

Muslim Tourists' Expectations toward Halal Tourism in Songkhla Province, Thailand

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore a level of Muslim tourists' expectation toward the Halal tourism of Songkhla province, Thailand. As a quantitative research methodology, a set of five-rating-scale questionnaires was used for data collection administered with 404 Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand. The results of the study revealed that variables of the respondents' expectation based on the 5As of tourism industry components included: 1) attractions which was found at a high level of expectation ($\bar{X} = 3.69$); 2) accessibilities which was found at a high level of expectation ($\bar{X} = 3.76$); 3) amenities which was found at a high level of expectation ($\bar{X} = 3.76$); 4) accommodations which was found at a high level of expectation ($\bar{X} = 3.77$); and 5) activities which was found at a high level of expectation ($\bar{X} = 3.77$). Also, the Halal tourism management with emphasis on the Islamic religious provisions showed that the Muslim tourists' expectation on tourism industry with 5As was found at a high level in terms of their Halal gastronomy service management, and followed by their management of Muslim religious practices. Therefore, the research findings on the development for effective tourism hospitality management leading to the values of required Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand could be all implicated for other different governmental and private organizations, as well as tourism-related business entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Expectation, Muslim Tourists, 5A Components of Tourism Industry

Introduction

Tourism industry plays important roles in economic development in many countries. Hence, the government of each country puts the importance of tourism industry management to be responsive to the needs of all groups of tourists to expand the market shares of tourism. Tourism taken are therefore harmonious with the country development of all dimensions. This is an important factor making a country to have competitive advantages and be able to

sustainably develop its tourism for prosperity. Besides, it can be truly responsive to needs and expectation of tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2015).

From the exploration of Crescent rating (Crescent Rating Company, 2017), it was found that the Muslim tourists' growth rate would reach 168 millions in 2020, and it would create tourism values for 200 million US dollars. Their travelling reasons could be classified into 4 aspects as follows: (1) visiting friends and relatives: VFR (75%); (2) Haji and Umrah (10%); (3) business (10%); and 4) others (5%). As a matter of fact, Thailand is a popular destination of Muslim tourists (Non-oic destinations). In other words, Thailand is not included in the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The top ten of non-ioc destinations are: (1) Singapore, (2) Thailand, (3) Great Britain, (4) South Africa, (5) Hongkong, (6) Japan, (7) Taiwan, (8) France, (9) Spain, and (10) USA. Thailand is behind Singapore with an average raking score of 61.2 and 67.3, respectively (Crescent Rating Company, 2017). Due to the Commandments of Islam, the management of tourism which is appropriate with Muslim tourists needs to be on the basis of Halal tourism.

Halal tourism is a kind of tourism focusing on factors related to the beliefs of Muslim. It covers the dimensions of accommodations, food, and drinks. An example is Halal food service which comprises beef passing a correct method of slush and without forbidden ingredients in accordance with Islam. The following included: beverages must be without alcohol; announcement of salah time during travelling and provision of a salah place; spa service and swimming pool must be separated based on gender; indication of salah direction in the room; and salah carpet service (Aree, 2016).

According to the analysis of environmental conditions in Songkhla province, Thailand, it is found that this province is located in the southern Thailand, close to Malaysia. There are three major border checkpoints in this province: (1) Padang Bezar customs house, is close to Perlis state; (2) Sadao customs house, close to Kedah state; and (3) Baan Prakob customs house, close to Kedah state. These three border checkpoints facilitate convenience for Malaysian, Indonesian, and Singaporean tourists to visit Songkhla province, Thailand. Besides, there is Had Yai International Airport located in Songkhla province, Thailand, which can save travelling time for these tourists. In addition, there is a development project of the Indonesia - Malaysia - Thailand Growth Triangle: IMT - GT (5 years, 2017-2021). This aims to carry forward the tourism routes "Thailand - Indonesia - Malaysia" or Ajeh - Penang - Phuket - Hat Yai - the other 3 provinces (Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat). This aims to elevate the collaboration in Halal tourism development, and connect a value chain having potential, as well as convenient facilitation structure of foreign tourists. Actually, Songkhla province, Thailand is one of the ten pilot provinces in the management of Halal food service. Also in 2001, the Department of Tourism prepared lists of entrepreneur places related to Halal services covering 19 provinces. In this respect, Songkhla province, Thailand had 9 Halal entrepreneur places and ranked second behind Krabi province (Department of Tourism, 2017). This can attract Muslim tourists to visit Songkhla province, which will result in their local economic expansion. About one-third or 35.11% of the population in Songkhla province, Thailand are Muslims and ranks second behind Buddhists (National Office of Statistics, 2017: 47).

Songkhla is a province, Thailand having diverse tourism resources which can be managed to be appropriate with Muslim tourists. Besides, the management of Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand conforms to the tourism strategy of Thailand (2015-2107) in terms of tourism service and product development and tourism of the Muslim group. In fact, Songkhla province, Thailand is one of the ten main tourist provinces and it had 4.2 million tourists in 2016. This ranks the sixth behind Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Phuket, Krabi, and Chonburi, respectively (Press Conference on tendency of tourism situations in 2017, first quarter, January - March, 2016)

The data mentioned above can explain that Halal tourism is a specific tourist group - Muslim tourists. Hence, components of tourism industry need to be consisted with the Commandments of Islam to be responsive to needs of Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand. This study involves Muslim tourist expectation towards Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand. 5As components of tourism industry are taken into consideration (1) attractions, (2) accessibilities, (3) amenities, (4) accommodations, and (5) activities (Lamaichin, 2008: 27). These are important variables to gain Muslim Tourist Expectation toward Halal Tourism of Songkhla Province, Thailand. This can create confidence of Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand and will lead to big tourism vales in the future.

Aforementioned, it was reflected that the Muslim tourists' tourism market values have more increased dramatically so that the Muslim tourists' different tourism behaviors on their Islamic tourism services, particularly in both their religious practices and Halal food consumption are all resulted in major important factors influencing the Muslim tourists' growth. Thus, a study of the Muslim Tourist Expectation toward Halal Tourism of Songkhla province, Thailand. In order to be guidelines for developing and upgrading the service quality served for the Muslim tourists' requirements on tourism hospitality services with emphasis on their no Islamic religious provisions, however, the other different governmental and private organizations', and the tourism-related business entrepreneurs' effective Halal tourism management should be implicated for their vast number of Halal tourism values, as well as their Muslim tourists' final decisions on their tourist destination in Songkhla province, Thailand.

Literature Reviews

Halal tourism has played a new role in tourism hospitality services found in Thailand; moreover, tourism services with emphasis on the Islamic provisions, particularly Halal food services and Islamic praying practice sites must be provided for the Muslim tourists' requirements. In addition, other different tourism-related organizations' amendments should be facilitated for the Muslim tourists' convenient and guaranteed tourism services. In order to present the Muslim tourists' interests and final decisions on their visit, the governmental and private organizations', as well as tourism business entrepreneurs' effective tourism management based on the Islamic provisions are divided into two major aspects: (1) Halal gastronomy and beverage services, and (2) Islamic praying sites served during their Muslim tourists' visit.

Concepts on Muslim's Categorization of Tourists Needs

According to the Office of Crescent rating's poll, "Halal tourism" is mostly preferred because of the upcoming targeted number of Muslim tourists with their wealth as well as the rapid ratios of annual economic growth. In fact, the Muslim tourists' requirements based on the Islamic provisions were classified into three major aspects (Fazal, 2014)

(1) Amenities or "Need to have" including Halal gastronomy services and Islamic praying sites were both facilitated for tourism services dealing with airlines, hotels, resorts, department stores, and tourist attractions. Thus, setting goals on the Muslim tourists' visit and tourism services with emphasis on the Islamic provisions was mostly signified for their trusts.

(2) Amenities or "Good to have" such as toilet services with bidet sprayers, and toilet services served for their fasting in Ramadan, etc. were rarely found and were less facilitated than amenities or "Need to have".

(3) Amenities or "Nice to have" were defined as recreational or tourism-related activities with emphasis on the Islamic provisions, as well as private tourism service activities were all provided for male and female Muslim tourists' visit. as shown in Figure 1

Muslim Traveler Needs' Categorization by Crescent Rating



Figure 1 Muslim travelers' needs on their travel

Resource: Fazal (2014)

Concepts on Service Quality

“Service quality” conceptualized by Theerakworn (2003: 105) was defined as excellent services were all facilitated for customers’ requirements or customers’ satisfaction, and loyalty.

In addition, “service quality” referred to the gap between expectations and the perception of customers about the services that were obtained from the customers’ expectations and experiences in their services (Sirichot, 2013: 248).

Also, “service quality meant providing services, which could meet the customers’ needs or expectations, directly affected the customers’ satisfactions (Inkaew, 2007: 28).

From the definition of service quality cited above, the quality of service in relations to the customer’s in-service process, in-service, and after-customer service were all involved with the service management responding to the customer’s needs and first impression, as well as better facilities and customers’ problem-solving. Therefore, it was very important to the Halal tourism expectations of Muslim tourists visiting in Songkhla province, Thailand.

Supportive factors on the tourists’ satisfactions and final decisions on their services cited in Thongho (2003: 4) were all detailed as follows.

(1) Tourist sites or tourism resources referred to a tourist site with its cultural activities could attract tourists’ visits;

(2) In aspects of tourists’ transportation, their convenient domestic and international transport services with its life security were all facilitated;

(3) In aspects of tourists’ immigration ceremonies and information services, tourists’ flexibility together with their convenient immigration regulations, good information services, as well as accommodation services were all offered;

(4) In aspects of tourists’ accommodation services, alternative types of hotels with its reasonable, tidy, and standardized prices were all provided;

(5) In aspects of tourists’ restaurant services, a variety of hygienic menus with its fixed rates and service minds were all served;

(6) In aspects of tourists’ tour agencies, the capable, friendly, and responsible tour guides’ excursion services were all provided for tourists’ visits on different tourist attractions;

(7) In aspects of souvenirs, the controlled quality of home-made products with its fixed prices, as well as unique and well-designed product packages were all supported;

(8) In aspects of tourists’ life security on their final tourist destination in all different tourist sites, tourists’ awareness of their life and asset securities were mostly signified, and

(9) In aspects of tourist sites' information services, the domestic and international tourists' interests in their visits and well-known tourist attractions were all resulted from the expansion of tourism industry.

In order to offer the tourists' convenient tour services as required by their expectation, as well as to encourage their satisfactions on their revisits, however, previous concepts on satisfactions toward their services were all vital for tourists' final decisions on their tour services.

Concepts on Tourism Industry

Tourism industry was dealt with the integration of various products and other different services, which were mostly made from the majority of intangible tourism products with mental values and tourist attractions.

Collier and Harraway (1997: 18) stated that the main components of tourism industry were divided into three aspects:

- (1) Attractions: natural or man-made tourist sites were all attracted by sites and events; otherwise, tourists' first impression was resulted from man-made tourist sites only;
- (2) Amenities: the tourists' accessibilities of convenient and safe tourism resources directly led to their interests in different tourist attractions so that infrastructural factors such as public utilities, different transport types, communication systems, accommodations, restaurants, souvenir shops, etc. should be all served.
- (3) Accessibilities: transportation systems including its routes, vehicles, and terminals were all facilitated; moreover, the tourists' visits in different tourist attractions should be guided by the carriers.

Like Jittungwattana (1999: 45) he also cited that the main components of tourism industry were divided into three aspects:

- (1) Attractions were one of the most important factors of tourism resources that attracted the tourists' interests in their revisit;
- (2) Tourists' amenities were all provided for their first impression on visiting different tourist attractions, and
- (3) In aspects of tourists' accessibilities, tourism routes could be all accessible for both different and nearer tourist attractions.

In order to accomplish the goals, however, the tourism industry with 5As cited in Lamaijin (2008: 27) were detailed as follows.

- (1) Attractions: Tourist resources with its unique natural identities could attract tourists' interests. These included white beaches, colorful coral reefs, various fish species, various kinds of forests and plants, as well as man-made lakes and resorts.
- (2) Accessibilities: In order to attract the tourists' interests in visiting tourist attractions, the tourists' visit could be reached closely to the tourist attractions, and the tourism-related organizations' transport services should be also more facilitated.
- (3) Amenities: The tourists' convenient tourist attractions together with the tourism-related organizations' infrastructure services such as electricity, waterworks, roads, and various communications services, etc. should be all facilitated for tourists' visit.
- (4) Accommodations: In order to facilitate the tourists' accommodation services, the numbers of tourists' accommodations services were all provided for their visit.
- (5) Activities: Tourism-related activities in different tourist attractions such as trekking, canoeing, boating, etc. should be all provided for tourists' visit.

Aforementioned, the Muslim tourists' expectations on Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand in integrations with the concepts of Muslim tourist's requirements, service quality, as well as 5A-based tourism industry should be investigated for effective tourism hospitality management in relations to the Muslim tourists' expectations on Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand.

From concepts on tourism industry with 5As mentioned above, the Muslim tourists' expectations on their Halal tourism in relations to its attractions, accessibilities, amenities, accommodations, and activities were investigated for key factors on the promotion for tourism accomplishment, and were all implicated for analyzing the level of tourists' expectations on their Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand.

Methodology

404 Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand were all used as the population and sample group found in this study. The computation of the sample group size based on infinite population and the reliability was set at 95%; and (e) was at $\pm 5\%$ as shown in the formula below (Slilpajaru, 2014: 46-47).

Research Instruments

A set of questionnaires (Category rating scale) was used for data collection administered with Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand. (Thawirat, 1997: 99).

Level of expectation

Score range	Description (Expectation)
4.21 - 5.00	= Highest
3.41 - 4.20	= High
2.61 - 3.40	= Moderate
1.81 - 2.60	= Low
1.00 - 1.80	= Lowest

Research Instruments' Validity

(1) In analyzing its content validity, a questionnaire with its content analysis was created and were then submitted to the major advisor and co-advisors correcting the questionnaire's accuracy, as well as editing its language use in this research.

In order to validate the research instruments used in this study, the Index of item-Objective Congruence (IOC), with its scoring scales for each question item, was carried out for data collection. Also, a selected question item with its score of more than 0.5, and an adapted question item with its score of less than 0.5 were both used for the educational experts' criteria for their selection of each question item (Thongkham, 1996: 232)

According to the validity of a questionnaire with its category rating scale, it showed that the content validity with its score of 0.6 in consistence with the objectives of the study could be analyzed for data collection.

(2) In analyzing the reliability of research instruments, 30 questionnaires approved by the supervisors and educational experts were all tried out with the Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand. Subsequently, the approved data were figured out for alpha-coefficient with its reliability level of 0.05, using the Cronbanch's method. In fact, the reliability level of 0.7 was accepted by the social sciences research. Therefore, a selected question item with its reliability level of 0.7, which was validated with the category rating scale, was figured out for the alpha coefficients (Taweerat, 1997: 125-126).

According to validating the category rating scale-based questionnaire conducted with 30 Muslim tourists, it showed that the alpha coefficient with its reliability level of 0.98 could be testified for data collection.

Data collection

Quantitative data were collected and the procedures of this study were as follows:

- (1) A meeting among the researchers' common understanding about questionnaire collection to achieve the goals of this study was provided;
- (2) The quantitative data were collected as planned, and
- (3) Obtained data were all analyzed, interpreted, and concluded.

Data Analysis

(1) Primary data were collected from the sample group with 95% of reliability and $(e) = \pm 5\%$ (Slilpajaru, 2014: 46-47)

(2) Quantitative research methodology was employed. Obtained data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics i.e. frequency, percentage, and standard deviation. This aimed to find the levels of Muslim tourists' expectations toward their Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand.

Research Results

The Muslim tourists' expectations toward their Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand, with a higher level, were detailed as follows.

(1) In terms of attractions, it showed that natural tourism resources together with sea tourism resources with its unique identities were mostly found in Songkhla province, Thailand; moreover, different tourism resources found in Songkhla province, Thailand with no Islamic provisions directly led to the Muslim tourists' high expectations because of stipulated Islamic provisions;

(2) In terms of accessibilities, it stated that the Muslim tourists' expectations toward their Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand were mostly found. This was because not only different land and air transports, but also well-prepared services and the Muslim tourists' accessibilities of tourist attractions were all provided;

(3) In terms of amenities, it was stated that unique facilities were all served for the Muslim tourists' requirements on their Halal food services, and the adequate number of Islamic religious practice sites facilitated in different cities found in Songkhla province, Thailand. However, the importance of Islamic provisions leading to their high expectations were mostly required for the Muslim tourists' visit in Songkhla province, Thailand;

(4) In terms of accommodations, the additional number of accommodations based on the Islamic provisions were all served for the Muslim tourists' requirements for their Halal food services, the adequate number of Islamic religious practice sites, toilet services with bidet sprayers, and clear location of Islamic religious practices. As a result, the Muslim tourists' expectations toward their Halal tourism services in Songkhla province, Thailand were mostly found, and

(5) In terms of activities, it was also stated that the verities of tourism activities with emphasis on Islamic provisions directly affected the Muslim tourists' selection of alternative tourism activities during their visit, and their high expectations.

Table 1 Average mean scores of the expectation towards the tourism industry with 5As

5As component of tourism industry	Assessment criterion (Item)	A average mean score of the expectation	SD.	Description
1. Attractions	8	3.69	0.72	High
2. Accessibilities	4	3.76	0.78	High
3. Amenities	21	3.76	0.76	High
4. Accommodation	10	3.77	0.77	High
5. Activities	9	3.77	0.79	High

Conclusions and Discussion

The results of the study showed that the respondents had a high level of expectation towards the 5As of the Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand in terms of its attractions ($\bar{X} = 3.69$), accessibilities ($\bar{X} = 3.76$), amenities ($\bar{X} = 3.76$), accommodation ($\bar{X} = 3.77$), and

activities ($\bar{X} = 3.77$). Therefore, it could be analyzed that the Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand would visit Songkhla province, Thailand again in the future. This conformed to the results of analyzing their revisit in the future which was found at 99.26%. Also, it conformed to a concept of services which Muslim tourists could use tourism services in Songkhla province, Thailand that was consistent with their expectation. This resulted in the tourists' loyalty toward tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand (Theerakhwanrot, 2003: 105).

With references to the consistence of the previous study of Arpornpaisarn (2018), she cited that important factors influencing on the tourists' final decisions on their revisits were all resulted from the quality of tourism industry. In addition to this study in consistence with the study of Khan and Mendes (2018), it was stated that the tourists' life security occurred in tourism industry directly led to the substantial ratios of national development. Also, the findings of the study in consistence with the previous study of Benjawan, Thoongsuman, and Pavanunkul (2018) insisted that the well-prepared management of hospitality services was resulted from the competitors' business differences and sustainable tourism development. However, the potentialities of Halal tourism management found in Songkhla province, Thailand was also needed for the Muslim tourists' final destination leading to the values of Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand.

In addition, the results of the analysis conformed to the concept of components of quality services which could create trustworthiness to Muslim tourists. That was to say, they were able to use tourism services which were not against the commandments of Islam (Parasuraman, 1985 as cited in Sirichot, 2013: 249). The results of the analysis also conformed to a study of Lina Munirah and Hairul Nizamismail (2016) on Muslims' tourism. It was found that their tourism activities must consider their tourist attractions which were consistent with the Islamic religion provisions such as religious practice (salah) and consumption of food and beverages.

The results of the analysis of the components of 5As of tourism industry based on amenities also conformed to a study of the following:

(1) A study of Crescent Rating company (2017) revealed that the Muslim tourists' travelling must be friendly with convenience facility services e.g. Halal food and salah places in tourist spots.

(2) A study of the Economic and Commercial Cooperation of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (Crescent Rating Company, 2017) found that travelling of Muslim tourists needs to have amenities in accordance with principles and rules of religious requirements.

(3) A study of Mohd (2015) on Halal tourism explained that Halal tourism allows to have any activity which does not against the Muslim's beliefs leading to the marketing success in Halal tourism promotion.

(4) A study of Fazal (2014) showed that the creation of Muslim confidence and services must not against the Commandments of Islam to create business values. This were of needed convenience facilities ("Need to have") i.e. Halal food service and religious practice (salah) places.

These researches mentioned above reflected all the dimensions of tourism service management for Muslim tourists, which needed to be consistent with the Islamic religion provisions. This aimed to make Muslim tourists be able to take their tourism services confidently. Also, they would have trustworthiness towards tourism services in Songkhla province, Thailand. The results of a study of Vokonic (1996 as cited in Aree, 2016) explained that travelling of Muslim people should not be differentiated based on tourism demands. This was because travelling of Muslim people was similar to that of other people. Also, only amenities must be diverse to make them to feel free in practice.

The results of the analysis of tourists' behaviors on their accommodation services using of the respondents conformed to the concept of quality service (Parasuraman, 1985 as cited in Sirichot, 2013: 249; Berry, 1985 as cited in Theerakhwanrot, 2003: 106-107). It also conformed to a concept of the decision-making to purchase of tourists (Soponsiri, 2011: 72) and motivation theory of Maslow (Pimonsompong, 2007: 37-39). Moreover, the three concepts had relationships with the process of decision-making to purchase of the respondents. Also, the results of the analysis of the 5As components of tourism industry was found at a high level in terms of its quality. This made the respondents be satisfied with it. In other words, it was a pull factor making the respondents need to visit Songkhla province, Thailand again in the future (revisit).

These data as mentioned above reflected tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand was not against the Commandments of Islam. This conformed to a study of Mohd (2015) which found that Halal tourism allowed to do any activity which does not against the beliefs to be successful in the Halal tourism markets. In addition, tourist attractions in Songkhla province, Thailand were suitable for doing tourism activities of Muslim tourists at a high level.

Furthermore, Songkhla province, Thailand had personnel, who understood the Islamic religion provisions and its expectation, was found at a high level. Regarding key success factors on the provision of Halal tourism services, personnel having knowledge/understanding about the Islamic religion provision was an important factor in public relations. This would result in the Muslim tourists' revisit.

According to the results of the study, this could be concluded that Muslim tourists visiting Songkhla province, Thailand had a high level of their services using behaviors based on their expectation towards Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand, and they would visit again in the future. (revisit). An important factor related to this was tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand was not against the Islamic religion provision. Besides, tour companies well-understood the provision of tourism services for Muslim tourists as shown in Figure 2.

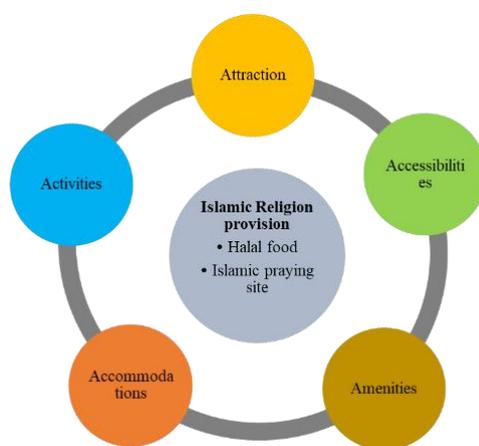


Figure 2 Elements of Muslim Tourists' Expectations toward Halal Tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand

In addition, it could be concluded that Songkhla province, Thailand was ready for the management of Halal tourism, and could handle the 5As components of tourism industry which were not against the Islamic religion provision. This study found that the Muslim tourists had a high level of expectation towards its tourism service quality in Songkhla province, Thailand.

However, this research results could be implicated for the other different governmental and private organizations' and business entrepreneurs' development, as well as their better improvements for the Muslim tourists' tourism service quality in order to be served for the Muslim tourists' trusts, as well as to upgrade Halal food tourism values in Songkhla province, Thailand. In other words, this province's border with Malaysia together with three major bordering checkpoints -- Sa Dao, Padangbeza, and Ban Prakob bordering checkpoints, in terms of geographical advantages, were mostly facilitated for different tourists coming from Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia to Songkhla province, Thailand. This would lead to the values of Halal tourism in Songkhla province, Thailand, and this province could be a central hub for Halal tourism in the future.

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