysis involved processing and analyzing the previously collected data, followed by an interpretation of the data based on the research issues. The next step was ensuring accuracy and reliability. Data analysis was performed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1992). This interactive and continuous analysis was utilized to ensure data saturation, where no new data or information is obtained.

Findings

According to statistics provided by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Toraja, there has been a substantial rise in the number of visitors visiting Toraja in the last three years. Table 2 delineates the number of visitors who visited Toraja from 2020 to 2022. The high number of visitors in Toraja shows that tourism objects in Toraja are in great demand. Indonesian Hotel & Restaurant Association (PHRI) (2019) reports that 75% of visitors in Toraja are dominated by Muslim visitors. The increasing number of Muslim visitors in Toraja is an opportunity in developing a halal food business considering that halal food is the main need for Muslim visitors. This is supported by the findings of Gabdrakhmanov et al. (2016) that the success of halal tourism in Russia is determined by the quality of halal food and hotels.

Table 2. Number of Visitors of Tana Toraja

No	Year	Number of Visitors
1	2020	93 545
2	2021	78 193
3	2022	480 631

The tourism office and the Toraja MUI responded to the increasing numbers of visitors by making various efforts to provide halal products and food. They label the

products of MSME actors. The same thing happened to hotels or inns in Toraja, the government began to pay attention to maintaining halal service and quality. The tourism office and important elements of Toraja collaborated in providing halal products and services as an opportunity for better tourism management.

Availability of Halal Food in Toraja

Based on direct interviews with informants who were met by chance at the location, visitors are dominated by Muslim visitors who come from various regions in South Sulawesi such as Palopo City, East Luwu, North Luwu, Belopa, and so on. Based on interviews conducted, the rationales behind visitors' visits are diversified. Nevertheless, visitors are drawn to the classic touch of local wisdom and the location of the resort allows informants to enjoy the view from above the city, as noted by interviewee PW:

"I am highly interested in visiting Toraja tourism because it is distinct from other visitor destinations. For example, the values of local wisdom, the weather that sustains it, and the peculiarities of fog-shrouded natural environments."

The interviews conducted with RN corroborated the findings, indicating a substantial annual growth in visitor visits. The motive underpinning their visit is almost the same which improving the economy of the local community. RP, the owner of the resort, affirmed that the escalation in the number of visitors to Mentiroku resort has had a constructive impact on economic development. These visitors have different regional and religious backgrounds.

In general, Muslim visitors have the same goal, which is to enjoy the wonderful natural environment steeped with the values of Toraja's indigenous wisdom. However, the study revealed that most Muslim visitors expressed their dissatisfaction due to the limited availability of halal culinary options. Halal cuisine is only accessible in specific areas of Toraja Regency, posing difficulties for Muslim visitors in procuring halal food. According to an interview conducted with VF, the availability of halal food is a problem that must be considered by the local government because halal food is a major requirement for visitors. This perspective was corroborated by PW:

"I really have a hard time finding halal food in the Toraja area. When visiting tourism destinations, I usually bring supplies from home such as instant noodles or cakes that can be eaten on the way. Limited halal food is the reason I do not linger when I visit Toraja."

The research findings demonstrate that the availability of halal cuisine in Toraja Regency is severely restricted. Halal food can only be found in certain areas. Even though visitors find restaurants or stalls whose owners are Muslim, Muslim visitors still have concerns. According to the interviews, the lack of halal labeling on food in Toraja Regency causes visitors to be hesitant to consume food indiscriminately. ZM said that they have taken concerted steps to ensure that every traded food or cuisine includes a halal label.

Constraints to Availability of Halal Food in Toraja

Toraja is one of the tribes in South Sulawesi, Indonesia with an alluring cultural heritage that appeals to both domestic and foreign visitors, including the renowned funeral ceremonies for the deceased and the traditional Tongkonan house. Since the majority of Toraja's population is Christian, local restaurants serve a wide variety of food, including non-halal cuisine. However, halal-certified eateries are scarce, and they are mostly concentrated in urban areas, while they remain challenging to find around tourism destinations. RN highlighted several factors that contribute to the dearth of halal food in Toraja, including the high price of land, which is comparable to that of big cities, and the dominant non-Muslim demographics. As a result, opening a halal restaurant business demands a significant amount of capital. In addition, ZM also added that many restaurants or MSME players did not register their business to obtain a halal certificate from the MUI due to the high cost, but since the existence of a free halal certificate program from BPJPH for MSMEs, it is hoped that this will no longer be an obstacle. Cooperation among various stakeholders, particularly the governments of Tana Toraja and North Toraja Regency, is crucial to address the needs of Muslim visitors.

Potential Solutions for Halal Cuisine Development in Toraja

The number of visitors to Toraja in the last 3 years has increased significantly. This was also conveyed by the Tana Toraja Tourism office that the increase in the number of visitors in Tana Toraja is a big advantage in economic development, especially the development of the Toraja district tourism sector. The findings indicate a need for improved collaboration and synergy in tourism development, particularly in the provision of halal food and praying facilities for Muslim visitors. According to interviews with RN:

"Visitors in Toraja are dominated by Muslim visitors from various regions. So far, the local government is trying to facilitate the needs of visitors, especially Muslim visitors, in worship, access to halal food, and so on. The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism is on the agenda of the Governor of South Sulawesi, which we must support considering that Toraja Regency has enormous tourism potential."

Toraja's high number of Muslim visitors presents an excellent chance for the culinary development of halal food. According to discussions with the head of the Toraja MUI, the halal culinary business in Toraja is expected to grow substantially in the future. This is due to the growing demand for halal food among Muslim visitors. Furthermore, ZM stated:

"To boost tourism development in Toraja, the government and MUI are optimizing the provision of halal food through halal labeling for MSME actors. Halal food in Toraja will see a substantial increase as the number of Muslim visitors grows year after year."

In addition, the efforts made by the government and MUI Toraja in developing halal cuisine are by halal labeling of products and food, providing training and education about halal products, and supervising MSME actors in Toraja.

Discussion

Availability of Halal Food in Toraja

According to [Hall \(2003\)](#), food is a crucial factor that determines visitor satisfaction when traveling. Additionally, [Meler and Cerovic \(2003\)](#) point out that food and culinary contribute significantly to tourism revenue. Muslim travelers have a high demand for halal food when traveling, and [Battour et al. \(2011\)](#) describe that Muslim visitors are extremely cautious when consuming food or products that do not conform to Islamic principles. Therefore, designing and supplying tourism items for Muslim visitors require a different process compared to non-Muslim visitors ([Mohsin et al., 2016](#)).

The limited availability of halal food in Toraja is an obstacle and complaint for Muslim visitors who visit the area. This confirms previous research by [Bon and Hussain \(2010\)](#), which showed that most Muslim visitors have difficulty getting halal food, especially in non-Muslim countries. Because of this problem, Muslim visitors resort to bringing their own food like instant noodles, cakes, and other snacks. Moreover, due to the limited availability of halal food or products, Muslim visitors opt not to extend their stay in Toraja. To address this issue, the local government, particularly the tourism agency, collaborates with the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) to label halal products for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprise (MSME) actors who operate their businesses in tourism destinations.

The limited availability of halal food has an impact on the satisfaction of Muslim visitors visiting. Access to halal products or food is very important because it can help Muslim visitors enjoy their trips and make decisions to revisit. The halal label is a crucial emotional attachment that influences the repurchase intention of a product ([Yoga, 2019](#)). Nevertheless, tourism managers and the government of Toraja continue to improve tourism facilities and services, especially for Muslim visitors in reaching halal products and services. Cooperation among various stakeholders, particularly the Tana Toraja and North Toraja Regency governments, is crucial to address the needs of Muslim visitors. One of the efforts is by enforcing Halal Product Guarantee Act to ensure the protection of halal products consumed by Muslim consumers ([Muslimin, 2019](#)).

Potential of Halal Cuisine Development in Toraja

The significant number of Muslim visitors in the tourism industry creates a chance for the growth and progress of halal food businesses. According to [Al-Ansi and Han \(2019\)](#), Muslim visitors are the highest consumers in tourism travel. This will support the growth and development of halal tourism and the tourism sector which is predicted to reach USD 300 billion by 2026 ([GMTI, 2021](#)). As halal food gains popularity, it will not only attract Muslim consumers but also non-Muslims due to its superior quality, health benefits, and safety ([Rezai et al., 2015](#)).

Muslim visitors in Toraja are increasingly aware of the existence of halal food that includes all activities involved throughout the production and supply chain to ensure that the various products they purchase are genuinely halal. Therefore, it is important to include the halal label on the food and products, which can be a guarantee for consumers. The concerns voiced by Muslim visitors have resulted in effective communication between tourism managers and local governments, such as the MUI and the Toraja Tourism Office, to provide access to halal products and services in Toraja.

This research indicates that Toraja has a promising potential to advance its culinary or halal food industry due to the continuous growth of Muslim visitors, where the need for halal food is the most crucial aspect. The accessibility of halal food can facilitate the development of the halal tourism industry and economy in Toraja. Thus, the availability of halal food can be regarded as a strength and opportunity for the advancement of the halal industry in Toraja.

Conclusion

The findings of this research demonstrate that the availability of halal food can boost tourism visits in Toraja. There are extensive opportunities for halal cuisine development in Toraja by collaborating with the Tourism Office, MUI, MSME actors, and tourism destination managers. The halal food in question encompasses several aspects, such as halal certification, nutritional value, safety, and adherence to Islamic regulations. Empirically, this study contributes to the literature on the empirical evidence of the growth of halal food that will bolster halal tourism over the long haul. The availability of halal food in areas with Muslim minorities is crucial for Muslim visitors to increase their satisfaction and loyalty.

However, it is important to note that this study has some limitations that can be explored by future researchers. For instance, the study only focuses on one district, namely Toraja, and thus, the findings cannot be generalized to other regions due to the differences in characteristics. Additionally, some other critical aspects of halal tourism, such as demographic conditions, are not included in this study.

Authors' Declaration

The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors took responsibility for data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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