

Understanding Behavior and Needs of Halal Tourism in Andaman Gulf of Thailand: A Case of Asian Muslim

Piangpis Sriprasert

Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand

Email: s.piangpis@yahoo.com

Oraphan Chainin and Hamzah Abd Rahman

Rajamangala University of Technology Srivijaya, Songkla, Thailand; University Utara Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia

Email: or_chanin@yahoo.com, hamzahd@uum.edu.my

Abstract—It is recognized that tourism industry is playing a vital role in contributing to economic development and sustaining employment, in both advanced and developing economies. Thus, various strategies have been launched to increase competitiveness of tourism industry. Attract a new market segment is one among other strategies for tourism business. Muslim tourist is the large niche market for tourism industry. Thus, the knowledge about Muslim tourist' behavior and needs are highly needed for tourism business sectors to develop, promote and sell tourism products that suit to the unique needs of this new market. Therefore, this study examines the Asian Muslim tourist's behavior and needs at Andaman Gulf of Thailand. A convenience sampling technique is utilized. Face-to-face interviews by using structured questionnaire are employed to elicit responses from 280 Asian Muslim tourist of Andaman Gulf, Thailand. The findings of this research reveal that seeing and experiencing a foreign destination is the main reason for visiting Andaman Gulf of Thailand. Internet is the major source of tourism information. The most popular theme of trip is Sun and Sea. Majority of tourist hired a car and travel with family. They demonstrated high needs towards the placement of Qibla stickers/ direction towards Makkah city in hotel room, availability of Halal sign at Halal restaurant, and availability of Mosque. Thus, the results from this study provide useful information for policy makers and business managers in formulating the strategy and program to enhance Halal tourism potential in Andaman Gulf of Thailand.

Index Terms—asian muslim tourists' behavior and needs, andaman gulf of thailand

I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that tourism plays an important role for regional development. Successful tourism can increase destination's tourist receipts, income, sustainable employment and government revenues. Thus, this leads to high competition among destinations on

attracting tourist. Attract a new market segment is one among other strategies for tourism business to survive and prosper in this high competition. Muslim tourist gain high attention as the large niche market for tourism industry. Due to the fact that, among the top 20 countries that have had the greatest growth in international tourism expenditure 2005-2010, 25% of that growth in expenditure is from OIC member countries. Thus, the significance of this growing source of international tourism from Muslim market is a key consideration for economies that have significant tourism revenues [1]. Since, the significant role of tourism in Thai economy has long been recognized, Thai government has granted various facilities to tourism agencies to develop other potential areas in the tourism industry, and developing Halal tourism is a promising approach to attract more tourists. However, there is a need for Thai community and tourism related sectors to understand the unique Muslim travel behavior and needs. Hence, this study is aimed to examine the behavior and needs of Muslim tourist in Andaman Gulf of Thailand.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Halal Tourism

Various factors influence tourist behavior; religion is one among others, such as the choice of destinations and tourism product preferences [2]. Muslim life is directed by the holy book of the Quran and the Sunnah or Hadith, containing the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad recalled by his companions and family [3]. Based on the Islamic worldview of God, man and nature, tourism is part of the region and travel is fundamental to Islam [4]. Even during traveling, Muslims are requested to respect fundamental Islamic precepts. The concept of halal, meaning permissible in Arabic, is not just being applied to food, but it includes any Shari'ah compliant products ranging from bank dealings to cosmetics, vaccines and in this case, tourism. This means offering tour packages and destinations that are particularly designed to cater for Muslim considerations and address

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Muslim needs [5]. Halal tourism integrates more religious conservative motivations, which try to valorize a conservative Islamic lifestyle and underline its incompatibility with Western type of tourism practices, which dominating the modern tourism industry. The demand for halal resorts, hotels or transportation reveals the reluctance of religious conservative families and individuals to travel in liberal or Western style locations and the condemnation of travel behaviors regarded as un-Islamic.

B. Tourist Behavior

The field of consumer behavior is a recent and young discipline which is form by contributions of many other disciplines such as sociology and economy in order to understand the way consumers behave (Blackwell et al. 2006); tourist as well. It focuses on individuals making decisions about the use of their available resources (time, money and effort) in the purchase of goods and services related to consumption [6]. There are five stages of decision making: 1) need recognition; 2) information search and information acquisition; 3) evaluation of alternatives, which involves rating of options and leads to formation of preferences and formation of behavioral intentions; 4) actual purchase and consumption decision; and 5) post-purchase behaviors [7]. However, these five stages of consumer behavior are able to regroup into three categories, which are before purchase and consumption, during purchase and consumption, and after purchase and consumption [8], [9]. Thus, this study utilized this model to examine tourist behavior in three aspects, which are pre travel, during travel and after travel at Andaman Gulf, Thailand.

III. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study were collected from Asian Muslim tourist in Andaman Gulf, Thailand, which consists of four provinces, namely; Krabi, Phuket, Pangna, and Satul. 280 tourists were participated this study. The survey was conducted from September to December 2011. The data were collected by using face-to-face with structure questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts. The first part dealt with personal characteristics of the respondents. Questions focused on respondents' gender, age, nationality, and income. The second part included questions of tourist behavior in relation to pre travel, during travel and after travel at destinations. The last part was assigned to gather information about tourist needs towards hotel, restaurants, and public areas aspects. Regarding the needs, the respondents were asked to give opinions on a five-point Likert scale (1- Not at all important to 5-very important). Content validity of these questionnaire items was evaluated by a professor from a tourism business school and a Halal expert. A pilot test was conducted to assess how well the instrument captured the constructs it was supposed to measure and to test the comprehension of the questionnaire items. The reliability of the measurements in this study was 0.86, which acceptable based on the Cronbach's alpha.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Demographic Profile

Frequencies related to demographic profile of the respondents were computed. Results reveal that the majority of the Asian Muslim tourist who visited Andaman Gulf, Thailand in this study are Malaysian (70%) followed by Indonesian (21.4%), Pakistani (4.3%), Bangladeshi (2.9%), and Kazakhstani (1.4%). Majority are male (51%) ranging in ages from 12 to 72 years. The highest proportion is between 23-33 years, which represents 45.7 percent of the total respondents, followed by ages 34 to 44 years (20%), ages 12 to 22 years (15.4%), ages 45 to 55 years (14.6%), ages 67 to 72 years (2.9%), and ages 56 to 66 years (1.1%). Majority (37.1%) of the respondents had monthly income between 5,500 to 25,500 Bath (31.40 Bath equal to 1 US Dollar), followed by income between 25,501 to 45,500 Bath (25.7%), between 45,501 to 65,500 Bath (19.6%), between 85,501 to 105,500 Bath (6.8%), between 65,501 to 85,500 Bath (6.1%), more than 125,500 Bath (2.9%), and between 105,501 to 125,500 Bath (1.8%).

B. Tourist Behavior

Regarding to pre travel behavior of tourists, the results show that seeing and experiencing a foreign destination is the main reason for visiting Andaman gulf at Thailand (n= 164), followed by experiencing new and different life styles (n= 160), interesting and friendly local people (n= 76), being free to act (n= 72), warm welcome for tourists (n= 68), Environmental quality of air, water and soil (n= 48), Outstanding scenery (n= 44). Among all the reasons for visiting Andaman gulf of the respondents, attending medical spa is the lowest. This could be explained by the fact that majority of respondents come from Malaysia, which has similarity in term of geography and weather with Andaman Gulf, Thailand. Thus, Thailand is the neighbor country that convenience for travelling to gain new experience of different lifestyle.

In regard to sources of tourism information used by respondents, Internet is the major tool for seeking information (n=168) followed by Travel book, travel guide or brochure (n =120), word of mouth of family and friends (n =108), tour company or tour operator (n = 60), and previous experiences (n = 48), advertising (n = 40), word of mouth of other travelers (n = 33), tourist office (n =28), and travel articles or documentaries (n =16). It could be said that Internet is the most powerful and effective channel in promoting tourism to Asian Muslim tourist.

Regarding to kinds of information that tourists searching prior their visit, information about attractions are the most popular information (n = 128) followed by weather (n =108), accommodation (n =100), activities (n = 96), shopping (n =88), and food (n =80). While information about transportation, cost of living, and geography are under the same rank (n = 48). These meaningful results would provide the guideline for tourism officers and businessmen in relation to provide tourism information in accordance with tourist needs.

Majority of them spent time in deciding to visit Andaman gulf less than one week prior visit (46.79%) followed by those who spent more than one week but less than one month (36.07%), between 1-6 months (9.64%), between 7-12 months (7.5%). This could be explained by the convenience of respondents in visiting Andaman gulf, Malaysia and Indonesia are the neighbors to Thailand. Thus, tourists did not require long period in planning for the trip. The results reveal that most of them are influenced to visit Andaman gulf by advice from friends (n = 132) followed by Internet (n = 96), magazine or newspaper (n = 76), tourist information center (n = 68), guide book (n = 56), advice from travel agent (n = 68), and television program (n = 20).

Regarding to during travel behavior of tourist, the results show that the most popular theme of trip for tourists is Sun and sea (n = 132) followed by country and nature (n = 63), get to know the place (n = 41), activity holiday (n = 16), visit friends or relatives and cities and monuments (n = 11), cultural and historical (n = 5), and religious trip (n = 1). This could be explained by the reputation of Andaman gulf about beauty of beach.

On travelling companion, most of the tourists travel with family (28.21%) followed by friends (25.71%), spouse (14.29%), business colleagues (10.36%), alone (10%), organized tour group (6.07%), girlfriend or boyfriend (3.93%), and others (6.07%). The results provide the important information that Asian Muslim tourist preferred to travel with companions, especially with family. Thus, the tourism business sectors should offer tourism products which suitable for family uses.

Asian Muslim tourists preferred to stay in hotel (n = 152), followed by resort (n = 92), homestay (n = 28), guesthouse (n = 16), motels (n = 5), and relatives house (n = 4). While travelling at destination, they preferred to hired car (n = 128), followed by coach (n = 55), friends and relative's car (n = 51), and public transportation (n = 46). It is worth to note that none of the respondents choose motorcycle as a mean for transportation. It probably due to the fact that majority of them travel with family and concern for safety issue.

On food preferences, this defined as the selection of type of food preferred by respondents. Thai food was the most popular choice among Asian Muslim tourists (n = 188) followed by Western food (n = 48), Arab food (n = 32), Indian food (n = 28), Chinese food (n = 24), and others (n = 20). This was not surprising as Thai food is well known and widely accepted, while Western food is internationally acceptable and available in many restaurants.

In relation to souvenir choices, majority of tourist preferred to buy cultural and traditional products (n = 120), followed by clothes (n = 107) and leather products (n = 16). It is worth noting that none of Asian Muslim tourists selected herbal products as souvenir. This could be explained that the cultural and traditional products are unique and serve as remembrance to the destination. Thus, the results in this study provide the implication for businessmen to produce high quality of the cultural and

traditional products that comply with Islamic practices such as avoiding animal forms.

Regarding activities preferences, most of Asian Muslim tourists preferred to walk around the city (n = 179) followed by visiting sights and attractions (n = 137), shopping (n = 136), visiting museums (n = 67), water sporting (n = 56), day spa (n = 53), trekking (n = 51), hotel and resort spa (n = 32), watching sporting event (n = 27), health spa (n = 16), adventure activity (n = 12), fresh water rafting and mountain climbing (n = 8), medical spa and golfing (n = 4). These results provide tourism related sectors with meaningful information to formulate appropriate strategy in attracting Asian Muslim tourists. Since the most favorite activity for Asian Muslim tourists is walking around the city, the authority should pay high attention in maintaining the cleanliness of the city and surrounding areas; especially the footpath, availability of signage and lighting.

Regarding to post travel behavior of tourist, the results show that they had high accommodation overall satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 4.78$, S.D. = .973), high food overall satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 4.14$, S.D. = .663), high activity overall satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 4.00$, S.D. = .784), moderate accommodation overall satisfaction ($\bar{X} = 2.86$, S.D. = .864). They had strongest intention to recommend others to visit Thailand ($\bar{X} = 4.64$, S.D. = .633). They had high intention to revisit Thailand ($\bar{X} = 3.86$, S.D. = .864).

C. Tourist Needs

This study categorizes the needs of tourist in three aspects, which are needs towards hotel, restaurant, and public area. Regarding to needs towards hotel, the results show that ; among all the needs, tourists expressed highest needs on placement of Qibla stickers or direction point towards Makkah city in the hotel room ($\bar{X} = 4.34$, S.D. = .910) and availability of halal food or halal restaurant in the hotel ($\bar{X} = 4.34$, S.D. = 1.042), followed by provision of a copy of the Holy Qur'an, prayer mat and prayer timetable in the hotel room ($\bar{X} = 4.28$, S.D. = 1.068), bed and toilet positioned not face direction of Makkah ($\bar{X} = 3.91$, S.D. = 1.221), practice Islamic financial way ($\bar{X} = 3.83$, S.D. = .901), conservative staff dress ($\bar{X} = 3.78$, S.D. = .973), banning alcoholic drinks in minibar at hotel room ($\bar{X} = 3.64$, S.D. = 1.048) banning of nightclub and other inappropriate entertainments at the hotel ($\bar{X} = 3.60$, S.D. = 1.080), segregated swimming pools for men and women ($\bar{X} = 3.56$, S.D. = .929), banning of sex channels ($\bar{X} = 3.41$, S.D. = 1.249), and separate floors for male, female and family ($\bar{X} = 2.71$, S.D. = 1.084). Thus, the results in this study could shade light to hotel industry on how to provide excellent service for Muslim tourists.

On the needs towards restaurant, the results reveal that; among all the needs, tourists demonstrated highest needs on the availability of Halal sikh at Halal restaurant ($\bar{X} = 4.36$, S.D. = .800), followed by service minded and friendly staff ($\bar{X} = 4.15$, S.D. = .882), conservative entertainment ($\bar{X} = 3.83$, S.D. = .967), available of Thai food ($\bar{X} = 3.79$, S.D. = .810), availability of pictured and English menu with shown rice ($\bar{X} = 3.69$, S.D. = .909), staff can communicate in appropriate language ($\bar{X} = 3.63$, S.D. = .972), available of Western food ($\bar{X} = 3.53$, S.D. = 1.067), available of Arab food ($\bar{X} = 3.48$, S.D. = 1.044), availability of waitress to serve female customer and waiter to serve male customer ($\bar{X} = 3.37$, S.D. = .926), and availability of private cabin for family dinning ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, S.D. = .873). This was not surprise that, among all the needs towards restaurant, the Asian Muslim tourists expressed the strongest needs on the availability of Halal sikh at Halal restaurant. The needs for type of food offer in the restaurant are consistent with previous findings on tourist behavior. The most popular choice of food among the tourists is Thai food, followed by Western food and Arabian food.

Regarding to needs towards public area, the results show that; among all the needs, tourists show the strongest needs on availability of Mosque ($\bar{X} = 4.47$, S.D. = .895), followed by presence of loud public pronouncement of Azan to indicate prayer time ($\bar{X} = 4.13$, S.D. = .959), availability of prayer facilities/rooms at tourism sites, airport and other public areas ($\bar{X} = 4.04$, S.D. = 1.017), available of first aids ($\bar{X} = 3.90$, S.D. = .947), Islamic financial services or banks ($\bar{X} = 3.88$, S.D. = 1.069), availability of security personnel or policemen ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = .840), banning of gambling activities by the authority at public places ($\bar{X} = 3.58$, S.D. = .790), availability of family-appropriate beaches ($\bar{X} = 3.40$, S.D. = 1.131), and availability of private cabin at the beach ($\bar{X} = 3.36$, S.D. = 1.121). The results in this study are able to shade light for policy makers and business sectors related to tourism industry to formulate the appropriate facilities and services to meet the demand of this new and promising market.

V. CONCLUSION

Halal tourism is a new business that been initiates in order to carter Muslim tourist needs when they are traveling away from home. However, only a handful study examined the behavior and needs of the Muslim tourist, particularly at Andaman Gulf, Thailand. Thus,

the results from this study provide the fundamental and meaningful information for policy makers and business sectors to effectively develop, promote and deliver products and services that meet the unique demand of this new market.

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Piangpis Sriprasert was born in Nakhon Sawan, Thailand on the 26 th of May in 1973 and holds a Master degree in management and received her Ph.D. in entrepreneurship from Universiti Utara of Malaysia, Kedah, Malaysia in 2007.

She is a lecturer of Business Administration Program at Management Sciences Faculty, Nakhon Si Thammarat Rajabhat University, Thailand. Her areas of research interest

include entrepreneurship, tourism and leadership.