

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region: A Potential for *Halal* Tourism Industry in the Philippines

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Abstract:

In numerous Muslim-majority nations, the tourism sector plays a pivotal role in driving employment and fostering economic growth. The escalating demand for *halal* tourism, coinciding with the annual increase in Muslim tourists, underscores the sector's prominence. Within the current interconnected global milieu, tourism has transformed into expansive industrial domains spanning both national and international spheres. The rapid growth in national and international tourism not only serves as a crucial income source for developing nations but also reshapes the global economic landscape. This study seeks to delve into the specific dynamics of the *halal* tourism market within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. The research questions guiding this exploration revolve around the potential and opportunities inherent in the development of *halal* tourism. The conceptual framing of this study encompasses an examination of the foundational concepts and principles that underpin *halal* tourism, providing a theoretical framework for the research. The methodology employed involves a meticulous analysis of the *halal* tourism market in the region, employing both qualitative approach to gain comprehensive insights. The key findings of this study illuminate the year-over-year increase in Muslim tourists, presenting a dual prospect for the tourism sector— an opportunity for growth and an associated challenge. Noteworthy initiatives taken by countries like Indonesia and Malaysia to position themselves as developed nations in the Southeast Asian region are explored, with a specific focus on how the tourism sector contributes significantly to their respective economies.

Keywords: Bangsamoro, *halal*, tourism, Mranaws, and Mindanao

1. Introduction

In the contemporary interconnected world, the emergence of halal tourism stands out as a unique phenomenon within the travel sector, blending Islamic values with hospitality offerings. The increasing number of Muslim travelers worldwide, who contribute substantially to the economy with billions of dollars in spending, presents promising prospects for destinations catering to halal tourism. According to (Churiyah, et al., 2021), citing data from PEW Research, the global population is expected to reach 9.3 billion by 2050, marking a 35% increase from 2010. In parallel, the Muslim population is projected to experience a significant 73% rise, reaching 2.8 billion within the same period. These forecasts resonate with the findings of the 2019 Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), which accurately predicted the presence of 160 million Muslim travelers in 2020, contributing to a total expenditure of USD 220 billion and maintaining a steady 6% annual growth rate (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2019). Moreover, Crescent Rating (2018) reinforces these projections by estimating that Muslim travelers' spending in the tourism sector will exceed US\$300 billion by 2026. Additionally, various sources indicate that global Muslim travelers, as highlighted by Mehr News Agency in 2016, constitute approximately 10% of the overall travel economy (Youssef, 2016). Therefore, Kamal et al. (2017) argue that "Tourism, as a significant contemporary human activity, has led to fundamental changes in the economy, conditions, culture, and traditions.

Twenty-five years ago, tourism was reserved for privileged small groups, but today it's a widespread activity enjoyed by large populations. Traveling is now universally recognized as an individual and social right. Crescent Rating, a leading authority on halal travel, has outlined six essential needs for Muslim travelers, including halal food, prayer facilities, and Ramadan services. Countries, both within and outside the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), are actively developing halal tourism destinations to attract Muslim travelers. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in the Philippines, with its predominantly Muslim population and cultural ties to Malay countries, presents an intriguing opportunity for halal tourism. Exploring halal tourism in Muslim-minority nations like the Philippines is crucial for understanding and improving the tourism industry. For instance, research on Muslim-minority countries like Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea emphasizes the importance of providing accessible information to Muslim visitors. Therefore, this study's examination of halal tourism in BARMM contributes significantly, as there's been no prior research on this topic. With this, it is essential to note that the '*Halal*' concept extends beyond the Muslim consumer base, despite being primarily targeted at Muslims. Scholars, researchers, and

organizations like JAKIM of Malaysia have defined '*halal*' to signify anything acceptable, clean, permissible, lawful, and not prohibited in Islam (JAKIM, 2014). In addition, Azam Siddique (2019) highlights the challenges faced by the global *halal* industry in raising awareness among non-Muslim consumers regarding the broader significance of the term '*halal*,' which extends beyond religious contexts. In the context of *halal* tourism, this underscores the need for strategies aligning with Islamic law (Shari'ah). However, there are challenges in precisely defining the concept, which is addressed using Al-Qaradawi's framework definition (Shari'ah). *Halal* tourism, from an Islamic perspective, encompasses any tourism practice or activity considered 'permissible' in Islam (Nicolaidis, 2016).

This viewpoint is consistent with the Quran, which regards tourism as a blessing and encourages Muslims to travel the world to appreciate Allah's creation fully and visit friends and relatives. Muslims have a duty to extend hospitality to visitors under Islamic law, affording them the rights of citizens. Therefore, analyzing tourism as a manifestation of human behavior warrants investigation into where people travel and why. Hence, this study specifically focuses on the potential of the *halal* tourism market in the Bangsamoro autonomous region in the Philippines. It delves into foundational concepts, principles, and the opportunities and challenges inherent in the global *halal* tourism market. Furthermore, it examines how BARMM actively embraces *halal* tourism to bolster its economic prospects beyond mere *halal* certification.

1.2. Research Methodology

The study on the *halal* tourism industry in BARMM, Philippines followed a meticulous methodology. It commenced with an exhaustive review of relevant information from print, electronic media, and existing tourism literature, focusing on the evolution of Shariah tourism in South East Asia and the Philippines. Subsequently, a systematic data collection process occurred, obtaining pertinent information on government tourism policies directly from the Ministry of Tourism of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region. The third step involved a detailed analysis and interpretation of the collected data, with a methodological exploration of *halal* tourism within the context of Muslim religious practices, drawing insights from the Qur'an and hadith. The study concluded with the synthesis of findings and the formulation of conclusions, resulting in a rigorous analysis contributing to a nuanced understanding of the dynamics in the *halal* tourism industry in BARMM, Philippines.

2. Results and discussion

2.1. Tourism in the Perspective of Islam

Analyzing the origins of the term "tourism," it stems from the Sanskrit roots "*pari*," meaning extensively or around, and "*wisata*," denoting travel or movement. Hence, tourism can be interpreted as a repetitive journey from one place to another (Suwena, 2017: 80). In today's globalized context, numerous scholars and researchers have put forth definitions for tourism. As referenced by Uraiby (2023), the World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as the act of individuals traveling and residing outside their habitual environment for a period of up to one year, whether for leisure, business, or other purposes—a definition widely embraced globally. Cook et al. (2014; p.3) articulated tourism as "the temporary displacement of individuals to destinations beyond their usual places of work and residence, encompassing the activities engaged in during their stay at those destinations, and the amenities established to fulfill their requirements." It is evident from this definition that tourism encompasses both the movement of people (tourists), representing the demand side, and the infrastructure and activities designed to meet tourists' needs at destinations, representing the supply side.

On another note, the study aims to investigate the permissibility of tourism within the framework of Islam. This investigation holds significance, particularly in the context of the Philippines, a predominantly Christian nation in Southeast Asia, which also accommodates a Muslim population in Mindanao, collectively recognized as the Bangsamoro people under Republic Act No. 11054.

In line with Islamic principles, travel carries profound religious importance as a form of worship. Particularly, journeys such as the Hajj and Umrah are integral pillars of Islam, with pilgrimage to Makkah being a year-round religious obligation. Moreover, within Islamic teachings, travel is closely linked to the pursuit of knowledge. In the early days of Islam, extensive journeys were undertaken with the explicit aim of acquiring and disseminating knowledge, as highlighted in the Quranic verse: "[Such believers are] the repentant, the worshippers, the praisers [of Allah], the travelers [for His cause], those who bow and prostrate [in prayer], those who enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, and those who observe the limits [set by] Allah. And give good tidings to the believers." (Quran: Surah At-tawbah: 112, English Translation, Sahih International).

Furthermore, traveling to diverse locations is viewed as an opportunity to broaden one's intellectual horizons. The Quran emphasizes the significance of exploring the Earth for understanding and contemplation, as seen in verses like:

"Say, 'Travel throughout the land and see the fate of the deniers.' Ask [them], 'To whom belongs everything in the heavens and the earth?' Say, 'To Allah!' He has taken upon Himself to be Merciful. He will certainly gather [all of] you together for the Day of Judgment—about which there is no doubt. But those who have ruined themselves will never believe." (Quran: Surah Al-An'am: 11-12, English Translation, Sahih International).

Furthermore, the tourism sector stands out as an industry capable of generating individual, communal, and national revenue streams. Numerous regions or countries heavily rely on tourism, significantly bolstering their economic incomes. Areas blessed with breathtaking landscapes, diverse artistic and cultural offerings, well-established transportation and lodging facilities, and rich historical legacies have strategically harnessed tourism as a promising and lucrative economic endeavor. "Have they not considered how Allah begins creation and then repeats it? Indeed that, for Allah, is easy. Say, [O Muhammad], 'Travel through the land and observe how He began creation. Then Allah will produce the final creation. Indeed Allah, over all things, is competent.'" (Quran: Surah Al-Ankabut, 19-20: English Translation, Sahih International).

According to Rahmadi Fuji's interpretation, the aforementioned verses in the Quran stress the importance of human travel to explore various historical and cultural artifacts. Such exploration serves as a reminder of individuals' mortal existence as creations of God. It underscores the notion that all deeds in the world will be judged by God, the Just Judge, ultimately leading to the meeting with God. The civilizations resulting from these pursuits become significant markers for subsequent generations (Fuji, 2019). Ultimately, the primary objective of halal travel is to encourage others to embrace Islam and disseminate the teachings revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This reflects the mission of the Prophet and his companions, who advocated for compassion and the adherence to truth on a global scale. Regarding the conversion of the Bangsamoro people to Islam, historical records, particularly the works of Dr. Najeeb Saleeby and Dr. Cesar Adib Majul, along with the support of numerous historians, suggest that Arab missionaries, traders, and travelers arrived in the archipelago, leading to the conversion of the local populace to Islam. "And we sent not before you [as messengers] except men to whom we revealed from among the people of cities. So have they not traveled through the earth and observed how the end of those before them was? And the home of the Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah; then will you not reason?" (Quran: Surah Yusuf: 109, English Translation, Sahih International).

Moreover, Suratul Yusuf verse 109 expressly encourages Muslims to engage with diverse countries, signifying the importance for individuals to acquaint themselves with the cultures of societies worldwide. A comprehensive understanding of a society's culture requires direct engagement. The verse also underscores the historical consequences faced by previous communities due to their wrongdoing. Consequently, individuals are urged to employ their intellectual faculties in discerning the truth while simultaneously having faith in the veracity of the Quranic revelations. This concept evolved to fulfill these noble objectives. As according to Jaelani (2016), “engaging in such travel aids in strengthening one's faith in the oneness of God and facilitates the fulfillment of life's obligations.” In other words, the Glorious Quran has permitted the Muslims to travel upon the given rulings of Shari’ah (Islamic Law).

Now, when considered from an Arabic etymological standpoint, the term permissible or *halal* has its roots in Arabic words such as *halla*, *yahillu*, *hillan*, *wahalan*, which essentially denote permissibility. According to Mohd Fuaad Said and colleagues, the concept of permissibility encompasses all objects or activities sanctioned by Islamic teachings, applicable across various facets of a Muslim's life (Said et al., 2020). In essence, *halal* signifies anything deemed acceptable, clean, permissible, lawful, and not prohibited in Islam. As highlighted by Liu et al. (2018), an Islamic perspective dictates that all aspects of product development (including food, drink, and shelter), places (destinations), dimensions (covering culture, religion, economy, etc.), and the management of service processes (encompassing marketing and ethical considerations) should align with Islamic teachings. To guide this approach, I have adopted the framework proposed by the globally recognized Muslim scholar, the chairman of International Union of Muslim Scholars, Muhammad Yusuf Qaradhawi, who articulated that: “The term *halal* is defined as that which is permitted, with respect to which no restriction exists, and the doing of which the law-giver, Allah is allowed (Al-Qaradawi, 2023; 25)”.

In other words, the researcher suggests that *Halal* tourism, as derived from verses in the Glorious Quran and Qaradhawi's framework, encompasses any tourism-related object or activity that aligns with Islamic teachings and is deemed permissible for engagement by Muslims in the tourism industry. The definition emphasizes the use of Islamic law (Shari’ah) as the guiding principle for developing and offering tourism products and services, catering primarily to Muslim customers. This includes establishments like *Halal* hotels, Shari’ah compliant resorts, *Halal* restaurants, and trips. Notably, the definition extends beyond geographical constraints, encompassing services and products designed for Muslim travelers in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Additionally, the

definition underscores that the purpose of travel within the context of *Halal* tourism is not strictly tied to religious reasons; it may align with any general motivations for tourism.

3. Prospects of *Halal* tourism in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, Philippines

In contrast to leading *Halal* tourism destinations such as Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia, the Philippines has yet to fully capitalize on the burgeoning market in this sector. Ahmed Uraiby (2023) highlights that studies anticipate a significant increase in the global Muslim population, reaching approximately thirty-five percent. The Pew Research Center underscores the rapid growth of Islam, projecting a 35% increase in the world's Muslim population over the next two decades, from 1.6 billion in 2010 to an estimated 2.2 billion by 2030. Furthermore, this trajectory is expected to persist, with an estimated 2.8 billion Muslims, constituting 30% of the world's population, by 2050 (Pew Research, 2015). Notably, projections suggest that Islam will become the world's most populous religion by 2075 (BBC News, 2017). Concurrently, in alignment with the expanding Muslim population, the Global Muslim Travel Index 2019 observes a rising trend in Muslim tourists globally, growing from 25 million in 2000 to 140 million in 2018. The forecast indicates a further increase to 230 million tourists by 2026, with anticipated expenditures ranging from USD 180 billion to USD 300 billion, a substantial portion of which is expected to be derived from online purchases (Global Muslim Travel Index, 2019).

According to the 2021 report from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Southeast Asia welcomed 137 million international visitors in 2019, generating exports valued at \$164 billion, equivalent to approximately 9% of the region's total exports. Additionally, nearly 1 billion domestic trips during the same year contributed an extra \$141 billion in destination spending. The travel and tourism sector played a significant role in Southeast Asia's economy, contributing 12.1% to the region's gross domestic product (GDP) and employing 42 million workers. Notably, a majority of these workers were women involved in small and medium-sized enterprises connected to extensive tourism supply chains. Before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, projections indicated that Southeast Asia's diverse tourism resources, enhanced global connectivity, and competitive pricing would lead to a consistent annual growth of 4%–5% in international visitor arrivals. It was anticipated that by 2030, these

arrivals would surpass 188 million, accompanied by proportional increases in tourism spending and employment opportunities.

In the Philippines, the Department of Tourism released an Inbound Tourism Update on December 1, 2023, reporting a total of 439,926 visitor arrivals at international air and sea ports across the country for the month of November 2023. Among these, 411,890 were foreign nationals, and 28,036 were Overseas Filipinos (Department of Tourism, 2023). The recorded visitor expenditure amounted to approximately PHP 35.49 Billion, indicating a substantial 36.50% increase from the PHP 26.0 Billion recorded in November 2022. In other words, this data suggests a substantial growth in tourism activities, both in terms of the number of visitors and the associated expenditure, contributing positively to the tourism sector in the Philippines.

As per Cuevas et al. (2021), there has been a growing demand for halal products and services in the Philippines. Consequently, in 2015, the Department of Tourism (DOT) initiated the Philippine Halal Tourism Project with the aim of promoting halal awareness among Filipinos and establishing a halal travel market within the country (Andrade, 2016). The Philippine government continued its efforts in 2019 by participating in events like the Arabian Travel Market to enhance the Muslim market share and increase arrivals from the Middle East and other Muslim countries (Arnaldo, 2019).

Moreover, the tourism dynamics in countries such as Malaysia and the Philippines reveal distinctive trends concerning visitor demographics and financial contributions. Malaysia, with a tourist influx of 13.02 million, primarily originating from other Asian regions, including the Middle East and Central Asia, signifies a robust regional appeal. This suggests a confluence of cultural and geographical factors contributing to Malaysia's popularity among its neighboring nations.

Conversely, the Philippines experiences a diverse range of visitors, predominantly from South Korea, the USA, and Australia. Notably, South Korean tourists emerge as the leading contributors to spending, with a noteworthy amount of PHP 2.41 Billion, followed by Australia with PHP 1.71 Billion. The USA and Singapore also play significant roles in tourism spending, contributing PHP 0.74 Billion and PHP 0.67 Billion, respectively. This distribution of expenditures underscores the economic significance of these key markets in shaping the financial landscape of the Philippine tourism industry. This also suggests that while Malaysia's appeal is anchored in regional factors, the Philippines attracts a diverse set of visitors with varying spending patterns. Notably, Malaysia ranks among the top 10 contributors, with its 9,382 tourists in the Philippines. Despite Malaysia's regional focus, the Philippines stands out for its ability to attract visitors from

various origins, and South Korea particularly leads in terms of contribution to tourism revenue.

In the context of *halal* tourism development in the Philippines, particularly within the Bangsamoro region, there exists a compelling opportunity to bolster revenue streams. The concentration of visitors from South Korea, the USA, and Australia, along with their considerable spending, provides a strategic foundation for diversification. Introducing *halal*-friendly amenities, accommodations, and experiences in the Bangsamoro region can attract a more diverse array of tourists, especially from Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries, emulating the successful model observed in Malaysia.

Amid the global surge in demand for *halal* tourism, aligning offerings in the Bangsamoro autonomous region with *halal*-friendly practices has the potential to tap into an emerging market segment. This not only broadens the geographical reach of Philippine tourism but also positions the Bangsamoro autonomous region as a distinctive destination catering to specific cultural and religious preferences. Consequently, the integration of *halal* tourism stands as a significant contributor to the revenue growth of the Philippines, highlighting the economic viability of strategic diversification within the tourism sector.

Examining the current data on tourism in the Philippines and Malaysia, it becomes evident that strategic development in *halal* tourism holds substantial potential for the Bangsamoro region, Philippines. As the region prepares for a parliamentary election in 2025, the imperative to bolster its economy is paramount. In other words, *halal* tourism in the Bangsamoro autonomous region becomes not only an economic necessity but also a strategic opportunity by showcasing its rich natural resources and cultural heritage, the region can position itself as a distinctive destination on the global tourism map. Embracing *halal* tourism not only aligns with the cultural and religious preferences of a significant global market but also promises to be a catalyst for economic growth, creating jobs and fostering sustainable development. As the Bangsamoro autonomous region embarks on this journey, it has the chance to weave a narrative of beauty, diversity, and economic prosperity, inviting the world to explore and appreciate its unique offerings.

In Malaysia and Indonesia, *halal* tourism has been instrumental in attracting a diverse and sizable tourist demographic, notably originating from Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries. The success of this model provides a compelling example for the Bangsamoro autonomous region, suggesting that aligning its offerings with *halal*-friendly practices could effectively tap into a growing global market. The varied influx of visitors from South Korea, the USA,

and Australia to the Philippines underscores the potential for the Bangsamoro autonomous region to diversify its tourism sector, particularly through the implementation of *halal* tourism practices.

3. *Halal* Tourism Landscape in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region, Philippines

The Philippines possesses the world's 34th largest economy, boasting an estimated nominal gross domestic product of \$435.7 billion in 2023 (World Economic Outlook Database, 2023). As of 2022, the country's labor force stands at approximately 49 million, with an unemployment rate of 4.3%. Recognized by the World Bank as one of the most dynamic economies in the South East Asia and Pacific region, the Philippines attributes its economic vibrancy to escalating urbanization, a burgeoning middle class, and a sizable, youthful population. This dynamism finds its roots in robust consumer demand, underpinned by a thriving labor market and substantial remittances (World Bank, 2023). The private sector, particularly the services industry, including business process outsourcing, wholesale, and tourism, continues to exhibit positive performance. Given the pivotal role of tourism in the Philippines' GDP, national employment, and overall economic development, it is evident that the tourism sector holds the potential to act as a catalyst for sustained economic growth and progress (Ghani, 2016). This data can inform the Philippines and the Bangsamoro government in fostering the development and promotion of *halal* tourism in the country.

Notably, the Philippines stands out as a favored retirement destination for foreigners, attributed to its favorable climate and cost-effective living conditions (Frost, 2015). Tourism, contributing 5.2% to the Philippine GDP in 2021, played a crucial role in providing 5.7 million jobs in 2019. In 2023, the Philippines welcomed 5.45 million international visitors (Business World, 2020), with Malaysians, Indonesians, Saudis, and other visitors from Muslim countries consistently ranking among the top foreign visitors in recent years.

In this regard, the Philippines has implemented two national policies aimed at fostering the growth of the *halal* industry. The first policy, Republic Act (R.A.) 9997, established the National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF), a governmental body entrusted with overseeing all matters related to Muslims, including the certification of *halal* food (Official Gazette, 2023). The second policy, R.A. 10817 or the Philippine *Halal* Export Development and Promotion Act of 2016, endorsed by former President Benigno C. Aquino III, further acknowledged the potential of *halal* food and export (Official Gazette, 2016).

In other words, the consistent influx of tourists from nearby Muslim countries points to an opportunity to develop *halal* tourism offerings, especially in the Bangsamoro autonomous region. Given Bangsamoro's majority Muslim population and its push for greater autonomy, positioning it as a *halal*-friendly destination could attract more Muslim tourists and investment from Southeast Asia and the Gulf region. Overall, this study reinforces the strong prospects for *halal* tourism to thrive in Bangsamoro autonomous region and deliver economic and social benefits to its people and the Philippines in general.

3.1. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region and its People

The history of the Bangsamoro people is marked by the rich tapestry of indigenous and Islamic cultures, aspiring to cultivate a harmonious coexistence and envisioning a Bangsamoro homeland characterized by nobility, virtue, unity, justice, progress, and freedom from conflict, corruption, decadence, and violence. The goal is to instill values such as dignity, honesty, modesty, and respect, fostering awareness, tranquility, and understanding to perpetuate a godly and value-based heritage. The dissemination of inspiring narratives aims to instill pride in the constituents' identity (BARMM, 2023).

Despite noteworthy achievements and persistent efforts, the recently established interim Bangsamoro government requires extensive support to establish stable self-governance in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges during the demanding transitional period (2019–2025). The focus is on achieving political legitimacy normalization, transitioning into effective governance, ensuring accountability and transparency guided by moral principles, and combating corruption to unify the fragmented Bangsamoro society.

BARMM was created following the ratification of Republic Act No. 11054, known as the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), serving as the foundational law for the region. This law, signed by President Rodrigo R. Duterte on July 26, 2018, adopted a parliamentary system in an area previously governed by a presidential system. The establishment of BARMM resulted from a two-part legally-binding plebiscite in Western Mindanao held on January 21 and February 6, 2019, confirmed on January 25, 2019, by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC), organized by the national government to replace the dissolved ARMM. The BARMM, covers 6 provinces, namely, Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Sur and del Norte, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. The regional center is the City of Cotabato.

BARMM encompasses six provinces, namely, Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao del Sur and del Norte, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi, with the regional center located in the City of Cotabato. Rudy Rodil (2003) broadly identifies the Islamized

groups in Mindanao, including the Iranun, Jama Mapun, Kalagan, Kolibugan, Maguindanawn, Mranaw, Sama, Sangil, Tausug, and Yakan. Additionally, Islamized groups in the Palawan provinces, such as the Molbog and the Panimusan (Palimusan), as well as the partly Islamized Ka'gan, and the Sama Dilaut or Sama Badjao of the Sulu Archipelago, are classified under the broader category of Moro groups Muslims due to their historical association with the Sulu seas (Rodil, 2003: 29).

The inhabitants of this predominantly Muslim region in the Philippines are commonly referred to as *Moros* or *Bangsamoro* (Moro Nation). According to the notable historian Dr. Najeeb Saleeby, he portrayed the Moros as individuals who embraced monotheism as committing themselves to the worship of '*Allahu Ta'ala*,' the Almighty God, in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet Mohammed and the Glorious Quran. Engaging in agriculture and fishing, the Moros thrived on the abundance of both land and sea resources. They skillfully transformed the timber from their rich forests into boats, navigating the seas to trade pearls for silks and spices. Driven by an inherent aptitude for navigation, they explored distant lands, acquiring a broad range of experiences beyond the confines of a single island or a limited group of islands (Saleeby, 1913).

Moreover, the term Moro has undergone a historical evolution. Etymologically, its roots can be traced back to the *Mauri* people in present-day Mauritania and were subsequently applied to the Berbers of North Africa. It also encompassed a group of Muslims who played a role in the conquest of Southern Spain. Notably, the term extended to include Arabs, including the Umayyad princes who established the Umayyad kingdom of Spain. Salah Jubair (1999) emphasizes that the name goes beyond a specific group or nationality, signifying a religious affiliation that surpasses geographical, racial, and temporal boundaries. The term Moro as an identifier for the Muslim population has evolved gradually, initially carrying negative connotations. It was only after the establishment of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) that the term took on a political identity. The MNLF, founded by Nur Misuari, redefined the term, shedding its negative connotations, stating that Moros are a group of people who resisted foreign invaders for over 300 years without being subjugated or colonized.

Furthermore, in the present, the Moro population as determined by the 2020 Census was 4,404,288. This represented 4.04% of the entire population of the Philippines. Based on these figures, the population density is computed at 120 inhabitants per square kilometer or 311 inhabitants per square mile (PhilAtlas, 2023).

3.2. Cultural and Religious Tapestry of the Bangsamoro

This section of the study navigates the traditional systems, architectural marvels, and enchanting destinations within the context of *Halal* tourism. This study unveils the unique stories woven into the landscapes, traditions, and sacred sites of this culturally rich and diverse region.

3.2.1. Traditional Political System

Before the arrival of foreign colonizers, three significant political entities thrived in the Bangsamoro region: the Sultanate of Sulu, Sultanate of Maguindanaw, and *the Pat a P'ngampong ko Ranaw*, which now serves as the locus for the current Bangsamoro autonomous government. The formal establishment of the Sulu Sultanate dates back to 1450 A.D. according to Dr. Rudy Rodil (2003). This sultanate encompassed present-day provinces such as Sulu, Tawi-tawi, Basilan, North Borneo (Sabah), Southern Palawan, and Samboangan (including Zamboanga City and the western portion of the Zamboanga Peninsula), where Tausug and Sama settlements were concentrated (Rodil, 2003: 40). Conversely, the Maguindanaw Sultanate emerged in the early 17th century, with its most expansive territory during Sultan Kudarat's reign (1619-1671), primarily in the present province of Maguindanaw and the southern part of Lake Lanao (Rodil, 2003: 42).

Meanwhile, in Lanao, the prevailing political structure was known as "*Pat a P'ngampong ko Ranaw*" (Four Federal States of Lanao). The Mranaw social structure is distinguished not by rigid ranks tied to specific obligations and privileges, but by the rights and duties associated with lines of descent. According to Dr. Manuel Tawagon (1990), the term *P'ngampong* denotes the traditional socio-political organization and territorial division in Lanao, governed by the social order called *taritib* (order). The *P'ngampong* can be applied individually or collectively to the four states in Lanao—Bayabaw, Masiu, Unayan, and Balo-i. This unique political system of the *Pat a P'ngampong ko Ranaw* stands out, as the concept of *P'gawid-P'gawidan* is not prevalent in other sultanates in Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan.

3.2.2. Moro Courtships and Wedding

Marriage customs and practices within the Mranaw community exhibit distinctive characteristics, with considerable emphasis on the financial aspects involved. Unlike other Moro groups with lower dowries, Mranaws, across all social classes, typically incur substantial expenses in arranging marriages. Prospective grooms are expected to save a significant amount, ranging from 30,000 to 500,000

pesos, as a dowry for their brides. Notably, even among economically disadvantaged families, the dowry for brides remains proportionately lower. In contrast, Sama, Tausug, and Yakan people in Tawi-tawi, Sulu, and Basilan adhere to a comparatively lower dowry tradition. The upper classes within the Mranaw/Iranun society experience a more intricate marriage process, involving dowries reaching hundreds of thousand pesos and property considerations. In many instances, financing a marriage may require mortgages, and grooms might seek financial assistance from relatives. Fulfilling the dowry is imperative, as legal marriages are deemed ineffective without its completion. In subsequent years, the responsibility to repay borrowed sums falls on the young couple. During courtship, parental wishes heavily influence young Moro males and females, fostering a restricted courtship where direct communication between the genders is limited, often occurring in group settings under close supervision.

The process of courtship usually begins with '*Kapangiza-za*' which means, male's family member will inquire through the help of some relatives where the soon-to-be-bride is coming from. This is the same with that of the practice of Malaysians called '*Merisik*', and among the Tausug and Sama people, called '*pagpanilas*' and among the Magindanawn, *Kapaninilong*. The same case with the bride's family when they knew someone will ask for their daughter for marriage. After knowing the status of the family, the family of the groom will do *kandaonga* (courtship), among the Magindanawn it is called *askapangengedong* which is undertaken through the matchmakers, often in verses exchanged continually until there is an assurance on both sides about the details of the marriage. If things goes well, the family of the groom will visit the place of the bride with the intention of justifying the reasons why the family of the bride should accept her future husband, this is called *kapanoksam* (searching for a bride). Among Malaysians, this is called '*Meminang*', and among Tausugs/Sama people, *pagpangasawa*. This happens when once both parties accept, each one of them will commence preparation for marriage proposal formally. With this, an official negotiation for dowry will be done and they will re-schedule another visit for the offering or giving the amount of dowry agreed upon the two families, this is what we called, '*Dialaga Di B'ntal*', (*Hari pertunangan* in Malaysia or *Pagkawah tugun* and *paghatud bugas* among Tausug/Sama people).

This is the most crucial point of the success of the marriage because through this, the family of the groom will have a final answer if the wedding will materialized or not. In the case of the bride's family, they will test also if the family of the groom will true to its conviction to the agreed amount of dowry. In addition, in some municipalities of Lanao del Sur, there is a given rule for *Dialaga*, this is the

amount of money that will be used for food and other preparations. Usually, this takes ten (10) percent of the total amount of dowry. Moreover, the beauty of the *Dialaga Di B'ntal* is that, both families will share foods. The family of groom will bring delicacies (such as *dodol*, *amik*, *tiyat'g*, and many more); and a bulk of fruits to be given to the family of bride. This is to show that the family is grateful for accepting their son to marry their daughter. Lastly, after the *dialaga*, both families will schedule the *nikah* or *kak'wing* (*Pagkawinamong* Tausug/Sama and *Kapagkalilang* among the Magindanawn), the solemnization ceremony which is usually held at home or in huge spaces. After the marriage, the young couple lives in the house of the girl's parents at the beginning. If they are going to live in the family of the groom, another payment is required to compensate for the loss of protection and acquaintance of her parents.

3.2.3. Some Moro Traditional dances

The earliest historical narratives among the Mranaw people are encapsulated in their *salsila* (genealogy) or oral tradition, specifically recounting the Kingdom of *Bumbaran*, the forebears of the contemporary Mranaw community. According to the *Darangen*, when the Muslim missionaries endeavored to propagate Islam, the inhabitants of *Bumbaran* resisted conversion, leading to the submergence of the entire kingdom beneath present-day Lake Lanao. The survival of only four individuals from this event marked the genesis of the present-day Mranaw lineage. In essence, the *Darangen* is regarded as a repository of beliefs, practices, norms, behaviors, thoughts, rituals, and various activities—social, political, cultural, religious, and intellectual—embraced by the Mranaw community.

In general, the *Darangen* has significantly influenced Mranaw history, society, culture, and institutions. Notably, the concept of *datuism*, encompassing political, social, and economic dimensions within this institution, is thought to have its roots in the *Darangen*. According to Dr. Mauyag M. Tamano, the former president of the Mindanao State University in Marawi City, "in the past, the datu's power, authority, and rank in the society constituted a style of life based on the legendary culture of the lost civilization of the city-state of *Bumbaran*, the pre-Islamic Kingdom form which Mranaw royalty is believed to have sprung" (Saber and Madale, 1975).

Madale (1981) also highlighted that the events narrated in the epic narrative *Darangen* are corroborated by living witnesses, serving as highly esteemed landmarks that bridge the gap between the present and the past. These revered

landmarks become a focal point during significant social gatherings and occasions, where activities and festivities mentioned in the text are reenacted to mirror historical occurrences. Consequently, these reenactments, occurring during events such as Prince Bantugan's preparations for battle, gave rise to *Sagayan*, a cultural manifestation featuring Mranaw dances, marking its introduction into Mranaw society. *Sagayan*, the dance of royalty or warrior dance, is accompanied by another dance illustrating women adorned in vibrant costumes, moving gracefully with arms swaying in the air. The specific episode, "*Kailid a Dempas*," intricately describes the warrior's movements, encompassing the manner of holding the *kampilan* (kriss) and the logistics of warfare. It's noteworthy that *Sagayan* is widely practiced among the Danao people, Mranaws, Iranun (Ilanun), and Magindanawns.

Furthermore, another traditional dance stemming from the *Darangen* is *Sadoratan*, a reenactment of an epic episode titled "*Paramata Gandingan*." This dance involves the princess Paramata Gandingan being abducted and asked to walk between two parallel strings to determine her nobility.

Additionally, the *Kapmalo-malong* or *malong* dance is a distinct Mranaw traditional dance depicting various occasions when the tubular clothing is worn. This dance is performed during community events, school functions, and the coronation of *datus* (royal chieftains) and *baes* (royal women). Finally, the widely known royal bamboo dance called *singkil* is derived from an episode of the *Darangen*. In "*Natangkopan a Ragat*" (Enchantment of Prince Bantugan), Prince Bantugan faces challenges set by guardian spirits, symbolized in the dance by clashing shields and clapping bamboos. The use of an umbrella held over the dancing princess is a modern addition, and the dance involves moving gracefully between crisscrossed bamboos without getting caught.

Meanwhile, among the inhabitants of the Sulu Archipelago, specifically the Tausog (Suluk) people, a traditional dance known as *Pangalay*, often referred to as the temple dance or fingernail dance, holds cultural significance (Severino, 2007). Despite critiques in dance literature questioning the Sanskrit origin of the term, *Pangalay* bears resemblance to classical Balinese and Thai dances. Notably, it stands out as one of the distinctly Asian dances from the southern Philippines, demanding dancers to exhibit agility and flexibility in their shoulders, elbows, and wrists (Mercurio, 2007). Typically showcased during weddings and festive occasions, the *Pangalay* has a male counterpart known as *Pangasik*, characterized by more martial movements. Additionally, when both male and female dancers partake in the performance, it is termed *Pangiluk*. Early writings on *Pangalay* by Fernando-Amilbangsa (1983) provide insight into the tradition, describing it

as: “The *Pangalay*, a dance style in the classical tradition, is the dominant indigenous dance form of the Tausug, Samal, Badjao, and Jama Mapun. This little-known dance style from the southern part of the country has the richest movement vocabulary of all ethnic dances in the Philippines. The intricate movements require strong technique, and demonstrate the same degree of artistry and sophistication parallel, if not superior, to other Asian dance forms. *Pangalay* is a “living” link to traditional dance cultures in the Asian region where sensitivity is the key to learning and gaining mastery of the many nuances of traditional dances.”

Furthermore, the Sama and Badjao (Sama Dilaut) communities in Tawitawi engage in a comparable dance known as '*igal*' or *tandak*. These terms denote elegant hand or arm movements, posturing, and footwork (Sheppard, 2011: 95). As emphasized by Orosa (1970): “The Samals (Sama people), who are fond of dancing, are usually employed to perform at Sulu feasts. The dancing is done by men or women, seldom by both together, and each dancer performs separately. The dancing consists in taking a series of postures, the feet keeping time to the music. The body is swayed slowly, and the hands, with fingers extended, are bent stiffly from the wrist...”

This text clearly suggests, as outlined by Santamaria, that the Sama community indeed shares the same cultural realm with the Tausug. Similar to numerous other cultural manifestations, the Tausug *pangalay*, the Sama *igal*, and the *pamansak* of the Sama Siasi, although maintaining distinct autonomy, likely influenced each other (Santamaria, 2016).

Concurrently, this study has traced the connections of the *Pangalay* or *igal* dances to Southeast Asia. According to Santamaria, while the “Balinese link” is less evident in the Tausug *pangalay*, it aligns more closely with the Sama *igal* dance tradition. Notably, the Balinese term for dance is *igel*, not *pangalay* or any of its close cognates (Santamaria, 2012). The widespread use of a term can signify a common origin and/or cultural contact. The term *igal* and its cognates are widely distributed in the Malay world. Considering cultural contact, the Balinese are not a seafaring people, making the idea of them reaching the southern Philippines and leaving a legacy highly implausible. On the contrary, the Sama, particularly the Sama Dilaut (Badjao), are known seafarers who inhabit certain areas of Bali and extend to Flores Island (Clifton et al., 2012). The established cultural contact between the Balinese and the Sama Dilaut makes the notion of a link between the Balinese *igel* and the Sama *igal* more plausible.

3.2.4. Religious Practices in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region

The Moro community engages in various social rituals and life cycle practices. Upon the birth of a child, a significant tradition involves reciting the *adhan* (call to prayer) in the newborn's ear, often done by the father or an elder. Another cultural custom is *katuri/katuli*, which pertains to circumcision—a surgical procedure performed by trained individuals, such as nurses or medical doctors. In adherence to Islamic teachings, circumcision is considered for hygiene reasons and may be conducted during infancy.

Islam encourages breastfeeding as a means of nourishing infants, aligning with the Quran's guidance for a two-year weaning period. Following the birth of a child, it is a Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to perform *aqiqah*—a ritual involving the sacrifice of livestock, with the meat distributed among friends, relatives, and those in need. This practice is considered a virtuous deed in Islam.

Haircutting is a customary practice, often accompanied by the tradition of weighing the cut hair. The equivalent amount in coins or gold is then given to the destitute. Moro parents play an integral role in providing their children with love, support, and maternal care. Additionally, parents bestow Muslim names upon their children as part of their cultural and religious heritage.

The Moro community practices the ritual of *rigo*, involving the ceremonial bathing of the deceased, followed by the performance of *ṣalāt al-Janāzah*, the Islamic funeral prayer. This prayer, offered in congregation, serves to seek forgiveness for the departed soul. *ṣalāt al-Janāzah* is a Fard *Kifayah*, indicating that if one person performs the prayer, the responsibility is fulfilled for all. Congregation is not obligatory, and even a solitary individual can perform the prayer.

After reciting *ṣalāt al-Janāzah*, the deceased, known as *mayt*, is transported to the *l'b'nga* (cemetery) for burial. The grave is dug perpendicular to the *qiblah* (direction towards Makkah), and the *mayt's* body is positioned on its right side, facing the *qiblah*. Participants in the burial recite "*Bismillah wa 'alā millati rasulillah*," translating to "In the name of Allah and in the faith of the Messenger of Allah."

To prevent direct contact between the *mayt* and the filling earth, a '*dindingali*,' a vertical layer made of concrete, wood, or slab, is placed atop the *mayt* once buried. A small stone or marker is then placed on the filled grave for visibility. The mourning period for the deceased lasts for three or seven days,

sometimes extended to fourteen days. During this time, immediate family members gather in the house to receive condolences from relatives.

Relatives of the deceased contribute *tabang* (support), consisting of essential items such as rice, raw meat, spices, vegetables, oil, refreshments, candies, pastries, raw fish, live poultry, and monetary assistance to meet the basic needs of the bereaved family. Recitation of the *Quran* takes place day and night, accompanied by sermons (*wasyat*) delivered by the *imam* or *Alim*, emphasizing Islamic teachings and rituals for the deceased, as articulated by Hadji Abdul Racman (2023).

4. Local Tourist Destinations in BARMM

The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) holds significant promise as a focal point for *halal* tourism in the Philippines. Boasting 97 hotels, over 80 beaches and resorts, along with numerous picturesque and culturally rich sites, BARMM is poised to attract Muslim tourists (Department of Tourism, 2023). Given its Islamic heritage and traditions, BARMM is well-equipped to offer *halal*-friendly accommodations, dining establishments, and experiences tailored to the preferences of Muslim travelers. The presence of nearly 100 hotels ensures a range of high-quality, *halal*-certified lodging and dining options. The local cuisine in BARMM aligns seamlessly with *halal* culinary requirements. Furthermore, the region's beautiful beaches and resorts enable Muslim tourists to engage in water activities while adhering to Islamic principles of modesty, with separate swimming areas and private venues for men and women. BARMM's diverse islands and dive spots also present ideal opportunities for *halal*-friendly retreats.

Apart from its beautiful coastlines, BARMM presents a plethora of awe-inspiring natural and cultural destinations. Diverse attractions include mosques, historical sites, mountain vistas, waterfalls, and vibrant festivals. As the sole autonomous region with a Muslim majority in the Philippines, BARMM offers a distinctive chance to immerse oneself in Islamic heritage and culture. Through strategic development and effective promotion of BARMM's *halal* tourism assets, it can carve out a specialized niche within the broader Philippine tourism industry. Capitalizing on the rapidly expanding global *halal* tourism sector can substantially contribute to the region's economic growth. Given its substantial potential, BARMM is well-positioned to emerge as a premier destination for *halal* tourism.

4.1. BARMM's Islamic Heritage: Notable and Iconic Masajid (Mosques)

BARMM is renowned for its expansive and magnificent *Masajid* or mosques, distinguished by their significant architectural features. Each of these mosques incorporates a *Mihrab*, a niche in the *Qibla* wall oriented towards Makkah, a crucial aspect of mosque design often adorned with inscriptions or verses from the Quran. Additionally, every mosque in BARMM features a *Minbar*, a pulpit resembling a staircase where the prayer leader (*imam*) stands while delivering a sermon, particularly before the Friday prayer. Typically positioned to the right of the *mihrab*, the *minbar* is often crafted from intricately carved wood. Notably, BARMM's mosques are equipped with a minaret, a tall tower attached to or adjacent to the mosque, designed to ensure the clear audibility of the call to prayer. While historically minarets lacked technological enhancements, contemporary practices involve the use of microphones and speakers to amplify the call to prayer.

These impressive mosques exemplify the region's rich Islamic heritage and architectural prowess. The largest among them, the Grand Mosque, also known as the Islamic Center Mosque, stands prominently in the Islamic City of Marawi. Its construction began in 1950 and was completed in 1970, a collaborative effort involving Marawi residents, private individuals, and foreign donors. According to Omar Pangarungan, the grandson of Datu Pangarungan, "With the support and contributions of the Muslim community in the region and abroad, the construction of the first phase of the Grand Mosque was completed in 1970" (Aguilon, 2021). The land for the Grand Mosque was generously donated by Datu Disalongan Pangarungan, whose son, Hadji Abdul Pangarungan, serves as the present administrator and chairman of the Jameo Mindanao Al-Islamie Islamic Center.

The Grand Mosque holds significant cultural and spiritual importance for the Mranaw community, drawing worshippers from Marawi City and beyond. Many consider it akin to *Masjidil Haram* in Makkah due to its stunning architectural design. The absence of a central ceiling, similar to Makkah, adds to the mosque's allure, attracting people from nearby and far-flung barangays, especially during Friday prayers.

Another notable mosque in Lanao del Sur is the Bacolod-Grande Mosque, characterized by its striking green structure adorned with intricate patterns and minarets. Situated beside the serene Lake Lanao, the mosque offers a tranquil atmosphere enhanced by the gentle lake breeze. Additionally, the pink-colored Dimaukom Mosque in Maguindanao, constructed in 2014, stands out as an iconic

symbol. This mosque, built collaboratively by Muslims and Christians, signifies unity among diverse faiths and represents the values of peace and love.

The *Taviran Pusaka* Mosque in Maguindanao also is considered heritage site with its unique pagoda design. Built in the 19th century the Mosque is one of the last-standing pagoda-style mosques in the Philippines. The intricate wood carvings and panels around the mosque are a sight to behold. The massive *Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah* Mosque in Cotabato City is currently the largest mosque in the Philippines. Named after the Sultan of Brunei who donated for its construction, the mosque can accommodate up to more than 10,000 worshippers. *Kaum Purna* Mosque in Basilan is also notable for its golden domes and unique cylindrical minarets. *Kaum Purnah* is one of the most interesting and important mosques in the Philippines. You can easily see it when sailing into the Isabela Strait. It also happens to be the oldest masjid in Basilan and has long been considered the capital of the Islamic faith in the province. Nearby is a fishing village with a prominent wet market for fresh seafood. This village also happens to have housed Chinese refugees coming in from Fujian province during the Chinese Civil War in the early 1950s. Expect a mix of Chinese and Islamic influences, especially in their food. Moreover, *Hadja Sitti Raya* Mosque in Sulu is known for its striking white facade and colorful domes. A breathtaking expression of devotion to the Islamic faith. Decorative patterns adorn the mosque's simple white walls, giving it a vibrant look. Various inspirations highlight Islam's different cultures in Sulu.

Additionally, the Little White Mosque by the Sea in Bongao, Tawi-Tawi stands as a charming beachside mosque adorned with a pristine white exterior. While it may not boast the grandeur of other mosques mentioned, its unique selling point lies in the serene solitude it offers, making it particularly appealing to some. As its name suggests, the Little White Mosque by the Sea promises a tranquil experience that transcends expectations when witnessed in person. If the idea of meditating by the sea captivates you, a voyage to Bongao, Tawi-Tawi to explore this sacred space is highly recommended.

Lastly, the *Sheikh Karimol Makhdum* Mosque in Simunul, Tawi-Tawi holds the distinction of being the oldest mosque in the Philippines, dating back to 1380. Named in honor of the Arab missionary credited with introducing Islam to the Philippines, this mosque carries immense historical significance. Visiting these mosques not only allows for an appreciation of Islamic architecture but also offers a chance to delve into the extensive history of Islam in the Philippines. The grandeur of their designs and the rich narratives associated with these BARMM mosques make them truly captivating destinations.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of *halal* tourism dynamics within the Bangsamoro region has revealed a nuanced landscape characterized by its rich cultural heritage, traditions, and amazing stunning destinations. The rising demand for *halal* tourism aligns with global trends, emphasizing its pivotal role in fostering economic growth and employment. As this study has revealed, the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in the Philippines holds substantial potential to emerge as a key player in the *halal* tourism market in South East Asia. The findings underscore the dual nature of the current scenario – an opportunity for the tourism sector's expansion alongside the challenge of addressing critical impediments. Drawing insights from successful models in ASEAN nations like Indonesia and Malaysia, the Bangsamoro region can strategically position itself by investing in infrastructure, ensuring safety, and implementing effective communication strategies. By doing so, the region not only stands to harness the benefits of *halal* tourism but also contributes significantly to the broader economic development of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region and the Philippines at large. This study serves as a call to action for collaborative efforts from the government, private sector, and local communities to unlock the full potential of *halal* tourism in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region.

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