A City of Thousand Rivers: Promoting Halal Tourism in Banjarmasin, Indonesia

Mochammad Arif Budiman  
Prodi Akuntansi Lembaga Keuangan  
Syariah (ALKS)  
Politeknik Negeri Banjarmasin  
Banjarmasin, Indonesia  
m.arif.budiman@poliban.ac.id

Manik Mutiara Sadewa  
Prodi Akuntansi Lembaga Keuangan  
Syariah (ALKS)  
Politeknik Negeri Banjarmasin  
Banjarmasin, Indonesia  
manikmutiara@akuntansi.poliban.ac.id

Lusiana Handayani  
Prodi Akuntansi Lembaga Keuangan  
Syariah (ALKS)  
Politeknik Negeri Banjarmasin  
Banjarmasin, Indonesia  
lusiana.handayani@poliban.ac.id

Abstract—Banjarmasin is a unique city and well known as a City of Thousand Rivers (Kota Seribu Sungai). There are basically many potential halal tourist destinations in the city primarily those related to rivers and the Islamic life of the people. However, this potential has not been developed adequately. The Ministry of Tourism also did not include Banjarmasin in particular and South Kalimantan in general as one of the mainstays of halal tourist destinations. As such, the aim of this study is to reveal the potentials of halal tourism in Banjarmasin and to examine the challenges faced in promoting and developing the city as a favorite halal tourist destination in Indonesia. The study was conducted with a qualitative approach and analyzed using the descriptive-analytic method. It is found from the study that Banjarmasin has the splendor of religious, natural, historical as well as shopping and culinary tourist destinations. All this provide a big opportunity to attract both domestic and overseas visitors. Given this exceptional opportunity, a number of strategic and technical efforts are required to further increase the growth of this industry in Banjarmasin.

Keywords—halal tourism, Islamic tourism, river, tourist destination, halal industry

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is bestowed with the beauty of natural panorama and the richness of cultural and historical heritage that can attract many foreign and domestic tourists to come. As the most populous Muslim country in the world, Indonesia has also many potential halal tourist destinations which are recognized worldwide. Based on the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), Indonesia has gained a better score and position every year in the last 4 years. In 2015, Indonesia’s score was 67.5 and ranked in the 6th behind Malaysia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. But in 2016, Indonesia’s rank was 4th and constituted the 3rd in 2017. Amazingly, in 2018 Indonesia’s score is further increased (72.8) and then becomes the 2nd rank behind Malaysia [1]. This greater recognition from the international halal market shows the improved performance of halal tourism industry in Indonesia (Figure 1).

In order to improve the halal tourism in Indonesia, the government through the Ministry of Tourism in 2015 has appointed 13 provinces as prospective halal tourist destinations. Those provinces involve Nusa Tenggara Barat, Nangroe Aceh Darussalam, Sumatera Barat, Riau, Lampung, Banten, DKI Jakarta, Jawa Barat, Jawa Tengah, Yogyakarta, Jawa Timur, Sulawesi Selatan, and Bali [2]. Unfortunately, the province of South Kalimantan is not included in the above list. Similarly, the Ministry has also not incorporated this province into 18 Indonesian favorite tourism destinations in the year 2018 [3]. This fact implies that the Ministry of Tourism assessed that this province has not yet the necessary readiness to develop halal tourism compared to above 13 provinces. This situation obviously obliges the local government to give more attention in order to improve the tourism industry. Based on this context, this study attempts to reveal the potential of halal tourism in Banjarmasin as the capital of the province of South Kalimantan. The study is also intended to examine the challenges faced in promoting and developing the city as a favorite halal tourist destination in Indonesia.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist destinations are commonly determined by several attributes that are thought to attract tourists to visit those places. Some scholars [4] identified the key attributes of a tourist destination known as the “Five As” which includes accessibility, attractions, accommodation, amenities, and ancillary services. Accessibility refers to the physical access to the tourism destination by any means of transportation through the air, maritime or land connectivity. Attractions motivate a tourist to travel which includes natural, cultural and social attractions. Accommodation means any supply of overnight facilities, hotels, guesthouses, campsites, etc. Amenities relates to various facilities and services provided at the destination which support the tourism destination. Ancillary services portray the provision of catering, entertainment, information at the destination, etc. [5]. Meanwhile, Buhalis [6] proposed the attributes of a tourist destination with a new additional component which consist of accessibility, attractions, amenities, activities, ancillary services, and available packages.

A. Halal tourism concept

Halal tourism is one form of tourism that puts forward the values and norms of Islamic teaching as its basic foundation. The compliance with the Shariah is highly important as a guide in all aspects of tourism activities [7]. The concept of halal, derived from an Arabic word meaning ‘allowed’, is very important for Muslims. Therefore, halal tourism is part of the actualization of Islamic teaching in
tourism activities where the values of *halal* and *haram* must be the fundamental reference for every actor in the tourism industry. This concept is applied not only in food but also in other products such as cosmetics, medicines, vaccines, financial products (banking, insurance, etc.), including tourism [8].

The use of term *halal* tourism still has not reached the consensus among academics, practitioners, and regulators. There are various terms to name this activity, among others Islamic tourism, *halal* tourism, *halal* travel, Muslim-friendly travel destinations, *halal* lifestyle, and others. Battour and Ismail [9] mention there are two terms that have been used most, namely Islamic tourism and *halal* tourism. Both are often considered the same and used interchangeably with each other.

### B. *Halal* tourism criteria and measurement

The development of *halal* tourism must be guided by the provisions of the Shariah as regulated in the Quran and As-Sunnah. Technically, there are specific criteria that must be observed and should be provided in tourist destinations. The key faith-based needs of Muslim travelers are as follows: (1) *Halal* Food. *Halal* Food with proper *Halal* assurance which is easily identifiable is the most important service that a Muslim traveler needs when traveling. (2) Prayer facilities. Prayer is the main worship and the second of the five pillars of Islam. Adequate prayer rooms need to be equipped in the services and facilities that are frequented by Muslim travelers. In support of this need, the prayer rooms need to have “foot washing” facilities for *wudhu*.(3) *Ramadhan* services. Muslim travelers have special needs during the month of fasting such as the catering of pre-dawn *Halal* meals. (4) Water-friendly washrooms. Water plays an important role in purity and cleanliness for Muslims. It requires the use of water in the toilets. (5) No non-*Halal* activities. Muslims travelers prefer to avoid facilities that serve alcohol, have discotheques or are adjacent to a gambling resort. (6) Recreational facilities & services with privacy. Some Muslim travelers look for recreational facilities that provide privacy for males and females such as separate swimming pools and gyms [1].

Meanwhile, Chanin et al. [8] portrayed the following criteria to be fulfilled by halal industry which include: (1) the performing arts for tourists should not be contrary to the Shariah; (2) a prayer room should be provided, including with a washing facility and a *Qibla* direction bookmark; (3) a separate bathroom or toilet for men and women should be provided in a clean condition; (4) *halal* restaurants should be available at tourist destinations; (5) signposts and information on tour performances should be provided, both in English and Arabic; (6) security and order in every show and tourist destination must be guaranteed; (7) special therapists for men and women should be available at each spa; (8) motorists must carry out their duties in an orderly and cautious manner.

The GMTI 2018 has updated the latest set of measurements to gauge the level of Muslim-friendly travel of each destination as shown in Figure 2. Based on this index, the measurement of the *halal* industry comprises access (10%), communications (15%), environment (30%), and services (45%).

**III. METHODS**

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach. The data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were gathered through interview and observation while the secondary data were obtained from government regulation, media reports, and prior studies. Data collected were analyzed using the descriptive-analytic method.

**IV. DISCUSSION**

This section discusses the collected data which comprises several subsections concerning about the fascination of Banjarmasin and its challenges.

#### A. A city of thousand rivers

Banjarmasin is the capital of the province of South Kalimantan. It is a unique city and well known as a City of Thousand Rivers (*Kota Seribu Sungai*) owing to many rivers it has [10]. Banjarmasin has two great rivers which flow through the city, i.e. Sungai Barito and Sungai Martapura. These two rivers are interconnected to many other rivers, brooks and small streams throughout the city. The total number of rivers in Banjarmasin is 102 rivers.

In Banjarmasin, rivers possess an important role particularly for those whose houses are on its banks. The river supplies water for the people needs including for bathing and washing. It is also used for transportation and a source of livelihood for many people [11]. Business and economic activities are partly also taken place on the river which then becomes famous until now as floating markets (*Pasar Terapung*). All this forms a river culture for Banjarese people since centuries.

Nevertheless, with the passage of time, the importance of the river and its culture becomes less and misses its uniqueness. Development, unfortunately, has changed the course from river-oriented activities towards land-oriented activities [12]. Banjarmasin does not any longer follow the peculiar concept of a water city [13]. Roads and bridges were constructed massively replacing the water transportation. Local wisdom in building construction is ignored by emerging new buildings that infringe the local identity [14]. Many houses and offices have been built excessively at the expense of small streams and rivers which then become
disappeared or shrink. As a result, the environmental balance is disturbed and becomes a serious problem especially in the rainy season when the water cannot be channeled due to the disappearance of many streams around the city.

B. The religiosity of the society

Historically, Islam is estimated to come to South Kalimantan in the early of 15th century. The spread of Islamic in this region was further intensified by the establishment of the Sultanate Banjar by Pangeran Samudera approximately in 1540. He was previously a Hindu prince but converted to Islam and changed his name to Sultan Suriansyah. He then declared Islam as an official religion of the sultanate [15].

Islam and Banjar become like two sides of a single coin. Being a Muslim means becoming an Urang Banjar/Banjarese (the people of Banjar) [16][17]. There were many cases in which people from different ethnics and races, such as Dayak and Chinese, converted to Islam and subsequently considered a Banjarese (the people of Banjar) [18]. Therefore, Banjar at the outset is not a name of particular ethnic, but a religious, social, political and cultural entity. Islam and Banjar in South Kalimantan are indeed closely related and cannot be separated from each other. For Banjarese people, Islam is the spirit and the identity that forms and influences many aspects of their life [18]. Based on the 2010 census, 96% of South Kalimantan people are Muslim.

In terms of religiosity, Banjarese people are considered practicing Muslims [18][17]. Thousands of mosques and langgar (small mosque) have been built all over the province showing the spiritual enthusiasm of the people to perform religious practices. Many of these holy places have regular religious instructions (majlis taklim) and the Quran kindergartens (Taman Pendidikan Al-Quran). These places are mainly self-financed by the Muslim society through waqf and infaq. In addition, Banjarese’s religiosity can also be seen in many forms as manifested in social and cultural life of the people such as maulid celebration (birth of the Prophet Muhammad), baayun maulid (swinging child ceremony), basunat (circumcision procession), batamat (completing the Quran recitation), marriage reception and many more.

C. Halal tourist destinations in Banjarmasin

The author divides halal tourist destinations in Banjarmasin into four categories as follows: religious, natural, historical, and shopping and culinary tourist destinations.

1) Religious tourist destinations

Banjarmasin has many religious tourist destinations which include great and historical mosques and sacrosanct tombs of respected figures. The biggest mosque in Banjarmasin and constitutes a famous landmark of the city is Masjid Raya Sabilal Muhtadin. The mosque was built in 1981 and situated in the center of the city, on the west bank of Sungai Martapura. The mosque building is magnificent, can accommodate around 15,000 people, equipped with 5 minarets, wide parking lot and city forest in its surroundings. Furthermore, Masjid Sultan Suriansyah or Masjid Kuin is the oldest mosque in South Kalimantan located in the bank of Sungai Kuin, Kuin Utara, North Banjarmasin. The mosque was built at the time of Sultan Suriansyah (1526-1550), the first Sultan of Banjar who embraced Islam. Another remarkable mosque is Masjid Jami’ or also known as Masjid Jami’ Sungai Jingga constructed in 1777. Its building is dominated by Ironwood (ulin) with three layers of joglo architecture. Furthermore, Habib Basirih Dome is a saccosanct tomb of Habib Hamid bin Abbas Bahasyim that becomes a popular object of pilgrimage tour in Banjarmasin. The dome is frequented by pilgrims not only from South Kalimantan but also from abroad such as Egypt, China, Spain, Bosnia, and Germany.

2) Natural tourist destinations

Rivers are the advantage of Banjarmasin that really beautify this city. Many tourist spots lie around those rivers. The Menara Pandang is a four-floor-tower that was built on the side of Sungai Martapura. It offers beautiful views of the city. The Tower was inaugurated in June 2014 and becomes a landmark of Banjarmasin. The development of the tower along with Siring Park was meant to strengthen the nickname of Banjarmasin as the “City of Thousand Rivers”.

The dome is frequented by pilgrims not only from South Kalimantan but also from abroad such as Egypt, China, Spain, Bosnia, and Germany.

3) Historical tourist destinations

Several historical tourist destinations are also available in Banjarmasin, for instance, Rumah Anno 1925, Museum Wasaka, and Prince Antasari’s memorial park. Rumah Anno was built in 1925 AD, located on Tendean Street. This house is one of house building of Palimasan, two-floor type of house that still exists in Banjarmasin. Along with Tendean floating market which is located in the same area, Rumah Anno has good facilities such as parking area, prayer room, halal food and clean toilet. Meanwhile, Museum Wasaka is a museum of the struggle of South Borneo people. Wasaka stands for “Waja Sampaik Kaputing” which is the motto of South Kalimantan people. It was inaugurated in 1991, housed in Rumah Banjar Bubungan Tinggi which was later transformed from a residential building to a museum. Another historical site is Prince Antasari’s memorial park. Prince Antasari is a local warrior who has been conferred an honor as a National Hero of Indonesia. He was buried in a funeral complex located on Malkon Temon Street, North Banjarmasin.

4) Shopping and culinary tourist destinations

Like any other major city in the country, Banjarmasin has numerous shopping centers and modern markets. What is different from Banjarmasin is the existence of traditional river markets which provides a unique experience for visitors. There are two river markets in Banjarmasin area, i.e. Kuin floating market and Tendean floating market. Kuin Floating Market is a natural floating market, located on the estuary of Sungai Barito, Kuin Utara which is estimated to have existed about 400 years ago. In this market, traders and
buyers using boats called *jukung* to conduct sale and purchase transactions. Surely, it offers a wonderful experience since all tourists must use a boat to get to the place. Kuin floating market attracts many visitors both from domestic and foreign. However, this market takes place only shortly after Fajr prayer until about seven o’clock in the morning.

In order to conserve floating market tradition, the government initiated a new floating market at the Siring of Sungai Martapura on Pierre Tendean Street in the city center. This new market was equipped with some conveniences such as adequate parking area, *small mosque*, and toilets. The government also provides this area with dock for *kelotok* (boat) that can be used for river tour around Banjarmasin. There is also another distinctive shopping area called Kampung Sasirangan, a small village where Banjarmasin typical fabrics namely *sasirangan* is widely produced by its residents.

Meanwhile, culinary destinations are available in many spots throughout Banjarmasin, but the most notable of those culinary spots are apparently *Soto Banjar Bang Amat*. *Soto Banjar* is a typical food of South Kalimantan with a special taste which is different from other types of *soto* in other part of Indonesia. This restaurant is located alongside Sungai Martapura. Here, visitors can enjoy not only a delicious meal but also beautiful river sights. Other than *soto*, Banjarmasin also has many other delicious foods such as *ketupat, lontong, nasi kuning* and a big variety of traditional cakes.

**V. CHALLENGES**

This section analyzes the conditions and challenges faced by Banjarmasin in promoting and developing the city as a favorite *halal* tourist destination in Indonesia. The analysis is carried out mainly by looking at the 2018 GMTI because this index is used by the government as a reference for standardizing the *halal* tourism industry in Indonesia.

**A. Access**

Visa requirements for entering Indonesia are now much easier because the government has opened a visa-free access for tourists from various countries to come to Indonesia. But because Banjarmasin has not yet served international flights, tourists who want to come to this city must enter through other airports such as Jakarta, Surabaya or Baliikpapan. The absence of an international airport is one of Banjarmasin’s main weaknesses as a tourist city in attracting foreign tourists.

While transport infrastructure in Banjarmasin generally is quite good, the public transportation route is limited. Due to the lack of public transportation, visitors must use private transportation to reach many tourist destinations. Moreover, the increasing growth of private vehicles without sufficient expansion of roads has added to the congestion of the streets in the city especially during rush hours in the morning and evening. Therefore, the government needs to provide a special transportation for tourists to arrive at *halal* tourist places more easily. In this case, water transportation becomes an appropriate solution because it is very suitable with the image of Banjarmasin as the city of Thousand Rivers.

**B. Communications**

The promotion of *halal* tourism in Banjarmasin needs to be improved using any means and media. Overseas promotions also need to be intensified. Meanwhile, unlike other cities in Indonesia such as Yogyakarta and Denpasar where many tourism industry operators and the public at large have become accustomed to foreign languages, especially English, Banjarmasin requires more translators and tour guides. Tour guides need to be prepared at various tourist destinations to help visitors in their journey in this city.

Although the Tourism Office of Banjarmasin government has a website promoting tourist attractions and destinations in this city, the language used in such a website is Indonesian only. This makes a serious difficulty for foreign tourists to access it. In addition, the website must always be updated with the latest information all the time. Unfortunately, it is very rare for tourist destinations management in Banjarmasin to have their own website.

**C. Environment**

The level of security in Banjarmasin is generally quite conducive, but in crowded places such as markets, theft or snatching sometimes still occurs. With regard to cleanliness, Banjarmasin has for several years received a clean city award (*Piala Adipura*) from the Ministry of Environment. However, river cleanliness is still a serious challenge for the government. Among the biggest problems is the amount of garbage coming from upstream areas. The garbage must be cleaned up before entering into the city so that the view of the river which constitutes the mainstay of the city river tour is maintained. The safety and security factors of river transportation should also be enhanced with routine inspections for all ships and the obligation to use buoys for all passengers. In addition, the design of the ship or *kelotok* may need to be changed so that passengers no longer climb to the roof to enjoy the beauty of the river panorama. River tour packages must also be provided more attractive not only to people who stay in hotels but also to the wider community.

The number of tourist arrivals every year continues to increase, including foreign tourists. Excellent facilities and services accompanied by promotions must be optimized to further increase the number of tourist visits. In the meantime, rules concerning the obligation to close *aurat* and banning seclusion for a non-*mahram* couple in public places are not yet available. The government needs to regulate it so that the rules of *Shari'ah* can be enforced well for the common comfort and orderliness.

**D. Services**

*Halal* food with a variety of menus can be found very easily in Banjarmasin because the majority of tourist service providers and residents of Banjarmasin are Muslims. However, the lack of restaurants and food providers having a *halal* certification from MUI is still a big challenge for this city. The people awareness about the urgency of *halal* certification still needs to be improved. In addition, all restaurants and food stalls should provide a menu list with their prices for ease for travelers. Places of worship for Muslim visitors in Banjarmasin are not difficult to obtain because there are a lot of mosques and small mosques (*langgar*) in various places. Information about the time of
prayers is therefore available all the time because adzan (a call to prayer) can be heard from those holy places. Clean water for ablution is also available sufficiently. However, separate toilets for men and women are still not widely available in most of the tourist destinations.

As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations of Banjarmasin is the absence of an international airport which is the entry point for foreign tourists. Even so, halal food is available for tourists at the existing airport, Syamsuddin Noor. In terms of accommodation, Banjarmasin already has many hotels and inns. Based on the data from the Indonesian Association of Hotels and Restaurants (PHRI) of South Kalimantan, there are 150 hotels in Banjarmasin, but very few hotels have been certified. Only 5% hotel has already received the certificate for their product, service, and management. There are several Shariah hotels located in Banjarmasin and some other are outside Banjarmasin, which is Banjarbaru.

Regarding the unique experiences which relate to Islamic heritage sites, there are two most visited graves, namely the tomb of Syekh Arsyad Al-Banjari in Kelampayan and Syekh Zaini Abdul Ghani in Sekumpul, both located in Martapura about 40 km from Banjarmasin. Hundreds of thousands of people come to these places to commemorate their deaths (haul) every year, including guests from outside South Kalimantan and abroad, such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. During these events, hotel occupancy rates are usually very high and airline tickets are sold out. This also causes severe traffic congestion around Martapura because of a large number of people coming.

VI. CONCLUSION

Banjarmasin is bestowed with the splendor of religious, natural, historical as well as shopping and culinary tourist destinations. All these provide a big opportunity to attract both domestic and overseas visitors. The prospect of halal tourism in Banjarmasin is therefore quite promising given the available resources. Nonetheless, the city still faces some challenges that need to be addressed with collaborative and coordinative actions from all stakeholders.

A number of strategic and technical efforts are required to further improve the access, communications, environment, and services of this halal industry. All stakeholders of this industry ranging from government, business operators and owners as well as the public at large need to work hand in hand to provide better service and to offer unforgettable moments for those who visit this city. The government needs to strengthen the regulation and provide supporting policies and programs that can better manage and encourage the industry to grow. Business operators and owners need to improve their business capacity and provide professional services to visitors as well as to make the necessary investment to boost the industry. Finally, the public at large are expected to support this growing industry through their hospitality and maintaining the cleanliness and orderliness of the city.

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