



BEST PRACTICE OF SUSTAINABLE HALAL TOURISM IN RUBIAH ISLAND, SABANG, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate implementing sustainable halal tourism practices on Rubiah Island, Sabang, Indonesia, emphasizing the integration of local wisdom rooted in Acehese culture and Islamic Sharia principles. The study examines how these elements contribute to a unique form of tourism that respects religious and cultural diversity. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through literature review, stakeholder interviews, and field observations. Data analysis involved thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights regarding the influence of Acehese local wisdom and Islamic Sharia principles on tourism practices on the island. Key sustainable tourism practices include halal-certified activities such as environmentally responsible snorkeling, promoting hospitality, and dolphin-friendly tourism that minimizes disturbances to marine habitats. Notably, Rubiah Island adheres to a policy of no permanent structures, maintains curated tour packages, highlights its historical significance, and is near protected forest areas. These efforts underscore Rubiah Island's commitment to sustainable tourism principles, aiming to preserve its natural beauty and cultural heritage while providing a halal-friendly experience for visitors. This research contributes to understanding how sustainable practices can be harmoniously integrated with Islamic values and local customs to enhance tourism development in Aceh.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, halal tourism, Rubiah island.

INTRODUCTION

Halal tourism is currently a serious topic of discussion in various countries. In Malaysia, for example, the local government, through the Islamic Tourism Center (ITC), has released the Muslim-Friendly Accommodation Recognition (MFAR) logo. This action shows the seriousness of the Malaysian government under the Ministry of Tourism to make its country the first halal tourist destination in the world (DinarStandard 2022). In addition, the Department of Culture and Tourism - Abu Dhabi has also issued tourism quality standards and a licensing framework to improve the quality of its tourism and compete in the global halal tourism industry. On the other hand, Turkey is also serious about preparing the halal industry and Islamic hotels. Although there are no halal hotel standards in Turkey, Turkey is quite serious about capturing opportunities in the hotel sector that fall into the category of Islamic Hotels. Currently, Turkey has



recorded around 140 hotels that can have halal standards, most of which focus on managing halal food certificates (COMCEC 2017).

The economic potential of halal tourism is very high; this is why many Muslim countries are serious about capturing the opportunities of the halal tourism market. From the analysis conducted by The Halal Tourism Market managed by International and Domestic Tours, it is estimated that the world's halal tourism market will be around USD 276 billion in 2024 and will increase to USD 417 billion in 2034, or grow by around 3.6% in a decade. The sector of halal tourism in Indonesia is undergoing a period of growth and improvement. Through the National Committee for Islamic Economics and Finance (KNEKS), Indonesia has created a Master Plan for Islamic Economics and Finance for 2019-2024 (KNEKS 2018). One of the areas focused on is Halal Tourism and Recreation. Some recommendations from the Master Plan for halal tourism in Indonesia are to prepare halal tourism packages, carry out halal tourism branding on social media and formulate laws (Wahyudin et al. 2022). In the appendix to the speech of the President of the Republic of Indonesia in celebrating Indonesia's Independence Day in 2023, the President also encouraged the formation of a new master plan in the halal industry and sharia economy in Indonesia.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has progressively supported the halal industry (Fitri and Mardiah 2023). The Ministry of Religious Affairs has issued 3,763,413 halal certifications for small and medium enterprises in Indonesia through the Halal Product Guarantee Agency (HPGA). This figure is threefold the government's initial target of one million halal certifications. The growing number of halal certifications for food products will significantly contribute to the advancement of halal tourism in Indonesia (Talib, Chin, and Fischer 2017; Ishak et al. 2020). In light of these developments, the Indonesian government has demonstrated a commitment to the management of halal tourism (Ajidin and Fatimah 2022). Conversely, the community also benefits from the growth of halal tourism, as it stimulates economic growth and provides a source of income for the community (Herawati et al. 2023). In some locations, numerous private enterprises are capitalising on the potential of halal tourism to expand their businesses, with the establishment of sharia-compliant hotels, halal travel agencies, and halal restaurants, among other ventures (Keliat and Sentanu 2022). While halal tourism was initially conceived to provide a comfortable and convenient experience for Muslim tourists, it is now a destination that non-Muslims and individuals from all backgrounds can enjoy.

The Indonesian government's initiatives in developing halal tourism have been recognized with international awards. In 2024, Indonesia was designated the Top Muslim-Friendly Destination of the Year. Furthermore, Indonesia received 12 out of 16 awards at the 2016 World Halal Tourism Award (WHTA) in Abu Dhabi. According to 12 awards, three pilot areas in Indonesia are identified as benchmarks of halal tourism in Indonesia: Aceh, West Sumatra and West Nusa Tenggara. In the WHTA category, Aceh won the World's Best Halal Cultural Destination award. West Sumatra was selected as the World's Best Halal Destination and the World's Best Halal Culinary Destination. At the same time, West Nusa Tenggara was honoured with the title of World's Best Halal Honeymoon Destination. This study discusses Aceh as one of the halal tourism destinations in Indonesia. Aceh is unique as the only province in Indonesia that



implements Islamic law and has transformed into a laboratory for sharia and legal research—one of the sharia fields that the Aceh Provincial (Muis 2020). The Aceh government's concern for the halal tourism sector is manifested in the issuance of Banda Aceh City Qanun Number 3 of 2022 concerning implementing Halal Tourism of 2022 concerning the Implementation of Halal Tourism (Adistira, 2022). This regulation emphasizes the importance of organizing tourism in various tourist areas in Banda Aceh City so that it remains within the limits of Islamic law (Huda 2022).

Despite these advancements, significant research gaps exist in examining how halal tourism practices in Indonesia align with sustainability principles, particularly in regions like Aceh. While government policies emphasize Islamic compliance, they do not adequately address potential conflicts or synergies between halal tourism and sustainable tourism objectives, such as environmental preservation, community well-being, and long-term economic benefits (Ramli, Marzuki, and Badarulzaman 2024). Prior research on halal tourism in Indonesia has focused mainly on economic and regulatory aspects (Ishak et al. 2020; Ajidin and Fatimah 2022), with limited analysis of local communities' environmental impacts or socio-economic outcomes. Additionally, the unique environmental setting of destinations like Rubiah Island, which relies on fragile marine ecosystems to attract tourists, poses challenges in balancing growth with sustainability.

This study addresses the gap in understanding how halal tourism can be harmonized with sustainable tourism objectives in an ecologically sensitive destination. Rubiah Island, a popular site for snorkelling and dolphin-watching in Sabang City, Aceh Province, presents both an opportunity and a challenge. While it attracts significant tourist interest, there is limited research on the environmental impact of tourism activities, such as coral degradation from snorkelling or disruptions to marine life. Moreover, the socio-economic impacts of halal tourism on local communities, including income distribution and employment stability, are underexplored in current literature. This study fills these gaps by examining the practices, benefits, and challenges of implementing sustainable halal tourism on Rubiah Island.

This research is urgent due to the increasing pressures on Rubiah Island's natural environment and the potential for unregulated tourism to degrade its ecosystems, thereby threatening biodiversity and tourism appeal. Additionally, as Indonesia seeks to position itself as a leader in halal tourism, there is a pressing need to demonstrate that halal tourism can coexist with sustainable tourism goals. This study offers original insights into how halal principles can enhance or complement sustainable tourism practices, such as environmental stewardship and community engagement.

The objectives of this study are to evaluate the implementation of halal tourism practices on Rubiah Island and their alignment with sustainable tourism principles; analyse the environmental and socio-economic impacts of tourism on Rubiah Island, focusing on coral reef health and community livelihoods; and identify best practices and potential improvements for sustainable halal tourism in ecologically sensitive areas. This research is expected to contribute to the academic literature by providing a case study on sustainable halal tourism in a marine tourism setting. Practical implications include recommendations for



policymakers and stakeholders in Indonesia on developing tourism frameworks that integrate Islamic principles with sustainability, ensuring long-term benefits for both the environment and local communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Rubiah Island

Rubiah Island is located north of Weh Island in Sabang City, Aceh Province, Indonesia. The island is less than 100 meters from Iboih Beach on Weh Island. The island is named after a woman and a proud figure of the Acehnese people named Siti Rubiah, who lived there until the end of her life (Yulsafli and Erfinawati 2022). She was the wife of an Acehnese cleric named Tengku Ibrahim or Tengku Iboih. They were instrumental in spreading Islam in the Aceh region, especially the Weh Island area where they settled.

Rubiah Island is also historical evidence of the implementation of the Hajj pilgrimage in the Dutch colonial era (Fauzan 2016). Rubiah Island was a quarantine place for prospective Indonesian Hajj pilgrims who wanted to visit Mecca and Medina. In the past, every prospective Hajj pilgrim was required to stay on Rubiah Island for 40 days to prevent the spread of disease when they were about to leave for the Hajj. The Dutch colonial government built the accommodation for prospective Hajj pilgrims in 1920 on the island. Until now, evidence of historical buildings left by the Dutch is still visible on Rubiah Island, although in an unkempt condition.

The situation in Rubiah Island is now different from that of the Dutch colonial era. Apart from the former quarantine building for Hajj pilgrims in the colonial era, the island has no unique accommodation. Although during the day it is crowded with traders and tourists, at night it is quiet again because traders, tour and travel service providers and tourists will vacate Rubiah Island to stay around Iboih Beach, Sabang, or in other areas on Weh Island. Much clean water is supplied from Weh Island and transported to Rubiah Island. The primary means of transportation that residents and tourists can use to visit Rubiah Island is riding a traditional boat owned by residents.

Halal Tourism Concept

Halal tourism has become a fascinating study in scientific forums in Islamic Economics. Experts have different opinions regarding halal tourism, but generally, their opinions complement each other. In general, the word "halal" means not only a prohibition and limitation in consuming something for Muslims (Hendrawan and Muslichah 2023; Sholihin 2024). Halal also has a moral dimension and benefits for its followers (Talib 2017). Initially, halal was used so that every Muslim would remain obedient to consuming products permitted by religion and in good condition (Ajidin and Fatimah 2022). Consuming halal food shows a Muslim's commitment and consistency in obeying the rules of Islam.

The command to consume halal and good food in Islam has become one of the indicators for a Muslim to test his faith and obedience (Arsil et al. 2018). Furthermore, the terminology of halal tourism appears in various academic studies, including the terms halal tourism and Islamic tourism. Both terms have the same meaning: a journey undertaken by a Muslim who remains by the



principles of Islamic law (Zidni et al. 2023). However, some literature agrees that halal tourism refers to travel that is intended for recreation but does not violate Islamic religious rules. While Islamic tourism is a journey aimed at religious and pilgrimage purposes (Putra and Tucunan 2021).

Islamic tourism is a journey to worship Allah, which includes the hajj and umrah, as well as the pilgrimage of guardians (Zidni et al. 2023). Halal tourism is an ordinary journey that emphasizes worship facilities, halal food and halal services such as Sharia hotels (Boğan and Saruşıık 2019). Halal tourism requires a Muslim to choose a comfortable destination that does not conflict with Islamic prohibitions (Suban, Madhan, and Shagirbasha 2023). In addition, a Muslim must ensure the halalness of the products he consumes and the facilities he uses are far from sin. Forms of facilities that are prohibited in Islam include gambling places, entertainment venues that expose the aurat and lead to promiscuity, and places that eat forbidden foods such as alcohol and pork (Amalia et al. 2024).

In implementing halal tourism policies, some parties believe that halal branding must be built to gain economic value for the progress of tourism in a region (Purwandani and Yusuf 2021). However, other opinions say that the most important thing in halal tourism is how a Muslim can carry out his worship activities comfortably, even when travelling to a place (Slamet, Abdullah, and Laila 2022). The current concept of halal tourism also requires sustainable development (Hassib and Ibtissem 2020). Sustainable tourism includes economic, environmental, and social development (Richardson 2021). Halal tourism should benefit economic development and maintain the sustainability of nature and the social environment. Another definition currently developing is the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism, which provides comfort for a Muslim to visit the location (Azam, Abdullah, and Razak 2019).

There needs to be a redefinition of the concept of halal tourism, Islamic tourism or Muslim-friendly tourism. Halal tourism should provide comfort for Muslims who want to travel, but non-Muslim tourists can also enjoy it (Jia and Chaozhi 2020). As for Islamic tourism, it does require that it can only be done by Muslims because it is related to the worship of Allah. Muslim-friendly tourism is generally located in areas with a non-Muslim majority, so non-Muslims can, of course, visit there (Dabphet 2021). However, Muslim-friendly tourism should provide convenience for Muslim visitors to remain comfortable in worship and get halal food (Cuesta-Valiño, Bolifa, and Núñez-Barriopedro 2020).

Sustainable Halal Tourism and Environmental Protection

Sustainable halal tourism can mean the sustainability of implementing halal-based tourism that the government or community has planned (Adinugraha et al. 2021). However, in this study, sustainable halal tourism refers to halal tourism accompanied by environmental preservation (Azam, Abdullah, and Razak 2019). In previous studies in the field of halal tourism, many defined halal tourism as tourism that is by sharia and does not conflict with Islamic prohibitions (Herawati et al. 2023). Meanwhile, this study adds and refines the meaning of sustainable halal tourism as halal tourism that also pays attention to environmental issues.

An important reason why this study discusses environmental preservation is the recommendation of Islam, which asks its followers not to damage the



environment and to maintain the natural environment so that this earth is not damaged. The command of Islam regarding the recommendation to protect the environment is contained in the Al-Quran, Surah Al-A'raf verse 56, which reads:

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا وَادْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Meaning: "Do not spread corruption in the land after it has been set in order. And call upon Him with hope and fear. Indeed, Allah's mercy is always close to the good-doers".

Islam commands its adherents to protect the environment and offers sustainable resource management (Bsoul et al. 2022). The implementation of Islamic rules also contributes to maintaining environmental problems. Muslims, on the one hand, can play a role in maintaining the environment that is still naturally preserved, but on the other hand, they also repair the damage that has occurred (Zulfikar et al. 2023). Furthermore, Islam requires its adherents to safeguard the natural environment and provide guidance on the sustainable management of resources (Nanda et al. 2023). The implementation of Islamic principles can also facilitate the maintenance of environmental quality. Muslims can contribute to preserving natural environments and simultaneously address the damage that has already occurred (Bsoul et al. 2022).

In another verse, the Prophet Muhammad motivated Muslims to protect the environment by planting plants. The benefits obtained are not only a source of income but also alms for other living things. "If a Muslim plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, it is regarded as a charitable gift (*sadaqah*) for him" (Bukhari). The hadith emphasizes that protecting the environment is a basic human need, especially for Muslims (Nasir et al., 2022). Therefore, sustainable halal tourism can be interpreted as a tourism concept that prioritizes the principles of ease of worship, ease of obtaining halal products, avoiding sinful behaviour, and maintaining the environment at tourist destination locations.

Government and Stakeholder Initiatives in Halal Tourism

The Indonesian government has made substantial efforts to develop halal tourism, mainly through policies and frameworks to improve tourism infrastructure and promote halal branding. For instance, the Master Plan for Islamic Economics and Finance includes strategies for social media branding, halal certifications, and developing Sharia-compliant tourism facilities (KNEKS 2018). However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in promoting sustainability still needs to be explored. While government initiatives have led to notable achievements, such as Indonesia's recognition as a top Muslim-friendly destination, their impact on local communities and environmental health in tourism hotspots like Rubiah Island requires further examination.

Moreover, while halal branding can enhance economic value and attract Muslim tourists, it may conflict with sustainable tourism principles if not managed thoughtfully. For example, high visitor numbers might boost the local economy temporarily. However, they can contribute to environmental degradation if proper waste management, water conservation, and habitat protection measures are still implemented. This study thus highlights the need for a critical analysis of how these government and stakeholder initiatives align—or potentially conflict—



with sustainable tourism goals, specifically in the context of fragile ecosystems and community well-being.

A critical area of analysis in halal tourism is the potential tension between the pursuit of economic gains and the commitment to environmental and social sustainability. While halal tourism aims to provide a comfortable and morally aligned experience for Muslim travellers, the emphasis on economic growth can inadvertently lead to unsustainable practices. High visitor influx, if unmanaged, risks damaging ecosystems, particularly in destinations dependent on natural resources, like Rubiah Island. Tourism-driven habitat destruction can harm coral reefs, marine life, and water resources, contradicting Islamic values of environmental preservation and sustainability principles.

On the other hand, halal tourism can synergize with sustainability by promoting responsible resource use and ethical consumption practices (Rhama 2022). For instance, halal tourism facilities prioritizing eco-friendly practices, such as sustainable seafood and waste reduction, can set an example for broader sustainable tourism efforts. Also, halal tourism can encourage Muslim and non-Muslim tourists to adopt sustainable behaviours by emphasizing respect for local culture and Islamic teachings on environmental stewardship (Bosone, Nocca, and Pirelli 2024). This study explores these synergies and tensions, contributing to understanding how halal tourism can align with long-term sustainability objectives.

While significant research has examined the economic and regulatory aspects of halal tourism, there remains a critical need for studies focusing on its environmental and social dimensions. Existing literature lacks comprehensive insights into the environmental impact of tourism practices on Rubiah Island's marine ecosystems, specifically regarding coral reef health and water resources. Additionally, little research has been conducted on halal tourism's economic impact on local communities regarding income distribution, employment stability, and community well-being. This study seeks to expand the discourse on halal tourism and its implications for sustainable development in ecologically sensitive regions by addressing these gaps.

METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative. Moreover, this study's data collection method is based on primary and secondary data sources. Three research approaches were used to ensure a comprehensive analysis: (1) Literature review: this approach aims to understand the concept of sustainable and halal tourism. Data sources from this approach come from academic journals, books, and tourism reports. The output to be obtained is to see the perspective of previous research on the same topic, sustainable and halal tourism practices in different locations, and gaps compared to previous literature. A literature review is used to track tourism developments on Rubiah Island in previous years and match previous literature claims with current conditions. (2) Stakeholder interviews: aims to gain insight from stakeholders regarding tourism practices on Rubiah Island. The interviewees were local government officials, tourism actors, and tourists. Five people were interviewed in this study: one local government official named Ferdi (34 years old), two tourism actor named Jun and Warih, and two



visitors named Okta (38 years old) and Zaidul (26 years old). The interview approach used snowball questions to obtain in-depth responses in January and July 2024. The output of this interview was to obtain key themes from the stakeholder's perspective. (3) Field observation aims to find out the current conditions of the natural environment at the research location and to directly see the practice of sustainable halal tourism on Rubiah Island. The procedure is to visit Rubiah Island directly. The method is to conduct direct field documentation and make detailed observational notes. The output of this approach is to obtain a detailed observation report on the current situation on Rubiah Island in terms of infrastructure, services and environmental impacts.

The steps in this study match the results of the literature review analysis with the results of stakeholder interviews. Furthermore, the results of the interviews will be confirmed for their truth with field observations conducted. The research framework can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Research Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This research focuses on implementing sustainable halal tourism policies in Rubiah Island. The anticipated form of sustainable halal tourism is contingent upon the availability of halal facilities, the preservation of the natural environment, and the acculturation of local Acehese culture in a manner consistent with the principles of halal tourism. Therefore, this research will be divided into three stages, with results and a discussion referring to previously presented methods.

Literature Review Results

In light of Sabang City's considerable tourism potential, including Rubiah Island, the local government is committed to enhancing tourism services and fostering innovation. The government's support for the tourism industry encompasses not only the improvement of the sector itself but also the development of supporting factors, particularly in the economic domain. This is based on sharia principles and local legislation. The Sabang City Government, in collaboration with the Sabang City Tourism Office, the Religious Office, Islamic financial institutions, the MSME development sector, and other industries, is spearheading this initiative (Zalikhha 2015).

The actual practice of the halal industry is carried out on Weh Island, Sabang City, by prioritizing the availability of halal facilities and infrastructure. This can be proven by adequate worship facilities and accommodation (Sharia hotels), fast services during Ramadan, halal food and drinks availability, and

family-friendly facilities. In addition, halal tourism practices also limit activities that do not follow Islamic Sharia law, such as being free of alcoholic beverages and restrictions on activities that are not by Sharia principles; even tourism services during the month of Ramadan tend to be limited in order to uphold the holy month of Muslims (Suciani et al. 2022).

Although Rubiah Island, Sabang City, upholds the concept of halal tourism, this tourist spot is not limited to Muslims but is open to all characters of tourists with diverse backgrounds. In addition to various regions in Indonesia, tourists who come to this western corner island of Indonesia are also recorded as coming from all over the country, such as Europe, Asia, America, and Africa, where they have different educational and religious backgrounds. All tourists are identified as carrying out activities comfortably and peacefully, enjoying halal tourism on Rubiah Island (Septian and Amri 2018).

The mention of non-Muslim tourists visiting Rubiah Island is an important aspect that warrants further exploration. While Rubiah Island, Sabang City, upholds the principles of halal tourism, it is a destination open to all tourists, regardless of religious or cultural background. Visitors come from various regions in Indonesia and international locations such as Europe, Asia, America, and Africa, bringing diverse educational and religious perspectives. This diversity raises interesting questions about how the island balances inclusivity with its commitment to halal standards.

This balance would add valuable insight into how Rubiah Island meets the needs of non-Muslim tourists while upholding Sharia-compliant practices. For instance, explore whether accommodations and services on the island are adapted to ensure that all tourists, including non-Muslims, feel welcome and comfortable. Such an analysis could highlight how the island navigates cultural inclusivity, providing a model for other destinations that combine halal tourism with sustainable, inclusive practices.

Rubiah Island, though uninhabited, has become one of the main tourism destinations in Sabang City, particularly known for its snorkeling opportunities. Semi-permanent structures, such as kiosks and trading stalls, have been set up on the island to serve the needs of tourists, offering refreshments and local products from residents of nearby areas. The island's attraction lies in its pristine coral reefs, which are well-maintained and support a rich marine ecosystem, attracting tourists seeking unique snorkeling experiences (Purbani, Kepel, and Takwir 2014). The presence of these coral reefs draws various species of sea fish, adding to the island's appeal as an ecotourism destination.

Stakeholder Interviews Results

To strengthen the research findings, interviews about sustainable halal tourism in Rubiah Island were conducted with three parties: tourists, tourism actors and local policymakers. In an interview with Okta (July 2024), a tourist from Pacitan, East Java, information was obtained that the implementation of halal tourism has occurred on Rubiah Island. One thing he felt was the easy access to consuming halal food. Rubiah Island is part of Aceh, so when halal implementation is carried out in the tourism sector, it will have an excellent impact on tourists, especially Muslims, because they will not have to worry about the halalness of food consumption. Apart from that, he suggested additional



variations of typical Acehnese cuisine so that tourists from outside the region can experience different tastes.

In another interview with Zaidul (July 2024), tourists from Bengkulu also felt the optimal service when visiting Rubiah Island. He also felt the implementation of halal tourism on the island, such as the availability of halal food, maintained clothing and friendly service. Halal tourism in Rubiah Island is not surprising because the island is located in Aceh. He also said that during his visit, Rubiah had an exemplary implementation of halal tourism, such as food, dress code and tourist services; these tourists also encouraged local communities to support this halal tourism, not only to increase the number of tourists but also for economic progress.

The following interview was conducted with Warih (July 2024), one of the tourism actors who viewed that tourism management on Rubiah Island prioritizes excellent service to all tourists without discrimination based on ethnicity and religion. Another advantage is that the price of the tourism services offered is competitive. Different from several tours in other areas that offer overpriced tours. In addition, there is an adequate availability of halal food based on local food. The snorkelling experience on Rubiah Island is one of the primary attractions for tourists, drawn by the island's clear waters and vibrant coral reefs. The snorkelling area around Rubiah Island is highly regarded for its biodiversity, including well-preserved coral formations and various species of tropical fish. It is a favourite destination for nature enthusiasts and underwater photographers alike. Strict environmental guidelines and best practices are enforced within the snorkelling tourism services to ensure this natural beauty remains intact.

One significant aspect of snorkelling operations on Rubiah Island is the requirement that all snorkelling guides are certified. This certification ensures that guides possess comprehensive knowledge of safety protocols and environmental conservation practices. Certified guides are trained in techniques to responsibly lead snorkelling tours, such as maintaining safe distances from coral reefs and educating tourists on avoiding accidental damage to marine life. This also includes awareness of handling emergencies and ensuring visitors' safe and enjoyable experience. Moreover, strict prohibitions are against actions that might harm the coral reef ecosystem. Tour operators enforce rules prohibiting touching, standing on, or removing pieces of coral and fishing or collecting marine species within the snorkelling zone. These guidelines are communicated to visitors before they enter the water, often through briefings conducted by the guides. Some tour operators provide written materials or signage to reinforce these conservation rules further. Additionally, boats must anchor only in designated areas away from sensitive coral sites, preventing anchor damage to the reefs. Local authorities and community members occasionally conduct environmental monitoring and clean-up activities to support these efforts. This collaborative approach helps preserve the island's natural resources and builds community engagement in tourism management. By protecting the coral reefs, Rubiah Island not only upholds the principles of sustainable and halal tourism but also ensures that future generations can continue to experience its underwater beauty. This commitment to conservation has earned Rubiah Island a reputation as an ecotourism destination, attracting responsible tourists who appreciate both the natural environment and the island's respectful approach to preserving it.



Although Rubiah Island invites many tourists, all snorkelling activities are temporarily closed during Ramadan and based on the results of interviews with Jun (January 6, 2024) travel business actors. During Ramadan, snorkelling facilities, such as diving equipment and others, cannot be displayed around Rubiah Island. This rule applies in Sabang and Rubiah Island and is supported by the local community. This fact is proof of the implementation of Islamic law and halal tourism in the Rubiah Island area. The implementation of halal tourism in Sabang, including Rubiah Island, prioritizes friendliness and comfort for visiting tourists. This statement was conveyed by Ferdi (January 5, 2024), one of the stakeholders who is the Deputy of the DPRD in Sabang City. Compared to other areas in Aceh, the Sabang community is more heterogeneous and comes from various tribes and religions, so the Sabang community has more tolerance for differences, religious moderation, and friendliness when welcoming foreign guests.

Field Observation Results

Field observations were conducted in January 2024 to examine current conditions on Rubiah Island and to compare these observations with findings from literature and stakeholder interviews. Field findings will confirm the data that has been collected and can also complement the findings of previous studies. The methodology for field observation included structured checklists, photographic documentation, and informal discussions with community members and tourists to ensure a thorough and objective assessment. This structured approach helped validate the observed facilities and services, reducing subjective bias and enhancing the reliability of findings.

Based on the observation, halal tourism facilities on Rubiah Island have begun to be established. In contrast to previous studies, which stated that there was no praying room on Rubiah Island (Ningrum, Hendradewi, and Marzwan 2019), in observations conducted in January 2024, there was already a prayer room on the island. Still, according to Ningrum, Hendradewi, and Marzwan (2019), there are no toilets on Rubiah Island, but current facts show that there are already toilets there. However, the research results of Ningrum, Hendradewi, and Marzwan (2019) stated that there are no clean water facilities on Rubiah Island; it is true. In fact, currently, there is still no source of clean water on the island, especially in the area of Rubiah Island Beach. Even if there is, the amount of clean water is minimal.

Regarding food services, the availability of halal food on Rubiah Island is notably high. This observation was based on visual confirmation of semi-permanent food stalls and conversations with stall owners. However, to provide a more objective evaluation, it would be beneficial to include quantitative data, such as the number of stalls, types of food available, and whether these stalls hold halal certification, strengthening the claim of “abundant” availability. Regarding sustainable tourism practices, the community shows commendable awareness and action toward environmental preservation. Waste is minimal around tourist areas, likely due to community-driven clean-up efforts. Local tour operators emphasize coral and fish conservation for snorkelling, as evidenced by certified guides and responsible diving practices. While these efforts indicate positive steps toward environmental stewardship, further evaluation of enforcement measures is needed



to assess the long-term effectiveness of these practices. Community services were observed to be very friendly, which was corroborated by informal feedback from tourists. However, to provide a more comprehensive assessment, future studies could include structured surveys or interviews to quantify tourist satisfaction with service quality. Additionally, while the economic impact of food sales on local vendors is apparent, there is a need to analyse the long-term sustainability of these tourism-driven income sources, including the potential risks of over-reliance on tourism.

Table 1 Research Findings

Method		Findings
Literature Review		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no prayer room on Rubiah Island • There are no toilets at tourist locations • There is no source of clean water • Halal and alcohol-free food is available • The beach on Rubiah Island is a snorkeling center • The coral reefs are well maintained, damage only occurred due to the tsunami
Stakeholder Interview Local policy makers	Tourist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenty of halal food available • Friendly service • Muslim tourists feel comfortable visiting Rubiah Island
	Tourism actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business actors provide friendly services to tourists • Implementation of Islamic law and halal tourism on Rubiah Island • Availability of affordable tour packages
	Local policy maker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The tourism concept highly prioritizes the friendliness and comfort of tourists • It is not permissible to damage the environment around the islands of Weh and Rubiah (Sabang) • There is religious and cultural tolerance in Sabang • The implementation of Islamic law applies in Sabang
Field Observation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Praying room and toilet facilities are available • Clean water is still hard to find on Rubiah Island • Coral reefs are still quite well maintained • Halal food is widely available • The services provided by the community are very good • Dolphin tourism is done by seeing dolphins directly in their habitat, not by catching and killing them

Source: primary and secondary data (processed, 2024)

Based on Table 1, it can be observed that field facts emerge through a systematic process of observation. This process begins with a literature review,



followed by stakeholder interviews, and concludes with field observations. To discuss the findings in Table 1 in more depth, they will be outlined in the following discussion.

Discussion of Literature Review Findings

The absence of prayer rooms and the lack of dedicated prayer rooms on Rubiah Island presents a significant limitation for Muslim tourists who seek to observe religious obligations while travelling. This aligns with a common gap in halal tourism infrastructure, especially in natural or remote locations (Rhama 2022). Providing prayer rooms could enhance the appeal of Rubiah Island as a halal-compliant destination, ensuring tourists can perform their prayers conveniently without leaving the site. Then, the unavailability of adequate toilet facilities and clean water sources on the island underscores a critical infrastructure gap. Clean water access is fundamental for general hygiene, and Muslim visitors need ablution facilities before prayers. This is because the concept of halal tourism is still relatively new in many areas, especially in locations that still need to understand its potential fully, so local governments and tourism managers still need to be made aware of the market demand for this service (Vargas-Sánchez and Moral-Moral 2018; Fadllan and Maufiroh 2023). Then halal tourism is often considered a niche market, so its development is not a priority compared to other types of tourism that are more common (Boğan and Sarıışık 2019).

The Sabang government has yet to assist anyone who wants to develop Rubiah Island directly. The Sabang government focuses more on developing Sabang tourism in general. If we look at the infrastructure built on Rubiah Island and its tourism facilities, the majority are the result of the efforts of the community and tourism actors there. In addition, in the context of environmental protection, around Weh Island, Sabang, there is a ban on netting and shooting fish. The government made this policy and agreed upon by the local community. Pulau Rubiah, located in the north and in the middle of Weh Island, also recommends maintaining the sustainability of nature in the location. The local government system in Aceh, which gives the Indigenous community a role in implementing local rules in their area, also plays a role in maintaining the tourism environment in Sabang City in general and Rubiah Island in particular.

The consistent provision of halal food free from alcohol is a positive feature that enhances Rubiah Island's appeal to Muslim visitors. This element aligns with Islamic dietary guidelines and showcases local efforts to cater to halal tourism (Dahlal, Saniff, and Noh 2024). However, expanding the food options with unique local dishes could further enrich the visitor experience and serve as a cultural bridge for non-Muslim tourists interested in Acehese cuisine. Furthermore, the island's well-preserved coral reefs, which remain primarily unaffected aside from natural damage like the tsunami, highlight the importance of Rubiah Island as an ecotourism spot. Popular among visitors, snorkelling must be managed responsibly to protect this delicate ecosystem. This aligns with the principles of sustainable tourism, where natural attractions are preserved for future generations (Sharmin et al. 2020).

It would be valuable to explore how snorkelling activities are regulated to protect coral reefs and how waste management practices are implemented in this ecologically sensitive area, particularly given the high volume of visitors.



Sustainability demands a comprehensive analysis of environmental impacts, which existing research needs to address. Furthermore, identifying gaps in the literature would strengthen this review, especially regarding the economic benefits for the local community. Future research should examine how halal tourism economically benefits residents, the long-term sustainability strategies in place, and areas where more empirical evidence or theoretical development is needed to understand sustainable halal tourism fully. This approach could provide a clearer view of where the current understanding of sustainable halal tourism on Rubiah Island is lacking. For infrastructure issues on Rubiah Island, it is better to collaborate with investors or private organizations to build halal facilities by considering economic and social potential (Ameraldo, Saiful, and Husaini 2019). The government can provide fiscal incentives or ease of licensing to develop halal tourism infrastructure on Rubiah Island. Increase understanding of the economic potential of halal tourism through training for managers and local communities (Yusuf et al. 2021).

Discussion of Stakeholder Interview Findings

Tourists expressed satisfaction with the availability of halal food and friendly service on Rubiah Island. This enhances the island's reputation as a welcoming and safe environment for Muslim visitors, crucial in a multicultural tourist market. Friendly services contribute to positive tourist experiences and increase the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth recommendations, driving sustainable tourism growth (Ali et al. 2019). The comfort Muslim tourists feel and the fact that they can confidently enjoy the island without concerns about religious observance or dietary restrictions is a key advantage. It reinforces the island's alignment with halal tourism standards, showing that Rubiah Island successfully creates an inclusive space that respects Islamic values.

Tourism business actors provide non-discriminatory, affordable services, which is significant for sustainable tourism. This approach aligns with Islamic principles of fairness and hospitality, attracting a diverse tourist demographic and fostering a positive reputation for Rubiah Island. The integration of Islamic law in tourism practices on Rubiah Island, coupled with affordable tour packages, makes the island accessible and attractive to a broader market, particularly Muslim families. This approach is crucial in balancing profitability with ethical and religious principles, making the destination more appealing to local and international tourists (Prajasari 2022).

Policymakers emphasize friendliness and comfort for tourists while prohibiting activities that could harm the environment around the Weh and Rubiah Islands. This dual focus supports a sustainable tourism model by balancing tourist satisfaction with environmental responsibility, making Rubiah Island a model for other destinations. The emphasis on religious and cultural tolerance highlights the harmonious coexistence in Sabang, which is crucial for attracting diverse tourists. By fostering an environment that respects various backgrounds, Rubiah Island benefits from broader tourist engagement and inclusivity, which is essential for the success of halal and sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism involves responsible travel practices that consider economic, social, and environmental impacts for now and the future (Salsa et al. 2023).



Discussion of Field Observation Findings

Contrary to the literature review, field observations indicate that Rubiah Island now offers prayer rooms and toilet facilities. This development shows progress toward meeting the needs of halal tourists, though there is room for improvement, especially in expanding clean water access. Access to prayer rooms and toilets enhances the island's attractiveness to Muslim tourists and supports Rubiah Island's sustainable tourism model. Despite these infrastructure improvements, clean water remains a scarce resource, a notable obstacle to fully supporting halal tourism. Clean water access is essential for hygiene and religious ablutions, affecting the overall tourism experience. Addressing this issue could improve tourist satisfaction and reduce the environmental impact of transporting water to the island. Good, complete and easily accessible infrastructure is very important for the sustainability of halal tourism (Rhama 2022). The solution that can be done is to increase cooperation between the government, private sector, and local communities to ensure that clean water needs can be met so that halal tourism on Rubiah Island can be sustainable.

Observations show that the reefs around Rubiah Island are well-preserved, critical for its ecotourism value. Additionally, dolphin tourism on the island is conducted responsibly, with practices that allow tourists to view dolphins in their natural habitat without disruption. These practices demonstrate a commitment to sustainable tourism and environmental stewardship, aligning with Islamic principles of respecting and preserving nature. Commitment to environmental management and preserving nature is a sustainable halal tourism strategy (Rhama 2022). The local community plays an active role in maintaining quality services, as observed during the field visits. The community's involvement supports sustainable tourism by fostering local economic growth, enhancing visitor experiences, and ensuring cultural integrity. This community-driven service model also reflects Islamic values of mutual benefit and ethical responsibility.

To enhance the sustainable halal tourism experience on Rubiah Island, efforts should focus on improving infrastructure and promoting environmental sustainability. Installing a clean water system, such as rainwater harvesting or desalination, would address the shortage of fresh water, support hygiene needs, and enhance the comfort of Muslim tourists who require ablution facilities. Additionally, enhancing halal food options with locally inspired Acehese dishes could enrich tourists' cultural experiences while supporting local vendors. These improvements align with sustainable tourism goals and promote preserving the island's natural beauty (Enzenbacher 2019).

To protect the environment and foster a culture of responsible tourism, Rubiah Island could implement environmental awareness programs and structured dolphin-watching tours that minimize disruption to wildlife. Introducing eco-friendly transportation, such as solar-powered boats, would reduce pollution, aligning with the island's image as a sustainable destination (Shetty et al. 2024). Strengthening collaboration between local government, tourism agencies, and community leaders is also essential, allowing for unified infrastructure development and environmental protection efforts. These steps would enhance Rubiah Island's reputation as a model of sustainable halal tourism, benefiting visitors and the local community alike.



This study contributes to understanding how sustainable tourism implementation can be integrated with Islamic values and local culture in tourism development in Aceh. The concept of halal tourism on Rubiah Island, Sabang, Aceh Province is expected to be an additional example of halal implementation and environmental protection in tourism areas in Indonesia. Although the implementation of halal tourism on Rubiah Island is not perfect, at least there are lessons that can be learned from this case.

CONCLUSIONS

This research on sustainable halal tourism in Rubiah Island highlights the successful integration of halal principles and local wisdom in the region's tourism practices. This study found that implementing sustainable halal tourism in Rubiah Island is on the right track. Several important points have been implemented, such as the availability of halal food, prayer rooms, good and friendly service, and providing environmentally friendly tourism such as snorkelling. However, there needs to be an infrastructure improvement, such as providing clean water at the location, to make it easier for tourists to worship or clean their clothes after travelling in the Rubiah Island area.

The implications of this study demonstrate that sustainable halal tourism can support economic growth and environmental protection, promoting a balanced approach to tourism development. By integrating Islamic principles, Rubiah Island attracts Muslim tourists while providing an inclusive environment for non-Muslim visitors. However, the study highlights several limitations, such as improved infrastructure, particularly water management and sanitation, to enhance the tourist experience and uphold sustainability goals.

Future research should address these limitations by exploring strategies for improving infrastructure on Rubiah Island. Additionally, further investigation into community involvement and long-term environmental preservation efforts is recommended to ensure the ongoing success of sustainable halal tourism. Developing comprehensive policies that support infrastructure and environmental management will be crucial in strengthening Rubiah Island's position as a model for halal tourism in Indonesia. Furthermore, local communities, businesses, and government entities must support and take a role in the improvement process to overcome weaknesses in advancing the halal industry on Rubiah Island, Sabang.

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