

Exploring the Readiness of the Hospitality Industries in Sorsogon City for Halal Tourism

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Abstract:- This study utilized a mixed method research design to evaluate the readiness of hospitality industries in Sorsogon City for halal tourism. Hotel owners, managers, and staff from 14 DOT-accredited establishments served as primary respondents. The research assessed the hospitality industry's preparedness to cater to the growing Muslim tourist market. It examined stakeholders' awareness of halal principles, focusing on food, amenities, and facilities. Challenges and strategies for halal tourism adoption were also explored. Findings revealed a fair level of readiness among hotel owners in providing halal food and alcohol-free environments, but a lower capacity to offer diverse halal amenities and facilities. Hotel staff demonstrated fair readiness in accommodating Muslim guests. Key challenges included infrastructure limitations, staff training needs, and operational complexities. Based on these findings, an action plan for promoting halal tourism in Sorsogon City was developed. This study contributes to fostering inclusivity and cultural diversity within the Philippine tourism industry.

Keywords:- Cultural Diversity, Halal Tourism, Hotel Readiness, Inclusive Tourism, Muslim Tourists.

I. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism has significantly shifted towards inclusivity and diversity. Through this paradigm shift, the tourism industry in various parts of the globe has considered catering to the needs of various types and races of travelers. One of the most significant trends is Halal tourism, which targets Muslim tourists who seek accommodation, food, and other services that are compliant with Islamic principles.

Halal tourism encompasses a wide range of practices such as the availability of halal foods, amenities, as well as facilities that align with Islamic standards. This expanding market provides opportunities as well as challenges for the hospitality industry especially in countries that aim towards more inclusive and diverse tourism.

The concept of Halal tourism encompasses not only dietary laws but also includes a holistic approach to hospitality respecting the religious and cultural needs of Muslim tourists. Due to the increasing number of Muslim tourists around the world, an increase in demand for halal tourism has been seen in many countries. These tourists look for tourist destinations that provide comfortable and faith-friendly environment.

The Global Islamic Economy Report stated that as of 2023, around USD194 billion was the total travel spending of Muslim tourists. This manifests the growing market of Muslim tourists around the world which calls for action among those involved in the hospitality State industry to cater to the needs of this segment of the market.

According to Belopilskaya (2018), the spending by Muslim tourists in 2020 was estimated to reach USD 220 billion and the number of Muslim tourists had grown from 121 million to 156 million in 2016 alone. This is a manifestation of the rapid expansion of the Islamic lifestyle market. This market growth provides opportunity for economic growth and cultural exchange while respecting religious principles.

The leaders in halal tourism in the international market are countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and United Arab Emirates. These countries catered diverse services for Muslim tourists though integration of halal standards in the hospitality industry. Case in point is Malaysia's comprehensive guidelines for halal tourism encompassing certification processes for hotels and restaurants which dramatically increased the demand for Muslim-friendly destination.

The Philippines is a country with rich cultural traditions and various tourist attractions. These tourist attractions could be potential players in the halal tourism market. In cognizance with the opportunity and the potential of the country, the Department of Tourism (DOT) spearheaded various activities to prepare the country for such increasing demand such launching Halal Culinary Tourism series, among others according to the Department of Tourism.

Cabico (2023) in her article, stated that President Marcos recently visited Malaysia to strengthen ties between the two countries. While there, a key area of discussion was the Halal industry. Halal refers to products and practices that comply with Islamic law. The Philippines wants to learn from Malaysia, a leader in this industry, and capture a bigger share of the Muslim tourist market. This focus on Halal tourism shows the Philippines' interest in attracting Muslim visitors and expanding its tourism industry.

Dagooc (2023), said that tourism stakeholders in Cebu are being encouraged to develop a robust halal industry to attract a significant portion of the global Muslim travel market, which is projected to be a USD 7.7 trillion industry by 2025. The Malaysian government is actively working with Cebu to hold a Halal Economic Forum in 2024, aiming to promote mutual tourism benefits and create a Muslim-friendly environment. This initiative is part of a broader effort to integrate halal practices into Cebu's tourism sector, supporting socio-economic growth and creating more jobs. With Malaysia as a model, the Philippines is encouraged to establish an ecosystem supporting the halal industry to capture both Muslim and non-Muslim travelers who prefer halal-certified options.

The Department of Tourism emphasized that the Philippines has been recognized as the Emerging Muslim-friendly Destination of the Year at the Halal in Travel Global Summit 2023 in Singapore. This accolade highlights the country's efforts to cater to Muslim travelers by developing a comprehensive halal tourism portfolio, which is integrated into the National Tourism Development Plan 2023-2028. The award acknowledges the Philippines' initiatives such as increasing halal certifications, conducting halal awareness programs, and promoting destinations like Mindanao. This recognition opens opportunities to showcase the Philippines' rich culture and beautiful destinations while boosting tourism growth and welcoming Muslim travelers to explore the country's diverse attractions.

The growing demand for Muslim-friendly tourist destinations and accommodations underscores the need for investigating the readiness of the hospitality industry particularly in Sorsogon City. With the growing demand for halal-compliant services, it is wise and imperative for cities to harness this opportunity by preparing its amenities, food services, and the entire hospitality industry. Understanding the current status of the hospitality industry when it comes to its readiness to cater services for Muslim tourists would help in mapping the local tourism and hospitality landscape and coming up with the roadmap to move towards a more capable hospitality industry in the context of halal tourism – local tourism that reflects inclusivity and respect diversity.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study assessed the readiness of the hospitality industry of Sorsogon City to Halal Tourism.

Specifically, it identified the level of readiness of hotel owners for halal tourism in terms of food, amenities and facility. The extent of readiness of hotel staff on halal tourism in terms of standard and practices. Challenges faced by DOT-accredited hotels in adapting halal tourism and the program project activities implemented by hotel owners in adapting Halal Tourism.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive quantitative and qualitative (mixed method) research design. The primary respondents of this study were the hotel owners or managers, and staff members of 14 DOT-accredited hotels in Sorsogon City. The said samples were taken using a purposive sampling technique.

The research instruments that were utilized in this study were a researcher-made survey-questionnaire. The descriptive statistics namely, frequency count to determine the number of hotels that fall into different awareness levels, training practices, or challenge categories, percentage to compare the proportion of hotels in each category to identify the most prevalent or least prevalent factor, and weighted mean are used to analyze the data and to determine the overall average level of awareness, training, or challenges faced by the hotels.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results were gathered, analyzed and interpreted by the researcher based from the objectives of the study. Tabular presentation and textual analysis and interpretation were also used.

A. *Level of Readiness of Hotels for Halal Tourism*

The travel industry is witnessing a surge in halal tourism, a sector catering to Muslim travelers seeking experiences that align with their religious beliefs. This growing market prioritizes destinations and hotels that cater to their specific needs. A crucial factor for Muslim tourists is the level of readiness hotels possess to accommodate halal principles. This translates to offerings like prayer facilities, a focus on halal-certified food, and amenities that respect Islamic modesty. Understanding the level of preparedness hotels have for halal tourism is vital to attracting this segment of the travel market and ensuring a smooth and fulfilling experience for Muslim guests.

Table 1. Level of Readiness for Halal Tourism in Terms of Food

Indicators	\bar{X}	Interpretation
The presence of permissible halal animal products are part of the food servings (beef, lamb, poultry, fish)	3.03	Fairly Ready
Halal foods are readily labeled for easy identification of guests	2.88	Fairly Ready
Preparation, storage, and serving of halal foods are separated from non-halal items	2.80	Fairly Ready
Absence of blood/blood products and alcohol in food preparation and servings	2.75	Fairly Ready
A variety of certified halal foods are made available in the hotel	2.58	Less Ready
Average	2.81	Fairly Ready

Table 1 shows the readiness of the hotel establishments in terms of food offerings particularly on the presence of permissible halal animal products (beef, lamb, poultry, fish) on the menu, this indicator had 3.03 as the mean acquired, signifying hotels are fairly ready. This indicator evaluates that the establishment sells food products that are made from animals that are acceptable for ingestion following Islamic dietary regulations. These consist of fish, poultry, lamb, and beef. Also, halal foods are clearly labeled for easy identification by guests and this gets a mean value of 2.88, indicating fairly ready. This indicator refers to how easily Muslim visitors may locate halal food options by having them prominently labeled on menus or food displays. Preparation, storage, and serving of halal foods are separated from non-halal items this had a mean value of 2.80, which is again fairly ready and this indicator talks about the practices used to handle halal food. It evaluates if, to prevent contamination, halal and non-halal food storage spaces, cookware, and utensils have been separated. The Absence of blood/blood products and alcohol in food preparation and servings this gets a rating of 2.75, which is fairly ready. This

indicator refers to the establishment avoiding using blood or blood-derived products, as well as alcohol, in their food preparation and servings. While a variety of certified halal foods are made available in the hotel this mean is the lowest at 2.58, indicating hotels are less ready in this aspect.

As highlighted by Suleman et al. (2021), halal food holds profound religious and cultural significance for Muslims. The absence of permissible halal food options can significantly impact the overall experience of Muslim guests. This finding underscores the importance of offering a wider variety of certified halal choices to cater to the spiritual and dietary requirements of Muslim guests.

Overall, the data suggests that hotels are moderately prepared to cater to the dietary needs of halal tourists. There's a good foundation with halal meat being served and a separation of food items. However, there's room for improvement, especially in terms of offering a wider variety of certified halal options.

Table 2 Level of Readiness for Halal Tourism in Terms of Facilities

Indicators	\bar{X}	Interpretation
Designating an alcohol-free zone in the vicinity	3.08	Fairly Ready
Availability of gender-segregated facilities toilets, hygiene areas, etc.	2.90	Fairly Ready
Availability of halal dining facilities in the vicinity	2.58	Less Ready
Signs or information indicating nearby mosques or prayer locations have been readily available for guests	2.45	Less Ready
Provision of prayer facilities within guest Rooms (qiblah indicator, prayer rug)	2.33	Less Ready
Average	2.67	Fairly Ready

Table 2 shows that designating an alcohol-free zone in the vicinity obtained a weighted mean value of 3.08 which means fairly ready. This indicator reflects how easy it is for guests to find accommodation that adheres to Islamic principles regarding alcohol consumption. A score of 3.08

presents that the hotels are fairly ready to provide options for those who prefer an alcohol-free environment. Availability of gender-segregated facilities (toilets, hygiene areas, etc.) scores also a 2.90 which is fairly ready.

This indicator looks at whether hotels provide separate facilities for men and women. It also indicates that the hotels are fairly ready to accommodate guests' preferences for their privacy. The availability of halal dining facilities in the vicinity scores 2.58 which means hotels are less ready in this aspect. This indicator assesses the ease of finding halal restaurants near the hotel. Signs or information indicating nearby mosques or prayer locations readily available for guests score 2.45 which is also less ready, this indicator reflects how easy it is for guests to find mosques or prayer spaces. This means hotels are less ready to provide this information. Provision of prayer facilities within guest rooms (qibla indicator, prayer rug) scores a 2.33 which is also less ready in this aspect. This indicator looks at whether guest rooms have amenities specifically designed for Muslim prayer rituals. Providing prayer facilities would make it more convenient for Muslim guests to perform their religious obligations while signs or information indicating nearby mosques or prayer locations readily available for guests score of 2.45 which means hotels are also less ready. This means that not all hotels may provide information on nearby mosques or prayer locations.

Ibrahim (2023) posited that, since Islam has specific guidelines on what is permissible, halal tourism caters to Muslim travelers by providing services and facilities that avoid things like alcohol (which is forbidden). This includes features that are important to their faith, such as dedicated spaces for prayer, food prepared according to halal standards, and separate swimming areas or spas for men and women.

It's clearly outlining the core aspects of halal tourism, including avoiding non-halal items and providing facilities for prayer and separate amenities.

Overall, the data suggest that there is potential for enhancement in meeting the requirements of Muslim tourists. Although hotels have made some basic preparations, there are still gaps in important areas, like the availability of halal food options, information on places to worship, and prayer facilities within rooms.

Table 3 Level of Readiness for Halal Tourism in terms of Amenities

Indicators	\bar{X}	Interpretation
Spa or wellness facilities with gender-segregated options or specific hours for halal guests.	2.00	Less Ready
A designated area for halal tourists is for fitness purposes such as gym and recreational place.	1.98	Less Ready
Availability of gender-segregated amenities such as pools.	1.93	Less Ready
Provision of concierge services to attend halal Muslim tourists	1.73	Less Ready
Average	1.91	Less Ready

Table 3 presents that spa or wellness facilities with gender-segregated options or specific hours for halal guests had a mean of 2.00 indicating hotels are less ready to cater to preferences for gender-segregated wellness facilities or specific hours for Muslim guests. A designated area for halal tourists is available for fitness purposes such as gym and recreational places a mean value of 1.98 indicates hotels are less ready to provide designated spaces for halal tourists to utilize gym and recreational facilities. This could be due to a lack of separate areas or limitations on access. The availability of gender-segregated amenities such as pool had a mean of 1.93 suggesting hotels are less ready to provide gender-segregated swimming pools. The Muslim guests prepare separate pools or designated swimming times for men and women for their privacy according to their religious beliefs. Lastly, the provision of concierge services to halal/Muslim tourists had a mean value of 1.73 indicating hotels are less ready to provide concierge services specifically trained to assist Muslim tourists. This could mean a lack of staff with knowledge about halal requirements or Islamic cultural practices.

Burton (2022) points out in the article that the growing trend of halal tourism caters to the needs of Muslim

travelers. Muslim travelers seek destinations that respect their religious beliefs, such as providing places for prayer, halal food options, and gender-segregated areas.

It reiterates the core needs of Muslim travelers. This emphasizes the importance of understanding what Muslim tourists look for in a destination, such as prayer facilities, halal food, and potentially separate amenities.

B. Extent of Readiness of Hotel Staff on Halal Tourism

In any aspect of hotel operation, the essential role of the staff is indispensable. These hotel staff play a crucial role in ensuring the comfort and satisfaction of tourists by providing quality services and products.

Promoting inclusive tourism has been an emerging trend and a growing segment of the tourism industry. A very notable development in this sector is the rise of halal tourism. This niche market attends to the needs and preferences of Muslim travelers, providing them with a travel experience attuned to their religious beliefs and cultural values.

Table 4 shows the extent of readiness of hotel staff for halal tourism. The Table shows that on sustaining rooms that are clean and free from impurities, the sampled hotel staff were satisfactorily ready on such indicator. This has a weighted mean value of 3.63. This implied the average readiness of the workforce to ensure the cleanliness of the rooms to be compliant with the standards of the halal tourists.

Halal tourists have to be provided with rooms that are comfortable and respect their religious values and practices. Halal features have to be noticed in the hotel rooms to create a welcoming ambiance for the halal tourists.

The data presented in the table reveal varying levels of readiness among hotel staff in accommodating Islamic practices and Muslim guests' needs. The highest level of readiness is observed in maintaining clean rooms, with a mean of 3.63, interpreted as "Satisfactorily Ready". This suggests that basic hygiene and cleanliness standards are well-maintained. Following this, staff's ability to greet guests with genuine smiles and create a welcoming atmosphere while being knowledgeable about Islamic practices has a mean of 3.40, interpreted as "Fairly Ready". This indicates a good level of customer service with some understanding of Islamic cultural norms.

Table 4 Extent of Readiness of Hotel Staff

Indicators	\bar{X}	Interpretation
Rooms are clean and free from impurities	3.63	Satisfactorily Ready
Hotel staff greet guests with genuine smiles creating a welcoming atmosphere, and are knowledgeable about Islamic practices.	3.40	Fairly Ready
Staff's awareness of halal dietary restrictions	2.98	Fairly Ready
Dress code policy for staff that respects Muslim attire	2.90	Fairly Ready
Staff are aware of prayer times and assist guests in finding suitable places to pray.	2.88	Fairly Ready
Reservation systems allow your guests to request Halal amenities (prayer rugs, qibla indicator) or a room free from alcohol beforehand.	2.85	Fairly Ready
No alcohol is served in public areas or rooms.	2.83	Fairly Ready
Staff Awareness on halal dietary restrictions.	2.80	Fairly Ready
Segregated spa facilities are available with specific spa hours.	2.28	Less Ready
Information on nearby mosques or prayer location is available.	2.25	Less Ready
Qur'ans or Islamic prayer books are available with specific spa hours.	1.98	Less Ready
Average	2.80	Fairly Ready

The table reveals a gradual decline in readiness as they move towards more specific Islamic accommodations. Staff awareness regarding halal dietary restrictions has a mean of 2.98 interpreted as "fairly ready". Meanwhile, dress code policies respecting Muslim attire has a mean of 2.90 interpreted as "fairly ready" while prayer times and assisting guests with prayer locations has a mean also of 2.88 interpreted as and the ability to fulfill requests for halal amenities or alcohol-free rooms has a mean of 2.85 all fall under the "Fairly Ready" category. While this indicates some level of preparedness, it also suggests there's significant potential for improvement in these areas.

Notably, the availability of segregated spa facilities with specific hours has a mean of 2.28, information on nearby mosques or prayer locations has a mean of 2.25, and

the availability of Qur'ans or Islamic prayer books has a mean of 1.98 all interpreted as "Less Ready". These areas indicate significant gaps in the hotel's readiness to fully accommodate Muslim guests' specific needs.

The overall average score of 2.80, interpreted as "Fairly Ready", suggests that while the hotel staff have a general level of preparedness in accommodating Muslim guests, there are several areas where improvements can be made to enhance the experience for guests seeking Islamic-friendly services and environments. The data highlight the need for more comprehensive training and resources to better meet the specific requirements of Muslim travelers, particularly in areas related to prayer facilities, Islamic literature, and specialized amenities.

The data revealed varying levels of hotel staff readiness in accommodating Islamic practices and Muslim guests' needs. While basic services like room cleanliness score well, areas such as prayer facilities and Islamic literature need significant improvement. The overall "Fairly Ready" status indicates a general preparedness, but with clear opportunities for enhancement

C. Challenges Encountered by the Hotels in Adopting Halal Tourism

The table presents the challenges encountered by hotels in Sorsogon City in adopting halal tourism. The challenges

are ranked by frequency, with the most frequently cited challenge being the difficulty in providing qibla indicators and prayer rugs in each room. This is followed by limited facilities for complying with sex-segregated purposes and limited space availability in existing hotel structures. These findings suggest that there are a number of significant obstacles that hotels in Sorsogon City face when trying to adopt halal tourism. These challenges include the need to make physical changes to the hotel premises, such as providing prayer rooms and qibla indicators, as well as the need to train staff on halal principles and procedures.

Table 5 Challenges Encountered by the Hotels in Adopting Halal Tourism

Challenges	Frequency	Rank
Difficulty in providing qibla indicators and prayer rugs in each room.	28	1
Limited facilities in complying with sex-segregated purpose.	26	2.5
Limited space availability, especially in existing hotel structures.	26	2.5
Costly provision of learning and development program for staff proper training on halal principles and procedures	24	4
Limited or insufficient space for a prayer room without compromising on other guest facilities.	23	5
Difficulty in enforcing smoke-free zones near prayer areas.	10	6
Implementing careful cleaning procedures to prevent cross-contamination.	18	7.5
Difficulty in ensuring complete separation of halal and haram/non halal kitchens (space, equipment, staffing).	18	7.5
Limited budget to comply with the requirements of Halal tourism.	16	9
Difficulty in ensuring prayer room that is well-maintained, clean, and has a peaceful ambiance.	13	10
The increased cost of halal ingredients compared to non-halal options.	11	11

The table also shows that the cost of halal ingredients is a significant challenge for some hotels. This is likely due to the fact that halal ingredients are often more expensive than non-halal ingredients.

Overall, the table highlighted the need for further research into the challenges that hotels in Sorsogon City face when adopting halal tourism. This research could help to develop strategies to overcome these challenges and make it easier for hotels to offer halal-friendly services.

In addition to the challenges mentioned in the table, hotels in Sorsogon City may also face other challenges, such as a lack of awareness of halal tourism among potential

guests and a lack of government support for the development of halal tourism in the city.

Despite these challenges, there is a growing demand for halal tourism in the Philippines. This is due to the increasing number of Muslim tourists from around the world. As a result, hotels in Sorsogon City that are able to successfully adopt halal tourism can expect to benefit from increased business.

In conclusion, the table above provided a valuable overview of the challenges that hotels in Sorsogon City face when adopting halal tourism. By understanding these challenges, hotels can develop strategies to overcome them and make it easier to offer halal-friendly services.

Table 5 shows that in terms of challenges encountered by the hotels in Sorsogon City in adopting halal tourism and the most challenges with a frequency of 28 and rank 1 is the difficulty in providing qibla indicators and prayer rugs in each room. Providing qibla indicators ensures that Muslim guests can accurately determine the prayer direction also, prayer rugs are essential for Muslims to maintain cleanliness and purity during prayer. It implies the absence of these amenities suggests a potential lack of understanding or awareness of Muslim traveler requirements. Rank 2.5, with a frequency of 26, limited facilities in complying with sex-segregated purpose and limited space availability, especially in existing hotel structures. This shows that these challenges all demonstrate the truth that accommodating Muslim customers frequently requires significant operational changes for the part of hotels. Rank 4 with a frequency of 24, costly provision of learning and development program for staff proper training on halal principles and procedures. This implies that high training costs can hinder small and medium-sized hotels from adopting halal tourism due to budget constraints. Rank 5, with a frequency of 23 limited or insufficient space for a prayer room without compromising on another guest. This also implies that Most of the hotels in Sorsogon City, especially the older ones, were not built with spaces for prayer in consideration. Because of this, there are less suitable spaces available.

Also shown in the table the rank 6 is the difficulty in enforcing smoke-free zones near prayer areas with a frequency of 20. This also implies that most of the hotel have an insufficient designated smoking areas or poor ventilation in existing smoking areas. Rank 7.5 with a frequency of 18 implementing careful cleaning procedures to prevent cross-contamination and difficulty in ensuring complete separation of halal and haram/non halal kitchens (space, equipment and staffing). This also implies that hotel staff may not have the necessary knowledge or training in halal cleaning standards and complete separation might not be feasible with the current kitchen layouts. Rank 9 limited budget to comply with the requirements of Halal Tourism with a frequency of 16. This implies that it can be expensive to renovate spaces to meet halal requirements, such as ablution areas, prayer rooms, and separate dining places and to provide comprehensive training to staff on halal food handling, preparation, and service standards requires financial resources for training programs and certifications. Rank 10 difficulty in ensuring prayer room that is well-maintained, clean, and has a peaceful ambiance with a frequency of 13. And lastly, rank 11 increased cost of halal ingredients compared to non-halal options with a frequency of 11. It implies that hotel owners in Sorsogon City are less concerned about it.

According to Huda et al. in their study, Halal tourism is an emerging sector within the broader halal industry, focusing on travel that aligns with Islamic principles. This article explores the challenges, solutions, and strategies for developing a robust model of halal tourism. Understanding these infrastructure gaps and advocating for improvements aligns with the goal of enhancing destination readiness and attractiveness to halal travelers

D. Programs, Projects, and Activities Implemented by the Hotel Owners in Adopting Halal Tourism

Participating in inclusive tourism seminars and training are essential for cultivating a welcoming and accessible tourism industry. These platforms equip individuals with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the diverse needs of travelers with disabilities, ensuring tourism experiences are enjoyable for all. By learning about accessibility requirements, effective communication strategies, and cultural sensitivity, participants can develop practical solutions to eliminate barriers and create inclusive environments. Moreover, networking opportunities and the sharing of best practices foster a more inclusive tourism ecosystem, ultimately enhancing the overall traveler experience and boosting a destination's competitiveness.

➤ *Attendance to Seminar Workshop on Inclusive Tourism*

The seminar workshop on Inclusive Tourism revealed a mixed level of participant engagement with the topic. While many attendees actively participated, demonstrating a clear understanding of its significance in the tourism industry, a notable disparity emerged. Some participants disclosed a complete lack of prior training in inclusive tourism. This inconsistency underscores a potential knowledge gap within the sector, highlighting the urgent need for more widespread and accessible training opportunities.

Furthermore, the high cost of attending such seminars was identified as a significant barrier to participation. To foster inclusive tourism practices among a broader range of tourism stakeholders, more affordable and accessible training options must be developed.

To address this, hotel owners are strongly encouraged to prioritize attending inclusive tourism seminars and workshops. These events offer invaluable insights into accommodating guests with diverse needs, expanding potential customer bases, and enhancing overall guest experiences. Embracing inclusivity not only aligns with growing consumer expectations but also positions hotels as socially responsible businesses. Ultimately, investing in inclusive tourism training can lead to increased revenue, improved reputation, and a positive community impact.

➤ *Conduct Orientation Among Staff on Inclusive Tourism*

Staff orientation on inclusive tourism is vital for creating welcoming and accessible tourism experiences for all. By equipping employees with comprehensive knowledge of diversity, accessibility, and inclusivity, organizations can foster a culture of respect and inclusivity. This training empowers staff to effectively interact with guests with diverse needs, including those with disabilities, by enhancing their understanding of accessibility requirements, communication strategies, and cultural sensitivity. Consequently, staff can provide personalized and tailored services, leading to increased guest satisfaction and loyalty. Ultimately, investing in inclusive tourism training enhances a destination's reputation, drives revenue, and promotes a more equitable tourism industry.

A participant stated “We greet the Muslim tourist similar to another tourist. We require our staff to wear their best smiles and use neutral terms to avoid misunderstanding. We always ask questions when we are not sure of what they want and need. We value respect above all.” This emphasizes the importance of staff maintaining a friendly demeanor and using neutral language to prevent misunderstandings.

➤ Promotion of Inclusive Tourism Through Transparency

Transparency is essential for fostering inclusive tourism. By openly sharing detailed information about accessibility features, accommodations, and experiences, destinations empower travelers with disabilities to make informed choices and feel confident in their travel plans. This transparency builds trust and ensures that tourism offerings genuinely cater to diverse needs. Furthermore, it empowers travelers to advocate for their specific requirements, driving improvements in accessibility and inclusivity over time. Additionally, transparent communication about environmental and social practices attracts conscious travelers seeking authentic and responsible experiences, contributing to the overall sustainability and positive impact of the tourism industry.

When Hotel Owners are asked about the promotion of inclusive Tourism, one participant said, “We are currently focusing on promoting our hotel's basic amenities and facilities.” This highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the adoption of inclusive tourism practices within the hotel industry. While the predominant focus among hotel owners is promoting core amenities and facilities, this highlights a missed opportunity within the industry. By expanding promotional efforts to encompass the needs of diverse travelers, including Muslim Tourist, hotels can significantly enhance their appeal and reputation. Shifting towards inclusive tourism not only opens up a larger potential market but also positions hotels as welcoming and accessible establishments. To effectively promote inclusivity, hotels should prominently showcase accessible features, accommodations, and services alongside their traditional offerings. Implementing targeted marketing campaigns, optimizing websites for accessibility, and providing comprehensive staff training are crucial steps towards creating a truly inclusive guest experience.

Battour (2022) stated that destination marketers need to understand Muslim travel behavior in order to satisfy his/her needs especially in Halal tourism industry. Muslim tourist needs are identified when travelling abroad: Muslim-friendly hotels, Halal food, Muslim-friendly phone application, Muslim-friendly airport, Halal holiday, Halal tourism websites, Halal healthcare facilities and services, Halal cruise and Halal swimming suit. The knowledge of Muslim tourists behavior in the context of Halal tourism is pertinent to industry players, marketers, and policy makers alike in developing Halal tourism infrastructure and facilities, Halal travel packages and Halal travel activities.

Understanding these needs is crucial for hotels to effectively prepare for halal tourism. It details various aspects Muslim tourists consider, including Muslim-friendly hotels, halal food options, and even phone applications.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding findings, the researcher concludes that hotels demonstrate a fair level of readiness in providing halal food and alcohol-free environments, but their capacity to offer halal amenities and facilities is low. Hotel staff exhibit a fair level of readiness in accommodating Muslim guests, particularly in terms of hospitality and foundational knowledge of Islamic practices. Hotels in Sorsogon City face significant challenges in implementing halal tourism due to infrastructural limitations, staff training requirements, operational complexities, and the need to provide prayer facilities, ensure halal food handling, and adhere to strict cleanliness standards. Limited initiatives to adopt inclusive tourism, particularly in catering to halal tourists are observed in the locale which paves the way to craft an action plan for the promotion of halal tourism in Sorsogon City.

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are given: (1.1) hotel owners may prioritize offering halal-certified food options by strictly adhering to Islamic dietary laws in ingredient selection, preparation, and handling. Establish a separate kitchen area or designating specific utensils for halal food is crucial; (1.2) hotel owners may prioritize the provision of dedicated prayer facilities and consider implementing separate gender swimming pools; (1.3) hotel owners may provide essential amenities such as Qurans in rooms, clear Qibla directions, and dedicated prayer or Wudu areas; (2) hotel management to invest in comprehensive staff training on Islamic practices, cultural sensitivity, and halal standards. (3) hotels guide staff training, invest in infrastructure, establish halal food protocols, and collaborate with local authorities to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for Muslim guests. (4) The adoption of the proposed plan in halal tourism be promoted in Sorsogon City.

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