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## Efforts to Increase the Role of Halal Tourism: West Nusa Tenggara Islamic Center

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**Abstract:** Recently, religious tourism has attracted the attention of various parties because of the high interest of Muslim tourists. West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is one of the provinces that carry religious or halal tourism. It was proven by attaining the halal tourism destination award by the West Nusa Tenggara Islamic Center in 2015. However, the West Nusa Tenggara Islamic Center still lacks development and literacy, especially tourism. Therefore, the motivation of this research is to find alternative strategies that might be used for the development process and increase literacy. By interviewing four respondents, the authors uncovered alternative strategies using SWOT analysis. The five strategies might be beneficial: collaborating with stakeholders, creating new attractions, marketing destinations, improving service quality, and strengthening the destination concept.

**Keywords:** Islamic Center; West Nusa Tenggara; Halal Tourism; Strategy; SWOT

**JEL Classification:** Z33, L83, Z32

## Introduction

A strategic and quantifiable plan is required to ensure that tourism development and growth align with the goals set forth to carry out tourist development. Therefore, it achieves the anticipated aims and objectives of economic, social, cultural, and environmental factors. Fundamentally, tourism relies on the uniqueness and authenticity of nature and culture in a regional community. Because nature is the foundation of tourism development, particularly in Indonesia, tourism and development must prioritize balance, including the relationship between humans and God, humans and humans, and humans and the surrounding environment in the form of natural and geographical resources.

Moreover, Indonesia has various tourism potentials ranging from nature, culinary, marine, and others to tourism development. Currently, religious tourism is being developed, one type of tourism product closely related to religion embraced by humans. Religious tourism is defined as a tourist activity to a place that has special meaning for religious people, usually in the form of places of worship, tombs, or ancient sites that have advantages. These advantages are, for example, seen from the side of history, the existence of myths and legends about the place, or one type of product uniqueness and architectural excellence of the building (Kasih, 2019).

Specifically, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) has a majority Muslim population. Based on BPS data in 2021, the total Muslim population in NTB reached 96.78% of the total 4,785,980 inhabitants. In addition, NTB is also known as an area with the potential for religious tourism (halal tourism). One of the icons that have become a halal tourism object is the West Nusa Tenggara Islamic Center, also known as the Hubbul Wathan Mosque.

Unfortunately, the development of literature on the NTB Islamic Center has not been widely carried out. Some of the research conducted at the Islamic Center was only limited to religious aspects (Walidaen et al., 2017). However, this study is different from the previous one. In this study, the authors focus on tourism at the NTB Islamic Center. Therefore, the authors want to find and provide strategic options in increasing the role of the Islamic Center of NTB.

Halal tourism is a relatively new product in the tourism industry directed towards Muslim tourists who adhere to Islamic rules (Ferdiansyah et al., 2020). According to Battour and Ismail (2016), halal tourism is a tourist attraction or tourist activity allowed in Islamic teachings to be used by Muslims concerning the tourism industry. In addition, Chookaew et al. (2015) said that the concept of halal tourism is the actualization of the Islamic concept, namely the value of halal and haram being the primary benchmark. It means that all aspects of tourism activities cannot be separated from halal certification, which must be a reference for every tourism actor.

Halal tourism is also a brand for a destination. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), brand image is a set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a person has of a product. Therefore, consumer attitudes and actions towards a brand are determined mainly by the brand image. Brand image is also a seller's promise to consistently provide certain features, benefits, and services to buyers, not just a symbol that distinguishes a particular company's product from its competitors. Also, Suryani (2008) argues that brand image is a set of associations about a brand stored in consumers' minds or memories. Meanwhile, Ashton (2014) mentioned that brand image is what consumers think or feel when they hear or see the name of a brand or, in essence, what consumers have learned about brand image. It can be concluded that a brand image could affect the tourist decision process.

On the other hand, decision-making can be considered an activity of consumers choosing a product or service in making purchasing decisions (Anggraini & Dewanti, 2020; Kotler & Keller, 2016). This decision-making process is essential for tourism development related to various facts that influence the decision to visit a tourist destination. In addition, Nugroho and Burhani (2019) stated that consumer decision-making is an integrated process used to combine knowledge to evaluate two or more alternative behaviors and choose one of them. Razalli (2018) also mentioned that purchasing decisions are consumer behavior after obtaining information about the desired product and the process of assessment and decision making by determining one option considered the most profitable.

## Research Method

The purpose of this study is to find an alternative strategy in developing the role of the Islamic Center as a tourist object in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). The research method used was qualitative with in-depth interviews, applied in this study using a non-probability sampling design to identify key informants. Snowball sampling was chosen as the data collection method for the first stage. Because the authors used the information saturation method, there was no single key informant as the exact number of sample sizes in the qualitative method. Hence, when the researchers reached a certain level of information, they would end the in-depth interview (Hartarto et al., 2021)

The authors involved four respondents willing to be interviewed directly: the NTB Islamic Center Mosque chairman and the local visitors. The respondents were provided with information about the process and results to conduct this interview. Respondents could stop the interview if they did not want to answer any questions. The obtained interview data were then transcribed, reduced, categorized, and presented in a SWOT analysis (Williamson et al., 2018)

In this case, SWOT analysis referred to internal and external assessment and evaluation. From an internal perspective, the authors interviewed the head of the management of the NTB Islamic Center Mosque regarding strengths (S) and weaknesses (W). Meanwhile, the authors considered the opportunities (O), threats (T), and other factors affecting the topics we raised externally. It helped the authors formulate appropriate strategies, plans, and preventive actions based on the analysis results.

Generally, the SWOT matrix is used to develop a tourism object development strategy. This SWOT matrix can clearly describe how the opportunities and threats are faced with being adjusted to the strengths and weaknesses of tourism. Through the SWOT matrix, the proper development strategy can be determined. This matrix can also generate possible alternative strategies. For more details, it can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1** SWOT Matrix

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Opportunities	Strengths and Opportunities Strategy (SO)	Weaknesses and Opportunities Strategy (WO)
Threats	Strengths and Threats Strategy (ST)	Weaknesses and Threats Strategy (WT)

Based on the Table 1, it can be explained that SO takes advantage of all strengths by taking into account opportunities, WO takes advantage of weaknesses by paying attention to opportunities, ST takes advantage of strengths by paying attention to threats, and WT minimizes weaknesses to face threats.

## Result and Discussion

From interviews conducted with the four respondents, the authors can conclude several points regarding internal and external factors from the SWOT analysis at the Islamic Center of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB). The following are the interview results that the authors conducted:

**Table 2** SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
The regular festivals related to halal tourism	Budgets constraint	Potential halal tourism center in Lombok	Natural disasters
Unique mosque architecture	Non-permanent tour guide	Cooperation with various parties	The emergence of halal tourism competitors in the surrounding area
Islamic center has a literacy center.	There is nothing to buy.	Regulation of the governor of West Nusa Tenggara on the sale of local products in the Islamic Center area	
Becoming a priority and role model of halal tourism in the city center	Lack of precise market segmentation	Plans to become a center for converts to Islam	
Having an online and offline promotional media	Low maintenance	Plans to create a digital museum	
The availability of English and Arabic speaking tour guide	There are no attractive choices of attractions yet.	Plan to become an eco-friendly tourism destination	
There are special tour packages for non-Muslim tourists.	Less service from the workers	Vast numbers of international tourists	
Halal certified			

After dividing the interview results into several elements, the next step was to analyze the right strategy according to the interview results using SWOT Matrix.

**Table 3** SWOT Matrix

	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Strengths and Opportunities Strategy (SO)</b>	<b>Weaknesses and Opportunities Strategy (WO)</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooperating with other stakeholders in holding a halal festival</li> <li>2. Creating a digital library that attracts young tourists</li> <li>3. Using a tour guide who understands religion to introduce Islam more deeply to non-Muslim tourists</li> <li>4. The unique architecture of the mosque can be harmonized with the concept of eco-friendly tourism.</li> <li>5. Increasing the promotion to foreign tourists.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Choosing the right target market for promotion</li> <li>2. Collaborating with local government to create outlets for local specialty products</li> <li>3. Collaborating with tourism activists to add exciting tourist attractions</li> <li>4. Cooperating with other parties to improve service quality</li> </ol>
<b>Threats</b>	<b>Strengths and Threats Strategy (ST)</b>	<b>Weaknesses and Threats Strategy (WT)</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Making the Islamic Center the center of religious activities in West Nusa Tenggara.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conducting periodic inspections of buildings as a precautionary measure for disasters</li> <li>2. Creating a differentiated attraction with rival destinations</li> </ol>

From the interview made, Table 3 depicts the alternative strategies to increase the role of West Nusa Tenggara Islamic Center as a halal tourism object. Therefore, the authors can conclude it into several alternative strategies:

#### **Cooperating with other stakeholders**

According to Sumarto (2009), stakeholders are individuals, groups, or organizations interested in development activities or programs. Tourism development involves three stakeholders: the government, the private sector, and the community (Soffan & Holis, 2020). Each stakeholder has a different role and function that must be understood to realize and appropriately implement tourism development in an area.

The government's role in tourism development is to make systematic policies and planning. For example, the government provides and builds infrastructure to support tourism activities, improve human resources who work as workers in the tourism sector, and others. The private sector as a business actor has a role in providing tourism supporting facilities. In addition, tourism requires many supporting facilities, such as

restaurants, accommodation, travel agencies, transportation, and others (Amalyah et al., 2016). At the same time, the manager can be part of a tourist attraction to attract tourists by introducing the object they have.

### **Creating a new halal attraction**

According to Suwena and Widyatmaja (2017), attractions or tourist attraction objects are significant in attracting tourist arrivals. Things that can be developed into tourist attractions are tourism capital or resources. Capital attractions that attract tourist arrivals are divided into three: natural resources, such as mountains, lakes, beaches, and hills; cultural tourism attractions, such as the architecture of traditional houses in the village, archaeological sites, arts and crafts, rituals, festivals, people's daily life, hospitality, and food; artificial attractions, such as sporting events, shopping, exhibitions, conferences, and others.

When it comes to the NTB Islamic Center, the management must add attractions that consider the concept of halal tourism, such as the Islamic history museum in West Nusa Tenggara, shops selling halal souvenirs, and digital libraries.

### **Marketing**

Market segmentation is the most researched aspect of target marketing research in tourism. Like any other market, tourists do not respond uniformly to marketing operations; hence, segmentation identifies diverse groups of tourists. Tourism's various services and clients make segmentation essential for adapting to changes and competing pressures.

According to a recent assessment of literature on tourist segmentation studies (Dolnicar et al., 2013), psychographic variables are the most commonly utilized segmentation criteria (75 percent), followed by behavioral (21 percent), and a combination of both (21 percent and 4 percent). Demographic, socioeconomic, and lifestyle factors are also the most commonly utilized foundation for segmenting tourists. Moreover, demographic characteristics, activities, travel expenditure, benefits, and motivation are the variables recommended for tourist segmentation (Frochot, 2005; Frochot & Morrison, 2000; Mok & Iverson, 2000; Sellick, 2004; Sung et al., 2000).

In the case of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Islamic Center, the management should reanalyze the halal tourist segmentation. Besides, the Indonesian government is still attracting more tourists from the Middle East with the halal tourism industry. However, the study of Battour and Ismail (2016) discovered that tourists from non-Muslim nations have a reasonably favorable attitude toward halal tourism. Most of their responders have visited Muslim nations to learn about and experience Muslim culture. They also benefit from the safer environment provided by Muslim countries. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Islamic Center of NTB must expand its segmentation to promote the concept of halal tourism owned, both from Muslim and non-Muslim countries.

### **Improving the service quality**

According to Coelho et al. (2021), the perception of service quality is the gap between expectations and perceptions. They added that product quality is more straightforward to judge than service quality. Therefore, with the characteristics of intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability, and simultaneity (production and consumption), service quality must be measured through other external factors. According to a prior study, service quality is defined as a consumer's subjective assessment of a service supplied by a service provider (producer) based on the disparity between their expectations and realistic perceptions of the service. In addition, Coelho et al. (2021) offered ten service quality dimensions, including tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, and comprehension.

Based on the observation in this study, the quality of the service at NTB Islamic Center was not in hospitality standards. It could be seen from the cleanliness of the toilet and the availability of workers on duty. Therefore, the Islamic Center needs to cooperate with other parties, such as the government, academics, and private parties, to improve the knowledge and skill of tourism services.

### **Destination concepts**

The conceptual destination is divided into two categories. First, attractiveness represents tourists' thoughts and sentiments regarding the destination's perceived potential to meet their needs. The more a destination can suit the needs of tourists, the more appealing it appears to be and the more likely it is to be picked (Mayo & Jarvis, 1981). As a result, the features of a location are critical in assisting tourists in evaluating the destination's attractiveness and making appropriate decisions. People are also more likely to visit and spend time at a tourist destination if appealing. Consequently, the most crucial aspect of a destination's attractiveness is its impression on tourists. Tourism would not exist without attraction, and there would be little or no demand for visitor facilities and services. Facilities and services will only follow when people are interested in a destination (Ferrario, 1979).

Second, if a destination's market share is significant enough for tourists and financial rewards, it is said to be competitive (Hassan, 2000). Hasan (2000) asserted that a destination's competitiveness is tied to providing a more pleasant experience than other locations. According to Pearce (1997), destination competitiveness is a technique and approach for analyzing and comparing distinct destination features in a planning context. In addition, the primary destination components can be evaluated to understand the destination's competitiveness better. Tourism destination competitiveness has also been examined from an environmental standpoint (Mihalič, 2000).

In West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Islamic Center, the respondent mentioned the concept to be applied. Tourism development at the Islamic Center will carry the concept of halal tourism based on eco-friendly tourism. What is meant by an environmentally friendly

concept is the development of destinations that pay attention to the environment, such as planting more trees and recycling waste.

## Conclusion

In recent decades, religious tourism has received more attention from tourists and researchers. Religious tourism is defined as a tourist activity to a place that has special meaning for religious people, usually in the form of places of worship, tombs, or ancient sites that have advantages. When it comes to religious tourism, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) is one of the intriguing examples. NTB province won the halal tourism award in 2015; one of the destinations that won was the icon of halal tourism in NTB is the NTB Islamic Center.

However, NTB Islamic Center still lacks development studies, especially in tourism. Therefore, the authors recommend the alternative strategies that are possibly used for its development process. The authors interviewed four respondents to find alternative strategies using SWOT analysis and found that NTB Islamic Center has five possible strategies: cooperating with stakeholders, making new attractions, marketing, improving service quality, and strengthening the destination concept.

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