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**TOURISM
IN FUNCTION OF DEVELOPMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA**

Spa Tourism in Serbia and Experiences of Other Countries



**THEMATIC
PROCEEDINGS**

II



**UNIVERSITY OF KRAGUJEVAC
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AND TOURISM IN VRNJAČKA BANJA**



HALAL TOURISM – A NEW CHANCE FOR SERBIA

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to investigate the importance of halal food as a factor in choosing a tourist destination for vacation of Muslim tourists. The sample consisted of 200 respondents from Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica and Belgrade. For assessment of the factors that influence the choice of tourist destinations a special questionnaire has been used. We collected basic socio-demographic characteristics of respondents as well. The results show that the halal food takes first place among the factors influencing the selection of a tourist destination, ahead of the prices and positive experience of tourists with accommodation. These findings are consistent with the assumptions and indicate that the halal feature of tourism is of great importance for the consumers of this kind of food. Meeting the needs of citizens should be one of the most important factors in attracting tourists from the Islamic world to Serbia.

Keywords: *halal food, touristic potential, Islam*

Introduction

We live in a multiethnic and multicultural world, which will be even more diverse. The task of every nation in the world is to find its place and to become acquainted with other cultures, their languages and customs. In this regard, today's tourists demand from the tourism sector to respect the customs and habits of different population groups.

Halal tourism includes food, miscellaneous goods and services (Akyol & Kilinç, 2014). This is a dynamic market with an increasing number of Muslim tourists and the global halal industry is rapidly developing. On

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the other hand, halal tourism is a segment of the market that is rapidly growing not only in Muslim countries, but globally as well (Chookaew et al., 2015). Non-Muslim countries such as Australia, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, countries in Europe, pay special attention to Islamic tourism as an important tourist segment. It is estimated that Muslims represent a fourth of the world's population. Also, a large number of members of this religion is becoming richer, thus able to afford traveling with family and friends. Due to high demands for halal products on the market and the growing mass of trade in these products, food manufacturers who intend to sell their products in these markets, should present evidence of their halal status.

Production and distribution of halal food and halal tourism itself as a service branch is interesting because it has religious significance, which attaches greater attention towards production and distribution of food. The issue we are dealing with in the current study is to examine the role and importance of halal food as a factor in choosing a tourist destination for vacation among Muslim tourists. The guiding principle in the preparation of the study was nowadays recognized potential of meeting the tourists' needs, while referring not only to the Muslim population in Serbia and what outside, but also to all those who want to live a healthy life.

The subject of the current research is to examine if halal tourism represents a development opportunity of Serbia, or whether the norms of behavior of people who are consumers of halal food are important factors in choosing a tourist destination for vacation among Muslim tourists.

Review of literature

The term *halal* comes from the Arabian language and means permissible or relaxed. The opposite of halal is the Arabic word *haram*, which means forbidden or illegal. These two words within members of the Islamic religion are guidelines to distinguish right from wrong, ie. allowed from unauthorized. Islam, as one of the major monotheistic religions, includes the concept of food that should be followed by all Muslim believers.

In other monotheistic and polytheistic religions food has great importance as well. Members of the Jewish religion have a similar principle of a diet as Muslims. They do not eat pork or drink alcohol, too. The Jews, like the

Muslims, have maintained their nutrition practice until today, and it is called *kosher*.

A product that is not allowed for Muslims to consume is called *Haram product* (Jašić et al., 2007). The products included in this group are composed of one of the following components:

- alcohol,
- pork,
- fats from prohibited animals,
- enzymes from prohibited animals,
- gelatin derived from prohibited animals,
- additives derived from prohibited materials.

A product that is suspicious according to Islamic regulations called *Mushbooh*.

According to the definition of Halal standard BAS 1049: 2007 Halal product is the product that is allowed for consumption, in terms of Islamic regulations. Halal products include the following items:

- food,
- cosmetics,
- medications,
- general usage items.

Characteristics of halal products are as follows:

- no part of any ingredient which is forbidden for Muslims to use;
- in the production process requirements of Halal standard were applied and prohibited raw materials and other resources were not used;
- the product would be halal first if all regulations on health safety, hygiene and sanitation are met;
- it is marked by trademark of halal quality (Ćeranić & Bozinovic, 2009).

Competitiveness of the halal product refers to the fact that it comes to products that are tested and safe due to the fact that they meet the quality requirements. Also, halal product can be used by non-Muslims as it is not contrary to the regulations of other religions. In terms of reliability, hygiene and quality halal is getting the attention of non-Muslim consumers as well (Akyol & Kilinç, 2014).

The global market for halal products and services is estimated at 2.770 billion US dollars, and exponentially grows by 20 percent annually. At least 38 million consumers who prefer halal products and services live in Europe.

Halal market is divided into three groups (Ušćumlić & Kalač, 2011):

1. Arab-Islamic market, which consists of the richest countries such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the poor such as Tajikistan. One of the potential markets within the group of the Arab-Islamic countries are the United Arab Emirates, which imports more than 90% of the food;
2. halal market of the European Union, that is estimated at 66 billion US dollars. The consumption of halal food is increasing in European countries as well, especially in France as the largest market. Halal market in that country is growing between 7 and 10% annually and consumption of halal meat per person in France is about 150 pounds, which is 30 percent more than the average;
3. regional market where there is Serbia and countries in the region (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania).

World Halal tourism market in 2013 was worth about 140 billion dollars, with approximately 13 percent of total global tourism industry, which is almost 60 percent higher than three years earlier (Ušćumlić & Kalač, 2011). In addition to being extremely fast growing, halal tourism is distinguished by guests who spend significantly more than the average, leaving on vacation about \$ 1,700, as opposed to the average Europeans which spend \$ 500.

Serbia takes only crumbs from this bountiful table. Guests from the Islamic world in the statistics are counted under "other", many of them do not even know for Serbia, and halal certification has only one hotel.

Strengthening offers, targeted advertising in the source markets, training of tourist guides, tour specialized fairs, with the obligatory association of all institutions following are the steps that Serbia should take in order to benefit from the enormous opportunities provided by halal tourism, especially in the area of spa, mountain and health tourism.

Numerous international examples show the broadness of services in accordance with halal that can attract this segment of guests and provide income. The Australian Gold Coast is one of the most attractive tourist

destinations because of its unique offer of Ramadan salon. Thai wellness centers offer special services for Muslim tourists, wanting to attract more tourists from the Middle East. One Indian Global Medical Center has offered halal service health tourism because of the increasing number of visits of Muslim patients. Precisely, medical and health tourism segments have the most potential, because prices in Serbia are much lower than in other international destinations. Halal tourists from the richest Islamic countries travel often with many family members and spend a lot. In addition, most of the guests from the Arab world comes to choose destination out of season, they are not interested in sun and sea because of that they already have too much. The 70 percent of guests from the halal market is coming from 15 countries, six Arabian Gulf states reached 37 percent of the guests, ten percent of Southeast Asia, 16 percent from Turkey and Iran and seven percent of the Western European countries (Turubatović, Vranić & Baras, 2002).

It is also interesting the fact that the half of the Muslim tourist population is under 25 years old, which ensures further growth of the markets (Ušćumlić & Kalač, 2011). Research Institute of Tourism conducted in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates showed that guests from halal markets generally do not know for Serbia and countries in the region, but desirable for them are our main competitors in the Mediterranean. France is pushing first on the list of the most desirable destinations, followed by Italy, Great Britain and Germany, which shares the position with Turkey. However, according to Muslim travel index in Europe in 2014, a quarter of guests who have visited this country describe availability of halal contents as average, which is finding that Serbia can convert into its comparative advantage (Chandra, 2014).

A positive example of successful implementation of halal standards for tourism are in neighboring Croatia. According to the Tourist Board of Zagreb, there were about 21,000 visitors from countries of the Islamic world (excluding Bosnia and Herzegovina) in Zagreb last year, generating a total of approximately 47,000 overnights. So far in Croatia the halal certificate is issued for 12 hotels in nine cities, four of which are from Zagreb, then in Rijeka, Dubrovnik, Umag and Varazdin.

In the terms of the Regulations on the categorization according to the requirements of halal quality, all hotels have a package label A, which includes the purchase and preparation of halal food from approved manufacturers, clearly labeled halal menu and a certificate at the

restaurant, in the rooms marked southeast (the direction of Qibla), secured mat prayer, as well as a mini bar without alcoholic beverages. Hotels in the bathrooms also have halal cosmetics, and tourists are offered wellness services in accordance with halal.

As for our country, halal standard as innovation in tourism of the Republic of Serbia was first introduced hotel "Solaris Resort" in Vrnjačka Banja.

Halal certification is a good opportunity for the development of not only recreation, but also medical and congress tourism in Serbia, as it is shown in the experience of the hotel "Solaris" in the short time since the hotel is certified. Thanks to the certificate, this hotel has so far hosted the delegations of Iraq and Malaysia, as well as the diplomatic corps of the Embassy of Indonesia. In the hotel also stayed Egypt's national handball team during the preparation period, junior football team of Kuwait, and several investors with business delegations from Saudi Arabia, too. After the certification, inflow of guests from Novi Pazar and surrounding towns has increased, and these are the areas where gravitates Muslim population that respects the standards of halal.

The policy of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in recent years is based and does everything to attract Arab investors. In order to meet such investors readily, it is important to create an environment where the whole system is rearranged in order to comply with market conditions. Therefore, the Agency for certification of halal standards has to be partner of the Government of Serbia and the Tourist Organization of Serbia.

The presence of a large number of diplomatic and consular representatives and international organizations of the Islamic world is a benefit that can be used to attract tourists from these settlement and thus to become competitive in this segment. Position of hotels, primarily in Belgrade and through a corridor, is a chance to be an ideal place for tourists from the Islamic world who are in transit on their way from the EU to Turkey and other destinations in the Middle East.

Considering the cultural and religious identity and way of living of people within areas of Turkey and other countries in the Middle East, Serbia in halal food has a chance to improve its tourist offer. In addition, halal tourism can encourage manufacturers to adapt their offer to the

requirements of halal, which would create opportunities to expand their markets beyond the borders of our country.

Method

The main objective of the research is to examine the contribution, and the degree of influence on the selection of halal food tourism destination. Specific objectives of the research are to determine set of the factors influencing the choice of tourist destination, as well as to explore differences in factors influencing the selection of a tourist destination in relation to place of living of the subjects.

The basic hypothesis is that halal food is the most important factor influencing the choice of tourist destinations in the environment in which is the largest number of members of the Islamic religion. Therefore, it is expected that the highest percentage of respondents from the group of respondents who live in the Raška district estimates the halal food as the most important factor that influences the choice of tourist destinations for vacation.

The instruments used in the research are questionnaire that assesses the factors affecting the selection of a tourist destination, and questionnaire used for collecting basic socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

The questionnaire for the assessment of factors influencing the selection of a tourist destination is constructed for the purposes of the current study, and modeled after the instrument used in the study by Araña and León (2013). It is intended to assess the importance of certain factors for selecting a tourist destination. The instrument consists of 11 items. Each of them is assigned four step scale (1 - "It is very important", 4 - "Irrelevant"). The task of respondents is to evaluate the importance of certain aspects when deciding on the choice of holiday destination.

General questionnaire is intended for the collection of general socio-demographic information about the respondents: gender, age, employment, education level, marital status, place of residence. This questionnaire evaluates the satisfaction with financial status and determines whether the respondents during the last year went on a journey as well.

The research is conducted on a sample of 200 respondents from the territory of Raška District and the City of Belgrade and its environs, 114 males and 86 females, mean age 36,4. The sample is stratified according to the place of residence, so that in each group is 100 subjects. The first group consists of respondents from Novi Pazar, Tutin and Sjenica, where lives the largest number of members of the Islamic religion in Serbia, while the second group comprises those living on the territory of Belgrade and its surroundings. Most of the respondents are employed, have university education and married. Sample characteristics are shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1: *Sex of the sample*

	N	%
Male	114	57.0
Female	86	43.0

Table 2: *Marital status of respondents*

	N	%
Single	43	21.5
In a relationship	42	21.0
Married	102	51.0
Divorced	10	5.0
Widowed	3	1.5

Table 3: *Education level and employment of respondents*

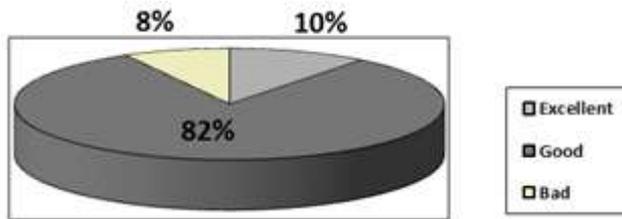
	N	%
High school	37	18.5
Higher school	24	12.0
University degree	132	66.0
PhD	7	3.5
Employed	160	80.0
Unemployed	40	20.0

Data collection is conducted during January 2016. Questionnaires are given in individual contacts with respondents, as well as through on-line survey techniques. The survey was also held with the mediation of travel agencies, where the questionnaires were transferred to their clients. Respondents were informed about the purpose of research and guaranteed the anonymity of the data.

Results

Using descriptive statistical measures (frequencies, mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum) we obtained distribution of variables that were subject of this study. Considering financial status of the participants, most of them evaluated it as „good“ (81.5%), and significantly less as „excellent“ or „bad“ (Figure 1)

Figure 1: *Evaluation of the financial status*



When it comes about traveling during past year, majority of the subjects, 80.5%, stated that they have been traveling during past year. Table 4 to 14 show results obtained exploring the factors that influence the selection of tourism destination.

Table 4: *Significance of halal food*

	N	%
Very important	123	61.5
Important	19	9.5
Not important	23	11.5
Irrelevant	35	17.5

We can see that halal food is the most significant factor that influences selection of destination for 61.5% of respondents in our sample. Further analyses showed that majority of them are residents of the areas of Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin.

Table 5: *Significance of price*

	N	%
Very important	85	42.5
Important	76	38.0
Not important	29	14.5
Irrelevant	10	5.0

The price is the most important when it comes to choosing a touristic destination for 42.5% of the sample.

Table 6: *Significance of relaxation*

	N	%
Very important	93	46.5
Important	72	36.0
Not important	24	12.0
Irrelevant	11	5.5

46.5% of participants said that the relaxation is very important factor in choosing touristic destination for vacation.

Table 7: *Significance of accommodation experience*

	N	%
Very important	77	38.5
Important	85	42.5
Not important	28	14.0
Irrelevant	10	5.0

Experience that subjects in our sample during their stay in hotel or another accommodation object is for majority of them, 42.5%, important factor for selection of touristic destination.

Table 8: *Significance of sport activities*

	N	%
Very important	29	14.5
Important	65	32.5
Not important	70	35.0
Irrelevant	36	18.0

Sport activities are not important for most of respondents, 35% of them, when it comes to selection of touristic destination.

Table 9: *Significance of adventure experience*

	N	%
Very important	53	26.5
Important	78	39.0
Not important	52	26.0
Irrelevant	17	8.5

The most of participants in our sample, 39%, stated that experiences of adventure on holidays are important factor that influences their selection of touristic destination.

Table 10: *Significance of restaurants*

	N	%
Very important	52	26.0
Important	88	44.0
Not important	41	20.5
Irrelevant	19	9.5

For 44% of individuals that participated in our survey restaurants are important factor when it comes to selection of touristic destination.

Table 11: *Significance of transportation*

	N	%
Very important	96	48.0
Important	67	33.5
Not important	23	11.5
Irrelevant	14	7.0

The significance of transportation is stated as very important (48%) or important (33.5%) factor that influences selection of touristic destination by majority of participants.

Table 12: *Significance of night life*

	N	%
Very important	41	20.5
Important	58	28.5
Not important	57	29.0
Irrelevant	44	22.0

Night life is the factor that is evaluated and distributed most diversely among respondents in our sample. The most of subjects evaluated it as not important (29%), but the differences between percentages are slight. Not surprisingly, the security of touristic destination itself is the most important factor that influences selection of a destination for 71.5% of participants.

Table 13: *Significance of security*

	N	%
Very important	143	71.5
Important	32	16.0
Not important	12	6.0
Irrelevant	13	6.5

In survey questionnaire participants had an option to write down and then evaluate factors that are important for choosing a touristic destination, in their own opinion. Some of the participants' answers are:

- company and contents of hotel accommodation
- good and active organization
- touristic attractions
- historical sights and their content
- good communication with touristic agency
- peace, silence, and high level of hygiene
- climate conditions
- good managerial-marketing organization that knows how to set both, accommodation facilities, as well as cultural and historical legacy, capacity for recreational and spa tourism, so that offer applies to all categories of potential users of these services
- highly significant historical sights
- program for children, starting from the feeding regime (in particular or joint restaurant) to the field of play and fun for the youngest
- wireless Internet speed.

Discussion

The main goal of this research was to investigate the importance of halal food as a factor in choosing a tourist destination for vacation of Muslim tourists. The survey was conducted on 200 participants divided into two groups by place of residence (Raška district or Belgrade).

Considering the factors that influence selection of touristic destination, in our sample is shown that halal food is very important for most of the participants and majority of them come from the areas where are situated Muslim inhabitants (Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin).

On general sample, the security connected to a certain touristic destination is found to be very important factor for selection of a destination.

Muslim customers are one of the fastest developing market segments and its needs cannot be ignored by destination marketers and tourism operators (Battour & Ismail, 2014; Battour et al., 2014). According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy report (Reuters, 2015), produced by Thomson Reuters in collaboration with DinarStandard, the global Muslim

travel market was worth \$140bn in 2013, which represents 11.5% of global expenditure. The same report predicts that the segment is expected to be worth \$238bn in 2019 and represent 13% of global expenditure. The tourism industry is increasingly competitive. Therefore, innovation is one of the success factors in this huge market. In developing new ideas and innovations, technology plays an important role in Halal tourism. In this regard, one of the best practices to make destination Muslim friendly is Muslim friendly application. One of the areas that needs more innovations and is neglected to make the destination Muslim friendly is 'Muslim-friendly airlines'. It is expected that Halal tourism industry could be competitive in the coming next years. Destinations, hotels and resorts, airlines, and travel agents are recommended to position itself in Halal tourism market.

The initiatives that are taken to make the destination Muslim friendly by some non-Muslim countries may motivate other destinations to be Muslim friendly. It is expected that worldwide global brands in hospitality industry may address this opportunity. Furthermore, many countries and businesses in Asia Pacific region are expected to increase attention to Halal tourism and may start to take initiatives to be Muslim friendly. In Muslim minority countries such as Taiwan, Vietnam, China, and South Korea, Halal tourism is considered a good business opportunity. Travel agencies could target Muslim travelers by customizing Halal tours to Muslim tourists; availability of halal food, an itinerary built around prayer timings, visits to mosques and Muslim tour guides. It could design programmes in Muslim minority countries to visit Islam related historical religious and cultural sites whereby Muslims can learn about other communities and share their faith. In general, travel agencies have many Halal tourism opportunities in areas such as Halal business travel, family-friendly packages, Muslim-friendly services, luxury Muslim market segment and Muslim heritage souvenirs. The numbers of Shariah compliant hotels and Halal resorts are still limited in non-Muslim destinations. Therefore, this is a business opportunity for further investment in tourism industry globally, especially in countries that have high inbound Muslim tourists. Education syllabus and training programmes are needed in hospitality industry to understand Halal issues and this could be an opportunity to universities and training centres to offer such programmes. Furthermore, Halal medical tourism could be a potential area that needs more attention for non-Muslim destination targeting Muslim tourists.

Undoubting, there are challenges in developing and marketing Muslim-friendly or Halal tourism. Therefore, standardization system is needed in Halal tourism to certify Halal friendliness in hotels, resorts, cruise, restaurant, airport and parks. The marketing of Halal tourism is not an easy task because of the variance between the demands of non-Muslim tourists and Muslim tourists. The non-Muslim tourist may decide not to travel to a particular destination in the absence of certain attributes (Battour et al., 2011; Battour et al., 2014). Therefore, the challenge for Muslim destinations is how to cater for the non-Muslim tourist and satisfy their needs without clashing with Islamic teaching. For example, some hotels declare on their website that they are Shariah-compliant hotel and this may not be attractive to non-Muslim guests. Therefore, Halal tourism practices could be seen as constraints to tourism destination development.

These constraints are critical and big challenge to tourism planning and destination marketers. However, this could be an opportunity for businesses to use their creativity and flexibility in catering to the different needs of Muslim and non-Muslim. Halal tourism practices and activities are affected by the political environment in Middle East. The Arab Spring affects the outbound tourists from Middle East. Although the Arab Spring proved beneficial for tourism industry in UAE, Turkey, and Malaysia where there was recorded an increase in demand for hotel rooms from Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Libya. However, the numbers of Muslim tourist could be affected in terms of inbound tourists to non-Muslim countries. Another challenge is the fall in oil prices. It could be a short run challenge but it is one of the obstacles that affect Muslim-friendly or Halal tourism market. Moreover, using social networks and proper geographical marketing programmes is one of the challenges in this market. The fast process of information dissemination of Muslim friendly destinations through social networks or geographical proximity is still very weak. The geographical marketing programmes should be designed and disseminated to places where the majority of Muslims are located, both in non-Muslim and Muslim countries. These programmes should be designed not only for strict adherents as well as general Muslim tourists as well.

Conclusions

Considering the factors that influence selection of touristic destination, in our sample is shown that halal food is very important for most of the

participants. However, majority of them are from the areas where are situated Muslim inhabitants (Novi Pazar, Sjenica and Tutin).

On general sample, the security connected to a certain touristic destination is found to be very important factor for selection of a destination.

These findings are consistent with the assumptions and indicate that the halal feature of tourism is of great importance for the consumers of this kind of food. Meeting the needs of citizens should be one of the most important factors in attracting tourists from the Islamic world to Serbia.

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