

Perceptions And Preferences of Indonesian Muslim Tourists for Halal Tourism Facilities and Conditions in Sembalun

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Abstract:

This study examines the perceptions and preferences of Indonesian Muslim tourists regarding halal tourism facilities and conditions in Sembalun. Halal tourism is a growing sector in Indonesia, reflecting the increasing demand for destinations that accommodate the needs of Muslim travelers. Using a descriptive research method, this study collected data from domestic Muslim tourists who have visited Sembalun. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to analyze the data. The findings indicate that Sembalun is not widely recognized as a Muslim-friendly destination due to its lack of compliance with halal tourism standards, including the availability of religious amenities such as prayer facilities and spaces adhering to Islamic values. Instead, Sembalun is predominantly known as an agro-tourism destination. Respondents emphasized the critical need for facilities such as clean and accessible toilets and well-maintained prayer spaces to enhance the destination's suitability for Muslim tourists. This study highlights the potential for Sembalun to become a more attractive halal tourism destination by addressing these gaps. By providing facilities that align with the principles of halal tourism, Sembalun could expand its appeal to the growing market of Muslim travelers, ultimately contributing to regional tourism development and economic growth.

Keywords: *halal tourism, muslim tourist preferences, sembalun destination, religious amenities.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, tourism has experienced remarkable growth and transformation, becoming one of the most significant contributors to global economic development (Bertocchi & Visentin, 2019; Rafa'al, Simabur, & Sangadji, 2021; Sangadi & Handriana, 2023; Ziyadin, Koryagina, Grigoryan, Tovma, & Ismail, 2019). As the tourism industry continues to expand, it has become essential to recognize and cater to the diverse needs and preferences of travelers worldwide (Kadir, Wulandari, & Hendratono, 2022; Nono, Patiung, & Sastryawanto, 2024; Utami, Yuniati, & Soeroso, 2022). One prominent aspect of this evolving landscape is the concept of halal tourism, which has gained momentum among Muslim travelers seeking destinations that align with their religious beliefs and values. Halal tourism is a niche segment that encompasses a range of services and facilities adhering to Islamic principles, ensuring a

comfortable and inclusive travel experience for Muslim tourists (Muflih, & Al Haq, 2024; Losurdo, 2022). It involves considerations such as providing halal-certified food, prayer facilities, gender-segregated amenities, and culturally sensitive offerings. As more destinations endeavor to attract Muslim travelers, understanding their perceptions and preferences becomes crucial in developing tailored strategies and enhancing destination appeal (Rahman, Zailani, & Musa, 2017; Yousaf & Xiucheng, 2018).

West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) has great potential to attract Muslim tourists. There is no doubt about the world's recognition of NTB's tourism capabilities. This can be seen from the crowning of Lombok as the winner of the 2015 World Halal Travel Summit award in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. Meanwhile, on 7 December 2016, the 2016 World Halal Tourism Award (WHTA) announced the winners from 16 categories that were contested at the world level. In this competition, Lombok should be proud because it managed to become the winner of the 2016 World's Best Halal Honeymoon Destination category through Sembalun Village or better known as the Sembalun Valley Region. This village in East Lombok has indeed become a favorite destination for local and foreign tourists and is usually used as a favorite "honeymoon destination." Tourism activities in Sembalun Valley, as a tourism center on Lombok, must be able to adapt to all demands for change by hearing the voices of various interested parties, especially tourists who have different preferences in choosing tourist objects to visit. Tourist preferences arise from the diversity of tourist facilities and activities that meet the needs of tourists when traveling. Tourist preferences are the basis for calculating the wishes and need for the services of tourism facilities that will be received. For this reason, it is necessary to pay attention to tourist preferences so that the way to develop tourism areas that suit the wishes of tourists is known precisely.

One important aspect that supports tourism is tourism facilities. This is one of the important elements forming a tourism product that plays a role in supporting the convenience and comfort of tourists in traveling. As a unique tourism product, halal tourism is highly dependent on its supporting facilities. Tourist perceptions and preferences for tourism facilities vary considerably. In fact, Muslim tourists as consumers of halal tourism products are not only from the Middle East and; there are many more countries such those who are locally residing in the Indonesia archipelago. Inevitably, they have different perceptions and preferences. Thus, Differences between these tourists needs to sufficed. This leads to different needs and perceptions. According to data obtained from the west nusa tenggara (NTB) Culture and Tourism Office (Disbudpar), the majority of visitors to the Sembalun area in 2015 were domestic tourists, most of whom are Muslim. For this reason, tourists' perceptions and preferences need to be known as input for the local community and the East Lombok Regency government so they can improve tourist facilities and seize opportunities for halal tourism businesses.

This is descriptive research that analyses a group of people, an object, a set of conditions, a system of thought, or a class of events in the present (Nazir, 2005; Sangadji et al., 2022; Sangadji, 2023; Hasan, 2024). In this case, the descriptive method was used to get an overview of the tourism services in the Sembalun Village, which are then evaluated by tourists. The population of this study was Muslim Domestic tourists who visit NTB Province, whose number is not known with certainty. The sample of this research was domestic Muslim tourists who have visited Sembalun. To determine the part of the population that becomes the sample, the researcher used a non-probability sampling method in which the samples in this study were determined based on certain conditions in accordance with the research objectives (Cooper, Schindler, Cooper, & Schindler, 2003). For this reason, the requirements for members of the population who can also be the sample are determined as follows:

1. Domestic tourists
2. Indonesian citizen

3. Have visited Sembalun Area, East Lombok, at least one time
4. Over 17 years of age;

Considering that the number of Domestic Muslim tourists is unknown, the number of samples is determined based on quota sampling, namely 50 samples. This is considering the limitations of funds, time, and manpower. In addition, the number of 50 people, in accordance with Roscoe's opinion in Sugiyono (2017), is sufficient. In collecting data, this research used a survey sample; it is so because the population size is so large. Data collection techniques used were interviews, observation, and questionnaires. The questionnaire was taken from the research by Wahyulina, Darwini, Retnowati, & Oktaryani (2018), which has the same context, so it does not require an instrument test.

2. Findings and Discussion

2.1 Geographical and Demographical Profile of Sembalun Tourism Area

The research is situated in the captivating Sembalun Tourism Area, which is a sub-district nestled in the northern region of East Lombok Regency. Covering an extensive area of 217.08 square kilometers, it comprises six charming villages: Sembalun Bumbung, Sembalun Lawang, Sajang, Bilok Petung, Sembalun, and Sembalun Timba Gading. To the north lies the Sambelia sub-district, while Aikmel and Pringgasela sub-districts border it to the south. To the west lies North Lombok Regency, and to the east, the Pringgabaya sub-district marks its boundary.

The heart of Sembalun Sub-district is the scenic village of Sembalun Lawang, situated approximately 45 kilometers away from the capital of East Lombok Regency, Selong. Among the villages, Sembalun Bumbung boasts the largest area, covering 57.97 square kilometers, representing around 26.70% of the entire sub-district. On the other hand, Sembalun Timba Gading Village occupies the smallest area, encompassing 15.76 square kilometers. The varying altitudes of the villages, ranging from 800 to 1,200 meters above sea level, add to the area's picturesque charm. Despite the geographical differences, the villages are relatively close to the sub-district capital, with the farthest being Sajang Village and Bilok Petung Village, located at distances of 6 km and 15 km, respectively. The sub-district capital, Sembalun Village, holds the nearest proximity, merely 0.025 km (25 m) away, as it hosts the sub-district office.

Sembalun Sub-district is home to a population of 19,051 people, as recorded in mid-2012. Of this population, 9,861 are females, while 9,190 are males, signifying a slightly larger female population. This vibrant community adds to the allure of the region, making it a unique and dynamic destination. Renowned for its pleasantly cool climate, the Sembalun area is a coveted starting point for climbers aspiring to conquer Mount Rinjani. Its favorable weather conditions allow climbers to conserve energy and time, facilitating their ascent to the peak. The journey towards Sembalun from Mataram takes approximately four hours and offers breathtaking green vistas, with the majestic Mount Rinjani forming an awe-inspiring backdrop. Meandering through winding asphalt roads, dense forests, and picturesque agricultural fields, the route also provides glimpses of the distant Gili Trawangan sea view. The neatly arranged tiered vegetable fields exude a charming countryside ambiance, where farmers can be seen diligently tending to their crops in traditional ways, adding to the region's authentic appeal. In 2023, Sembalun welcomed a total of 3,744 climbers who used it as a gateway to Mount Rinjani, comprising 1,510 local visitors and 2,234 international climbers (Radar Lombok, 2024). This data underscores the significance of Sembalun as a favorite destination not only for domestic travelers but also for tourists from around the globe. Its position as a vital access point to one of Indonesia's most iconic peaks highlights its role as a cornerstone of tourism in the region, further enhancing its reputation as a must-visit location.

2.2 Result

Based on the data obtained from the research questionnaire, the perception and preferences of halal tourism visitors in Sembalun were analyzed using the latest version of SPSS. The results of the analysis show as follows:

Table 1.
Respondent's Perception of The Statement
"Tourists Come Because of Sembalun's Halal Tour Promotion"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	1	2%	2%	2%
	TS	5	10%	10%	12%
	CS	9	18%	18%	30%
	S	15	30%	30%	60%
	SS	20	40%	40%	100%
	Total	50	100%	100%	

From Table 1 above, it is known that most Muslim tourist respondents agreed and strongly agreed to visit Sembalun because there was a halal tourism promotion carried out by the government. Only 14 percent of those who strongly disagree to moderately agree to visit. This means that the promotion of halal tourism by the government makes respondents perceive Sembalun as a halal tourism destination.

Table 2.
Respondent's Perception Of The Statement
"Tourists' Visit Because Of Halal Tourism Facilities In Sembalun"

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STS	17	34%	34%	34%
	TS	15	30%	30%	64%
	CS	5	10%	10%	74%
	S	6	12%	12%	86%
	SS	7	14%	14%	100%
	Total	50	100%	100%	

From the table above, it is known that Muslim respondents did not come because of the halal tourism facilities in Sembalun. This is evident from fifty respondents; only 24 percent agree to strongly agree to visit. This result is confirmed by the surrounding condition where there are no accommodation facilities that show halal characteristics. For example, there are no hotels that meet the requirements of halal hotels.

Table 3.

Respondents' Perception of Statements
 "Tourists Come Because of the Beauty of Sembalun, East Lombok Regency"

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STS	0	0%	0%	0%
TS	5	10%	10%	10%
CS	6	12%	12%	22%
S	19	38%	38%	60%
SS	20	40%	40%	100%
Total	50	100%	100%	

The table above shows that the majority of respondents (78 percent) responded with "the beauty of Sembalun that made them come to the area." Meanwhile, there were no respondents who strongly disagreed. This shows that the natural beauty of Sembalun is the main attraction for tourism in the highlands. Thus, all tourist activities in Sembalun must be directed according to the natural beauty.

Table 4.
 Respondent's Perception Of The Statement
 "Tourists' Visit Due To Religious Values In Sembalun"

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STS	20	40%	40%	40%
TS	18	36%	36%	76%
CS	6	12%	12%	88%
S	5	10%	10%	98%
SS	1	2%	2%	100%
Total	50	100%	100%	

From the table above, it is known that 12 percent of respondents agree to strongly agree with statement that they traveled to Sembalun because there is religious value in that area. Meanwhile there were 76 percent of respondents who disagreed to strongly disagree. This means that the respondents did not consider Sembalun to have religious value, considering they went to Sembalun to visit agro-tourism.

Amenities (Facilities)

The study's findings reveal that respondents hold positive perceptions regarding the availability and condition of various elements within the tourist attractions in the Sembalun Village area, making it a conducive destination for travelers. Visitors particularly appreciate the well-maintained accommodations, such as Nusantara Sembalun Villas and Resto, Jelita Hotel, and Rinjani Lodge, as well as dining establishments like Resto Taman Sari and Warung Gili. These amenities contribute to a supportive environment for tourism in the area. The results also emphasize the need to maintain and enhance specific infrastructure and services, such as the cleanliness and accessibility of hiking trails leading to Mount Rinjani, the upkeep of public rest areas, and the improvement of road conditions connecting the village to neighboring areas.

By addressing these aspects and capitalizing on the positive feedback from visitors, local authorities and stakeholders can foster sustainable growth in tourism, further solidifying Sembalun Village's reputation as an attractive and welcoming destination.

Attraction

Based on the research results, it is evident that respondents hold a positive perception regarding the attractiveness of tourist attractions in the Sembalun Village area. This positive perception plays a significant role in enticing tourists to visit for a tour. The findings indicate that the allure of the tourist spots in Sembalun Village, such as its natural beauty, cultural heritage, and hospitality, has a considerable impact on attracting visitors. Notably, the cultural heritage of Sembalun includes attractions like Bale Beleq Sembalun, the Ngayu-Ayu ritual, and traditional dances unique to the region. These elements enrich the cultural experience for visitors, making the area a desirable destination for tourists seeking unique experiences and scenic beauty. The research highlights the importance of understanding tourists' perceptions to further enhance tourism in the region.

Accessibility (affordability) Sembalun Village area

Based on the research results, it is evident that the respondents hold a positive perception regarding the affordability of the Sembalun Village Area and its various facility attributes. The findings indicate that the community views the area as economically accessible and appreciates the amenities available within it. This positive sentiment suggests that Sembalun Village offers a promising and convenient living environment. Such perceptions could be pivotal in attracting potential residents or investors to the area. The recognition of favorable attributes further emphasizes the potential benefits of residing in Sembalun Village. This data provides valuable insights into the overall attractiveness and appeal of the location for individuals seeking a conducive and well-equipped living space.

Table 5.

Tourist Perceptions And Preferences For Tourism Facilities In Sembalun

Tourism Support Facilities In Sembalun	STB	TB	CB	B	SB	TK
Toilet	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%	43
Place of worship	0%	0%	10%	30%	60%	42.6
Trash bin	60%	20%	20%	0%	0%	41.6
Four-wheeled vehicle parking area	56%	20%	20%	4%	0%	40.8
Two-wheeled vehicle parking area	60%	16%	20%	4%	0%	40
Bus and mini-bus parking area	60%	16%	20%	4%	0%	39.6
Visitor rest areas	56%	24%	20%	0%	0%	39.6
Security Guard post	10%	18%	20%	36%	16%	29.2
A special zone for street vendors	50%	22%	20%	0%	8%	30
Restaurant	50%	20%	20%	0%	10%	28.6
ATM bank money changer	32%	20%	20%	10%	18%	26.4
Accommodations	14%	17%	17%	31%	21%	26.4
Health services	10%	20%	10%	40%	20%	26.2
Entertainment venues	30%	14%	20%	10%	26%	24.2
Souvenir shop	40%	32%	20%	0%	8%	24.2

Of all the supporting facilities for tourism in Sembalun, the toilet is the most important supporting facility expected by Muslim tourists visiting Sembalun. On the other hand, according to the perception of Muslim respondents, the condition is very bad. The next facility

that is considered important is a place of worship. According to the perceptions of Muslim respondents, places of worship are facilities that have the best conditions among all supporting facilities. Other facilities that are considered important are parking facilities for motorbikes, 4-wheeled cars, mini buses, and buses. Parking facilities in Sembalun are perceived as very unfavorable by respondents.

3. Conclusion

The perceptions of Muslim tourists towards the Sembalun area reveal several key insights that align with the findings in the study. Domestic Muslim tourists do not perceive Sembalun as a fully Muslim-friendly destination due to its lack of adherence to halal tourism standards, such as the availability of religious amenities and the integration of Islamic values. Instead, Sembalun is primarily viewed as an agro-tourism destination, attracting visitors for its natural beauty and agricultural experiences. While respondents acknowledge some positive aspects, such as the general availability and condition of tourist amenities, the absence of halal-certified accommodations and sufficient religious facilities highlights a gap in meeting the expectations of Muslim tourists. Despite this, the allure of the area's attractions remains a significant draw for visitors.

To address these gaps and enhance Sembalun's appeal to Muslim tourists, several recommendations are proposed. The government should focus on promoting halal tourism while simultaneously developing infrastructure that meets halal standards, such as certified hotels and additional prayer facilities. Furthermore, improving public amenities—including the provision of clean toilets, trash bins, and adequate parking spaces for various types of vehicles—will enhance the overall tourist experience. By aligning these efforts with the needs and expectations of Muslim tourists, Sembalun can transition into a more inclusive destination, benefiting both its tourism sector and local economy.

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