

Halal Tourism In Thailand: Between Political Economy and Government Concern

Nurul Husna,^{1*} Risatul kautsari,² Andi Farahdhiba Irfan³

¹Langsa State Islamic Institute-Indonesia, ²Universitas Al-Ahgaff-

Yaman, ³Bartın University-Turki

hj.nurulhusnaabdulaziz@gmail.com,^{1*}

risatulkausari36@gmail.com,²afarahdhiba23@gmail.com³

Corresponding*

Received: 28-07-2023; Accepted: 01-11-2023; Published: 20-12-2023;

ABSTRACT

Halal tourism is an income source in a number of Muslim countries. It's just that the halal tourism trend is also emerging in Muslim minority countries such as Thailand. Currently Thailand is developing a halal tourism project with various products, such as providing sharia hotels, and halal food menus since being on airlines such as: Thai Airways. The critical question examined in this research is whether efforts to develop halal products and sharia banking are a government concern for Islamic law, or are they merely political-economic interests to reap financial benefits from Muslim consumers. This research uses a qualitative approach, sourced from online literature, journals and websites that are relevant to halal tourism studies. In this way, this article can see the extent to which the halal tourism policy is being implemented in Thailand, and its impact on the tourism sector. The results of this research show that the Thai government is pursuing halal tourism not because they are concerned about Islamic law, but only for the benefit and political-economic interests.

Keywords: Halal Tourism, Islamic Law, Concern, Thailand.

ABSTRAK

Halal tourism merupakan salah satu income di sejumlah negara muslim. Hanya saja tren halal tourism juga muncul di negara minoritas muslim seperti Thailand. Saat ini Thailand mengembangkan proyek halal tourism dengan beragam produk, seperti penyediaan hotel syariah, dan menu makanan halal sejak berada di maskapai penerbangan seperti: Thai Airways. Pertanyaan kritis yang dikaji dalam penelitian ini: apakah upaya mengembangkan produk halal dan perbankan syariah merupakan *concern* pemerintah terhadap hukum islam, atau sebatas

kepentingan politik-ekonomi untuk meraup keuntungan finansial dari konsumen muslim. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, yang bersumber dari literasi online, jurnal, dan *website* yang relevan dengan kajian wisata halal. Dengan demikian artikel ini bisa melihat sejauh mana kebijakan *halal tourism* yang dijalankan di Thailand, dan dampaknya terhadap sektor pariwisata. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pemerintah thailand dalam mengupayakan *halal tourism* bukan karena mereka *concern* terhadap hukum islam, tetapi hanya sebatas kemaslahatan dan kepentingan ekonomi-politik saja.

Kata Kunci: Halal Tourism, Hukum Islam, Concern, Thailand.

A. INTRODUCTION

The latest trend developing internationally is the halal tourism sector. According to Mohamed Battour and Mohd Nazari Ismail, halal tourism is an activity or tourist attraction that is in accordance with Islamic law, in this case it is used as a tourism industry that provides products or services to Muslim tourists such as: halal restaurants, halal resorts and halal trips. (Mohamed Battour & Mohd Nazari Ismail, 2015).

Nowadays, halal tourism is not only a claim for Muslim-majority countries. However, halal tourism can also be enjoyed by Muslim minority countries, even Muslim minority countries do better than Muslim majority countries. Because they are Muslim majority countries, they are too comfortable with the idea of being called a "Muslim country" so that it is less than optimal in developing halal tourism. In this case the author relates it to Thailand as one of the Muslim minority countries in Southeast Asia whose population is predominantly Buddhist.

The beginning of the development of the halal industry in Thailand was through the food sector. In 1998, the Thai Ministry of Industry created the halal codex standard as a national halal standard. Then in 2002, the government proposed a food center plan as a strategic halal food center in southern Thailand. In the following year 2003, the Thai government supported the establishment of the Halal Standard Institute of Thailand (HSIT) under the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT), and the Halal Science Center (HSC). Until 2009, the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT) established Regulations on the Management of Halal Affairs, the use of halal logos, as well as testing and monitoring the quality of halal products (Pratiwi, 2016).

Based on the Global Islamic Economy Indicator 2022-2023, Thailand is in the top 10 (State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, 2019). Meanwhile, in the Global Muslim Travel Index report, Thailand is in 2nd position after Singapore which is ranked first in the non-OIC category based on access, service, environment and communication, which aims to provide comfort for Muslim tourist visitors (Mastercard-Crescentrating, 2022).

Each country must pay attention to what efforts can be made to meet the needs of Muslim tourists in various countries. In terms of: easy access to tourist attractions, friendly environment for Muslim tourists, good service, smooth communication network (Mastercard-Crescentrating, 2022). The main achievement in halal tourism is comfort and safety for Muslim tourists. Thailand is starting to develop the concept of halal tourism as an instrument of public diplomacy to attract Muslim tourists, which in 2018 reached 3.6 million tourists or the equivalent of 10 percent of all global Muslim tourists (Purnama et al., 2021), and in 2023 it will reach 16.4 million tourists, which is increasing (Oktaviani, 2023).

Based on the Global Islamic Economy Indicator 2022-2023 report, Muslims spend USD 2 trillion on tourism in 2021, and it is estimated that in 2025 it will be USD 2.8 trillion. (Shafaki, 2022). The countries most visited by Muslim tourists are Turkey with 6.4 million, the United Arab Emirates with 6.2 million, Russia with 5.6 million, France with 5 million, Malaysia with 4.8 million and Thailand with 3.6 million tourists. Muslim (Purnama et al., 2021). In this data, it is interesting to see that countries with Muslim minorities are visited the most, such as: Russia, France and Thailand. This shows that the halal industry can be developed by any country that wants to do so.

Therefore, this research discusses the efforts made by the Thai government in implementing the halal industry, which is related to halal tourism and halal products. Is the government's motive for caring about Islam or is it just economic and political interests?

This research uses a qualitative method which is carried out to develop knowledge directly with various texts, obtained from secondary data and reviewing various literature which is then analyzed with relevant themes. The data collection technique in this research uses secondary data, namely data not directly obtained through the research object. Secondary

data is used as accountability for halal tourism in Thailand which reviews political economic interests or government concerns about Muslims.

Data obtained from this research through online journals, which is closely related to the research theme, namely halal tourism in Thailand: between political-economic and government concerns, was then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach using literature study.

B. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of Thailand

One of the countries in Southeast Asia that was colonized by Western countries is Thailand, which is known as the "Land of the White Elephant". This title is attached to Thailand because elephants in their country play a major role in transporting and lifting wood. The area of Thailand is 513,120 km² (Annur, 2023) this is roughly the same as France. The western and northern parts of Thailand border Myanmar, the eastern border with Cambodia, the northeast with Laos, and the southern border with Malaysia (Robert & Brown, 2019).

The term Thailand used to be called "Siam" which means "slave" then changed to "Thai". The origin of the name is associated with the Sukhothai kingdom, which was a short-lived kingdom in 1238. At the end of the word, the word "Thai" means "free". Then in 1939-now it officially became Thailand (Wikipedia ensklopedia, 2023).

Thailand experienced independence very easily compared to other countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. If studied from the beginning of history, Thailand was first colonized by Burma, and continued by Pattani during Islamic leadership, because there were elements of discrimination against Pattani, which at that time was led by the son of King Ismail Syah who had converted to Islam, and the attacks carried out Pattani ended up winning. In the 4th century, Pattani experienced decline and a queen from the fourth king period took over the country that had been controlled by Pattani. Since then, Pattani has been part of Thailand (Aslan et al., 2020).

Initially, Pattani was formed, originating from the largest Malay tribe in Malaysia. Then they moved to the Thalind country as immigrants, who had good luck in terms of trade routes. At that time, many people were fighting over the Pattani area, from India, Pagan, Sriwijaya, Java and

Cambodia to establish this area. However, it was the Thai state that really wanted Pattani, so that every effort was made and ended up reaching the pinnacle of its glory (Abuddin Nata, 2014)

Several centuries later, Southeast Asian countries were colonized by Europe, including Thailand. However, because the king was very clever he was able to avoid the invaders' touch with political-economic strategies. The situation experienced by Indonesia and Malaysia is different. The political economy used by the king of Thailand is paying tribute to the countries: England, France, Denmark, the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia (Nordholt, 2017). It was with this ingenuity that Thailand gained a claim with other countries that it was free from the touch of invaders (Abdullah Idi, 2018).

Thailand is also an agricultural country with workers and the main income coming from agriculture, which produces the most rice in Southeast Asia, so it is claimed to be a "rice granary". It adheres to a constitutional monarchy system of government led by a king and the head of the government is held by the prime minister. The official language of Thailand is Thai, and other languages are English. The spy used by Bath, their national anthem Phleng Chat (Aslan et al., 2020).

Islam in Thailand

One by one, Islamic countries began to fall into the hands of the West, because European kingdoms divided them throughout the Islamic world. Just like the British took Egypt and India. Russia controlled Central Asia by crossing the Caucasus, and France succeeded in conquering North Africa. Therefore, there is a massive migration to leave their home country, in order to create a better life. Therefore, now many Muslim migrants are found in countries such as the United States, France, Germany, England, Norway, Germany, Australia, Canada, the Philippines, New Zealand and Thailand (sanurdi, 2018). The countries mentioned above all have Muslim minorities, one of which I would like to mention here is Thailand.

Even though Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonized by Europe, Thailand received influence from Western countries. Because Thailand is an allied country with the United States and other allied countries, especially in the field of trade. In other aspects,

Thailand is a Buddhist-majority country with a rating of 95%, the remaining 4% are Islamic, 0.6% Christian, and 0.4% other religions.

As recorded in history, in the 13th century, the king of Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, was very concerned with trade. With this trade route, Ayutthaya brought Islam closer. Even Muslim merchants who were close to the king served as ministers who played an important role at the Palace (sanurdi, 2018). Since the arrival of Islam in Thailand, Muslims not only control trade routes, but they can play a significant role in the administration of the Sukhothai kingdom. In playing an important role like this, they also use it to develop Islamic da'wah.

Because that is what makes other Muslims able to control the southern part of Thailand. One of the southern regions of Thailand that was controlled by Islam was Pattani, which was an Islamic Malay kingdom that was under the influence of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya until 1767. Pattani is divided into 12 administrative regions, namely: Sai Buri, Mai Kaen, Yaring, Yarang, Mueang Pattani, Khok Pho, Nong Chik, Mae Land, Panare, Mayo, Thung Yang Daeng, Kapo. These 12 areas are further divided into 115 regions and 629 villages. In Pattani province, the Muslim majority reaches 80%. Southern Thailand includes the provinces of Krabi, Nakhon si Thammarat, Chummpphon, Yala, Pattani, Phattalung, Narathiwat, Phuket, Ranong, Satun, Trang, Songkhla, Surat Thani. However, there are only 4 Muslim-majority provinces, namely: Pattani, Yala, Narathiwat and Satun (Samah et al., 2017).

Muslims in southern Thailand are called Malay Muslims. Meanwhile, other Muslims who live in northern and central Thailand are often called Thai Muslims, and they are even more diverse than the Malay Muslim population. The scope of Thai Muslims includes descendants of Muslims from: India, Pakistan, Malay, China, Champa, Iran and Indonesia who settled in areas dominated by Thai Buddhists located in central and northern Thailand. Most descendants of Indonesian, Pakistani, Indian, Champa, Iranian and Malay Muslims live in Bangkok (the capital of Thailand) in central Thailand. Meanwhile, those who live in northern provinces include: Chiangrai, Lamphun and Chiangmai.

Although Muslims in Thailand are aware of their diverse ethnic heritage and maintain their respective religious traditions. But they are still assimilated into Thai society, both through a uniform socialization process

towards education, the media and other Thai institutions. Not only in terms of belief and religion, Muslims there also apply many of the norms and customs of Thai society, such as marrying Thai people who are Buddhists, and they do not consider this to be an irredentist or separatist act among Malay Muslims in the southern region (sanurdi, 2018).

The problem faced by Malay Muslims in the south of Thailand is that they are required not to wear Malay clothing, and use Thai names when going to school, and jobs provided by the government, and they are also prohibited from speaking Malay whether taught at school or in conversation. used with the government. Minority Muslims in Thailand are viewed negatively as *khek* people. The term "Thai Muslim" for "Malay Muslims" is an element of obscuring their identity which is different from other Thai people. Thus, the terms "Thai Muslim", "Malay Muslim", and "*khek*" became their official designations. But the nickname "*khek*" is a nickname that has an insulting connotation for Muslims (Thohir, 2009).

As a result of all this, Malay Muslims created several organizations to fight against the government (royal), and finally they succeeded in creating a number of organizations such as: Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO), and Barisan Nasional Liberation Pattani (BNPP) (Thohir, 2009). This organization is fighting for southern Thai Muslims to gain autonomy.

The government's anticipation in this case is to provide freedom for Muslims to practice their religion, and also invite Malay Muslims to play a role in Thailand's development. The government allows Muslims to preach, publishes religious literature, forms organizations, and provides funds for other religious activities. The government also provides a party in the interests of Muslims, called Chularatmontri who is the person responsible to the Thai king, and is the leader of the Islamic religious bureaucracy throughout Thailand which deals with all registered mosques in Thailand at all levels, and they also have a share in resolving religious conflicts, halal certification for slaughterhouses, and issuing fatwas. The term Chularatmontri is the term for a leader in Islam (*shaykhul Islam*).

However, there is still a nature that underestimates Muslims by creating administrative integration plans to include Muslims in the political system centered in Bangkok. Because they think that Muslims don't understand the political system they use, they place Muslims below

Thai Christians and Buddhists (Seni Mudmar, 1993). This is a big challenge, especially for Thailand's Muslim minority, in facing Thai society and the government.

Development of Halal Tourism in Thailand

The halal tourism trend is present as a facility for Muslim tourism (Styllis, 2018). Halal tourism provides packages that are in accordance with the rules of life of Muslims, both in terms of travel, tourist destinations, and accommodating all food so that it is not contaminated with haram things. This halal tourism began to become global since the World Halal Tourism Summit (WHTS) event was held for the first time in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. This activity was attended by 202 exhibitors, one of which was Malaysia, Indonesia, United Kingdom, Kenya, Bosnia, Tanzania, Lebanon, etc. This event aims to develop awareness of halal tourism which has a huge influence on the economy of a country that needs to be developed (Puri Yuanita, 2016).

In 1982 the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT) formed a certification and the Thai government granted permission to use the halal logo. So in 1994 the potential for halal tourism began to develop. In developing halal tourism potential, Thailand established the Halal Science Center at Chulalongkorn University which is used for halal food research. The founder is Dr. Winai Dahlan, who was born and raised in Thailand, is the grandson of the founder of Muhammadiyah, KH. Ahmad Dahlan. In 1995 Dr. Winai Dahlan created a halal science laboratory at Chulalongkorn University, Faculty of Health Sciences (Pratiwi, 2016).

In 1996 the Central Islamic Committee of Thailand (CICOT) registered its halal logo with the Ministry of Trade as a regulation for product logo users. Then, in 1997 CICOT was recognized as an authority on halal products. Meanwhile, in 1998, the Ministry of Halal Industry in Thailand used the Halal Codex Standard as a national standard (Commission, 1997).

Goals of Halal Tourism Development

The increasing development of halal tourism in Thailand has made the government pay more attention to developing halal tourism. Even though Thailand has a predominantly Buddhist population, this does not

rule out the possibility for the Thai government to develop this trend. So that the development of halal tourism is used as a form of expansion and differentiation. Even though behind the government's policies there is turmoil with the Muslim majority in Southern Thailand, political turmoil often occurs there.

Due to the conditions of political turmoil that occurred in the Southern Thailand region, the Thai government created an alternative route to create justice and equality by making tourism halal. The Thai government is also advancing relations of peace, integration and national inclusiveness in order to reduce disturbances in political stability that occur. So that tourists visiting Thailand do not feel worried about the conflicts that occur.

C. CONCLUSIONS

Halal tourism in Thailand is a unique product where the Thai population is predominantly non-Muslim but implements an Islamic tourism dynasty. However, the implications that we can see in the Thai government are that they prioritize economic politics rather than supporting Muslims in Thailand. Meanwhile, the Indonesian government is intensifying halal tourism because the government supports Islam, not just political economics.

References:

- Abdullah Idi. (2018). *Konflik Etno Religius di Asia Tenggara*. Lkis Pelangi Aksara.
- Abuddin Nata. (2014). *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam*. Kencana.
- Annur, C. M. (2023). *Indonesia Negara Terluas di ASEAN, Berapa Luas Daratannya?*
<https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2023/03/24/indonesia-negara-terluas-di-asean-berapa-luas-daratannya#:~:text=Selanjutnya%2C Thailand menempati peringkat ketiga,daratan 513%2C12 ribu km²>.
- Aslan, A., Hifza, H., & Suhardi, M. (2020). Dinamika Pendidikan Islam Di Thailand Pada Abad 19-20. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 3(1), 38–54. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v3i1.476>

- Commission, C. A. (1997). *#273 Report Of The Twenty-Fourth Session Of The Codex Committee On Food Labelling Ottawa, Canada, 14-17 May 1996. July, 2-7.*
- Mastercard-Crescentrating. (2022). *Global Muslim Travel Index 2022 Report* (Issue June).
https://www.crescentrating.com/download/thankyou.html?file=j-EXWnF4_GMTI_2022_Report_-_FINAL.pdf
- Mohamed Battour & Mohd Nazari Ismail. (2015). Halal Tourism : Concepts, Practises, Challenge and Future. *Elsevier, Vol. 19.*
- Nordholt, H. S. (2017). Masa-Depan Cerah, Bahaya Menunggu: Negara-Bangsa Baru dan Kekerasan Massal di Asia Tenggara. *Lembaran Sejarah, 11(2), 109.* <https://doi.org/10.22146/lembaran-sejarah.23805>
- Oktaviani, Z. (2023). *Thailand Luncurkan Rencana Baru untuk Menarik Wisatawan Muslim.* Republika.
<https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/rzn27s366/thailand-luncurkan-rencana-baru-untuk-menarik-wisatawan-muslim>
- Pratiwi, F. (2016). *Belajar Halal dari Thailand.*
<https://republika.co.id/beritakoran/teraju/16/01/27/o1lt0h1-belajar-halal-dari-thailand>
- Puri Yuanita. (2016). *Indonesia Berpartisipasi dalam World Halal Tourism Summit.* <https://travel.dream.co.id/news/indonesia-berpartisipasi-dalam-world-halal-tourism-summit2016-160812z.html>
- Purnama, C., Konety, N., Purnama, C., Konety, N., & Subarkah, A. R. (2021). *Diplomasi Publik Thailand Melalui Industri Halal Pendahuluan Industri halal memainkan peran penting dalam investasi Islam salah satunya dari sektor pariwisata halal yang pertumbuhannya meningkat pesat . Berdasarkan laporan Global Muslim Travel Index (GMT. 8090(18), 29-46.*
- Robert, B., & Brown, E. B. (2019). *Pengolahan Penyajian Makanan Negara Thailand. 1, 1-14.*
- Samah, M., Abdullah, R., & Ferdousi, N. (2017). Muslim family law in

- Southern Thailand: A historical overview. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 37(3), 357–370.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1379694>
- sanurdi. (2018). 78-Article Text-222-1-10-20200213 (1). *Tasamuh: Jurnal Studi Islam*, 10(September), 1–12.
- Seni Mudmar. (1993). *Negara, Kekerasan dan Bahasa, Tinjauan atas Sejumlah hasil Stdi Mengenai Kaum Muslim Mungthai* (S. Muzani (ed.)). LP3ES.
- Shafaki, R. El. (2022). *State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2022*. DinarStandard. <https://www.dinarstandard.com/post/state-of-the-global-islamic-economy-report-2022>
- State of the Global Islamic Economy Report. (2019). State of the global islamic economy report: Driving the islamic economy revolution 4.0. In *Dubai International Financial Centre*.
<https://cdn.salaamgateway.com/special-coverage/sgie19-20/full-report.pdf>
- Styllis, G. (2018). *How Thailand's military is putting a stop to Bangkok's famously rambunctious underground nightlife*.
<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/bangkok-nightlife-crackdown-thailand-latest-bars-clubs-licencing-prostitution-prayuth-chan-ocha-military-a8272786.html>
- Thohir, A. (2009). *Perkembangan Peradaban di Kawasan Dunia Islam - Ajid Thohir.pdf* (p. 364).
- Wikipedia ensklopedia. (2023). *Sejarah Thailand*.
https://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sejarah_Thailand