



Halal Tourism as a Vehicle for Community Service and Development: A Case Study of Butig, Lanao del Sur, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study assesses the halal tourism potential of the Municipality of Butig, Lanao del Sur, a historically rich and culturally vibrant town in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Known as one of the cradles of Mëranao civilization, Butig offers a wide array of attractions—from royal pageantry, traditional dances, and Islamic educational institutions to natural springs, agricultural products, and halal-certified delicacies. Employing an ethnographic approach, the study utilized fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews to explore the municipality's tourism assets within the framework of Islamic principles. The findings highlight significant potential for developing halal tourism that not only fosters economic growth but also strengthens local identity and intergenerational knowledge-sharing. Positioned as a form of culturally grounded community service, halal tourism in Butig can empower residents, preserve religious heritage, and contribute to inclusive development. The study recommends a sustainable tourism model that integrates Islamic values, community engagement, and government collaboration, transforming Butig into a model destination for faith-based tourism and community enrichment in the Philippines.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a dynamic and ever-expanding global industry that involves travel for leisure, business, education, and cultural enrichment (Mohd, 2018; Anggayana, 2023; Keadplang *et al.*, 2024). It includes various interconnected services such as accommodation, transportation, food services, and entertainment, all catering to the needs and expectations of travelers. Tourism plays a vital role in economic development and cultural exchange by creating jobs, preserving cultural heritage, and generating income for local communities (Sharma *et al.*, 2012; Meyer & Meyer, 2015; Hacıa, 2019; Nooripoor *et al.*, 2021).

A specialized and increasingly recognized form of tourism is halal tourism, which caters to Muslim travelers seeking services compliant with Islamic principles. Halal tourism ensures that services—such as food, lodging, and recreation—adhere to the religious values of Islam (El-Gohary, 2016). These include offering halal-certified food, alcohol-free environments, prayer facilities, modest attire codes, and gender-segregated recreational areas when necessary (Jemal, 2020). In essence, halal tourism serves both spiritual and practical needs, bridging religious values and leisure travel.

The concept of halal, deeply embedded in Islamic teachings, extends beyond dietary restrictions to encompass ethics, business conduct, and social behavior. The Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) defines halal as anything permissible, pure, and beneficial under Islamic law (Hadji Abdul Rahman, 2020). Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei have adopted national halal certification systems, offering international models of how tourism can align with Islamic values while also stimulating economic development.

In the context of community service, halal tourism takes on an even deeper significance. It is not solely about creating an industry; it is about serving local populations through inclusive and ethical economic opportunities. Halal tourism promotes the development of infrastructure, the preservation of religious and cultural identity, and the empowerment of community members—particularly women, artisans, and small-scale entrepreneurs. It contributes to education, interfaith dialogue, and the cultivation of mutual respect between locals and visitors. When managed sustainably, halal tourism becomes a vehicle for community empowerment, cultural preservation, and social cohesion.

This is particularly relevant in regions such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where communities like the Municipality of Butig possess rich Islamic traditions, unique cultural expressions, and untapped tourism resources. Butig, often referred to as one of the cradles of Mëranao civilization, holds deep historical and religious significance. From royal lineages and ancient mosques to breathtaking natural landscapes and traditional Mëranao delicacies, Butig offers a wealth of experiences that can be integrated into a halal tourism model.

However, the community continues to face challenges such as poverty, limited infrastructure, and a history of armed conflict that has contributed to marginalization in national development narratives. By introducing a halal tourism initiative as a form of community service, the people of Butig can showcase their culture to the world while gaining sustainable sources of livelihood, educational support, and civic pride.

This study aims to assess the potential of halal tourism in Butig by identifying its cultural, historical, natural, and culinary assets. Through an ethnographic approach—including field observation and local interviews—the research investigates how halal tourism can function not just as a strategy for economic revitalization but also as a community-based service that aligns with Islamic values and strengthens local identity.

Ultimately, this paper advocates for a community-driven tourism model that places Mëranao traditions at its core while fostering respect, equity, and inclusion for all stakeholders. By integrating spiritual principles with sustainable development, Butig has the potential to become a model for halal tourism not only in the Philippines but across Southeast Asia.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach to assess the potentials of halal tourism in the Municipality of Butig, Lanao del Sur. Ethnography, as a method, involves immersive engagement with the community through participant observation, interviews, and documentation of local customs, practices, and sociocultural dynamics. This approach is particularly suited to exploring the rich tapestry of Mëranao culture, enabling this study to uncover lived experiences, values, and traditions relevant to halal tourism.

The research was anchored in community service principles, aiming not only to generate academic insights but also to contribute practically to the development of the local community. As such, the data collection process prioritized collaboration with local stakeholders, including barangay leaders, religious scholars (ulama), small business owners, educators, and youth representatives. Their voices were essential in identifying local assets, needs, and aspirations related to tourism and development.

Primary data was collected through:

- (i) Participant observation at cultural events, religious sites, and public markets.
- (ii) Semi-structured interviews with key informants, including members of royal families, school and madrasah administrators, and food vendors.
- (iii) Field documentation through photographs, sketches, and notes on traditional dances, architectural features, and natural landscapes.

This participatory method enabled a deeper understanding of how halal tourism can function as a form of community service by uplifting economic conditions, preserving Islamic and indigenous heritage, and encouraging civic pride.

The selection of participants was purposive, focusing on individuals with direct knowledge or involvement in tourism-related activities. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, the research outcomes were designed to be shared with the community, allowing local leaders and residents to benefit from the findings. By emphasizing sustainability, inclusivity, and spiritual alignment, the methodology aligned closely with the goals of community empowerment and service.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Location of the Study

The Municipality of Butig is located in the southeastern portion of the province of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao, Philippines. As shown in **Figure 1**, Mindanao is the second-largest island in the Philippines and is home to a significant portion of the country's Muslim population, particularly in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The island plays a vital role in the cultural and historical development of Islam in the Philippines.

Butig, highlighted in **Figure 2**, is one of the oldest municipalities in Lanao del Sur and holds historical significance as a center of early Mëranao civilization. The town is accessible via major cities such as Marawi City and Cotabato City. It is surrounded by neighboring municipalities, including Sultan Dumalondong, Lumbayanague, Lumbatan, and Masiu.

Despite being landlocked, its strategic location and proximity to important urban centers enhance its potential as a destination for halal tourism.

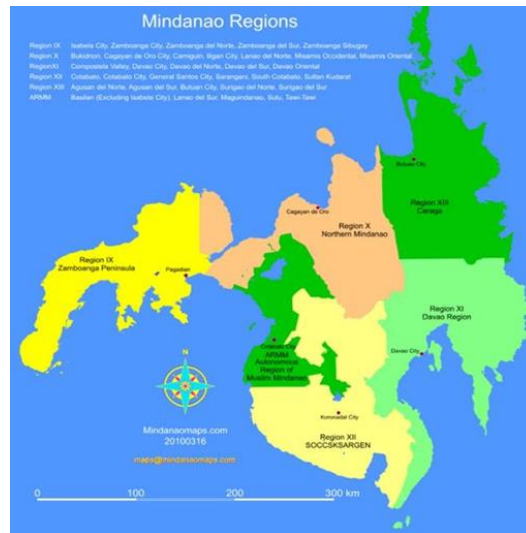


Figure 1. Map of Mindanao showing the location of Lanao del Sur.



Figure 2. Map of Lanao del Sur with the Municipality of Butig highlighted.

3.2. History

Butig is one of the oldest settlements in Mindanao and is historically recognized as a sultanate within the Pangampong (Principality) of Unayan—one of the four major principalities under the Sultanate of Lanao. Because of its deep historical roots and the influence of its royal families, Butig is often referred to as the “cradle of Mëranao civilization”.

The town was officially declared a municipality on June 25, 1963, through Executive Order No. 21 under the administration of President Diosdado Macapagal. It has since evolved into a significant cultural and political hub in Lanao del Sur, preserving centuries-old traditions, including royal enthronements, cultural ceremonies, and Islamic scholarship.

Leadership in Butig has passed through generations of royal lineages. Mayors such as Ibrahim Mitoon Macadato, Sultan Macabayao M. Macadato, Sangcad S. Bao, and the current mayor Atty. Dimnatang Labay Pansar, among others, have contributed to shaping Butig’s modern identity while maintaining its cultural legacy.

Butig is also home to the seventeen Royal Houses of Lanao, with strict traditions requiring ancestral ties for anyone to claim royal titles within the Sultanate. This has further entrenched the town’s status as a sacred place for Mëranao identity and authority. Historically, Butig was

composed of 44 barangays under Mayor Sultan Macabayao M. Macadato, but this number was later reduced to 16 barangays during the administration of President Corazon Aquino.

3.3. Role in Islamization of Mindanao

The Municipality of Butig holds a foundational place in the Islamization of Mindanao. Historically, the arrival of Sharif Muhammad Kabungsuwan in the early 16th century marked a turning point for the region. As a Muslim missionary and political figure from Johor (modern-day Malaysia), he journeyed to the southern Philippines to spread Islam. Upon arriving in Mindanao, Kabungsuwan strategically formed marital and political alliances with local ruling families, allowing for both the religious and political integration of Islam into indigenous communities.

These alliances gave rise to powerful Muslim dynasties, including the Sultanates of Maguindanao, Buayan, and, notably, Butig. The Mëranaos of Butig, situated along the interior of Lake Lanao, played a critical role in expanding Islamic governance and religious instruction across the surrounding communities. The people of Butig were instrumental in establishing the Sultanate of Lanao, which later evolved into the Pangampong of Unayan—one of the four key principalities of Lanao.

In this context, Butig is often described as a “cradle of Mëranaw civilization,” with its royal houses and sultanate traditions symbolizing not only cultural identity but also the deep-rooted Islamic heritage of the region. Over time, the Islamization of Mindanao was reinforced by interregional connections with neighboring Islamic sultanates such as those of Sulu, Brunei, and Ternate, enhancing the shared spiritual, cultural, and economic ties throughout the Malay-Muslim world.

The legacy of Butig’s role in Islamization remains visible today through its religious institutions, traditional leadership structures, and continued observance of Islamic customs. The municipality continues to serve as a vital link between the historical spread of Islam and the contemporary cultural identity of the Mëranaos people.

3.4. Cultural Heritage and Royal Traditions

The Municipality of Butig, revered as the “cradle” of Mëranaw civilization, stands as a vital center for cultural heritage and royal lineage in Lanao del Sur. Historically tied to Pangampong a Unayan, one of the four principalities of the Lanao Sultanate. Butig is recognized for its deep connection to the Seventeen Royal Houses of Lanao, where only those with ancestral ties to Butig can hold recognized royal titles.

Among the most vibrant cultural practices in Butig is the royal enthronement ceremony of the *Bae-a-Labi* and *Sultans*. This elaborate celebration reflects the deeply rooted traditions of the Mëranaw people. Before the final enthronement, the selected *Datu* or *Bae* must perform a cultural dance, accompanied by their own composed *Pananaroon*—a traditional poetic oratory that signifies wisdom, nobility, and cultural pride.

In some enthronements, the royals themselves participate in the performances, adding an interactive element that connects leadership with cultural expression. This involvement of the sultans and *bae* in public performances distinguishes Butig’s royal pageantry from that of other municipalities in Lanao del Sur and serves as a living example of how tradition and governance coexist.

Royal garments include ornate *malong*, intricate beadwork, and symbolic artifacts such as the *kawing* (ring of authority). These materials symbolize honor, legitimacy, and continuity. Traditional instruments such as the *kulintang*, *agong*, and *dabakan* are played to accompany

the ceremonies, bringing the historical ambiance of Mëranaw culture to life (Dance and Dance, n.d.).

These enthronement rituals serve not only as political transitions but as cultural preservation practices passed down across generations. They reinforce Mëranaw identity and strengthen social cohesion in the community. Furthermore, these events are occasions for unity, where elders, *ulama*, women, and youth gather to witness and reaffirm their shared values and history.

Figure 3 illustrates one of these royal processions, where the enthronement of a Sultan is marked by traditional regalia, community participation, and performances that echo centuries of heritage.



Figure 3. Royal Pageantry Procession of a Sultan in Butig. The ceremonial entrance of newly enthroned sultans showcases Butig’s vibrant traditions and royal protocols.

The uniqueness of Butig's royal enthronement, where performance, poetry, and leadership intersect, offers an opportunity for cultural tourism initiatives, especially under the lens of halal tourism. Visitors can engage in meaningful cultural experiences that align with Islamic values while also learning about the region’s history and governance.

By incorporating these cultural assets into local tourism strategies, Butig stands to benefit not only economically but also socially, as cultural pride and awareness are enhanced through community-based tourism.

3.5. Religious Infrastructure and Community Identity

Religious infrastructure plays a vital role in shaping the cultural and social fabric of Butig, Lanao del Sur. The municipality reflects deep-rooted Islamic traditions through the presence of *masjids* (mosques) and *ranggar* (small prayer houses), which serve as both spiritual centers and markers of community identity. These sacred spaces not only provide a place for prayer but also function as symbols of unity, guidance, and cultural preservation among the Mëranaw people.

In Butig, there is a customary belief that each barangay should ideally maintain only one central *masjid*. This traditional norm discourages the construction of additional mosques near the original one, promoting communal worship and preventing division within the local Muslim population. Despite this, *ranggar*—smaller structures used for daily prayers—are commonly found throughout various neighborhoods, offering accessible prayer spaces for residents who cannot travel to the central mosque.

While the total number of large mosques in Butig is limited, the few that exist exhibit distinct architectural designs. These *masjids* are characterized by local craftsmanship and Islamic motifs, symbolizing the spiritual devotion and artistic expression of the Mëranaw community. One of the most prominent examples is the mosque located in Barangay Sandab,

which stands as the largest in the municipality and serves as a central place of worship and gathering for residents (**Figure 4**).



Figure 4. The Largest Mosque in Butig, Located in Barangay Sandab.

Additionally, smaller *ranggars* can be found nestled within residential zones or along main roads. These are typically used for quick prayers, accommodating up to ten people at a time. Their humble design reflects the practical and accessible approach to fulfilling religious obligations in daily life (**Figure 5**).

Visitors to these religious structures are welcome, provided they follow appropriate etiquette, such as removing footwear, dressing modestly, and maintaining cleanliness. These places, beyond their religious function, embody the values of modesty, discipline, and reverence central to Mëranao Islamic life. The preservation of these spaces ensures the continued transmission of faith, tradition, and communal solidarity in Butig.



Figure 5. A Typical Ranggar in Butig.

3.6. Festivals, Dances, and Social Practices

The cultural identity of Butig is vividly expressed through its traditional festivals, dances, and social customs, all of which are deeply rooted in Mëranao heritage. These cultural manifestations are not only symbolic but also serve as vital tools for preserving communal memory, identity, and cohesion in the context of Islamic and local traditions.

One of the most prominent celebrations in Butig is the royal enthronement ceremony of the *Bae-a-Labi* and *Sultans*. These events are characterized by elaborate rituals that combine Islamic values with indigenous customs. Before the final enthronement, the selected *Datu* or

Bae must perform a cultural dance exhibition, often accompanied by their self-composed *Pananaroon*, a traditional poetic oratory that communicates wisdom, leadership, and ancestral values. This distinct cultural performance signifies not only the passing of leadership but also the preservation of oral traditions.

The royal pageantry of Butig is uniquely interactive. In some instances, members of the royal family themselves participate in cultural dances, engaging with the audience and reinforcing their connection with the community (see **Figure 3** in the previous section). This fusion of performance and leadership makes the enthronement a powerful representation of Mëranao social harmony and hierarchy.

Among the traditional dances performed in Butig are *Kasipa*, *Malong-Malong* (also known as *Sambi-sa-Malong*), and *Kapagapir*. These dances are integral to celebratory events such as weddings, *madrasah* recognition ceremonies, and local cultural competitions. The *Kasipa* dance, typically performed by Mëranao men, involves kicking a rattan ball with precision to hit a suspended decorative target called a *manggis*. Historically, it was a royal form of entertainment during enthronements and elite social gatherings (**Figure 6**).



Figure 6. Kasipa Dance Performance at a Cultural Festival in Butig.

Malong-Malong highlights the elegance and multifunctionality of the *malong*, a tubular cloth worn by both men and women. Women performing this dance use the *malong* as a versatile garment, while men incorporate it into their ceremonial attire. This dance reflects the Mëranao philosophy of adaptability, modesty, and cultural pride.

Meanwhile, *Kapagapir* features the use of *apir*, ornate fans made of rattan. Dancers manipulate the fans with refined hand gestures and partially conceal their faces, showcasing the grace and mystique associated with traditional femininity in Mëranao society (**Figure 7**).

These cultural dances and social practices, passed down through generations, continue to thrive in Butig. They serve not only as a form of artistic expression but also as a medium for reinforcing Islamic values of respect, community, and leadership. Their integration into official events, education, and tourism underscores their centrality to Butig's cultural identity and its potential as a halal tourism destination.



Figure 7. Dancers Performing a Combination of Malong-Malong and Kapagapi.

3.7. Natural Attractions and Ecotourism Opportunities

The Municipality of Butig is endowed with abundant natural attractions that enhance its potential as a halal and eco-friendly tourism destination. Its rich natural environment includes freshwater springs, waterfalls, mountain ranges, and agricultural landscapes—all contributing to a serene and spiritually aligned travel experience for Muslim and non-Muslim tourists alike.

One of the most popular natural sites in the municipality is the Butig Nature Spring, locally known as “Sumpit”. Sumpit has become a significant attraction for locals and visitors due to its cool, clean water sourced directly from the surrounding mountains and forests. Visitors can enjoy the spring for a modest entrance fee, and free wooden tents with aluminum roofing are available for day use. Sumpit is envisioned by local officials as a core component of agroecotourism, combining nature appreciation with sustainable agricultural practices (**Figure 8**), including the biggest spring water (**Figure 8a**), tent camp (**Figure 8b**), cute snack-in (**Figure 8c**), water irrigation (**Figure 8d**), fish pond (**Figure 8e**), and fresh spring water (**Figure 8f**).

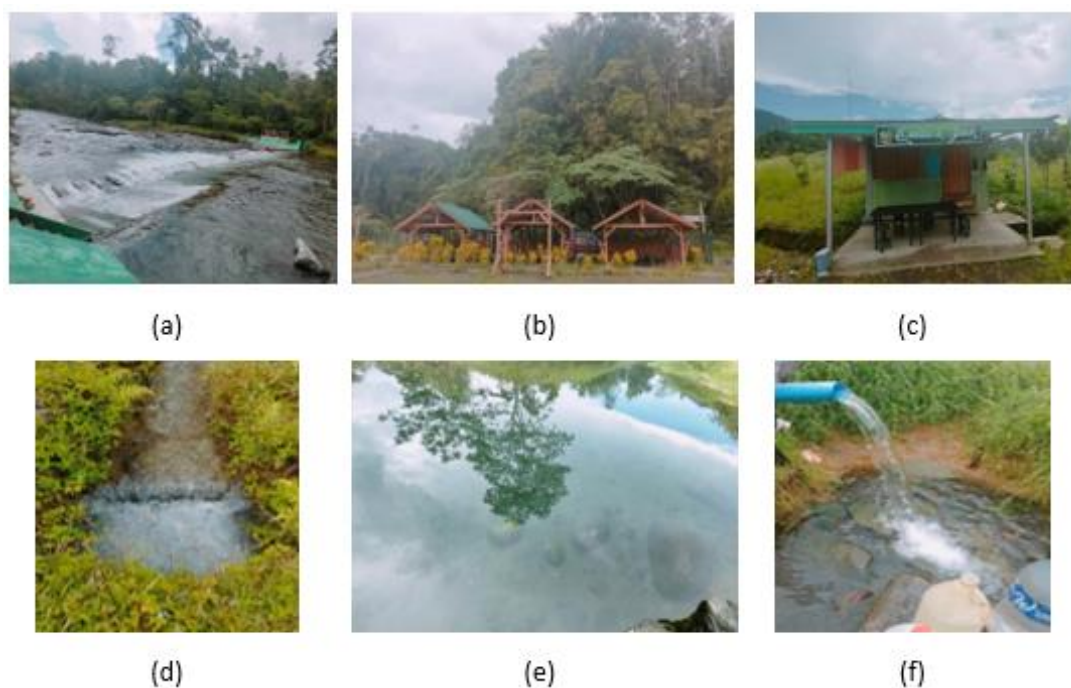


Figure 8. Sumpit Spring Resort in Butig, A Popular Eco-Tourism Destination. Figures (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), and (f) are the biggest spring water, tent camp, cute snack-in, water irrigation, fish pond, and fresh spring water, respectively.

The area also features small lakes, irrigation streams, and scenic fishponds that offer both leisure and livelihood for the local population. For example, a fishpond located in Barangay Sandab serves not only as a food source but also as a relaxing site for eco-tourism development.

Additionally, Mount Makaturing and Mount Latuk (Latukan) provide breathtaking panoramic views of Lanao del Sur’s diverse terrain. Mount Makaturing, a stratovolcano, stands at an elevation of 1,940 meters (6,365 feet) with a base diameter of 29 kilometers, offering opportunities for hiking and nature treks. Adjacent to it, Mount Latuk contributes to the municipality’s distinct skyline and provides ecological diversity for flora and fauna unique to the region (**Figure 9**).



Figure 9. Panoramic View of mountain (Mt. Makaturing and Mt. Latuk) in Butig.

Beyond recreational use, these natural areas serve vital ecological functions. The spring water from the mountains provides drinking water to several barangays, while black sand mining in certain areas has become a source of income for local residents. However, sustainable tourism development must ensure that these practices do not compromise environmental integrity.

The development of these natural sites for eco-tourism aligns with Islamic principles of environmental stewardship (*khalifa*) and respect for creation. Islamic teachings encourage responsible enjoyment of nature without exploitation or harm. Thus, Butig's rich natural resources, when properly managed, can serve as both spiritual retreats and engines for sustainable community development.

3.8. Educational Institutions and Islamic Learning

The Municipality of Butig places strong emphasis on both secular and religious education as pillars of community development. Educational institutions in the area are well-integrated into the cultural and religious framework of the Mëranaos, fostering not only academic achievement but also spiritual growth and identity formation.

Several public schools operate across barangays, providing free education from preschool to senior high school. Among them is **Butig National High School**, located in Barangay Bayabao, which accommodates a large number of students pursuing general secondary education (see **Figure 10**). Another key institution is **Bayabao Central Elementary School**, which provides foundational learning in core academic subjects.

A notable addition to Butig's roster of schools is **Sultan Magarang Elementary School**, which serves as a vital center of education for children in its respective barangay. This school contributes significantly to the municipality's literacy rate and exemplifies how public schools in Butig are positioned as accessible institutions that support long-term socio-economic advancement (see **Figure 11**).



Figure 10. Bayabao Central Elementary School, One of the Major Educational Institutions in Butig.



Figure 11. Sultan Magarang Elementary School.

In parallel with formal state education, Islamic learning is well-established through madrasahs, which provide instruction in Arabic language, Qur’anic memorization, and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). These institutions help preserve religious and moral values and serve as training grounds for future *ustadz* (Islamic teachers) and community leaders.

A prime example is the Ma’ahad Imam Mohammad Bin Abdulwahab Al-Islamie, recognized as the largest madrasah in the municipality. This institution offers both primary and secondary education, with facilities that include gender-separated classrooms and a gymnasium reserved for Islamic events. The school is attended by both male and female students and emphasizes discipline, scholarship, and Islamic ethics (see **Figure 12**).



Figure 12. Ma’ahad Imam Mohammad Bin Abdulwahab Al-Islamie – The Largest Madrasah in Butig.

These educational institutions are instrumental in fostering a literate, ethical, and community-oriented population. Through an integrated curriculum that includes both academic and Islamic components, Butig’s youth are taught to value education as a form of worship (*ibadah*) and service (*khidmah*) to the community. In doing so, education in Butig not only uplifts individuals but also strengthens the overall social and spiritual fabric of the town.

3.9. Agricultural Resources and Local Produce

Agriculture forms the backbone of Butig’s local economy, employing a significant portion of its population and sustaining many households. Despite being classified as a sixth-class municipality, Butig thrives through its fertile lands, natural irrigation systems, and diverse crop production.

The municipality’s primary agricultural products include rice, corn, bananas, coconuts, and bamboo. These crops not only fulfill local food consumption but also serve as valuable commodities for trade with nearby cities and provinces. Rice farming is especially prominent, with many paddies located across barangays. While most rice farms are privately owned,

farmers are often compensated through a sharecropping system that ensures a fair division of labor and profit.

Corn farming is another vital livelihood, with produce regularly exported to local snack manufacturers in Cagayan de Oro, thus creating inter-regional trade opportunities. The agricultural sector in Butig is not only productive but also adaptive, with farmers establishing contacts for export and pursuing methods that enhance yield despite limited resources.

Aside from food crops, bamboo is grown and harvested as a raw material for construction and craft-making. Its abundance and versatility make it a sustainable resource for economic activities and small-scale enterprises.

Banana plantations in Butig contribute to both household consumption and local commerce. Meanwhile, coconut trees flourish in the area, with coconuts used in cooking, traditional food processing, and other home-based industries. These fruit-bearing trees represent resilience and continuity, growing through multiple generations and supporting family livelihoods.

Together, these agricultural resources highlight Butig's self-reliance and potential for agritourism. Farming practices, if further modernized and supported by infrastructure, could increase food security, income levels, and economic opportunities in the community.

3.10. Infrastructure and Public Services

The Municipality of Butig has experienced noticeable progress in its infrastructure development, especially under the leadership of Mayor Atty. Dimnatang Labay Pansar. This advancement plays a crucial role in supporting the region's aspiration to become a halal tourism destination by improving accessibility, amenities, and public services.

Among the most significant developments is the new Municipal Hall, which serves as the administrative center for governance and local planning (**Figure 13**). This structure reflects the municipality's commitment to transparency, service delivery, and structured governance.

Another notable addition is the Dianaton Naim Gymnasium, a multi-purpose facility that accommodates a variety of functions, from government initiatives such as 4Ps distributions and senior citizen support to private events like weddings and community gatherings (**Figure 14**). This accessible venue has become a central hub for civic life and celebration.

The Public Market, strategically located beside the municipal building, has become a commercial landmark. With its modern design, it accommodates vendors from across Butig and neighboring towns, especially during the bustling market days on Sundays and Wednesdays (**Figure 15**). Temporary stalls are allowed outside the facility, ensuring inclusivity and economic opportunity for informal sellers. This thriving marketplace provides locals with a platform to sell their agricultural products, halal foods, and handmade crafts.

In line with tourism promotion, the municipal leadership has initiated the rehabilitation of the road leading to Lake Pindolonan, a natural site with untapped tourism potential. With support from the Ministry of Public Works of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), this development aims to integrate eco-tourism with cultural preservation.

All of these improvements demonstrate a coordinated effort to build a more connected, service-oriented, and tourism-ready municipality. Infrastructure development is not only key to economic stimulation but also to fostering pride and dignity among residents.



Figure 13. The new building of the Butig Municipal Hall, serving as the center of governance.



Figure 14. Dianaton Naim Gymnasium, a central venue for public and private events.



Figure 15. The newly developed public market, operational on major market days.

3.11. Culinary Tourism: Halal Food and Local Delicacies

Culinary tourism plays a significant role in shaping a destination's cultural identity, and Butig is no exception. The municipality boasts a wide array of halal-certified local delicacies, each deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual practices of the Mëranaos. These native dishes and pastries not only satisfy the palate but also reflect the traditions, beliefs, and way of life of the local people.

One of the most iconic desserts in Butig is Dodol, a sticky and sweet delicacy made from glutinous rice flour, coconut milk, and jaggery. Known for its rich texture and labor-intensive preparation (requiring up to eight hours of continuous stirring) dodol is a staple in festive

gatherings and religious celebrations. Its presence in markets and homes throughout Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte underscores its cultural significance.

Another popular item is Browa, a soft sponge biscuit often enjoyed with tea or native coffee. Browa is traditionally served to mothers after childbirth as a source of nourishment and comfort. Similarly, Tamokonsi, a knot-shaped soft dough snack, symbolizes longevity and is typically served during birthdays and joyful celebrations.

Tiyatag, which visually resembles a wire mesh due to its intricate design, is created by pouring batter in hot oil in a crisscross motion. Once crisped and rolled, it is glazed with syrup, becoming both a visual and a flavorful delight often served during mourning or commemorative events.

Other notable delicacies include Apang (a native hotcake made from flour, coconut, and sugar), Balolon (a rolled pancake stuffed with toasted coconut and muscovado sugar), and Pabrot (sweet sticky rice balls glazed in caramelized sugar). These snacks are typically sold in the public market or roadside stalls, making them easily accessible to visitors seeking to experience authentic Mëranaos flavors.

Butig's halal culinary offerings also include full-course meals. Restaurants in the municipality serve traditional Mëranaos dishes such as Piyaparan a Nitib-a-Manok (native chicken with grated coconut), Inaloban a Tilapia (tilapia in yellow coconut broth), and Beef Rendang—a richly spiced beef stew. No Mëranaos meal is complete without Palapa, a condiment made of sakurab (native scallions), ginger, and chili, adding spice and depth to every dish.

These halal delicacies are not only culinary attractions but also vital expressions of Mëranaos cultural heritage. They can be leveraged to draw both domestic and international halal tourists seeking authentic cultural and gastronomic experiences. Promoting these foods through local markets, cultural festivals, and tourism campaigns can strengthen Butig's identity as a halal destination while providing economic opportunities for local producers.

3.12. Implications for Community Development

The assessment of halal tourism potential in Butig, Lanao del Sur, reveals a strong foundation for sustainable economic and cultural development rooted in Islamic values and Mëranaos heritage. The municipality's diverse offerings (from royal traditions and historical landmarks to religious institutions, natural landscapes, local education, and culinary practices) serve as pillars for an inclusive halal tourism model that aligns with community service objectives.

A key implication of this study is the opportunity for economic empowerment through the formalization of halal tourism enterprises. By registering local businesses, including vendors of native delicacies, tour operators, and producers of handicrafts, the local government can expand its revenue base while ensuring that halal principles are upheld across all services. Formalization also enables capacity-building programs for entrepreneurs and service providers, fostering professionalism and enhancing the quality of tourism experiences.

The preservation and promotion of cultural identity is another crucial outcome. Traditional dances, enthronement ceremonies, madrasah education, and culinary heritage are not only attractive to visitors but also reinforce the sense of pride and identity among the local population. Establishing community-based tourism that places locals as the primary storytellers, performers, and producers of halal experiences encourages ownership and cultural continuity.

Investing in infrastructure and accessibility (such as roads, signage, clean water systems, and eco-friendly accommodations) can improve tourist comfort while benefiting the wider

community. Infrastructure projects like the construction of the new public market and gymnasium (see **Figures 13-15** in the previous section) not only serve tourism purposes but also enhance the delivery of public services and access to livelihoods for residents.

Moreover, the development of Butig as a halal tourism destination can contribute to social cohesion and interfaith understanding. By inviting visitors from diverse backgrounds to experience Mëranaos hospitality and Islamic cultural heritage, Butig has the potential to become a bridge for intercultural dialogue and peacebuilding, especially given its past challenges with social unrest.

Educational institutions such as madrasahs and Islamic schools further provide an avenue for community transformation by promoting both religious and secular learning. Encouraging youth participation in tourism development, cultural performances, and local industries fosters a generation of responsible citizens invested in the town's progress.

Lastly, aligning halal tourism development with environmental sustainability (particularly in ecotourism zones like Sumpit Spring and Mount Makaturing) can ensure that economic growth does not compromise the region's natural resources. Ecological preservation, coupled with traditional environmental stewardship practices, positions Butig as a model for ethical tourism development within the BARMM region.

In summary, halal tourism in Butig is not just a strategy for economic gain. It is a community service initiative that integrates cultural preservation, economic empowerment, educational development, and environmental stewardship, all grounded in the Islamic ethos of balance, respect, and mutual benefit.

4. CONCLUSION

The Municipality of Butig in Lanao del Sur holds substantial potential to become a recognized destination for halal tourism within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). With its rich tapestry of Islamic history, cultural traditions, natural wonders, and unique local delicacies, Butig stands as a testament to the depth and vibrancy of Mëranaw heritage. Through this study, it is evident that the municipality possesses the key components necessary to support halal tourism—religious infrastructure, cultural festivities, community-based learning, and halal-certified food production.

Despite these promising attributes, the municipality faces challenges related to the formalization of local businesses, limited marketing and promotion, and the lack of a structured tourism framework. Many local enterprises, particularly in food, crafts, and services, operate informally and are not registered, making it difficult for the local government to monitor quality, ensure halal compliance, and collect taxes that could support public infrastructure and tourism development.

To unlock the full potential of halal tourism in Butig, collaborative efforts must be initiated among local authorities, religious leaders, educators, business owners, and community members. The local government should prioritize infrastructure development, including the improvement of roads, visitor facilities, and eco-friendly accommodations. Promoting Butig's unique cultural identity through organized festivals, culinary showcases, and educational tours can position it as a must-visit halal destination for both domestic and international travelers.

Furthermore, integrating tourism with educational institutions (particularly madrasahs and public schools) can provide platforms for young people to engage with their heritage and actively participate in community development. Tourism education, environmental

awareness, and entrepreneurial training should be included in local development plans to empower the next generation.

Ultimately, halal tourism in Butig is more than a tourism strategy. It is a holistic, community-based initiative that bridges cultural preservation, economic development, and religious identity. When implemented with care, respect, and sustainability, Butig can serve as a model for halal tourism across the Philippines and beyond, promoting peace, unity, and prosperity in a historically rich and culturally resilient community.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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