

# Transformation of Religious Tourism Destinations from Pilgrimage to Mosques: A Case Study of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo, Indonesia

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## Abstract

Visiting religious tourism destinations to mosques is currently becoming a trend among Indonesians. Social changes in society in choosing religious tourism destinations are relevant topics for research. This study intends to explain the phenomenon of the transformation of religious tourism visit destinations from pilgrimages to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo. This study used a qualitative research method that uses data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data sources in this study are the community around the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, visitors, and managers of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The data were analyzed using data reduction techniques, data presentation, and conclusions. The empirical findings of this study have shown that there has been a shift in the goals of religious tourism destinations from those that used to be pilgrimages to tombs and have now shifted to visits to major mosques, one of which is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Based on the results and findings of this study, it can be concluded that transformation is closely related to the changes from one form to another. The findings of this study explain the process of transforming a religious tourism destination, which is usually a pilgrimage to a visit to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The existence of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque has been proven to have a better financial impact on the surrounding community.

**Keywords:** Pilgrimage; Religious Tourism; Religious Transformation; Sheikh Zayed Mosque; Tourism Destination



## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is currently growing rapidly in Indonesia, and is the largest foreign exchange earner in Indonesia. On the other hand, tourism activities also generate negative impacts. As we all know, tourism activities can have positive and negative impacts on those who play a role in tourism activities, both from the tourist destination, the surrounding community, and the local government (Kuncoro, 2019). Tourism comprises a variety of tourism activities and is supported by various facilities and services provided by the community, businessmen, government, and local governments. Religious tourism is related to the religion, history, customs, culture, and beliefs of people in the community. This is also related to local economic development, which is a participatory process that encourages and provides a way for local parties to increase their competitiveness, aiming to open decent jobs and create sustainable economic activities (Ulya & Futaqi, 2022).

The current development of religious tourism is community and regional development based on improving people's living standards as well as preserving local cultural identity, increasing income economically while distributing it evenly among the local population, oriented towards the development of small and medium enterprises with large workforce absorption and potential for comparative technology, and optimally utilizing tourism as an agent of cultural traditions with minimal negative impacts (Kadri, 2022).

Religious tourism, while admiring the beauty of mosque architecture in Indonesia, has become a popular destination for religious tourism (Ali et al., 2019; Jaelani et al., 2020; Kasdi et al., 2021; Rahman & Anwar, 2022). Mosques in Indonesia not only bring inner peace to anyone who worships in them (Riyanto, 2023). The beauty of mosque architecture in Indonesia has succeeded in amazing many people (Perdana et al., 2020). In Indonesia, which is predominantly

Muslim, people or tourists can easily find mosques anywhere. Interestingly, nowadays many mosques are built using a contemporary architectural style, thus attracting the attention of the wider community to come to visit them. Magnified mosque buildings, decorations, and carvings to the interior of the mosque, which received great attention from architects, make each unique mosque in Indonesia very attractive as a religious tourism destination in Indonesia (Satwiko et al., 2023).

For people who want to worship while admiring the beauty of the unique mosque architecture in Indonesia, one of them is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Solo (Sam & Ramadhani, 2022). The newest religious tourism destination in Solo City, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, was established as a symbol of friendship between Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The architectural design of this mosque resembles that of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, which was created by an architect named Yusef Abdelki. Although the shape is smaller than that of Abu Dhabi, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque has the same color as the original, which is dominated by white and additional gold ornaments. The architecture of the mosque was further enhanced by four minarets and one main dome with a typical Middle Eastern architectural style. At night, the bluish color of the lights further beautifies the mosque building (Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI, 2023).

The changing pattern of visits to religious tourism destinations today compared to eleven or twenty-one years ago has shifted from visits to grave pilgrimages to a social arena for various purposes and activities, one of which is visiting the grand mosque in each area, such as the Sheikh Zayed Mosque (Purwanto & Rahardjo, 2023). For a certain purpose, grave pilgrimages begin to fade, deliberately created by agents or actors to influence the spiritual values that are currently starting to change. This pattern of change interprets grave pilgrimages

as a religious tour that focuses on the tourism element, not on the pilgrimage procession, and this will make the image of the pilgrims less meaningful (Handriana et al., 2020). Before this change, grave pilgrimage was a sacred ritual that became a religious ceremony as a hereditary legacy (Rahman & Anwar, 2022).

The transformation of religious tourism destination visits from grave pilgrimages to mosque visits occurs because of the shift in religious tourism destinations (Narulita et al., 2019; Mawarni & Puspitasari, 2020), one of which is what happened at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Many mosques are also used as tourist attractions in Indonesia and the world. Because it sounds like religious tourism, many Muslims visit it. In terms of benefits, visiting a mosque is an effort to increase faith. Approaching a mosque is interpreted as a way to increase piety.

Theoretically, transformation is a change that cannot be avoided in human life and that becomes a natural thing (Pung et al., 2020; Semilet, 2023). Human life always experiences the dynamics of change as a consequence of human relations in society (Salvatore et al., 2018). Society is a group of living things with a new reality that develops according to laws and has a pattern of development (Altinay & Arici, 2022). Based on this explanation, it can be emphasized that society experiences development based on laws or rules that they create themselves and will always develop in a certain pattern (Bu et al., 2022). This development indicates that human life is constantly changing from one condition to another (Handono, 2020).

The transformation of religious tourism destinations from pilgrimages to mosques at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is a phenomenon of social change in Indonesia, and as a result of the changes that began in 2022, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque has become a new destination for religious tourism by Indonesian people. As a religion with the largest majority of adherents in Indonesia, examples of seasonal variations in

religious tourism activities are quite abundant. One of the most popular is the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages in Mecca and Medina, which is often a once-in-a-lifetime wishlist for Muslims worldwide. The goal itself is very clear, namely to worship, say prayers, and increase social status. Furthermore, there are pilgrimage activities for the graves of saints, ancestors, heroes, and famous or sacred people. Pilgrimage activities are usually carried out at certain times, with various motives. Some purely send prayers, want to feel spiritual nuances in the grave area, get peace, and even ask for blessings and inspiration. Religious tourism is usually not limited to Muslim visitors. During the pilgrimage, many visitors performed special traditions and rituals. Finally, there are religious tours to large, iconic, or historic mosques as well as visits to Islamic museums (Huang & Chu, 2020). One of the destinations in Solo, which is often a religious tourism destination today, is Sheikh Zayed Mosque.

Religious tourism focuses more on worship. The purpose of this trip is the same as that of other types of tourism, namely to enjoy the objects and attractions offered there (Tjahjani & Sondakh, 2023). However, these attractions certainly differ for each tour type. In religious tourism, tourist attractions are usually in the form of worship, pilgrimages, and religious ceremonies. Behind each of these activities, there are also various motivations that can vary between individuals, such as the purpose of worship to gain inner peace, sending prayers, asking for something (blessings, happiness, sustenance), feeling spiritual and magical nuances, enriching insights about religion, deepening spiritual sense, and improving social status (Anismar et al., 2018). Based on these motives, it is known that religious tourism activities are not just fun and tend to be personal.

Previous studies that follow this research study, namely Khotimah & Sadewo's research (2017), stated that the social changes

in the Tebuireng community that occurred after the religious tour of Gus Dur's grave had proven to have changed their way of thinking and working. The social changes of the Tebuireng people are found in the patterns of behavior, economy, and culture of the surrounding community. The changing patterns of grave pilgrimages as a social arena have undergone various changes. The tradition of visiting graves has been ongoing for hundreds of years in Islam ([Arifin, 2020](#)). Transformation occurs not only in religious tourism, but also in tourist villages. During its development, tourism village activities have changed in response to the challenges of developing tourism trends, which is often referred to as transformation. The transformation of this tourist village not only changes the physical structure, but also the territorial and cultural arrangements ([Prakoso, 2022](#)). Religious tourism is a type of tourism. Religious tourism is connoted with visits to places with a history of Islamic da'wah ([Satriawan et al., 2019](#)), such as the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The development of religious tourism aims to increase people's welfare; advance community culture; and preserve nature, the environment, and other resources in the area around tourist destinations ([Arsvendo et al., 2022](#)).

Based on research phenomena, theoretical frames, and several previous studies that are relevant to this research, researchers are trying to examine in depth the transformation of religious tourism visit destinations from pilgrimages to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo. The practical objective of this research is to add to the treasury of public insight into the changing pattern of religious tourism that is currently happening.

## **METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. A descriptive qualitative approach is an appropriate method for obtaining results from field observations or research ([Jilcha Sileyew, 2020](#)). Retrieving

data from places that will be used in research, especially when observing the phenomenon of a formal object. The object is in the form of a social phenomenon or transformation that occurs during a visit to a religious tourism destination, from a pilgrimage visit to a destination visit to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo. The procession of religious tourism activities visited the destination of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, which was determined by the Indonesian government and mosque administrators. In carrying out visits, tourists are directed by mosque guards and can also be done independently. For tourists who visit during prayer time, the prayer will be led directly by the Imam of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, who is scheduled by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia. After the Imam of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque has finished leading prayers, visitors can continue their prayers based on their intentions. Analyzing social symptoms and patterns of social change from both pilgrims and the community around the Sheikh Zayed Mosque to obtain an overview of the transformation of religious tourism visit destinations from a pilgrimage to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo, and then analyzed again using the theory of transformation originating from phenomenon-related phenomena and field studies.

Phenomenology was used in this study. This research collected data through observations, interviews, and documentation (Vyhmeister et al., 2023). The types of observations that have been made in this study are: a. participant observation, meaning that the researcher takes part in or sees directly in the activities of the people being observed at Sheikh Zayed Mosque; b. structured observation, meaning that in conducting observations, the researcher refers to the guidelines that have been prepared in advance by the researcher. Structured observation means that in making observations, the researcher refers to the guidelines prepared in advance by the researcher.

The data obtained in this study are as follows: a. The situation and environmental conditions of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque; b. State of Sheikh Zayed Mosque's infrastructure; c. The phenomenon of visitors and managers of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque; d. Activities of visitors and managers of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Activities of visitors and managers of Sheikh Zayed Mosque; and e. Situation of residents around the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. To collect data for this study, researchers used a structured interview method. Structured interviews are questions that directly answer the questions posed. Researchers prepared complete and detailed questions regarding the transformation of religious tourism destinations from pilgrimages to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo, Indonesia.

Documents are records of various past activities or events. The documentation method in this research is used to obtain data about the brief history of the establishment of Sheikh Zayed Mosque, the organizational structure of Sheikh Zayed Mosque, data on visitors, managers, and the community around Sheikh Zayed Mosque, and the facilities and infrastructure of Sheikh Zayed Mosque. These three techniques are simultaneously used to obtain data and describe the transformation of religious tourism destinations from pilgrimages to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo, Indonesia. The data sources in this study are the community around the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, visitors, and managers of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Data were analyzed by data reduction techniques, data presentation, and conclusion.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **History of Sheikh Zayed Mosque**

Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates (UEA) have a unique relationship. These two countries are good friends. Indonesian President Joko Widodo has close relations with former President Sheikh Zayed (deceased) and President Mohamed bin Zayed.



Friendships between the two countries are enshrined in several monuments. For example, there is the Mohamed bin Zayed (MBZ) elevated toll road in Jakarta and President Joko Widodo roads in Abu Dhabi. Most recently, there was Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo. This Great Mosque was a gift from the President of the UEA to Indonesia. This mosque is a replica of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE, so its design is similar to that of the original. On January 12, 2023, the two parties signed an agreement on the joint management of the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque. This agreement was signed by the Director General of Islamic Guidance at the Ministry of Religion, Kamaruddin Amin, and the Chancellor of Muhammad Bin Zayed University UEA, Khaled Salem Al-Yabhouni Al-Dhahrei, in Solo (Fauzi, 2023).

Thus, it can be seen that the City of Solo has added one more religious tourism destination, namely the Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque. The mosque, which is located on Jalan A. Yani, Gilingan, Banjarsari, Solo, was recently inaugurated by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ). The inauguration was conducted on November 14, 2022. The time for this inauguration was advanced by several days from the original plan, namely rice on Thursday. Before the inauguration, several processions were carried out, starting from the wrong tahiyyatul mosque, which was carried out by the President of the Republic of Indonesia Jokowi and the President of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

After prayer, President Jokowi and Mohamed bin Zayed signed an inscription that had been prepared. After the signature is completed, it continues with the prayer reading. The reading of the prayer was led directly by the High Priest of the Istiqlal Mosque Nasaruddin Umar. After the prayer reading was completed, the process continued with tree planting. The two country leaders headed

the tree-planting locations that had been prepared by the committee. The mosque, which was built on a 3.6-hectare plot of land, looks majestic; it is even the largest in the Greater Solo area.

The appearance of this mosque is very beautiful with modern Islamic architectural styles. The Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque is a gift from the Prince of the UAE, Mohamed bin Zayed, for President Jokowi in Solo. After it was inaugurated, residents were enthusiastic about coming to the mosque. Not infrequently, the hectic visits of these residents cause traffic on Jalan A. Yani to stagnate. Khan (1990) states that the mosque architecture of a number of countries around the world has been built by prioritizing the beauty and uniqueness of its buildings over the past twenty-five years around the world. The architectural design of the mosque building was built at the request of various stakeholders ranging from governments to individuals.

The Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque can accommodate ten thousand people, which is explained by the fact that under normal conditions, it can reach ten thousand people up to the outer hall, while the main building can accommodate four thousand people consisting of the upper and lower floors. This mosque, a gift from the Prince of the UAE, was built with funds of approximately IDR 300 billion. In addition to prayer, this white and gold-nuanced mosque can also be used for recitation and religious tourism. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque, which is located in Jalan A. Yani Number 128, Gilingan, Banjarsari District, has an area of approximately 8,000 square meters. As reported by [surakarta.go.id](http://surakarta.go.id), it consists of a mosque building, a VIP room, a 20 square meter library, and a basement used for ablutions for boys and girls.

The architecture of the building is similar to that of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo was designed to have four minarets and one main dome. Small domes and ornaments are typical of Middle-Eastern buildings.

Modern Islamic architecture depicts the friendship between the UAE and Indonesia. What is unique is that the Sheikh Zayed Al-Nahayan Solo Mosque has traditional characteristics, namely that part of the mosque's floor is decorated with kawung batik motifs. This motif is found in the courtyard of the mosque. In addition, batik motifs adorn the carpet and cover the floor of the main mosque building. These batik motifs can be found on the edges of the carpet, combined with the geometric arabesque designs in the middle. Right in the middle of the building, lights hanging from the middle of the main dome can be seen. The magnificent lamp had a golden color ([Tim CNN Indonesia, 2023](#)). Islamic architecture in mosque buildings, such as in Malaysia today, has become a modern style of reference to Middle Eastern models ([Tajuddin et al., 2007](#)).

The Sheikh Zayed Al Nahyan Mosque in Solo was cared for by the Grand Imam KH Abdul Rozaq Shofawi. K.H. Abdul Rozaq is the caretaker of Al-Muayyad Solo Islamic Boarding School. KH Abdul Rozaq's representative as Grand Imam of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is the caretaker of the Al-Quraniy Azzayadiy Islamic Boarding School, K.H. Abdul Karim Ahmad Al Hafidz or fondly called Gus Karim. Gus Karim is also known as one of President Jokowi's Qur'an teachers, while he studied the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and *fiqh* ([Tim detikcom, 2022](#)).

### **Sheikh Zayed Mosque as a New Religious Tourism Destination**

Sheikh Zayed Mosque Surakarta Solo is one of the religious tourism destinations in the city of Solo, which was inaugurated by President Jokowi and Prince of the United Arab Emirates Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan. As the newest religious tourism destination, many people from outside the Solo or Surakarta areas visit or have religious tours at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The construction of the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque has been running since March 6, 2021, at a cost of approximately Rp. 300 billion. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque itself

stands on an area of approximately 26,581 m<sup>2</sup>, which can accommodate around 12,000 worshippers. The architecture of the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque has 82 domes in the Moroccan architectural style, decorated with white marble and adopting the Replica of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Abu Dhabi. This Mughal-style courtyard makes worshipers who attend this mosque feel like they are at the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan. For the floor itself, the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque uses original marble imported directly from Italy ([Perkasa, 2022](#)).

The parking area and roads are 3,500 square meters for vehicle roads as well as bus, car, and motorcycle parking areas. The Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque has facilities in the form of a VIP room, a 20 square meter library, and a basement that is used for ablutions for men and women. There is also a parking area so that visitors can place their vehicles in the locations provided, so that they can be neatly arranged and avoid traffic jams. An Islamic Center was built around the mosque complex as a center for Islamic education and teaching. Al-Qur'an Education Park, a study of Al-Qur'an interpretation, madrasas, and a place for Sharia economic development with halal market products (halal market). Behind its splendor is contemporary historical values that are specifically dedicated to all Muslims. The modern Islamic architectural art he applied became a symbol of friendship between the UAE and Indonesia. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque, the largest mosque in the city of Surakarta, is not only a place of worship but also an attractive tourist destination, especially religious tourism, because of its magnificent architectural appearance and ornaments ([Triono, 2022](#)). The findings of this study were also confirmed by tracing the results of interviews with Suhail Al Mazrroui, the Minister of Energy of the UAE.

“President Mohamed bin Zayed and his staff are trying to build a mosque close to the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi. The

architecture is special, so it is not only for worship but also for religious tourism destinations. His party claimed to be proud, because the mosque being built was named the Great Mosque of Sheikh Zayed Solo. Namely the name of the founder of the United Arab Emirates was Shaykh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. We hope that this will become a proud religious tour that can attract many tourists. On that occasion, his party claimed to be proud of Indonesia, which is the largest Islamic country and competitive in the fields of economy and science. We hope that Indonesia will become a world model in the economic sector because Indonesia has its authority," said the UAE Minister of Energy Suhail Al Mazrroui ([Diskominfo Jateng, 2023](#)).

The Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, Yaqut Cholil Qoumas, hopes that the mosque given by the President of the UAE can become a place for the development of the Islamic world in Indonesia, even the world. In addition, the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia hopes that (this mosque) will help improve the quality of welfare for the Indonesian people, especially the people of Solo, with productive activities in the future.

"This is a very beautiful mosque. I hope this mosque can contribute to the people in the development of Islam that is rahmatan lil alamin," explained Yaqut Cholil Qoumas in Surakarta after accompanying President Joko Widodo at the inauguration ceremony (2022).

The Director General of Islamic Community Guidance Kamaruddin Amin added the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque as an example of professional mosque governance for other mosques throughout Indonesia. According to Kamaruddin Amin, the mosque is the most trusted space for public contestation and information dissemination. Referring to the function of the mosque in history, the Prophet Muhammad SAW carried out worship and religious education, consultation, and communication on economic and entrepreneurship issues.

"The presence of the Great Mosque of Sheikh Zayed Solo is expected to be a prototype of a mosque that is professionally managed, both

idarrah (management), imarah (prosperity), and ri'ayah (maintenance)," said Kamaruddin Amin (2022).

In addition, the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque is also a pride and attraction for religious tourism, as well as a sign of friendship and cooperation between nations in strengthening Islamic civilization that is friendly to all. Kamaruddin also hopes that the Grand Mosque can become a pioneer in strengthening religious moderation. According to him, the efforts that are being made are not only because religious moderation has become a priority program for the Ministry of Religion but also because strengthening religious moderation is necessary. The mosque is an important focus for strengthening moderation because it is a mosque where religious people gather regularly. He often refers to mosques as Mega Islamic Boarding Schools, places where millions of Muslims worship and gain knowledge every day; therefore, mosques must be a means of moderate religious education (Fauzi, 2023).

The Sheikh Zayed Mosque is managed by the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque Management Board, which was established by the Indonesian government. The mosque manager was formed by the Ministry of Religion and is directly responsible for the Minister of Religion. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque is expected to provide real benefits to the community around Surakarta City, Central Java, and throughout Indonesia. Therefore, the Muslim community should jointly prosper the existence of the Sheikh Zayed Solo Mosque. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque has now become a new icon in Solo, not only as a center for religious celebrations but also as a center for new religious tourism destinations in Solo, particularly in Central Java.

### **The Pattern of Transformation of Religious Tourism Visits from Pilgrimage to The Sheikh Zayed Mosque**

Local culture fades and gradually begins to be forgotten, many religious leaders admit, on the other hand, religious leaders must

become pioneers to further introduce the culture of religious traditions and this role must be further enhanced so that it can be published to the next generation (Raya, 2022). Local cultural information must be preserved so that future generations can love their own culture more and, at the same time, learn about the history and culture of their nation, especially indigenous cultures (Adinugraha et al., 2018). The scope of studying culture is very broad, not only concerning life for the world but also how to prepare everything for the day after facing death. Every living thing will experience an event of death. This is where it is inspired, especially religious leaders, to convey enlightenment to the younger generation so that they can prepare for it from an early age (Adinugraha & Sartika, 2022).

Grave pilgrimage is a social activity that has been known by mankind in various parts of the world, including social structures and social processes that can make a social change for individuals, groups, and groups (Rahman & Anwar, 2022). Pilgrimage and sociology essentially want to understand the state of social relations in social life. In carrying out pilgrimage activities, individuals or groups certainly interact, both mentally and physically, with fellow pilgrims. In carrying out pilgrimage activities, individuals or groups directly deal with the community. Grave pilgrimages are related to social relations, which include behavior, actions, structures, social systems, and norms (Handriana et al., 2020). This applies to pilgrimage activities at sacred tombs or sacred tombs, such as the tombs of Walis, Sultans, or charismatic religious figures.

The relationship between sociology and grave pilgrimages is very close because it involves a social relationship that is difficult to separate. Before sociology was studied and developed, the tradition of visiting graves came to this world. Even primitive people knew pilgrimage rituals, which at that time were still traditional and followed the rules determined by the tribal chief or someone who was

considered sacred. However, as civilization becomes modern, the pilgrimage tradition undergoes a change, which was previously not given much attention, but is now a scientific study. It has even become a religious tourism destination that will certainly be a special attraction and opportunity to improve the community's economy ([Arifin, 2020](#)).

The pilgrimage to the graves of God's saints is no longer an ancient religious ritual that only a small number of Muslims carry out. However, at this time, many Muslims pilgrimage to the graves of God's saints, known as religious tourism. Pilgrimages are included in the category of tourism types ([Fournié, 2019](#)). Religious tourism is not just having fun and looking for entertainment, but it is more important to broaden one's horizons to witness the verses of God's greatness that are spread across this earth of His creation, such as visiting the places or graves of pious people as spiritual tourism or spiritual tourism. Spiritual tourism or spiritual sightseeing is not only an external beauty, but also an inner peace that can be enjoyed. Through religious tourism, it is hoped that this will be an effort to increase the value of spirituality in a person. However, this spiritual value is not only limited to being increased but also must be maintained, namely in terms of the quality of worship, heart, and feelings, as well as the good character ([Sari et al., 2018](#)).

Religious tourism has become a tourism potential that has always been growing and is never quiet. Religious tourism is an activity of traveling to holy places, mosques, former Islamic empires, the tombs of great people or exalted leaders, hills, or mountains that are considered sacred, burial places of figures or leaders as miraculous human beings full of legends to obtain enjoyment, satisfaction, and knowledge carried out by individuals or groups ([Fauziah, 2021](#)). Religious tourism activities are dominated by spiritual experiences followed by social and educational experiences. Religious tourism is



tourism where people are attracted to or motivated to visit holy places as a result of the spiritual magnetism possessed by each individual. Environmental and spatial physical aspects can support the use of the area as a tourist area. These two aspects include physical nature, land use, transportation, and facilities. Aspects that can support an area to be used as a religious tourism area are the character and culture of the local community (Kemalasarri & Sugiri, 2023).

Based on the description above, it was found that religious tourism is a type of tourism that has a close attachment to a certain belief, tourism activities with high spiritual value, and is visited by tourists either with the motivation or purpose to increase the value of pilgrimage or just leisure time. This type of religious tourism is unique because, in addition to filling free time with recreational motivation, it can also increase spiritual values, and most of the objects are areas that have historical value. Religious tourism is also closely related to the existence of religious festivals that are culturally thick. Therefore, the activities contained therein have the potential to improve the local community apart from being a conservation effort as a result of these religious tourism activities (Kemalasarri & Sugiri, 2023). Travel motivation plays an important role in attracting tourists to tourism destinations (Nassar et al., 2015). Based on the description above, religious tourism is interpreted as a tourism activity to a place that has a special meaning, usually in the form of a place that has special food, one of which is a mosque. Sheikh Zayed Mosque is a religious center where the mosque is used to worship prayers, I'tikaf, call to prayer, and *iqamah*.

Theoretically, the functions of the mosque area are The mosque is a place for Muslims to worship and get closer to Allah; A mosque is a place for Muslims to practice *i'tikaf*, cleanse themselves, and galvanize their minds to build awareness and gain inner/religious experience so that a balance of body and soul is always maintained

and personality integrity; A mosque is a place of deliberation for Muslims to solve problems that arise in society; A mosque is a place where Muslims consult, submit difficulties, and ask for help and assistance; The mosque is a place to foster the unity of the congregation and cooperation in realizing common prosperity; The mosque with its religious assembly is a vehicle to increase the intelligence and knowledge of Muslims; The mosque is a place for coaching and developing cadres of community leaders; A mosque where funds are collected, stored, and distributed; The mosque is a place to carry out social arrangements and supervision ([Marlina, 2019](#)).

The religious tourism referred to here is more towards visiting tours to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Currently, mosques are no longer only centered on places of worship for Muslims in the world. The mosque is also used as a place for social and community activities, one of which is to become a religious tourism destination. As commonly known by most people in Indonesia, the mosque is a place of worship for Muslims worldwide ([Haryono et al., 2022](#)). The mosque comes from the Arabic "*sajada*" which means a place to prostrate or a place to worship Allah. However, this prayer word refers to all parts of the Earth that can be used as a place of prostration to Allah. To refer to a place, the word "*sajada*" was then changed to "mosque" which means "a place of prostration to worship Allah." The mosque is indeed a place of worship for Muslims, but not only that. Aside from being a place of worship, mosques can function in other ways, one of which is to make the mosque a major religious tourism destination ([Tabti, 2022](#)).

Sheikh Zayed Mosque is the newest religious tourism destination currently in Solo. One of the uses of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque, besides those mentioned above, is religious tourism. Religious tourism is a type of tourism that is closely related to religious

activities or special places related to religious aspects. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque has now become a tourist spot for the community, both from the surrounding community and people outside the area (Hegazy et al., 2020).

At this time, mosques used as religious tourism sites have become commonplace, such as the Golden Dome Mosque in Depok, the Great Mosque of Banten in Banten, the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta, the Great Mosque of Kudus in Kudus, and many more mosques that are used as religious tourism destinations for the people of Indonesia. The reasons for the Indonesian people to make the mosque their tourist destinations diverse: some want to visit to make pilgrimages, some visit to carry out worship such as sunnah prayers, or just read the Holy Qur'an. Some want to take pictures and admire the beauty of the mosque's architecture, and some visit to stay silent in the mosque solely to seek peace from life's problems and get closer to Allah (Lasttio, 2023).

The purpose of religious tourism can be used as a reference for conveying Islamic preaching in all corners of the world as a lesson or adding knowledge to acknowledge the oneness of Allah. Invite and direct people not to fall into duping God or lead to disbelief. Generally, the purpose of the mosque is to be used as a place of worship for Muslims; even when it is used as a tourist spot, the purpose of the mosque does not change. In addition, the mosque can also be used as a medium of education for Muslims to add insight into the Islamic world, increase faith to always unite Allah, and prevent Muslims from falling into disobedience.

Another goal of making the Sheikh Zayed Mosque a tourist destination is to improve the quality of worship for visitors and to increase visitor interest in evidence of Islamic civilization in Indonesia, one of which is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Religious tourism in the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is beneficial for visitors. The first is to remind

people of their death. In Surah Ali-Imran verse 185, it is stated that every soul, including humans, will die. Death will come to anyone, wherever and whenever, regardless of position or rich or poor. By participating in religious tourism, visitors can remember that all humans will die, including visitors themselves, and that way visitors can prepare as much provision as possible for the afterlife because this world is a temporary shelter. The second factor is the ability to meet visitors' spiritual needs. Because the souls and hearts of visitors require spiritual cleansing, holding or participating in religious tours with friends or family can be an alternative to meeting the spiritual needs of visitors. Finally, letting go of boredom. Many visitors have reasons to come to mosques or other religious tourism sites just to find peace of mind from the boredom of worldly life and get closer to Allah.

Based on the current phenomena, the findings of this study have shown that there has been a shift in the goals of religious tourism destinations from those that used to be pilgrimages to tombs and now shift to visits to major mosques, one of which is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. As explained in [Figure 1](#).

**Figure 1**

*Transformation of Religious Tourism Destinations*



Source: Primary data. Authors' analysis.

Etymologically, transformation comes from English, namely “transform” which means controlling a form from one form to another (Fachrunnisa et al., 2020). Whereas in Indonesian “transformation” is defined as change, changing from a previous state to a completely new one. Transformation, in terminology, is a change to a thing or situation. Social transformation is the process of changing society from agrarian to industrial. This transformation process also changes the patterns of social relations in various manifestations. Transformation is a change from one form to another that can occur while achieving a goal and avoiding the risk of punishment or winning a competition (Toscano-Jara et al., 2023). Transformation can also be interpreted as a continuous process of dialectical historical bargaining that results in major changes in form. Another definition explains that transformation is a process of changing social characteristics at a certain time (Lopez-Gonzalez, 2018). Thus, it can be understood that transformation is a process of change that takes place dialectically in society and produces a change to achieve a certain goal.

Based on the above theory and definition, it can be understood that transformation is closely related to changes from one form to another. The findings of this study explain the process of change and transformation of religious tourism destinations, which are usually pilgrimages to visits to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque.

### **Impact of Religious Tourism Destinations Sheikh Zayed Mosque**

A destination is a place that is visited within a significant amount of time during a person’s journey compared with other places that are passed during the trip or transit areas. A place must have both actual and legal boundaries. The development of religious tourism destinations in the Sheikh Zayed Mosque requires precise planning. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque development technique has been able to combine several aspects to support the success of religious tourism. These aspects are accessibility (transportation and marketing

channels), characteristics of tourism infrastructure, level of social interaction, linkage or compatibility with other sectors, resilience to the impact of religious tourism, and the resistance level of local communities in Solo.

According to one of the visitors, Ulfa, the facilities available at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque are quite complete and good. However, she regretted that many visitors were more concerned with photographs than with worship. She hoped that administrators would discipline visitors when approaching prayer time. According to her, worship is more important than taking pictures when the time for prayer arrives (Ulfa, personal communication, 2023).

Another visitor from Kendal, Muhammad (63), joined a group from his village in Dramajo in five cars to go to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo.

“Yesterday I found out from TV and I was curious. When you come here, it is very satisfying. The building is satisfying compared to the others,” (Muhammad, personal communication, 2023).

The impact of developing a religious tourism destination at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque can be explained as follows:

### ***Economic Impact of Sheikh Zayed Mosque Religious Tourism***

The religious tourism destinations of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque visited by tourists can be seen as temporary consumers. They come to the area for a certain period, use their resources and facilities, usually pay for various purposes, and then leave the place to return to their home or country. If there are so many tourists who come to these destinations and spend so much money to buy various necessities during their holidays, it cannot be denied that this will have an impact on the economic life of the area, both directly and indirectly. The economic impact it generates can be positive or negative.

There are many positive impacts of religious tourism on the Sheikh Zayed Mosque on the economy, including the following: 1)

Income from foreign exchange. 2) A healthy foreign trade balance. 3) Income from businesses or tourism businesses. 4) Government revenue. 5) Labor absorption. 6) Multiplier effects. 7) Utilization of tourism facilities by local communities (Aman et al., 2019).

In addition to the positive impact of religious tourism at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque on the economy, as described above, it cannot be denied that there are also some negative impacts of religious tourism at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque on the economy of a region or country. However, generally, these negative impacts have a smaller magnitude than positive impacts. These negative impacts include the following: 1) excessive dependence on tourism; 2) increasing inflation and skyrocketing land prices; 3) increasing the tendency to import materials needed in tourism to prevent local products from being absorbed; 4) the seasonal nature of tourism cannot be accurately predicted, causing the return on investment capital to be uncertain in time; and 5) the emergence of other additional costs for the local economy.

Economic globalization and the expansion of world markets are two historical phenomena (Li, 2022). Today's economic globalization and market expansion have unprecedented power, scope, and speed. Concretely, economic globalization is marked by a change in the mode of production of society, namely, from subsistence to the orientation of regional markets. Institutionally incarnated in commercial acceleration. The resulting impact is social change, such as the spread of individual actions based more on economic rationality.

### ***Social Impact of Sheikh Zayed Mosque Religious Tourism***

Tourism activities tend to lead to activities of social action in the sense that tourism activities are closely related to the behavior of each individual. Travel groups and the influence of tourism activities in society. With the development of tourism, people are free to move from one place to another and from one environment to another with

completely different nations and religions. Traveling people have direct contact with people of other nationalities and environments at their destinations, get to know each other, and introduce customs, culture, and beliefs (Fourie et al., 2015). Tourists have different habits, behaviors, and desires that are contrary to the way of life of the people they visit. This phenomenon can make the religious tourism sector of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque something that is considered sensitive and can affect relations between nations.

Therefore, religious tourism in the Sheikh Zayed Mosque creates social contact between people. This social contract implies the following: 1) Providing opportunities for both parties to get to know each other's culture within certain limits. 2) Provide opportunities for both parties to get to know the basic attitudes of the association.

The religious tourism of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque includes the activities of moving several people who travel individually or in groups. Tourism is an important cross-cultural manifestation, because it is a gathering of people from various nations with different backgrounds and diverse social environments. In the form of interaction between tourists and the local community, tourists spend time in places that are exclusive and luxurious and have fun according to their way. They lazed on the beach, eating sumptuous and abundant food. Residents serve as restaurant waiters, dishwashers, security guards, etc.

An excerpt from an interview with visitors to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque revealed that Idatul Ilmiyah (47) admitted that he was amazed when he stepped into the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo. Incessantly, he uttered tasbih sentences when he entered and headed several parts of the mosque.

“This is called *tadabur al-'alam* with a very Arabic feel, which is very spectacular for me; the building is amazing. Very good. I came here earlier, *Subhanallah* we have never been to Mecca, but when you look



here, your heart is immediately touched' (Idatul Ilmiyah, personal communication, 2023).

### ***Cultural Impact of Sheikh Zayed Mosque Religious Tourism***

One of the most positive results of understanding the culture of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque religious tourism community is cross-cultural awareness, which increases mutual understanding between people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. Opportunities to exchange knowledge, ideals, and traditions are more open today than ever before. Apart from simply satisfying curiosity, tourism promotes international goodwill and exchanges cultural values. Many manifestations of the traditional culture are sacred. If this is presented to tourists, there is a shift in value. Sacred values become spectacle and are rewarded with a certain amount of money. This shift in values is often regarded as a damaging culture (Shinde & Olsen, 2023).

Meanwhile, the Indonesian government, in developing the Sheikh Zayed Mosque's religious tourism, will still pay attention to the maintenance of national culture and personality. This statement is confirmed by Law No. 9 of 1990. It cannot be suspected that a large number of tourists arriving economically has an impact on tourist destinations. However, the overall impact, including the impact on sociocultural life, is difficult to calculate.

The changes that occur in the community around the tourist attraction are a consequence of the construction or development of religious tourism at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Conceptually, the changes that occur are the result of the emergence of the process of acculturation between the culture of the people around the object and the culture brought by visiting tourists. In this process, there is mutual influence between the culture of the surrounding community and the culture of tourists. The findings of this study are supported by Abu-

Alhaija et al. (2018), who found that integrating cultural and religious influences can increase customer loyalty.

In this study, the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is highlighted as an example of how religious tourism is changing in Solo, Indonesia. The astonishing metamorphosis of this architectural wonder from a pilgrimage site to a diversified tourist destination reflects the general global trend of religious attractions and broadens their appeal. According to this study, Solo's Sheikh Zayed Mosque represents religious tolerance and cross-cultural exchange. It was first constructed to serve the neighborhood's Muslim community, but it now warmly welcomes guests of all origins and faiths. This welcoming attitude has helped the mosque become a well-liked tourist attraction, drawing both visitors and academics to its magnificent architecture and the peaceful coexistence it symbolizes.

This study also emphasizes the significance of eco-friendly tourism strategies. While maintaining the site's sacredness, local authorities invested in infrastructural improvements to create a visitor-friendly atmosphere. This harmony between accessibility and preservation has been crucial to the mosque's successful transformation from a pilgrimage to a well-known tourist destination around the world. This research also emphasizes the importance of digital technology in promoting mosques. People from all over the world may now experience the mosque's beauty and spirituality via social media platforms and virtual tours, igniting interest and bringing more tourists to Solo.

The evolution of religious tourism destinations is best illustrated by the Sheikh Zayed Mosque in Solo, which went from being a pilgrimage site to a mosque with international appeal. The promise of its religious legacy has been fully realized by Solo by embracing diversity, sustainable development, and digital marketing. This has helped Solo's tourism sector to grow. This case study provides

insightful information for other locations seeking to reconcile and maintain their religious value by drawing a wide variety of tourists.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research concluded that religious tourism can be interpreted as a journey undertaken by a person or group of people temporarily to enjoy objects and attractions at the destination, one of which is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. Religious tourism to the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is carried out to take lessons from Allah's creation and the history of human civilization. Religious tourism at the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is interpreted as a tourism activity in a place that has a special meaning because the Sheikh Zayed Mosque is a religious center where it is used for mahdhah worship and social worship. Based on the current phenomena, the findings of this study have shown that there has been a shift in the goals of religious tourism destinations from those that used to be pilgrimages to tombs and now shift to visits to major mosques, one of which is the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. These findings support the transformation process, which is closely related to the changes from one form to another. The findings of this study explain the process of changing religious tourism destinations, which are usually pilgrimages to visit the Sheikh Zayed Mosque. The existence of the Sheikh Zayed Mosque had a positive impact on financial changes in the surrounding community. Starting from changes in education, the economy, insight, and the mindset of life. People who previously made a living as farm laborers and were more unemployed are now becoming more productive by being self-employed and creating jobs. Thus, people's incomes increased significantly.

### **Author Contributions**

Conceptualization: H.H.A. & M.S.; Data curation: H.H.A. & M.S.; Formal analysis: H.H.A. & M.S.; Funding acquisition: H.H.A. & M.S.; Investigation: H.H.A. & M.S.; Methodology: H.H.A. & M.S.; Project administration: H.H.A. &

M.S.; Resources: H.H.A. & M.S.; Software: H.H.A. & M.S.; Supervision: H.H.A. & M.S.; Validation: H.H.A. & M.S.; Visualization: H.H.A. & M.S.; Writing – original draft: H.H.A. & M.S.; Writing – review & editing: H.H.A. & M.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent for this study was obtained through verbal agreement to participate in survey.

## **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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