



Applying Muslim-friendly tourism principles in destination management: Evidence from Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – This study describes and analyzes the implementation of Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) principles in managing tourist destinations in Aceh, Indonesia.

Methodology – This research uses a qualitative approach with a case research method, collecting data through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis.

Findings – The results showed that implementing MFT principles in Aceh still faces challenges, such as limited worship facilities, suboptimal halal certification in the culinary and accommodation sectors, and a lack of local community involvement in destination management. Nevertheless, applying Sharia law in Aceh is a strong asset for strengthening the halal tourism ecosystem. Local governments, tourism businesses, and communities play a strategic role, but stakeholder coordination still needs improvement. The availability of Sharia-based services strongly influences Muslim traveler satisfaction and directly affects traveler loyalty.

Implications – The implications are to design a more inclusive and sustainable halal tourism development strategy for policymakers. This research emphasizes the importance of synergy between the government, business actors, and the community in strengthening Aceh's competitiveness as a global halal tourism destination.

Originality – This research enriches the literature on halal tourism and provides strategic recommendations for the more effective management of Sharia-based destinations.

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Introduction

Halal tourism is growing as a leading sector in the global industry (Harits Nu'man et al., 2023). Muslim-friendly tourism (MFT) is a solution for Muslim travelers who want a travel experience based on Islamic values (Irawan et al., 2024). As the only province in Indonesia that officially implements Islamic law, Aceh has strong potential to develop tourist destinations based on MFT principles. However, several challenges remain in practice. Some destinations in Aceh still fall short of meeting MFT standards, including facilities, management policies, and effective promotions (Nugroho et al., 2021).

Aceh won a prestigious award as the world's best Halal Destination at the World Halal Travel Awards Festival in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, in 2016 ([Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI, 2021](#)). Aceh, for two consecutive years, won the title of the leading national Halal Tourism Destination based on the Indonesian Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) Standard ([Fadhilah et al., 2020](#)). These achievements further encouraged our enthusiasm to continue promoting Aceh's tourism. By carrying the tagline "The Light of Aceh," the attraction will continue to be marketed to the international world, so that the number of tourists coming to our area will continue to increase ([Maulida, 2019](#)). The launch of "The Light of Aceh" tagline symbolizes the Aceh Halal Tourism campaign. The tagline has been exhibited in various places as a teaser or lure for tourists visiting Aceh. Aceh has excellent potential to develop halal tourism, primarily because it has implemented qanun (regional regulations) under Islamic law. Aceh has often received awards as the top MFT destination in the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) award 2023. The event was organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in collaboration with Bank Indonesia, the National Committee for Sharia Economics and Finance (KNEKS), the Central Sharia Economic Society (MES), and the Indonesian Halal Tourism Association (PPHI) ([Safrina, 2023](#)).

Winning the Halal Tourism award presents an excellent opportunity for Aceh to develop its halal tourism and service industry further, aiming to make halal tourism synonymous with Aceh ([Yusuf et al., 2021](#)). Therefore, developing halal tourism in Aceh requires a straightforward and suitable approach that aligns with the province's implementation of Islamic laws. As halal tourism is relatively new, in-depth research is essential to guide the creation of an effective development model. Tourism in Aceh must remain within the framework of Islamic law and is expected to help drive local economic growth ([Huda et al., 2021](#)).

The Aceh Culture and Tourism Office (Disbudpar) and Aceh Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU) have worked together to promote halal tourism that reflects Islamic values. Halal tourism has proven to be effective in attracting visitors to Aceh. The involvement of ulama is essential for developing a world-class halal tourism industry. To support this effort, a qanun was established as part of the Aceh Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPKA) for 2022–2037 ([Setyadi, 2022](#)). The Qanun states that halal tourism is based on Islamic law and applies to tourists, attractions, and business operators. Tourists are expected to follow both the local and Islamic guidelines. Implementing Islamic law in Aceh is a proud and fundamental pillar of developing its halal tourism brand. Consequently, halal tourism has become a key attraction for visitors to Aceh ([Aceh Jaya Regency Regulation Number 10 of 2019 Concerning Halal Tourism, 2019](#)).

Implementing and modeling halal tourism in Aceh is challenging. Recently, halal tourism has been considered appropriate and has begun to be accepted by the Acehnese people living within the framework of Islamic law ([Sartiyah, 2021](#)). The uniqueness of tourism in Aceh, which has a wealth of art, customs, and culture, including Islamic culture, is expected to create its halal tourism model. Aceh should be able to provide another dish for the world tourism industry in studies on halal tourism ([Umuri et al., 2022](#)). In addition, the growth of the halal tourism industry and the increasing arrival of local and foreign tourists will encourage regional economic growth to become a fundamental foundation of Aceh's economic development. Halal tourism can improve community welfare and reduce unemployment and poverty in Aceh ([Ahmadisyah et al., 2022](#)).

Table 1. Comparison of the number of Muslim tourists in Aceh and contribution to the total number of Muslim tourists in Indonesia in 2023

Category	Total in Aceh	Number in Indonesia	Aceh contribution (%)
Domestic Muslim Tourists	7,989,477	140,000,000	5.71%
Foreign Muslim Tourists	29,848	140,000,000	0.02%
Total Muslim Tourists	8,019,325	140,000,000	5.73%

Source: [Muslim \(2024\)](#)

Based on the data, Muslim tourist visits to Aceh have increased, but the numbers remain significantly lower than those in countries with well-developed halal tourism. This reveals a gap in

how MFT-based destinations are managed in Aceh that requires further investigation. This topic is essential because Aceh is unique as a Sharia-based destination, with policies that support Islamic values across many aspects of life (Irshad et al., 2022). This uniqueness positions Aceh as a key player in halal tourism in Southeast Asia. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, underdeveloped policies, and weak marketing strategies continue to hinder this potential (George, 2021).

Some previous studies have discussed aspects of MFT in a broader analysis, such as the research of Azali et al. (2023), which highlights the importance of Muslim-friendly facilities in improving the tourist experience. Dabphet (2021) discusses the challenges of managing halal tourist destinations in various countries. Research that explicitly examines the implementation of MFT principles in managing tourist destinations in Aceh

The theory used in this study is the theory of destination competitiveness (Serruto-Perea & Cordova-Buiza, 2024), which emphasizes that resources, policies, and management influence the competitiveness of tourist destinations. This theory is relevant for analyzing how applying MFT principles can improve the competitiveness of tourist destinations in Aceh.

This research is necessary, both academically and practically. Academically, this study adds to the literature on halal tourism management by providing empirical evidence on how MFT principles are applied in Aceh. Practically, the findings offer recommendations for local governments and stakeholders to develop effective policies and strategies for halal tourism. This study aimed to assess how well MFT principles have been implemented in managing tourist destinations in Aceh, identify existing challenges, and suggest strategic solutions for future development. Overall, this study offers theoretical insights and practical guidance to support the growth of sustainable halal tourism in Aceh.

Literature Review

Halal tourism, or Muslim-friendly tourism (MFT), is a concept that has grown rapidly in recent decades, along with the increasing demand from global Muslim tourists (Battour et al., 2023). This concept emphasizes providing services, facilities, and tourist experiences that follow Islamic principles, including halal food, worship facilities, and a friendly environment for Muslim tourists (Syah Putra & Tucunan, 2021). The MFT principle in managing tourist destinations has become critical to increasing the competitiveness of destinations that have the potential to attract Muslim tourists, such as Aceh.

Aceh has a competitive advantage in developing tourist destinations based on the MFT principles. Implementing this concept not only aims to increase domestic and international Muslim tourist visits, but also ensures that tourist activities remain aligned with the Islamic values adopted by the local community (Rachman & Sangare, 2023). However, implementing MFT poses many challenges, including regulation, infrastructure readiness, and tourists' perceptions of halal tourism attractions in Aceh (Baiquni & Heriani, 2021).

Some theories that can be used to understand the implementation of MFT in the management of tourist destinations in Aceh include the destination competitive advantage theory of Benur and Bramwell (2015), and Serruto-Perea and Cordova-Buiza (2024), which emphasizes that destination competitiveness is determined by the main attraction factors, supporting resources, and destination management policies and strategies. A competitive advantage in halal tourism can be obtained by providing infrastructure that supports halal tourism, including halal-certified accommodations, halal restaurants, and adequate worship facilities. In addition, the theory of planned behavior is also relevant in understanding how Muslim tourists' perceptions and attitudes towards halal destinations can influence their travel decisions (La Barbera & Ajzen, 2024).

Several studies have discussed the implementation of MFT principles in various countries. Battour et al. (2024), in their research on halal tourism in Malaysia, emphasized that tourists' religiosity is one of the main determinants of choosing halal destinations. Another study by Desky et al. (2022) showed that worship facilities, halal food, and the Islamic environment are essential for Muslim traveler satisfaction. Qoir (2024) examined halal tourism marketing strategies and found that destinations that successfully developed Muslim-friendly services experienced a significant

increase in the number of Muslim tourists. Research on halal tourism in Indonesia is underway. [Khan and Callanan \(2017\)](#) showed that tourists' trust in halal certification significantly affects their visit intentions. Research conducted by [Alfanda and Suhartanti \(2018\)](#) showed that Aceh has excellent potential as a halal tourism destination because of its Sharia-based regulations. However, the lack of promotion and infrastructure readiness is still a significant obstacle.

Based on the literature review, a research gap exists in implementing MFT principles for managing tourist destinations in Aceh. Most studies focus on marketing or tourist behavior, while studies addressing how MFT principles are applied in destination management policies and practices are still limited. Therefore, it is essential to conduct this research to provide a deeper understanding of how MFT principles can be effectively applied in the management of tourist destinations in Aceh and to identify the challenges faced in the implementation process.

Research Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case research method to explore implementing MFT principles in managing tourist destinations in Aceh. This approach was chosen because it can explain phenomena contextually and provide a holistic understanding of the experiences, policies, and challenges of implementing MFT principles in the studied tourist destinations.

This study's primary and secondary data sources were primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders such as Aceh Culture and Tourism Office officials, tourist destination managers, tourism businesses, and Muslim tourists visiting Aceh. Direct observations of several tourist destinations were also conducted to observe the facilities, services, and management practices related to MFT principles. Secondary data were collected from government policy documents, tourism industry reports, and the relevant academic literature.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies ([Durdella, 2020](#)). Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in exploring various resource persons' perspectives regarding MFT implementation. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including Aceh Culture and Tourism Office officials, tourism destination managers, tourism industry players (hotel owners, restaurants, and travel agents), and local and foreign Muslim tourists.

Participatory observations were conducted by visiting tourist destinations, recording the condition of facilities, and interacting directly with industry players and tourists. These observations were made at major tourist destinations such as the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, Lampuuk Beach, and the Tsunami Museum. The observations aimed to directly examine the availability of worship facilities, halal food, and the application of Islamic values in tourism services.

Documentation studies have analyzed Aceh's regulations and policies supporting halal tourism development. The documentation reviewed included local government policy documents related to halal tourism (Qanun, RIPKA), tourism industry reports, academic literature, and survey results from official agencies.

This study used purposive sampling, which purposively selected participants based on their knowledge, role, and experience in developing halal tourism in Aceh. The inclusion criteria were direct involvement in managing tourist destinations, implementing sharia policies, and experience as Muslim travelers.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, with the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing ([Crossman & Bordia, 2021](#)). Data obtained from interviews and observations were reduced by grouping information based on the main themes, such as government policies, halal tourism facilities, tourist behavior, and challenges in implementing MFT. Data were presented in descriptive and interpretative narratives to show the pattern of the findings systematically. The research conclusions were drawn by considering the relationship between the empirical data and the theory used.

Data validity was guaranteed through triangulation of sources, techniques, and theories. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from various sources, while technique triangulation was applied by combining interviews, observations, and documentation

(Koro-Ljungberg, 2020). Theoretical triangulation was conducted using MFT, destination management, and tourist behavior theory. The credibility test was also strengthened by member checking, in which the interviewees confirmed the interview results to ensure data accuracy. With this method, this research can provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of MFT in managing tourist destinations in Aceh. The validity and reliability of the findings are carried out holistically and contextually to obtain a comprehensive description of the principles of Muslim-Friendly Tourism implemented in Aceh.

Results and Discussion

MFT standard in Aceh tourism destinations

Aceh offers several interesting and unique tourist attractions. With 978 destinations, visitors enjoy marine, natural, cultural, religious, culinary, and heritage tourism. One of Aceh's standout features is its focus on halal tourism, which appeals to travelers seeking experiences aligned with Islamic values. The growth of halal tourism has also created a positive ripple effect across other sectors, including investments. Tourism is the fastest and most effective way of boosting Aceh's prosperity. It supports various industries, ranging from small businesses to hotels, and attracts investors. Halal tourism has become a key strategy for promoting Aceh as a must-visit destination, attracting more tourists to the region.

The level of fulfillment of MFT standards in Aceh tourist destinations is based on three main aspects: worship facilities, availability of halal food, and supporting policies for Muslim tourists. Data were collected through direct observations, interviews with tourism managers, and surveys of Muslim tourists visiting Aceh (Khalifah et al., 2023). Worship facilities in Aceh's tourist destinations are mostly available, especially in leading tourist attractions such as the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque, Lampuuk Beach, and the Tsunami Museum. Some natural tourist destinations and beaches still lack adequate prayer rooms and wudu stations. Some tourist sites still lack official halal certification from appropriate authorities. The Aceh government has implemented policies based on Islamic law to support the halal tourism ecosystem. However, challenges remain in enforcing these policies, particularly in monitoring and educating tourism businesses on MFT standards. The following table summarizes the research findings based on the three main aspects of MFT at several tourist destinations in Aceh.

Table 2. Level of fulfillment of MFT standards in Aceh tourism destinations

Tourist destinations	Worship facilities	Availability of halal food	Supportive policy
Baiturrahman Grand Mosque	Very adequate	Very adequate	Very supportive
Aceh Tsunami Museum	Adequate	Very adequate	Supportive
Lampuuk Beach	Less adequate	Adequate	Supportive
Weh Island	Inadequate	Adequate	Less supportive
Laut Tawar Lake	Inadequate	Inadequate	Less supportive

Source: Observation results (2025).

The fulfillment of MFT standards in Aceh still varies between tourist destinations. Destinations with a religious character, such as the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque and the Aceh Tsunami Museum, have a high level of fulfillment because of complete worship facilities, available halal food, and supportive policies. Natural tourist destinations, such as beaches and lakes, still face obstacles in providing worship facilities and guaranteeing certified halal food.

This indicates that implementing MFT in Aceh has not been evenly distributed across all tourist destinations. Some tourism managers do not wholly understand MFT standards, particularly regarding providing adequate worship facilities for Muslim tourists. This aligns with research by Boğan and Saruşik (2019), who state that the main challenge in halal tourism is the imbalance between policy and implementation in the field. Although the availability of halal foods is generally very high, halal certification remains a challenge. Many culinary businesses in tourist destinations

have not taken care of official halal certification, even though the products sold are halal in practice. This is in line with the findings of [Katuk et al. \(2021\)](#), which shows that in many Muslim-friendly destinations, businesses often rely on assumptions of halalness without clear certification, which can create uncertainty for Muslim tourists.

Islamic Sharia-based regulations in Aceh have become a significant factor in the development of halal tourism. However, they must still strengthen their supervision and coordination with tourism industry players. According to [Purwandani and Yusuf \(2024\)](#), implementing an effective halal tourism policy requires the involvement of all stakeholders, including the government, business actors, and local communities. The findings of this research can be explained using the Halal Tourism Framework theory, which emphasizes three main components of halal tourism: halal-friendly facilities, halal food services, and Islamic hospitality ([Ghofur & Ismanto, 2022](#)).

Several tourist destinations in Aceh have met the standards for halal-friendly facilities. However, there are still shortcomings in providing Masala or Wudu stations in natural tourist sites. In halal tourism theory, this facility is crucial because Muslim tourists need convenience in carrying out worship during a trip ([Syah Putra & Tucunan, 2021](#)). Aceh has an advantage because almost all food in tourist destinations is halal. According to the theory proposed by [Takeshita \(2020\)](#), halal certification is essential for building the trust of international Muslim tourists. It is not just a formality, but also a guarantee of halalness that can increase the competitiveness of tourist destinations.

The success of the halal tourism policy depends on how the rules are applied in practice and accepted by the local community ([Syamsurrijal et al., 2021](#)). [Muharis et al. \(2023\)](#) revealed that one of the main challenges in halal tourism is the gap between regulation and implementation at tourist destinations. Another study by [Anggarkasih and Resma \(2022\)](#) confirmed the importance of halal certification in increasing the trust of Muslim tourists. [Rasyid et al. \(2023\)](#) show that halal tourism is related to worship facilities, halal food, and travel experiences that follow Islamic values. This suggests that the management of halal tourism destinations must be more comprehensive, including education for businesses and the provision of friendly services for Muslim tourists. [Aliyev \(2021\)](#) highlighted that a clear implementation strategy and synergy among the government, industry players, and local communities must support an effective halal tourism policy. This is in line with the findings of this research, which show that despite Sharia-based regulations in Aceh, implementation challenges remain a significant issue.

The findings show that Aceh has a strong potential for developing halal tourism, but several areas still need improvement. Worship facilities at natural tourist sites need to be upgraded, halal food certification should be expanded, and enforcement of halal tourism policies requires stricter oversight. This study highlights the importance of collaboration between local governments, destination managers, and businesses to build a stronger halal tourism ecosystem in Aceh. Improving education, expanding halal certification, and providing more evenly distributed worship facilities are key to boosting Aceh's competitiveness as a globally friendly destination.

The role of stakeholders in implementing the MFT concept in Aceh

The Aceh Culture and Tourism Office is essential for organizing the development of halal tourism in Aceh and assisting the governor in formulating technical policies in the field of tourism. The Aceh Culture and Tourism Office is also responsible for developing tourist attractions, managing tourism, preserving tourism resources, marketing, increasing tourism understanding and community participation, and optimizing tourism partnerships. The role of the Aceh Culture and Tourism Office in tourism development guides the tourism industry and awareness groups ([Setiawan, 2023](#)).

Implementing MFT in Aceh involves three key stakeholders: the government, tourism businesses, and local communities. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with government officials, tourism business owners, and community leaders, as well as direct observations of various tourist sites in Aceh. The findings show that local governments play a central role in developing MFT policies. However, regional implementation still faces challenges, particularly regarding coordination and oversight. Tourism businesses, such as hotels, restaurants,

and travel agencies, have started applying MFT principles, but compliance with halal standards and the availability of prayer facilities remain inconsistent. Local communities are also vital in supporting the halal tourism ecosystem through cultural practices rooted in Islamic values; however, their involvement in tourism planning and management remains limited. The following table presents a summary of the research findings based on the role of each stakeholder in implementing MFT in Aceh.

Table 3. Stakeholder roles in the implementation of MFT in Aceh

Stakeholders	Role in MFT	Challenges faced
Government	Formulating halal tourism policies and regulations	Lack of coordination and supervision
Business Actors	Providing Muslim-friendly services (hotels, restaurants, travel agents)	Uneven distribution of halal standardization
Local Communities	Supporting the halal tourism ecosystem through culture and social norms	Minimal involvement in tourism management

Source: Observation results (2025).

Implementing Muslim-Friendly Tourism (MFT) in Aceh still faces challenges, particularly in stakeholder coordination. While the government has introduced Islamic law-based policies to support the halal tourism ecosystem, implementation still requires stronger education and oversight. Aceh's tourism businesses have tried offering Muslim-friendly services such as halal food and prayer facilities. However, there are still inconsistencies in the application of halal standards, especially in the hotel and restaurant sectors, where not all establishments have official halal certification. This aligns with research by [Hariani and Hanafiah \(2024\)](#), who show that one of the main challenges in halal tourism is the imbalance between regulatory policies and implementation at the business level. Local communities are essential to maintaining a social environment that supports halal tourism. The culture and social norms in Aceh, based on Islamic values, support Muslim tourists. Community involvement in tourism planning and management has remained limited. [Rahman et al. \(2019\)](#) emphasized that the success of halal tourism destinations depends not only on government regulations and industry readiness, but also on the active involvement of local communities as part of the halal tourism ecosystem.

The research findings can be explained using the destination competitive advantage theory of [Ritchie and Crouch \(2010\)](#), which states that the competitiveness of tourist destinations is influenced by five main factors: primary resources, supporting resources, policies and planning, destination management factors, and demand conditions. MFT Destinations in Aceh's primary resources include Islamic cultural heritage, historic mosques, and Islamic-based tourist attractions. According to [Ritchie and Crouch \(2010\)](#), destinations with advantages in supporting resources tend to be more competitive in the global market. Islamic-based policies and plans in Aceh have provided a foundation for the development of halal tourism. The main challenge in implementing this policy was the lack of stakeholder supervision and coordination. This shows that destination management strategies must be more systematic and based on synergy between tourism industry actors. Destination management is also a challenge when implementing MFT in Aceh. Local community involvement remains limited to the tourism management process. In contrast, [Ritchie and Crouch \(2010\)](#) stated that the role of local communities is crucial in creating authentic and sustainable tourism experiences.

The global halal tourism market continues to grow, with more Muslim travelers seeking destinations that reflect Islamic values. However, Aceh still faces challenges in attracting international Muslim tourists because of limited targeted promotion and ineffective marketing strategies. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of stakeholder involvement in the development of MFT, which aligns with the findings of this study. Effective halal tourism policies require strong government, business, and community coordination. This research confirms that, while Islamic law-based policies have been introduced in Aceh, there are still significant challenges in ensuring proper coordination and implementation ([Jaelani et al., 2023](#)). [Sutono et al. \(2021\)](#) also indicated that in the MFT ecosystem, the involvement of the tourism industry in providing halal

services is a key factor for success. This research also highlights that the lack of halal certification in the hotel and restaurant sectors remains a significant obstacle to creating a tourism experience based on Muslim standards. [Rachmiate et al. \(2023\)](#) revealed that a community is essential for building a friendly environment for Muslim tourists. This research also shows that without active involvement in destination management, local communities will only be passive beneficiaries of the tourism industry, without having a strategic role in its development.

The government plays a strategic role in setting policies and regulations, but coordination and supervision still need to be improved. Tourism business actors have begun implementing Muslim-friendly service standards, but variations in compliance with halal certification are still a significant obstacle. Local communities have great potential to support halal tourism; however, their involvement in tourism management is minimal. This research implies the importance of increasing synergy between stakeholders in developing Aceh as a more competitive Muslim-friendly destination in the global market. The government must strengthen halal supervision and certification policies, business actors must be more active in adopting halal tourism standards, and local communities must be empowered in tourism management. With a more integrated approach, Aceh can increase its competitiveness as a superior halal tourism destination at the national and international levels.

Challenges and barriers to managing MFT destinations in Aceh

The development of halal tourism in Aceh presents an excellent opportunity to boost the regional economy while preserving cultural and religious values. With its rich culture, unique cuisine, and beautiful tourist attractions, Aceh has the potential to attract more visitors and bring significant benefits to local communities. However, challenges such as poor planning, limited stakeholder involvement, and inadequate infrastructure must be addressed to realize this potential fully. Although the prospects are promising, stronger collaboration among the government, local communities, and the private sector is still needed. With better coordination, Aceh can become a leading global destination for halal tourism. Without it, the progress may stall. Clear regulations and improved infrastructure, especially in transportation, accommodation, and accessibility, are essential for supporting growth in this sector.

The main obstacles to implementing the MFT concept in Aceh are related to three main aspects: regulations and policies, supporting infrastructure, and public awareness. Aceh already has a legal basis for supporting halal tourism by implementing Islamic laws. Implementing this regulation still faces obstacles such as inconsistent policies between the central and regional levels, weak supervision of halal standards in the tourism sector, and a lack of incentives for business actors to implement the halal tourism concept. Although Aceh has a strong Islamic-based tourist attraction, there are still limitations in supporting facilities, such as the lack of places of worship in several tourist destinations, the lack of halal-certified restaurants, and limited transportation and accommodation that meet Muslim-friendly standards. Public awareness also influences the success of implementing this concept. Many business actors and local communities do not fully understand the idea of MFT and how its implementation can increase the competitiveness of tourism in Aceh ([Musa et al., 2021](#)). Table 4 summarizes findings related to the challenges in managing Muslim-friendly tourist destinations in Aceh.

Implementing MFT in Aceh faces complex challenges, especially in policy, infrastructure, and public awareness. Although Aceh already has Islamic law-based regulations that support halal tourism, their implementation still faces structural obstacles. The lack of synchronization of policies between the central and regional governments has resulted in overlapping regulations that have confused business actors in implementing halal standards.

Weak supervision of halal certification is a significant obstacle. Many restaurants and hotels do not yet have official halal certifications, which reduces the trust of Muslim tourists. This aligns with research by [Perbawasari et al. \(2019\)](#), who emphasize that the success of halal destinations is highly dependent on tourism industry players' strict supervision of compliance with halal standards.

Table 4. Challenges in managing Muslim-friendly tourist destinations in Aceh

Challenge aspects	Obstacles found	Impact on MFT
Regulation	Disinconsistency between central and regional policies Weak supervision and halal certification	Lack of business compliance with halal standards Not all destinations have appropriate halal facilities
Infrastructure	Lack of incentives for business actors Lack of places of worship in several locations	Low motivation in implementing MFT standards Reducing the comfort of Muslim tourists
Public Awareness	Lack of halal-certified restaurants Transportation and accommodation are not yet fully Muslim-friendly	Increasing the risk of tourists consuming non-halal food Reducing the attractiveness of Aceh as an MFT destination
Regulation	Low public understanding of MFT Not all business actors are aware of the benefits of halal tourism	Lack of social support for halal tourism development Low participation of local industries in MFT

Source: Observation results (2025).

The limited number of Muslim-friendly places of worship and supporting facilities can reduce Aceh's attractiveness as an MFT destination. Several tourist destinations in Aceh, especially those in coastal and hilly areas, do not provide adequate prayer rooms or ablution facilities. [Jia and Chaozhi \(2020\)](#) show that easily accessible prayer facilities are one of the main factors in Muslim tourists' decisions to choose tourist destinations.

Transportation and accommodation in Aceh are still not fully oriented towards halal tourism. Many hotels do not yet have halal certification, and some travel agents do not yet provide tour packages that specifically target Muslim tourists. According to [Huda et al. \(2022\)](#), the success of MFT depends on the readiness of the hotel and transportation industries to provide services that suit Muslim tourists' needs. Public awareness of the MFT concept is still low. Many business actors do not yet understand that halal tourism is not just about providing halal food, but also includes services that follow Islamic principles, such as the availability of prayer facilities, gender separation policies in certain areas, and tourism activities that follow Islamic values. [Adinugraha et al. \(2020\)](#) found that active community participation in managing halal destinations is essential for creating an environment that supports the optimal experience of Muslim tourists.

This finding can be explained through the theory of tourism destination management, which emphasizes that policies, infrastructure, human resources, and stakeholder participation influence a destination's competitiveness ([Sun & Shu, 2024](#)). Aceh already has policies to support MFT, but its implementation remains suboptimal because of limited coordination between regional and central governments. According to the destination management theory, effective implementation requires strong management to support good policies, including halal certification and supervision. Destinations with infrastructure that meets the needs of tourists are more likely to attract specific market segments. Community involvement in planning and managing destinations is key to creating authentic and sustainable tourism experiences.

The findings showed that the main challenges in implementing MFT in Aceh are related to regulations, infrastructure, and public awareness. Regulatory issues include a lack of policy alignment, weak enforcement of halal standards, and limited business incentives. Infrastructure to support halal tourism, such as places of worship and halal-certified facilities, is lacking in several tourist areas. In addition, both the public and business sectors have a low awareness of the benefits of halal tourism, which hinders its full implementation. This research highlights the need for stronger government, business, and local community collaborations to address these issues. Such synergy is essential for Aceh to become more competitive as an MFT destination nationally and globally.

The impact of MFT implementation in Aceh

The concept of halal tourism in Aceh emphasizes the customs and culture of the Islamic Acehnese people and the implementation of qanuns in Islamic law in Aceh. Aceh's potential in the halal tourism sector: Aceh has won the title of victory in national and international halal tourism competitions as a region for the development of halal tourism. The majority of Aceh's population is Muslim, and Aceh's Islamic customs and culture, as well as the tradition of "Peumulia Jamee," have significant potential for the development of halal tourism (Kamal, 2024).

Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), domestic tourist visits to Aceh in 2023, as of November, reached 7,270,318 people and foreign tourists 29,848. The target for this year is a total of 7.8 million tourist visits. Aceh, nicknamed the "Veranda of Mecca," has excellent potential for developing halal tourism. The determination of Aceh as an Islamic Sharia area has given birth to several legal products that regulate society's ethics and social order based on Islamic laws (Hariani & Hanafiah, 2024). Therefore, halal tourism is a tourism product suitable for implementation in Aceh, where most of the population is Muslim. The development of halal tourism has influenced economic growth by using halal-certified products and services. Based on data from the Global Islamic Economy, Islamic finance, halal food/culinary, halal tour packages, Muslim clothing, halal tourism, halal medicines, and halal cosmetics continue to increase (Kamal, 2024).

The implementation of MFT plays an essential role in increasing tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The application of this concept in halal tourism has reflected efforts to meet the needs of Muslim tourists through various facilities and services that follow the principles of Sharia. Services such as halal food, adequate places of worship, and accommodation policies that are friendly to Muslim tourists are the main factors in creating a comfortable and high-quality tourist experience (Yusuf et al., 2021).

Collaboration among the government, tourism industry players, and local communities is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of strategies implemented in implementing MFT. The government plays a role in providing regulations and incentives for business actors who adopt the MFT principle (Abduh, 2022). Industry players must provide services that meet global halal standards, whereas local communities help create a welcoming environment for Muslim tourists. However, several challenges remain. Some destinations lack halal-compliant infrastructure, and awareness among tourism providers remains limited. Improving halal literacy and developing targeted marketing strategies can address these issues. The findings showed that applying MFT boosts tourist satisfaction and loyalty. Sustainable growth depends on stakeholder collaboration and quality services focusing on Muslim needs. In Aceh, proper prayer facilities, halal-certified dining, and Sharia-compliant environments have proven essential in creating positive, lasting experiences for Muslim travelers through a systematic, sustainable approach (Hendrawan & Muslichah, 2023).

Muslim tourists choose destinations that guarantee their comfort in worship and consumption of halal food. Putra et al. (2021) confirmed that the availability of halal facilities and services based on Islamic values is the main factor that increases Muslim tourists' satisfaction. This study shows that tourists who find adequate prayer facilities and halal food in Aceh are generally more satisfied with their experiences. Satisfaction is closely linked to intention to revisit and recommend a destination. However, improvements are needed, particularly in Muslim-friendly transportation, such as airlines and taxis that cater to Muslim tourists. In addition, tourists desire more nature-based and cultural destinations that align with MFT principles. Service quality is another concern, with some tourists noting inconsistent standards, particularly regarding industry players' understanding of MFT. This highlights the need for improved training in the tourism sector (Garrod & Nicholls, 2022).

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) states that a person's behavior is influenced by their intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Farizkhan et al., 2023). Tourist satisfaction with MFT in this research has formed a positive attitude towards Aceh as a halal tourist destination. Tourists who have positive experiences tend to build the perception that Aceh is a comfortable and suitable place to visit again. Subjective norms play an essential role in tourists' loyalty. Tourists who are satisfied with the services in Aceh tend to provide recommendations to others, which can ultimately increase the number of Muslim tourists visiting

Aceh. [Chen et al. \(2016\)](#) showed that recommendations from satisfied individuals play a role in improving the destination image among Muslim tourists, which is in line with the findings of this research. Perceived behavioral control also influences tourists' decisions to return to Aceh. This is also supported by the research by [Najib et al. \(2020\)](#), who found that destinations that provide a comfortable environment for Muslim tourists have a higher repeat visit rate. This research indicates that implementing MFT affects tourist satisfaction and shapes loyalty intentions and behavior, which can be explained through the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Implementing MFT in Aceh significantly affects the satisfaction of Muslim tourists, which, in turn, affects their loyalty. Tourists satisfied with services and facilities based on Islamic principles are more likely to return and recommend Aceh as a halal destination. Several aspects still need to be improved, such as Muslim-friendly transportation, various tourist destinations, and consistency of service quality. Therefore, tourism destination managers in Aceh need to enhance training for tourism industry players, expand the scope of halal tourist destinations, and ensure that all facilities and services meet MFT standards, so that Aceh can be more competitive as a halal tourist destination at the national and global levels.

Conclusion

This study analyzed the implementation of the MFT principle in managing tourist destinations in Aceh. The results indicate that although Aceh has excellent potential as a halal tourism destination, implementing the MFT principle still faces challenges regarding regulation, infrastructure, and human resource readiness. Sharia-based policies have provided a strong foundation for the development of halal tourism, but their implementation has not been fully optimized because of a lack of coordination and supervision. In addition, supporting infrastructure such as prayer facilities, halal-certified restaurants, and Muslim-friendly transportation services still needs to be improved to meet global halal tourism standards. This study found that Muslim tourists choose destinations that can guarantee comfort while praying and consuming halal food. Tourist satisfaction with services and facilities following Islamic principles has a positive relationship with loyalty to a destination. Satisfied tourists are more likely to return to Aceh, and they recommend it as a halal tourism destination. The uneven quality of service and the lack of variety in halal tourism destinations are challenges that need to be overcome to increase Aceh's competitiveness in the halal tourism industry.

This research provides theoretical contributions by confirming the relevance of Theory in explaining the relationship between the satisfaction and loyalty of Muslim tourists in MFT research. From a practical perspective, the results of this research emphasize the importance of improving coordination among the government, tourism industry players, and local communities in managing halal tourism destinations. The government needs to strengthen halal supervision and certification policies, and industry players must be more active in providing services that suit the needs of Muslim tourists. With a more strategic and sustainable approach, Aceh can increase its competitiveness as a superior MFT destination nationally and globally.

This research has several limitations that need to be noted. First, the focus of the study is limited to several major destinations in Aceh, thus not covering all potential areas; the qualitative approach provides depth to the findings but does not allow for broad generalization; and the respondents in this study were dominated by industry players and domestic tourists, thus not representing the perspective of international Muslim tourists as a whole. Recommendations for future research include the expansion of the study area to include more tourist destinations in Aceh and other provinces that apply the concept of halal tourism, the use of quantitative or mixed methods approaches to statistically measure the influence of MFT elements on tourist satisfaction and loyalty, longitudinal studies to monitor the development of MFT policy implementation in the long term and evaluate its impact on regional economic growth, and international comparative research, such as with Malaysia or Turkey, to identify best practices that can be adopted in the local study.

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