

DISCOVERING THE POTENTIAL OF PADANG BESAR, PERLIS AS A NORTHERN HALAL HUB IN MALAYSIA: A REVIEW

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Abstract: *The development of Muslim nations in terms of economic, political, and social stability has led to the emergence of the global halal hub. Malaysia has rapidly become the world's leading halal centre due to its pioneering role in the halal industry and certification, capitalising on its unique advantages to meet the increasing global demand for halal goods and services. Perlis, a state in Malaysia, has gained recognition from many stakeholders for its potential for economic growth. However, the potential of Padang Besar, Perlis, as a northern halal gateway remains underexplored in current academic literature. This article examines the feasibility of establishing a halal hub in northern Malaysia, with a particular focus on Padang Besar in Perlis. The study employed qualitative research methods through content analysis. Drawing on a range of scholarly works related to Malaysia's halal industry, the research aims to identify opportunities or potential for positioning Perlis as a key player in Malaysia's halal market. The findings suggest that Padang Besar's strategic geographical location, government support, and status as a tourist destination could enhance its potential as a halal hub. Nonetheless, to achieve this goal, all stakeholders must improve and develop the state's facilities, infrastructure, export capacity, economic regulations and policies, and enhance Perlis Halal Park, among other aspects, to attract investors and increase SME productivity. This study contributes to the existing literature on halal hubs in Malaysia.*

Keywords: *Halal Hub, Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), Halal Lifestyle, Border Economic Zone.*

Introduction

A halal hub plays a crucial role in the halal business sector and is highly regarded by government agencies and key organisations. Southeast Asian nations are making considerable efforts to position themselves as global halal hubs in this field. For example, Malaysia has advanced this initiative through its Halal Development Corporation (HDC) and stringent certification standards established by the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM), while Thailand and Brunei have introduced the Thai Halal Industry Centre (THIC) and the Halalan Thayyiban Research Centre, respectively, to compete in the global halal market (Nasir *et al.*, 2021; Noor Azalie & Haji Samad, 2022; Nation Thailand, 2024). Malaysia's active promotion of halal certification, its strategic location in Southeast Asia, and its multicultural society have strengthened its status as a leader in the halal industry, giving local businesses a competitive edge and attracting international investment (Dinar Standard *et al.*, 2023; Ghazali *et al.*, 2023; JAKIM, 2024; Abu Bakar *et al.*, 2025). Consequently, this regional competition underscores the strategic need for Malaysia to develop specialised regional hubs to consolidate its leadership and capture new growth in the global halal economy.

The potential of Padang Besar, Perlis to become the northern halal hub in Malaysia has received increased attention and discussion over the past decade, attracting significant interest in this development. Located at the northern tip of Peninsular Malaysia, Padang Besar has been included in regional development plans, such as the Koridor Utara Malaysia (2013). Its unique geographic position at the Malaysia-Thailand border offers notable opportunities for cross-border trade and access to ASEAN markets, serving a substantial Bumiputera demographic with a demand for halal products (Hashom *et al.*, 2022). Since 2010, the country has been actively working towards establishing a regional hub status for the import and export of halal products, including promoting local halal brands, developing the concept of halal goods and services for the global market, strengthening halal integrity within the industry, and incorporating technological advancements to enhance traceability and compliance (Karia *et al.*, 2015; Abu Bakar, *et al.*, 2025). These initiatives clearly show that the government has a strategic vision for the future of halal products and services, both locally and internationally.

Despite the well-documented strategies for a national halal hub, a clear research gap remains regarding the potential of regional hubs in Malaysia's northern states. Existing literature mainly focuses on established industrial zones in central regions (Hanafi *et al.*, 2023; Zakaria *et al.*, 2018), leaving the prospects of northern nodes like Padang Besar underexplored beyond initial studies (Hashom *et al.*, 2022), the key success factors of Halal Park (Hanafi *et al.*, 2023), or a focus on other border towns (Salleh & Ahmad, 2022). While its strategic location is acknowledged, there is a lack of a consolidated academic review that systematically synthesises the geographical, governmental, and economic factors influencing its viability as a dedicated halal hub. This absence of comprehensive analysis hampers a clear understanding of the potential and challenges specific to the Perlis border economy. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a qualitative review to explore and synthesise the potential of Padang Besar, Perlis, as a developing northern halal hub in Malaysia. The paper will analyse its potential through the lenses of its strategic location, government support, and potential as a tourist destination. A qualitative research design is adopted, utilising content analysis of secondary data from scholarly works and official reports. This approach offers new insights and facilitates the interpretation of reliable conclusions regarding Padang Besar's potential (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Horani, 2023).

Literature Review

Definition of Halal Hub

The halal hub plays a vital role in the global halal industry. A 'hub' is a central point of connection and activity within a network, relevant across various sectors like transport, finance, and commerce (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.; Borzooei & Asgari, 2013). This definition emphasises a hub as a central entity with many links: a leading organisation within a system to coordinate activities. According to Othman and Mohd Isa (2022), the halal hub is a focal point or area dedicated to manufacturing, circulation, and marketing of halal products and services to meet the needs of Muslim consumers worldwide. In other words, the halal hub functions as the nucleus to stimulate growth and expansion of the halal industry, including food, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, logistics, and services, in accordance with Islamic obligations towards Muslims. It acts as a bridge and a foundation for businesses seeking to uphold halal integrity while adhering to Islamic Law and consumer demands. Thus, a halal hub is a strategic intervention designed to centralise all halal-related activities, products, and services in one location, thereby driving growth, innovation, and internationalisation.

Global Halal Lifestyle

The shift in the global lifestyle paradigm has progressed rapidly across various sectors, not limited to halal food production but also halal entrepreneurship, halal banking, halal logistics, Muslim-friendly tourism, and others. This trend emerged when people became increasingly aware of Islamic teachings and concerned about the obligation to consume halal food and utilise halal services (Bella-Salsa *et al.*, 2023; Abidin & Niskaromah, 2025). Driven by heightened awareness of Islamic principles through numerous online and social media platforms, this shift serves as a spiritual and ethical guide for Muslims, influencing consumer and corporate behaviour worldwide. Notably, this trend has expanded beyond Muslim-majority countries. Nations like Indonesia and Thailand have increasingly become leading producers of certified halal products, demonstrating the sector's significant economic potential (Mohd Nawawi *et al.*, 2020). This indicates that non-Muslim-majority countries can also thrive in this sector. The appeal of halal is growing more universal, rooted in its association with ethical production, health, and hygiene, establishing it as a global standard for quality (Abu Bakar & Ahmad, 2020; Saleh & Rajandran, 2024). This perception has cultivated a trend of consuming halal products and services, where halal is seen as a mark of quality and ethical standards across various industries.

According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy report, the global Islamic economy has experienced significant growth in recent years. The report highlights an increase of over 41% in consumer expenditure within the global Islamic economy, rising from \$1.62 trillion in 2012 to \$2.29 trillion in 2023 (Hashem, 2024). Additionally, Malaysia's halal exports increased significantly from RM39.4 billion in 2015 to RM59.9 billion in 2022, solidifying its position as a global leader in the halal industry (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2025). Digitalisation has further driven this expansion, with digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered halal verification and social networks enhancing access and trust for a new generation of consumers (Saharani, 2025). This emphasises the growing importance of halal goods and services across various sectors, supported by rising consumer spending worldwide. The halal lifestyle has become a global trend, influencing economic growth and consumer behaviour (Jailani & Adinugraha, 2022). Consequently, companies and entrepreneurs are adjusting to the evolving preferences of a new era, catering to the increasing number of consumers who value halal products and services in the market.

Overview of Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT)

Border economic zones in Malaysia provide a strategic platform for halal industry growth, facilitating trade expansion into neighbouring markets. The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT) is a pivotal sub-regional cooperation initiative, established in 1993 to accelerate economic and social progress (Aziza *et al.*, 2020). The strategic location of a border facilitates engagement with neighbouring markets, thus assisting with operations and trade expansion. The Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), which includes three core states (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand), is recognised as a key area for halal logistics and supply chain linkages (Zhan *et al.*, 2016; Irewati & Nufus, 2024). IMT-GT identifies five priority economic corridors as vital zones for regional economic cooperation. These are the Songkhla-Penang-Medan Corridor, Strait of Malacca Economic Corridor, Bandar Aceh-Medan-Pekanbaru-Palembang Corridor, Melaka–Dumai Economic Corridor, and Ranong-Phuket-Aceh Corridor (Sudirman *et al.*, 2023). This collaborative framework is essential for addressing shared challenges like climate change, unemployment issues and for implementing sustainable resource management, thereby ensuring the region's continued economic stability and growth.

The IMT-GT region covers tourism, agriculture, finance, and infrastructure development. Through collaboration under the IMT-GT, various strategic initiatives have been introduced to promote economic growth and competitiveness within the region. For instance, the study by Aziza *et al.* (2020) indicated that the IMT-GT has supported the creation of certification laws, research centres, and halal tourism policies to enhance regional tourism businesses. This focus on halal tourism also highlights the growing opportunities for halal consumption, which can position the IMT-GT countries as key providers of halal goods and services. In addition, IMT-GT also aims to strengthen cooperation and maximise outcomes by leveraging its strengths to foster regional economic development. As a result, the countries within the IMT-GT could become influential players in the global halal industry. In conclusion, the IMT-GT serves as a strategic framework for promoting economic, social, and regional development among the three core countries.

Research Methodology

This study aims to identify the potential in positioning Padang Besar, Perlis, as a northern halal hub in Malaysia. It utilises a qualitative research method through content analysis of secondary data. Content analysis encompasses a range of approaches, from intuitive and interpretive reviews to systematic and rigorous examination of textual content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This technique involves analysing content with a well-organised structure and clearly marked ideas (Horani, 2023). The content analysis will provide new insights into understanding the perspective of establishing Padang Besar, Perlis, as a northern halal hub in Malaysia from a secondary data standpoint.

This study employed a content analysis method, collecting data through a systematic literature review from databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Emerald Insight, Malaysian Citation Index (MyCite), and Elsevier. Keyword searches for “halal hub,” “Perlis halal certification,” “Padang Besar Halal Park,” “border economic zone,” “IMT-GT,” and “halal lifestyle” were conducted to locate relevant sources. Due to the limited number of peer-reviewed articles, both published and non-scholarly literature in English and Malay were included, such as conference proceedings, online articles, and government publications and reports, addressing halal-related developments in the Padang Besar region. Fifty-three sources were analysed using deductive and inductive coding. Initial codes reflected core themes that

were categorised into 1) geographical advantage, 2) government support, and 3) tourism potential. Iterative analysis revealed emergent themes, including cross-border collaboration, challenges faced by SMEs, and barriers in the development of a halal hub. The results were systematically arranged to facilitate a conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Geographical Location

Geographically, Perlis is located in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia and benefits from being the northern halal hub. As Malaysia's smallest state, covering just 819 square kilometres, it borders Kedah to the south and Thailand to the north and east. Padang Besar is a border town situated in the mukim of Titi Tinggi, in northern Perlis, Malaysia, bordering the Songkhla province of Thailand (Azmi *et al.*, 2017). This strategic location emphasises its potential as a centre for halal products and services, aligning with the findings of Hashom *et al.* (2022), who noted that Perlis's position in northern Malaysia provides access to Thailand and other ASEAN countries. Therefore, Padang Besar in Perlis enjoys a competitive advantage due to its connectivity to both domestic and international markets, giving Perlis the potential to distribute its products both locally and globally.

Thailand's position in halal exports underscores its vital role in the ASEAN halal market. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2025), ASEAN countries were the most influential in the performance of the Malaysian halal exports, valued at RM17.2 billion (28.7%). Data from the Halal Knowledge Centre (HKC) and HDC showed that among the nine ASEAN countries, Thailand ranked third in halal goods exports from Malaysia in 2022. This ranking highlights Thailand's importance in exporting halal goods and services within the ASEAN region. Furthermore, it is noted that Thailand's halal export market is estimated to send 60% of its halal goods to neighbouring Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei (Ayman Falak, 2022). Malaysia is among Thailand's main importers of halal goods; thus, it has the prospect of establishing a direct port in Perlis. Additionally, Thailand recognises the need and opportunity to develop suitable infrastructure to support halal transportation, aiming to transform the southern border of Thailand into a hub for halal logistics (Zhan *et al.*, 2016). This strategic plan could sustain the country's focus on expanding its halal business and effectively meet the demands for halal product transportation.

Table 1. Malaysia Halal Exports Destination (ASEAN countries) 2022

No.	Country	Value (RM Mil.)	Growth Rate (100%)
1.	Singapore	6,242.9	+69.9
2.	Indonesia	3,059.1	+72.5
3.	Thailand	2,635.6	+55.1
4.	Philippines	2,301.3	+82.9
5.	Vietnam	1,901.2	+42.1
6.	Brunei	561.7	-5.7
7.	Myanmar	285.0	+49.3
8.	Cambodia	182.8	+96.8
9.	Laos	3.0	+55.0

Source: Malaysian Halal Exports Destination 2022 ASEAN. (2022)

Padang Besar's proximity to Thailand creates opportunities for cross-border trade and collaboration in the halal industry. Padang Besar is renowned for its cross-border shopping activities, which have become a significant contributor to the state's tourism (Rafie *et al.*, 2021; Yusof *et al.*, 2013). It is also recognised as one of the proposed sites for the Malaysia-Thailand Special Border Economic Zone (SBEZ), which the government aims to develop to enhance residents' quality of life, promote mutual growth, and encourage bilateral projects between the two nations (Salleh & Ahmad, 2022; Sohaimi *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, Padang Besar functions as a centre for research and educational institutions. This area has been the focus of studies on sustainable agricultural practices, such as the germination rate of *Mucuna bracteata* (Ghassan *et al.*, 2023) and the variation in flesh colour of Harumanis mangoes in the Padang Besar fields (Yusuf *et al.*, 2018). These research activities offer valuable insights for developing relevant academic disciplines and help address local and regional issues.



Figure 1. Map of Padang Besar, Perlis

Source: Google Maps

Government Support

The government of Perlis has actively promoted the halal industry in the region by encouraging its growth. According to Ab Talib *et al.* (2017), these efforts are vital for enhancing the competence of halal ventures. This shows that the government adopts policies and strategies that support the halal industry. Consequently, all these initiatives help lay the foundation for expanding Perlis's halal sector. For instance, Perlis has been particularly proactive in ensuring that all halal certification procedures meet the highest quality standards. This is supported by Hanafi *et al.* (2023), where the accessibility of halal accreditation and services in Perlis acts as a key success factor in the operation of Halal Park. This is essential in building consumer trust both domestically and internationally, thereby encouraging products to be exported to countries that enforce strict halal standards.

The Research Division and Halal Hub of the Department of Islamic Religious Affairs Perlis (JAIPs) has implemented several measures to motivate SMEs to obtain halal certification. This is achieved through rigorous oversight of entrepreneurs' operations and effective coordination in the certification process, as noted by Hassan *et al.* (2023). The data below shows an increase in the number of halal certificate holders over the past two years. Despite a lower rate of SME involvement in Perlis compared to other states, the rising numbers indicate that awareness and measures are being implemented to reach more businesses in the state.

Table 2. Number of Halal Certificate holders in Perlis

Year	Total
2021	33
2023	53

Source: (MAIPs, 2023) and Research Division and Halal Hub, JAIPs

JAIPs, Perlis Islamic Religious Council, Malay Customs (MAIPs), and other related agencies are very proactive and show great interest in the well-being of SMEs in Perlis. To determine the future of the Malaysian Halal Certification industry in Perlis, various private and public agencies, including People's Trust Council (MARA), Muda Agricultural Development Authority (MADA), Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA), Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) and others, frequently collaborate to address issues and develop strategies in this sector. This includes providing financial assistance, policies and standards, and capacity-building initiatives that enable the establishment to raise awareness and enhance the competitiveness of halal industries in Perlis. This is evident through numerous programmes and festivals organised by the agencies in 2024 as a year to visit Perlis, including the annual Sunnah Village Programme and Perlis East Wind Festival. These events enabled SMEs to enhance their brand image and generate revenue.

The Perlis state government is also heavily investing in infrastructure development. Examples include the green projects managed under the Chuping Valley Industrial Area (CVIA). The Northern Corridor Economic Region (NCER) is also involved in attracting investments and fostering development in northern Malaysia. Initiatives such as the Padang Besar Halal Park aim to integrate local production within the region (Hanafi *et al.*, 2023). The construction of Perlis Inland Port (PIP), particularly the Padang Besar Cargo Terminal (PBCT), benefits the country's transportation system due to its strategic location near the international border (Osman *et al.*, 2024). NCER has allocated funds and human resources to the Northern Corridor Implementation Authority (NCIA) to develop halal industrial infrastructure in Perlis.

PBCT creates employment opportunities for local residents and promotes economic development. It also encourages youth and younger generations to pursue careers in logistics and related industries. This initiative aims to make Padang Besar the gateway for regional trade via container routes, thereby strengthening Perlis's position through improved connectivity, streamlined infrastructure, and enhanced cross-border trade and commerce. Notwithstanding its potential, the establishment of a halal hub in Perlis is contingent upon overcoming significant developmental obstacles. Key areas requiring attention include developing more robust industrial infrastructure, enhancing regulatory enforcement, establishing investment policies, ensuring socio-economic benefits for local communities, and maintaining environmental sustainability alongside industrial growth (Muhammad Izzuddin, 2024). This involves strengthening and promoting Perlis Halal Park by tackling its export capacity, infrastructure, and investment limitations to enhance its resilience and long-term success in becoming a regional halal hub (Hanafi *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, the successful development of a halal hub fundamentally depends on deploying multifaceted strategies.

Tourist Destination

With the planned developments in Perlis, there is potential for more tourist attractions. Tourism is closely linked to economic growth, serving as a catalyst for industrial development and other benefits. Perlis is renowned for its scenic landscapes and tranquil environment, which sharply contrasts with the bustling atmosphere of Kuala Lumpur. Ibrahim and Ahmad (2020) supported

this by stating that Perlis is gradually becoming a preferred travel destination for Malaysian tourists. Moreover, Ismail Khan *et al.* (2025) claimed that there has been an increase in homestay tourism in Perlis, capitalising on its rich and unique heritage and rural-lifestyle experiences. As one of the border checkpoints for entering Langkawi, promoting Padang Besar as a halal centre could also encourage visitors to stay longer. For example, based on the studies by Yusof *et al.* (2013) and Abdullah Sani *et al.* (2023), Padang Besar is a frontier town on the border of Thailand and Malaysia. Consequently, many Malaysians and Thais cross the border for shopping, business, or leisure activities. A study on border shopping at Padang Besar revealed that people continue to visit Padang Besar, particularly on weekends and public holidays (Rafie *et al.*, 2021). Thai products, cuisine, and services have long been popular among Malaysians due to their widespread availability in Padang Besar shopping centres (Saad, 2024). Malaysia's cultural and geographical proximity to Thailand facilitates the exchange of goods and services, creating a natural affinity between the two countries.

The government can leverage the economic potential of cross-border activities by establishing a robust tourism identity for Perlis, capitalising on border towns like Padang Besar, and meeting the needs and motivations of border shoppers. According to Abdullah *et al.* (2023), compared to the central and eastern parts of the northern states, which are predominantly reliant on agricultural districts for their economic base, the development of the border districts with Songkhla in Thailand has shown strong economic growth, particularly from Padang Besar. Abdullah Sani *et al.* (2023) also highlighted that Padang Besar's accessibility is enhanced by its road infrastructure, allowing direct transportation.

Additionally, this tourism activity could create employment opportunities within the industry for local labour forces. Yusof *et al.* (2013) noted that Thai women often seek employment in Malaysia due to the many job opportunities available. These workers can also contribute to the state's economic growth, as many people relocate to Perlis for employment opportunities. Since most residents living on the border between the two countries are Bumiputera, establishing a halal hub in Padang Besar is conveniently located to match the area's demographic and religious characteristics.

Implementing Muslim-friendly tourism can serve as a catalyst for enhancing tourist satisfaction and promoting sustainability within the industry. Saffinee and Jamaludin (2023) strongly advocated for adopting a friendly tourism concept to develop a sustainable and profitable halal travel that benefits both locals and travellers. This involves developing or promoting cuisine, destinations, accommodations, and services tailored for Muslims worldwide. In this context, Muslim-friendly tourism not only attracts Muslim travellers but also enhances their satisfaction (Bangsawan *et al.*, 2019), as high-quality services are believed to influence customer loyalty and boost their confidence (Md Noor *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, a satisfied customer can significantly boost marketing within the Muslim travel sphere, positively contributing to business growth.

Padang Besar can become a sustainable halal travel destination that caters to the needs of Muslim travellers while benefiting the local community. The state boasts natural resources, scenic terrains, traditional village concepts, and active community engagement that can be leveraged as part of a tourism product. This allows Perlis to explore various tourism niches suitable for different tourist groups, such as those interested in nature, entertainment, delicacies, and culture, as well as those seeking exotic experiences. This evolving tourism landscape offers

a strategic opportunity to reposition the region as a premier destination for halal tourism and eco-friendly travel.

The ultimate goal is to develop a thriving halal hub that supports the region's economy while upholding Islamic values. However, achieving this will require collective efforts from the entire state, starting with better tourist investments and facilities. Despite its potential, the local community remains passive in the tourism sector, especially in Muslim-friendly tourism, as it continues to rely heavily on the services sector as its primary source of income. Therefore, establishing a halal hub in Perlis still faces several challenges that need to be addressed meticulously.

Conclusion

Thus, in the northern state of Perlis, Padang Besar has been recognised and developed as a 'prospect hub' for the halal industry. Supported by its strategic location, cross-border activities, government support, efforts to promote halal products, infrastructure development, and tourist attractions within Perlis, it can serve as a distribution channel to meet the diverse demands of the expanding halal market. In this study, the researchers aim to identify the potential of Padang Besar, Perlis, to further promote the establishment of the northern halal hub in Malaysia by assessing key factors that make the area appealing to halal businesses and investors. The research suggests that Padang Besar already has strengths in terms of location, government support, and tourism, highlighting the importance of this district as a potential global halal contributor. For this vision to become a reality, a long-term commitment to halal integrity and a well-structured state strategy must be adopted in Malaysia to position the country as a leading hub within the global halal ecosystem. Despite the promising vision, addressing specific areas is contingent upon overcoming developmental obstacles, such as improving industrial facilities and infrastructure, strengthening export capacity, promoting the Perlis Halal Park, enforcing regulations and policies, enhancing job opportunities, and ensuring the sustainability of industrial practices. Therefore, all parties, organisations, and stakeholders must collaborate and develop a comprehensive framework, policies and management to achieve this goal.

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