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Prospects of Developing Halal Tourism in Bangladesh: Possibilities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh is categorized as a moderate democratic Muslim country by the United Nations. Islam has played a significant role in the political and socio-cultural lives of the majority of the population of Bangladesh. The social value, norms, and ethics of Bangladeshi society are mainly based on the basic teachings of Islam. Bangladesh also has significant possibilities to develop tourism for its authentic natural beauty and diverse culture. The tangible and intangible Islamic heritages of the country are also noteworthy. Haram food and culture, prohibited in Islam, can hardly be seen in Bangladesh. So, Bangladesh is an ideal destination for Muslim travelers, especially those who maintain the sharia order of Islam. The primary objective of the study is to ascertain if Bangladesh is a preferable destination for developing Halal tourism. The study discovered that Bangladesh would be an ideal destination.

Keywords: Halal tourism, Sharia based tourism, Prospects, and Muslim friendly destination.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism is among those industries that play a significant role in generating revenue for any country. The WTTC, (2020) concluded that in 2019 tourism industry accounted for 10.3% of the global GDP and 330 million jobs globally which is 14% of total employment. Halal Tourism is the newest yet fastest emerging segment of tourism. At present, non-Muslim countries are also finding interest to develop halal tourism because of the total size of the market. The halal travel market is projected to become 300 USD billion markets by 2026 (Crescent Rating & Master card, 2018). Studies reveal that the international halal food market has already reached around 547 USD billion a year.

In contrast, non-food products such as hotel and catering services, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals are estimated to be worth around USD 2.1 trillion annually

(Bhuiyan & Darda, 2018). In the global tourism market, Muslim travelers account for more than 10 percent of the total spending. It significantly impacts the economic prosperity of many of the world's leading markets, creating jobs and boosting public finances. Its power and potential should not be ignored (Arabian Business, 2016). These statistics show the potential economic benefits of halal tourism globally.

Bangladesh has nearly one thousand years of Muslim history. 86% of this country's population is Muslim. Muslim heritage sites and historically significant places can attract a large number of tourists. Bangladesh is also known for its natural beauty and authentic culture. Therefore, Bangladesh can be mentioned as a favorable place for halal tourism. According to Sivaloganathan, (2015) Bangladesh ranked 13 in the Top Muslim-friendly OIC Destinations list. The list was

made based on survey of halal food availability, Muslim-friendly accommodations, prayer facilities, etc.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the study is to identify if Bangladesh has the potential to become an ideal Halal Tourism destination. The specific objectives of this study can be summarized as follows:

- 1) to determine the notion of halal tourism,
- 2) to recognize the Muslim tourists' demands,
- 3) to identify the advantages of Bangladesh in developing halal tourism,
- 4) to discover the potential of Bangladesh in halal tourism and
- 5) to find the limitations of halal tourism implementation.

Literature review

Mohamed M. Battour, (2010) highlighted the impact of sharia practice on the tourism industry. It discussed future trends and challenges associated with halal tourism theoretically. Tourism activities should be conducted by adopting Islamic teachings and policies in order to improve the halal concept of tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2015). Bhuiyan & Darda, (2018) showed that through halal tourism, the needs of Muslim tourists can be met by the ancillary services of the hospitality industry. It also discussed the importance of public-private partnerships in a constant apolitical condition to develop further in Bangladesh. It suggested that a comprehensive country branding with Muslim-friendly components is needed to fascinate Muslim tourists worldwide. Islam, (2020) conducted a SWOT analysis that reveals Bangladesh has the potential for halal tourism industry with some barriers that can easily be overcome. The study suggested some marketing strategies and campaigns increase awareness. The study also suggested creating skilled human resources for the industry. Faluthamia *et al.* (2022) noticed that halal tourism is not well accepted in some parts of Indonesia. They studied and revealed that the knowledge of halal tourism in the host communities is inadequate. The community considers halal tourism to be a part of Islamizing tourism; however, the study has finally proved it wrong. It also discovered the significant contribution of Muslim-friendly tourism knowledge in responding to the rejection of halal tourism from different communities.

METHODOLOGY:

A qualitative method has been used to fulfill the objectives of this study. The study is descriptive, and the majority of the data was collected from secondary sources, including the existing literature such as websites of the Bangladesh tourism board, the bureau of statistics, different annual reports of Muslim travelers, study-related books, published journal articles, periodicals, and newspapers. This study used the literature review to describe the development of the Halal Tourism Industry in Bangladesh, which the stakeholders may use to develop the halal tourism industry in Bangladesh.

The Notion of Halal Tourism

It is challenging to define halal tourism (Battour & Ismail, 2015). Understanding the words "Tourism" and "Halal" is mandatory to define Halal Tourism. According to the UNWTO definition, "Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes" (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2006). According to sharia, halal means everything permissible for Muslims. There is five morality of human action in Islam such as Halal (allowed), Fard (compulsory), Mustahabb (recommended), Makruh (disliked), and Haram (forbidden). Halal has been considered much in the sharia (Faruki, 1966). From the definitions above, it can be extracted that halal tourism comprises the activities (permissible in Islam) of a Muslim traveler traveling outside their usual environment for less than one year for vacation, trade, and other purposes that are Halal in Islamic Sharia. For both Muslim and non-Muslim tourists, halal tourism can be a commendable business scope. It promotes different cultural experiences in non-Muslim communities. They sometimes choose halal tourism since prohibited things for Muslim communities can be prohibited for others also. The Holy Quran states: "Nor come nigh to adultery: for it is a shameful (deed) and an evil, opening the road (to other evils)" (Al-Quran, 17: 32). Tourism involves patronizing sins are prohibited for the Muslim who believes in Allah (Rasma, 2008). According to Qaddahat *et al.* (2016), several components like halal hotels, halal transportation, halal food place, halal arrangements, travel packages, and lifestyles are involved in halal tourism.

Demands of Muslim Tourists

Religiously, most Muslim tourists want to consume services or products permitted by sharia. In travel, a Muslim tourist also seeks accommodation services that are allied with Islamic principles. Muslims usually prefer services that are related to Muslim-friendly environments and that are sharia-compliant. To be considered a fully sharia-compliant hotel, the hotel's operation, design, and financial system must comply with Shaira's rules and principles (Saad *et al.*, 2014). Sharia-compliant hotel, also known as Islamic hotel, as it provides customers with hospitality experiences that are allowed and encouraged by Islamic law and principles. However, the widely accepted specific definition of a sharia-compliant hotel is rare. Generally, Muslim-friendly hotels deliver to Muslim guests all services that comply with Islamic practice, such as Qibla direction, Halal food, Alcohol-free beverages, and a prayer room with the call for prayers (Battour *et al.*, 2010). Battour *et al.* (2016) mentioned that shariah-compliant hotels are increasing rapidly in Muslim and non-Muslim destinations. Sen Nag, (2009) showed Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim country in the world. A

survey conducted by Bhuiyan & Darda, (2018) reveals that Bangladesh receives 13% of its total tourists from OIC countries. Halal accommodation can be a valuable tool for Bangladesh to invite a large number of tourists from Muslim or non-Muslim countries. International Muslim travelers are increasing day by day. MasterCard – Crescent rating, (2021) shows that international Muslim traveler arrivals grew from an estimated 108 million in 2013 to 160 million in 2019. This is a compound annual growth rate of 7.5% during that period. It indicates that the airlines and the airports are facing a significant number of Muslim tourists that need some special facilities during their travel. Muslims need qibla direction, clean prayer rooms, washrooms with wudhu facility, Jumu'ah prayer on Fridays, and halal dining centers while traveling for long hours. Seeing the opportunity, many world-class airports are coming forward with Muslim-friendly environments. Master card – Crescent Rating, (2019) reports that airports worldwide are also becoming increasingly Muslim-friendly, and most airports are now equipped with multi-faith prayer facilities and increasing availability of Halal food outlets.

Table 1: Muslim-Friendly Airports for 2012 (Non-OIC).

Rank	Name of the Airport	Muslim-friendly Facilities
1	Suvarnabhumi International Airport, Bangkok	1) Prayer rooms both in public and transit area 2) Proper Wudhu facility 3) Conduct Jummah Prayer 4) Halal Dining zone
2	Changi International Airport, Singapore	1) Prayer rooms for male and female travelers 2) Halal dining in all terminals 3) Wudhu place for both male and female 4) Halal fast food center
3	Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg	1) Muslim Prayer room open 24 hours 2) Jummah salaah 3) Halal dining
4	London Heathrow Airport, UK	1) Prayer room 2) Jumu'ah salaah prayer every Friday 3) Halal dining
5	Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport, Sri Lanka	1) Salaah prayer rooms for both males and females 2) Halal-certified food products
6	Munich "Franz Josef Strauss" Airport, Germany	1) Muslim prayer room with prayer rugs 2) Copies of the Quran in prayer rooms 3) Halal restaurants in terminals 2 and 3
7	John F. Kennedy International Airport, New York	1) Prayer rooms for both males and females in terminals 1 and 4 2) Jumu'ah prayer every Friday 3) Provides iftar during Ramadan time

8	Melbourne Airport, Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prayer rooms for male and female 2) Wudhu facility 3) Halal dining
9	Hong Kong Chep Lap Kok International Airport, China	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prayer rooms for male and female travelers 2) Wudhu place
10	Manchester Airport, UK	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prayer rooms for male and female travelers 2) Wudhu place 3) Changing area for Hajj passengers during Hajj season

Adapted from CRaHFT Ranking (2012).

Advantages of Bangladesh in the Development of Halal Tourism

Traveling to Bangladesh is not very difficult for foreigners. Wikipedia, (2021) shows that Bangladesh has fewer visa restrictions. Twenty-five countries do not need any visa to enter Bangladesh, and fifty-two countries whose citizens can obtain a visa on arrival for official duty, business, investment, and tourism.

Historical Advantages

Since the 13th century, Muslims have been preaching Islam in Bangladesh. Many Islamic sites were built, like mosques, palaces, forts, etc., during this period. Dhaka has thousands of mosques, as does the other part of Bangladesh. Bdnews24, (2011) reports that Bangladesh has 250, 399 mosques in total according to the Islamic Foundation survey conducted in 2008. Al Awad, (2018) says that in Bangladesh, Adhan (Muslim call to prayers) can be heard easily everywhere during Salah time and could lead you to a mosque nearby. In the “Bishwa Iztema,” the second largest Muslim gathering in the world, at least 5 million Muslims gather for three days of a prayer meeting that culminates in here munajat. Lemos, (2016) reported that the Ijtema is not political; therefore, people from all Islamic schools are attracted to it. Devotees from 150 countries attend it. Major cities like Chittagong, Khulna, and Sylhet are major tourist destinations famous for different shrines and Muslim historical places. Muslims from different countries travel to these cities to visit shrines and other Muslim heritages every year.

Halal Food

Muslims believe that halal food and drinks have a great impact on their body and mind. Halal food and accommodations can add extra benefits to the guests especially those from the Middle East, and other Islamic countries (Ranea *et al.*, 2016). They mentioned UniversePG | www.universepg.com

some principles for halal food, for instance, halal animal and plant-based sources containing no human parts, and halal regulations in cleaning, controlling, and distributing foods. Because of fulfilling the necessities of sharia dietary standards, like Muslim tourists, non-Muslims also receive halal products as a representation of quality, hygiene, and safety (Ambali & Bakar, 2014). The Holy Quran utters, “O ye people! Eat of what is on earth, lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy” (Ali, 1975, v. A2:168). Muslims can consume all foods created by Allah except for certain prohibited items (Adekunle & Filson, 2020). They have identified that “Allah (SWT) has prohibited pork and the meat of animals that have died for reasons other than proper slaughter, food that has been immolated to someone other than Allah (SWT), alcohol, intoxicants, and inappropriately used drugs.” Talib, (2017) mentioned to protect the Muslim faith and physical well-being; they should abstain from those prohibited items. There are about four hundred thousand restaurants and hotels in Bangladesh, of which only five-star hotels offer alcohol, according to BBS (Uddin, 2021). A government survey reveals that there are only 16 five-star hotels in Bangladesh. Therefore, Bangladesh can be categorized as almost an alcohol-free country. The Daily Star, (2017) reported that South Korea is the top alcohol consumption country in Asia, a survey by WHO revealed. They showed the average amount of alcohol consumed per year.

This report mentioned the highest average consumption of alcohol, where South Korea had 10.9 liters and Vietnam 8.7 liters per year. It also shows the lowest consumption of alcohol, where Bangladesh is 0.2 liters in a year, meaning a Bangladeshi hardly drinks a bottle of wine in a year on average.

Socio-cultural Advantages

Bangladesh is well known for its culture of hospitality. Patwary, (2016) reported that the hospitality sense of the mass people of the country is praised by travelers from western countries, and according to Howlader, (2012) Bangladeshis are found to be friendly to their guests. Islam also teaches Muslims to treat their guest with the highest care; Bangladeshi people have great respect for this Islamic teaching. Since Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim-populated country in the world we can see halal tourism has enormous potential in Bangladesh (Habiba, 2022; Islam, 2020).

Demographic Advantage

The demographic factor is one of the major factors that influence the attitudes and behavior of a tourist (Rhama *et al.*, 2017). Being a Muslim-majority country, it is easy to find a Muslim-friendly environment in Bangladesh. Socially, the principles of Muslim rituals can be observed effortlessly. The Bangladeshi culture is very favorable to halal tourism. Bangladesh is also one of those destinations where halal foods are accessible and easy to find. A maximum number of hotels here produce halal food in a halal way. In Bangladesh, animals are slaughtered as per Islamic law.

Religious Advantage

Religion is a fundamental element of human culture to drive human behavior. It can create society's norms, habits, and culture, which control human nature based on prohibitions and obligations. Such as drinking alcohol or eating pork are not allowed for Muslims (Fauzi *et al.*, 2018). Since Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, eating pork and drinking alcohol are strictly forbidden here in public. Islam, (2020) commented that as a favorable destination for Muslim travelers, Bangladesh is receiving a good number of tourists from OIC countries.

Limitations

International chain hotels must maintain some compliances, such as a combined bar, spa, and health center. These hotels can serve alcoholic beverages and have a shared pool area for both males and females. So it can be challenging to offer a Muslim-friendly environment for these properties. Fahim & Dooty, (2014) identified that not having proper Islamic knowledge is the reason why halal tourism is still a new idea in

Bangladesh. Ordinary people and even tourism stakeholders do not know much about it. They also said that Islamic tourism could not focus highly on the tourists in Bangladesh due to improper marketing strategies where most Muslim tourism-dominated countries adopt and follow modern and suitable marketing strategies. Tourism stakeholders such as tour operators have failed to provide a halal-friendly environment. There are some requirements of halal tourism such as halal food, halal accommodations, prayer facilities, and Muslim tour guides, who are not combined in travel packages (Bhuiyan & Darda, 2018). Some rituals, like slaughtering animals, may not always be possible to monitor; in such cases, halal tourism can remain questionable. Halal tourism can work against non-Muslim behavior. It is often seen that non-Muslim tourists do not like the service with Islamic teachings. Such as, alcohol is prohibited & sometimes separate places are kept for men and women in sharia-based hotels. So non-Muslim tourists often do not choose halal-practiced destinations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

An intensive policy on identifying halal travel services in Bangladesh must be made by the Policy Makers, in collaboration with the tourism stakeholders and religious groups of Bangladesh, aiming at benefiting the community economically and socio-culturally. Destinations with Islamic historical significance must be identified, renovated, and promoted in and through international Islamic organizations like OIC, etc. Muslim-friendly ancillary services must be integrated with these destinations for tourists seeking a halal travel experience in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government may initiate a Halal accreditation organization under the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism to develop Halal indicators and certify halal travel services. This accreditation body may work on Muslim tourist behavior, the interest of the non-Muslim tourist, industry demand, research, and innovation of Muslim-friendly travel experience to expand further. Travel service providers, e.g. Travel Agents, Tourists Police, etc., should be trained and understand the benefits of halal tourism.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

This is an original study by the authors. There are no potential conflicts of interest associated with this study.

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