

# ISLAMIC TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM AND DIGITAL INNOVATION

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**ABSTRACT** - With its rich cultural heritage and strong religious identity, Aceh Province, Indonesia, has a strategic opportunity for Islamic tourism development. Combining local wisdom and digitalization can create distinctive experiences, boosting visitor numbers and improving community income and welfare. However, significant challenges persist, including limited attraction diversification, inadequate human resources, minimal digital promotion, and insufficient government support and stakeholder coordination. This study aims to formulate a strategic framework for the development of Islamic tourism destinations in Banda Aceh City by integrating local wisdom and digital technologies to enhance community income. Employing a qualitative approach, the study conducted in-depth interviews with nine key informants, including government officials, tourism practitioners, and business actors. The data were analyzed using NVivo 15 software. The results reveal that tourism in Banda Aceh suffers from a lack of innovation, low human resource competence, and the absence of regulatory instruments such as the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA) and halal certification. The proposed strategies include collaborative RIPPARDA development, targeted human resource capacity-building, digital marketing, local wisdom-based festival creation, and enhanced policy and stakeholder support. These findings underscore the need for integrated, cross-sector efforts to optimize the potential of halal tourism in supporting inclusive local economic development.

**Keywords:** Islamic tourism, local wisdom, digitalization, Banda Aceh, community income

**ABSTRAK – Strategi Pengembangan Pariwisata Syariah: Integrasi Kearifan Lokal dan Inovasi Digital.** Dengan kekayaan warisan budaya dan identitas keagamaannya yang kuat, Aceh memiliki peluang besar untuk pengembangan pariwisata syariah. Penggabungan kearifan lokal dengan digitalisasi dapat menciptakan pengalaman unik wisatawan, meningkatkan jumlah pengunjung, serta memperbaiki pendapatan dan kesejahteraan masyarakat. Namun dalam implementasinya terdapat sejumlah tantangan seperti kurangnya diversifikasi daya tarik wisata, rendahnya kapasitas sumber daya manusia, minimnya promosi digital, serta kurangnya dukungan pemerintah dan sinergi antar pemangku kepentingan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan strategi pengembangan destinasi pariwisata Islam berbasis kearifan lokal dan teknologi digital untuk meningkatkan pendapatan masyarakat di Kota Banda Aceh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam terhadap sembilan informan kunci yang terdiri dari praktisi, pejabat pemerintah, dan pelaku usaha pariwisata yang kemudian dianalisis dengan software NVivo 15. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pariwisata di Banda Aceh masih cenderung monoton, sumber daya manusia belum kompeten, serta belum adanya regulasi spesifik seperti Rencana Induk Pengembangan Pariwisata Daerah (RIPPARDA) dan sertifikasi halal. Strategi yang disarankan meliputi penyusunan RIPPARDA secara kolaboratif, penguatan kapasitas sumber daya manusia, promosi digital, pengembangan festival berbasis kearifan lokal, serta dukungan kebijakan dan kerja sama antar pemangku kepentingan. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya upaya lintas sektor yang terintegrasi untuk mengoptimalkan potensi pariwisata halal dalam mendorong pembangunan ekonomi lokal yang inklusif.

**Kata Kunci:** pariwisata Islam, kearifan lokal, digitalisasi, Banda Aceh, pendapatan masyarakat

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic tourism has witnessed substantial growth over the past decade, driven by the increasing number of destinations adopting halal tourism standards to attract Muslim travelers worldwide. According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), the halal tourism industry is projected to reach a value of USD 220 billion by 2026, reflecting growing demand not only from Muslim-majority countries but also from non-Muslim nations that provide Muslim-friendly amenities (Dihni, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022, 2023). As the country with the largest Muslim population globally, Indonesia holds significant potential in developing its Islamic tourism sector. However, the sector continues to grapple with various challenges, including infrastructure limitations, insufficient promotion, and inconsistent implementation of halal standards (Musa et al., 2021; Maskuroh, 2023).

Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh Province, has demonstrated notable progress in tourism development since the early 2010s. Following recovery efforts from the catastrophic 2004 earthquake and tsunami, the city government prioritized the promotion of historical and religious tourism. Banda Aceh offers a unique combination of natural beauty, cultural richness, and historical significance, positioning it as a compelling destination for both domestic and international tourists. Key religious landmarks such as the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque serve as major attractions, alongside sites of historical and educational interest including the Aceh Tsunami Museum and the PLTD Apung Ship, which commemorate the tsunami tragedy. Nature-based tourism—exemplified by scenic beaches and urban parks—complements the city’s cultural appeal, while culinary and market-based tourism enrich visitors’ experiences. Improvements in infrastructure, accommodation, transportation, and digital promotion have further accelerated tourism growth. By 2023, Banda Aceh emerged as one of the leading tourist destinations in Sumatra. Figure 1 presents the trend of tourist arrivals in Banda Aceh between 2012 and 2023, illustrating fluctuations shaped by socio-economic and global health events.

In 2012, Banda Aceh recorded 172,646 domestic tourists and 4,324 foreign tourists. The figures steadily increased, peaking in 2019 with 477,189 domestic and 26,803 foreign visitors. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted this growth in 2020, with numbers dropping to 140,557 domestic and 3,244 foreign tourists. A recovery trend began in 2021, with figures rising again to 355,251 domestic tourists and 26,778 foreign tourists by 2023.



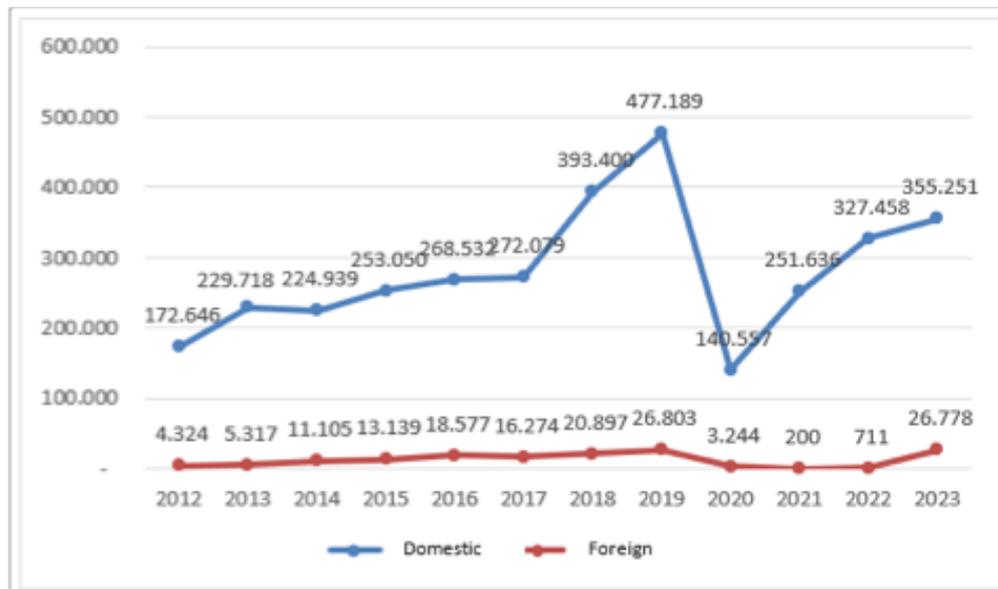


Figure 1. Number of Tourist Visits to Banda Aceh (2012–2023)

(Source: Banda Aceh City Tourism Office, 2024)

As a hub of Islamic culture, Banda Aceh possesses considerable potential to further develop its sharia-compliant tourism sector, thereby enhancing local community welfare. While the city is already recognized as a destination for religious tourism, the integration of local wisdom and digital technology in sharia tourism development remains limited (Idris et al., 2022; Muis, 2020). Aceh's deeply rooted Islamic traditions can enrich the spiritual experience for travelers, while digital tools—such as social media platforms and mobile travel applications—can extend the market reach and competitive edge of Islamic tourism destinations in the digital era (Rahman et al., 2017). To sustain this growth, strategic initiatives based on local values and supported by technological innovation are essential (Henderson, 2016).

Preliminary interview with the Aceh Culture and Tourism Officer identified the underutilization of communication and information technologies as a critical weakness in the region's tourism promotion strategy. Similarly, Rahmi (2017) emphasized the lack of effective strategies to enhance local incomes and overcome digitalization barriers. Digital transformation opens up significant opportunities for promoting halal tourism, particularly through internet-facilitated business models (Saniati et al., 2022).



Despite increased academic attention, prior studies on Islamic tourism in Indonesia reveal a fragmented understanding of how to integrate local wisdom with digital innovation. Research focused on local wisdom (e.g., in Pekalongan) acknowledges its potential to improve community welfare, yet often omits discussion on the role of digital technologies (Ghofur & Ismanto, 2022; Sonjaya et al., 2024). Conversely, studies on tourism digitalization rarely incorporate local cultural dimensions (Akim et al., 2023; Fikri et al., 2024). Although recent works (e.g., Mubarok, 2024; Rahman & Hakim, 2024; Wahyuningsih & Wahyudi, 2024) have emphasized the significance of digital tools in promoting tourism grounded in local wisdom, they have not comprehensively integrated both aspects in the context of sharia tourism development.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by proposing a holistic framework that integrates digitalization and local wisdom in the development, promotion, and management of Islamic tourism in Banda Aceh. Such an approach is crucial for enhancing the competitiveness of sharia-based destinations while simultaneously improving community welfare. As highlighted by Rahman et al. (2017), integrated strategies are necessary to expand market reach and sustain tourism in the digital transformation era. This research offers a novel contribution by bridging two underexplored dimensions—digital technology and local cultural values—in the advancement of Islamic tourism, with broader implications for similar destinations across Indonesia and in other Muslim-majority contexts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores key concepts and research pertinent to the development of Sharia tourism. It examines the definition and scope of Islamic and Sharia tourism, strategies for its development, the integral role of local wisdom, the impact of digital transformation, and the connection between tourism and community income.

### Sharia Tourism

Islamic tourism encompasses travel activities undertaken by Muslims for various purposes, such as pilgrimage, business, or recreation, all while adhering to Islamic principles (Hugo, 2020). Islamic teachings, such as those found in the Qur'an (51:56), emphasize that human creation is for worship, thereby encouraging Muslims to engage in *halal* (permissible) and beneficial activities,



including tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as an individual's travel outside their usual environment for less than one year for purposes such as leisure, business, or other objectives. Consequently, Islamic tourism can be understood as a form of travel and tourism activities guided by halal principles, intended not exclusively for Muslims but accommodating their specific needs.

In the Indonesian context, Sharia tourism has been officially defined by the Ministry of Tourism (Kementerian Pariwisata Republik Indonesia [Kemenpar], 2015) as tourism activities supported by facilities and services that comply with Islamic regulations. This concept extends beyond religious tourism, encompassing tourism products, services, and destinations aligned with Islamic ethics and values. Terms such as Islamic tourism, halal tourism, halal travel, and Muslim-friendly tourism are often used interchangeably to describe this sector (Amaliyah et al., 2020). The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, in its Ministerial Regulation No. 2, stipulates that "sharia" in the tourism sector refers to Islamic legal principles as approved by the Indonesian Ulema Council (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia—MUI*). The expansion of the halal industry in Indonesia has seen the application of sharia principles move beyond banking and finance into sectors like tourism, hospitality, and culinary arts (Antara, 2023).

### **Strategies for Developing Halal Tourism**

The development strategy for tourism in any region must extend beyond mere infrastructure expansion and facility enhancement. It should also incorporate policy-driven approaches and digital innovations to bolster competitiveness and ensure the industry's sustainability (Budiman, 2019). Key strategies for developing halal tourism, as identified by Ismayanti (2020), Primadany et al. (2013), and Wijayanto et al. (2012), include improving accessibility, providing Muslim-friendly services, and implementing smart tourism technologies. The Tourism Opportunity Spectrum (TOS) is a conceptual framework used to assess the potential for tourism destination development, evaluating factors such as accessibility, suitability of tourism activities, availability of facilities, and social interactions to determine a destination's readiness (Afrisal, 2022).

Several critical aspects warrant consideration in halal tourism development. Firstly, prioritizing the development of infrastructure and transportation systems that cater to Muslim travelers' needs is essential, including providing



prayer rooms (musala), halal-certified restaurants, and Sharia-compliant accommodations (Fajarini, 2014). Secondly, destination suitability is crucial, emphasizing the integration of halal tourism with local culture rather than limiting it to religious tourism. This ensures broad acceptance by the local community while maintaining Islamic values and identity. Thirdly, tourism infrastructure development must encompass digital-based services. Furthermore, fostering community engagement and education is vital to ensure local populations understand and respect visitors' cultural and religious practices.

This approach enhances the experience for Muslim tourists and promotes inclusive interactions. Halal tour guides can play a significant role by providing insights into local customs and facilitating meaningful exchanges, thereby bridging cultural gaps. Such an environment fosters mutual respect, encouraging visitors to appreciate the destination's heritage. As more destinations recognize the value of catering to diverse needs, the tourism industry can evolve towards greater inclusivity, benefiting both travelers and local economies. Aligning payment systems with Sharia principles also enhances convenience for Muslim travelers (Manan et al., 2023; Widodo et al., 2022). This comprehensive approach addresses the unique needs of Muslim travelers and cultivates inclusivity and mutual respect between tourists and host communities.

### **Local Wisdom and Halal Tourism Development**

Local wisdom is pivotal in developing halal tourism, facilitating a balance between local culture and Islamic principles. Setiyawan (2012) and Fajarini (2014) define local wisdom as encompassing value systems and traditions passed down through generations, forming an integral part of a community's identity. In tourism, local wisdom provides a guiding framework for sustainable tourism while preserving a region's distinct cultural characteristics.

The application of local wisdom in halal tourism is evident in several aspects. Firstly, customs and traditions that align with Islamic teachings, such as providing halal food and fostering a strong culture of hospitality, are central to Muslim communities (Koba, 2020). Secondly, destination development that maintains social and cultural balance, often through community-based tourism management, allows local residents to actively participate in developing and administering tourist attractions. Thirdly, environmental conservation guided



by Islamic values, as seen in eco-halal tourism, emphasizes environmental preservation in accordance with Islamic sustainability principles (Harianja, 2022). This approach underscores that Islam and local culture can coexist harmoniously in halal tourism development (Muhamad et al., 2019). Consequently, halal tourism offers travel experiences compliant with Islamic law while respecting and preserving local communities' cultural heritage, allowing tourists to immerse themselves in authentic local cultures while comfortably practicing their religious obligations (Manan et al., 2023).

### **Digital Transformation in Halal Tourism**

Technology significantly influences halal tourism development, particularly by enhancing information accessibility and enriching the travel experience. Digital technology enables Muslim travelers to access information more easily, book services rapidly, and enjoy journeys that align with Islamic principles (Ramos & Mafé-García, 2018). Within the context of digital transformation, the Tourism 4.0 concept emphasizes integrating information technology into the halal tourism industry (Rini, 2019). Digital innovations supporting this sector include online booking platforms for certified halal-friendly hotels and restaurants, Sharia-based travel applications providing information on prayer rooms, halal restaurants, and Muslim-friendly destinations, and Sharia-compliant digital payment systems like e-wallets adhering to Islamic economic principles (Al-Zaghbi, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated technological advancement, compelling rapid digitalization across various sectors, including tourism (Morrone et al., 2021). Businesses adapted to digital-based models to ensure operational continuity and meet the needs of travelers increasingly reliant on technology. Therefore, collaborations, such as those between the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy and the Ministry of Communication and Informatics in Indonesia to develop digital infrastructure at tourist destinations, represent strategic efforts to support the sustainability and competitiveness of the halal tourism industry in the digital era.

### **Tourism and Community Income**

Income is defined as financial earnings received by individuals, companies, or organizations in forms such as wages, salaries, rent, interest, and profits (Haig, 1921/2020). A community's income level in a specific region is a key indicator for assessing local economic conditions. Commonly used income-related



indicators to measure societal economic well-being include monthly earnings, employment type, expenditure budgets, and financial dependents, which offer insights into societal welfare and potential future economic growth (Tanemura et al., 2022). Per capita income, derived by dividing a nation's total income by its population, often serves as a benchmark for prosperity and development; a higher per capita income generally indicates greater prosperity (Lestari et al., 2021).

The tourism sector significantly contributes to both domestic and international economies by augmenting national income and driving economic growth. Consequently, active community participation in tourism development is crucial for ensuring that local populations understand the sector's positive and negative impacts (Muhammad, 2019). Developing the tourism industry necessitates active community involvement to maximize economic benefits, such as job creation and income generation, through the optimization of tourism potential (Rachmawati et al., 2022). The government plays a vital role in promoting tourism sector growth by managing tourism resources wisely and ensuring that this management does not adversely affect the social and natural environment, thereby accelerating economic growth at local and national levels (Trimulato et al., 2023). An effective strategy involves engaging the community in planning and developing tourism products, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sector's sustainability (Saha et al., 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the development strategies of sharia-based tourism through the integration of local wisdom and digital innovation, and to assess its implications for community income in Banda Aceh. The qualitative approach was selected to allow for an in-depth understanding of naturally occurring phenomena within their real-life contexts. This methodology is particularly well-suited for examining complex social dynamics and the perceptions of key stakeholders in the halal tourism sector. This design enabled the researcher to capture nuanced insights from informants and corroborate these with existing records and documentation.



## Data Collection

The research was conducted between July and August 2024, utilizing qualitative methods to collect primary data through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on their relevance to the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2017). Criteria for selection included subject-matter expertise, involvement in the tourism sector, and familiarity with sharia tourism initiatives in Banda Aceh. The study involved nine informants representing key institutional and community stakeholders in the halal tourism ecosystem. The breakdown of informants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Informants

No	Element	Total	Type of Informant
1	Tourism Expert	1 person	Key Informant
2	Tour & Travel Owner / Aceh Tourism Council	1 person	Primary Informant
3	Indonesian Halal Tourism Association – Aceh Province	1 person	Primary Informant
4	Indonesian Tour Guide Association – Aceh Province	1 person	Primary Informant
5	Ulema Consultative Council (MPU) – Banda Aceh City	1 person	Supporting Informant
6	Islamic Sharia Department – Banda Aceh City	1 person	Supporting Informant
7	Academic	1 person	Key Informant
8	Banda Aceh City Tourism Office	1 person	Key Informant
9	Aceh Traditional Council (MAA) – Banda Aceh City	1 person	Supporting Informant

## Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes three core stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This model facilitates systematic processing of qualitative data to identify key themes, patterns, and relationships.

To enhance the rigor and clarity of analysis, the study employed NVivo 15 software. This tool was used to code interview transcripts, map thematic networks, and categorize emerging strategies, constraints, and solutions related to the integration of digital innovation and local cultural practices in halal tourism development.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The analysis of qualitative data, facilitated by NVivo 15 software, involved several stages, commencing with data condensation. This process included selecting, focusing, and simplifying data from informant interview transcripts, leading to the identification of key terms, coding of relevant concepts, and categorization of meaningful statements. Subsequently, recurring patterns and key categories emerging from the coded data were developed into research themes and further refined into sub-themes.

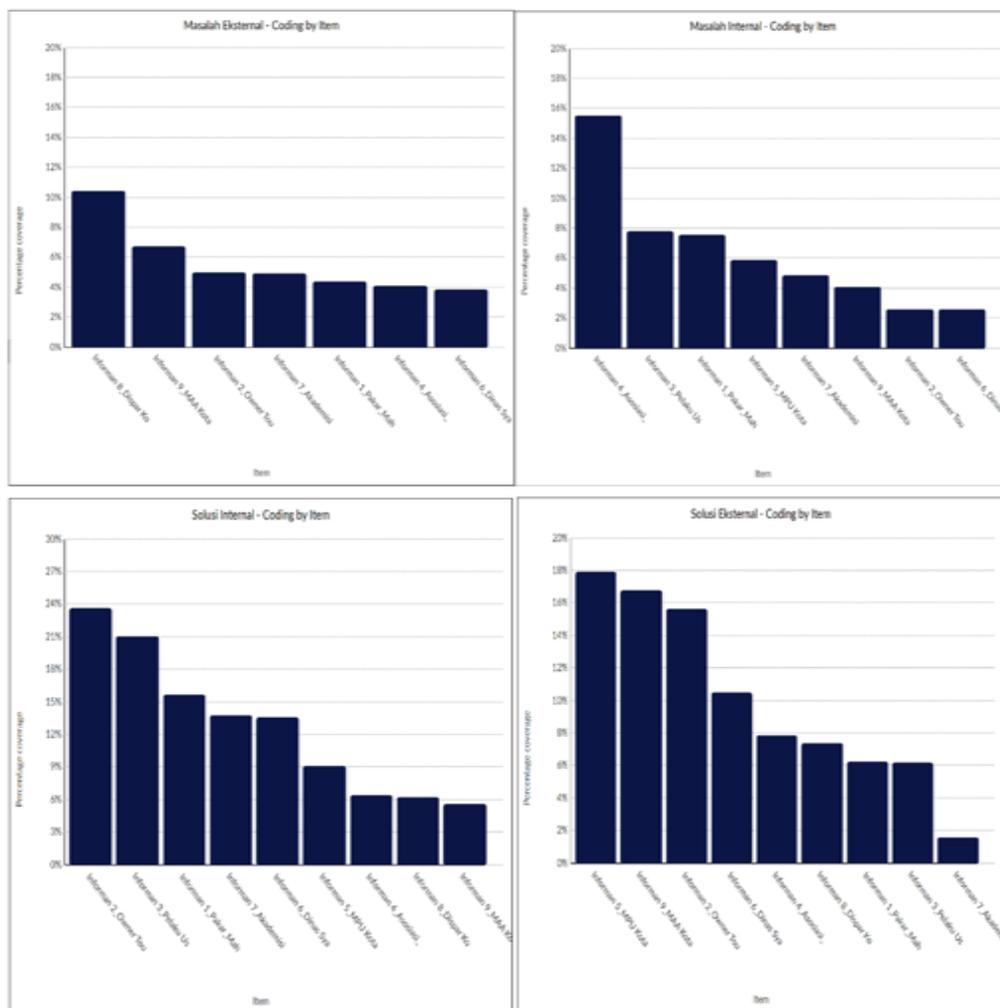


Figure 2. Visualization of Frequently Occurring Coded Items  
(Source: NVivo 15 Word Condensation Analysis, 2024)



Initial analysis using the Codes feature in NVivo 15 visualized the most frequently occurring words within the interview transcripts, indicating dominant aspects discussed by the informants. This visualization is presented in Figure 2.

Based on this initial data condensation and word frequency analysis, prominent terms identified included: tourism, sharia, destination, community, development, digital, wisdom, program, improvement, culture, promoting, and income, among others. These frequently occurring terms were then further analyzed and systematically grouped into broader conceptual categories, which formed the basis for the main research themes. The process of categorizing these codes into references for theme development is illustrated in Figure 3.

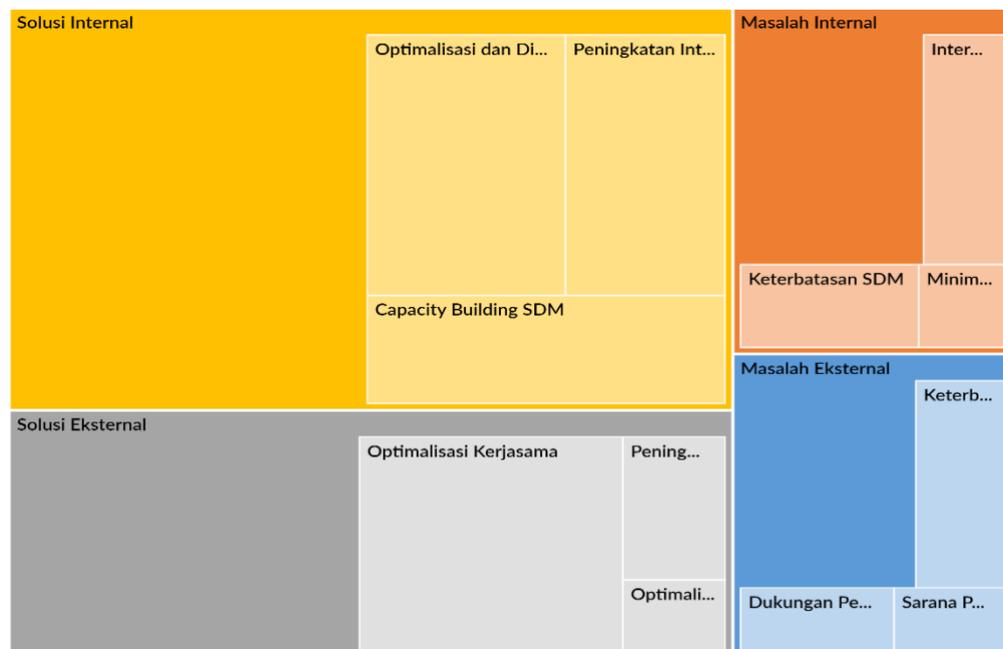


Figure 3. Categorization of Codes by Reference into Themes  
(Source: NVivo 15 Word Condensation Analysis, 2024)

This thematic analysis yielded four main themes, encompassing a total of 12 sub-themes and associated categories. The four main themes identified are: (1) Internal Problems, (2) External Problems, (3) Internal Solutions, and (4) External Solutions. These themes, with their constituent sub-themes and categories, are detailed in Table 2. The "Key Issues Identified" column in Table 2 highlights specific deficiencies or challenges noted by participants in relation to the problem-oriented themes. For the solution-oriented themes, the sub-



themes and categories presented represent the identified resolutions or ameliorative strategies.

Table 2. Matrix of Research Themes, Sub-Themes, and Categories

No	Main Theme	Sub-Theme	Category	Finding Gap
1	Internal Problems	Internal Tourism	Lack of tourist attraction; limited product diversification; non-standard cleanliness	Monotonous tourism products; lack of innovation
		Limited Human Resources	Insufficient understanding and skills in tourism businesses	Absence of standard recruitment; no continuous capacity building
		Lack of Promotion	Unavailable tourist maps; limited destination profiling	Many attractions lack formal promotional profiles
2	External Problems	Nonoptimal Government Support	Absence of RIPPARDA; limited halal certification	Unequal income distribution; insufficient supervision
		Limited Stakeholder Cooperation	Weak synergy; low stakeholder involvement	Fragmented and unsustainable initiatives
		Limited Supporting Facilities	Inadequate regulation; weak cultural preservation	Regulatory frameworks not comprehensive; ineffective oversight
3	Internal Solutions	Internal Tourism Improvement	Attraction development; product diversification; community empowerment	—
		Human Resource Capacity Building	Education, training, extension programs	—
		Promotion and Digitalization	Digital marketing; tourist map digitization; enhanced destination appeal	—
4	External Solutions	Optimizing Government Support	Preparation of RIPPARDA; business development and supervision programs	—
		Stakeholder Cooperation	Synergistic collaboration among stakeholders	—
		Supporting Facility Improvement	Regulatory reform; cultural preservation initiatives	—

(Source: Decomposition of Data Analysis Results, 2024)

The four main themes and their associated sub-themes provide a structured overview of the empirical findings. They reflect the perspectives of stakeholders on the current state of sharia tourism development in Banda Aceh, including existing challenges and proposed strategies for enhancement.



### *Theme 1: Internal Problems*

Informants identified several internal barriers to halal tourism development. These include a lack of diverse tourist attractions, limited innovation in tourism products, and non-standardized cleanliness at certain sites. In addition, human resource limitations were noted, particularly in understanding and applying sharia principles in tourism services. Interviewees also highlighted a lack of promotional tools, such as comprehensive tourist maps and destination branding materials. Key Informant 1 (Tourism Expert) expressed that:

“There is no long-term plan for sharia tourism. Community awareness remains low, and human resources in related agencies are limited. Additionally, promotional materials are scarce, and many attractions are not visually appealing or well-packaged.”

### *Theme 2: External Problems*

Three major external challenges were identified. First, the absence of a Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA) for Banda Aceh was seen as a significant hindrance. Second, informants noted low stakeholder synergy, with many actors working in isolation. Third, there was mention of insufficient supporting facilities, including transportation and infrastructure, as well as weak regulatory and supervisory frameworks. Key Informant 2 (Tourism Department Official) revealed that:

“The city does not yet have a RIPPARDA. Collaboration among stakeholders is also minimal, and infrastructure is underdeveloped.”

Key Informant 3 (Tourism Council) added that:

“Establishing formal cooperation agreements is important to accelerate the development of sharia tourism.”

### *Theme 3: Internal Solutions*

Proposed internal solutions included the development and diversification of tourism products, particularly those that incorporate local wisdom and Islamic values. Additionally, structured training and capacity-building programs for tourism personnel were emphasized. Another area of focus was the enhancement of digital marketing, including online branding and the digitization of tourist information. These findings were supported by multiple



informants who highlighted the need for both technical and conceptual training in sharia-compliant tourism and the importance of digital engagement in reaching a wider market.

#### *Theme 4: External Solutions*

Recommended external strategies included the immediate development of RIPPARDA to guide long-term planning. Several informants stressed the importance of government support in certifying halal tourism businesses and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration. Furthermore, the improvement of tourism-related infrastructure—such as transportation, accommodations, and public facilities—was identified as critical to enhancing the visitor experience. Key Informant 4 (Islamic Sharia Department) stated that:

“Infrastructure improvements must be synchronized with community and government efforts. Certification and regulation are crucial.”

#### *Community Income Gaps*

Another key issue identified in the analysis was the inequitable distribution of income from tourism activities. Respondents noted that economic benefits tend to concentrate among business actors and individuals directly involved in tourism, with limited spillover to the broader community.

This was highlighted across several interviews, with suggestions for community-based tourism initiatives that could broaden participation. Proposed examples include involving locals in culinary, handicraft, and homestay services, and leveraging digital platforms to connect them to broader markets.

#### *Strategic Framework Identification*

The findings were synthesized into a strategic framework, as shown in Figure 4, which outlines problem areas, strategic responses, and development priorities for integrating digital innovation and local wisdom in Banda Aceh’s halal tourism sector. The framework includes components such as the development of RIPPARDA, ESG integration, digitalization strategies, local attraction branding, infrastructure investment, and the creation of real-time data systems to support smart tourism applications.



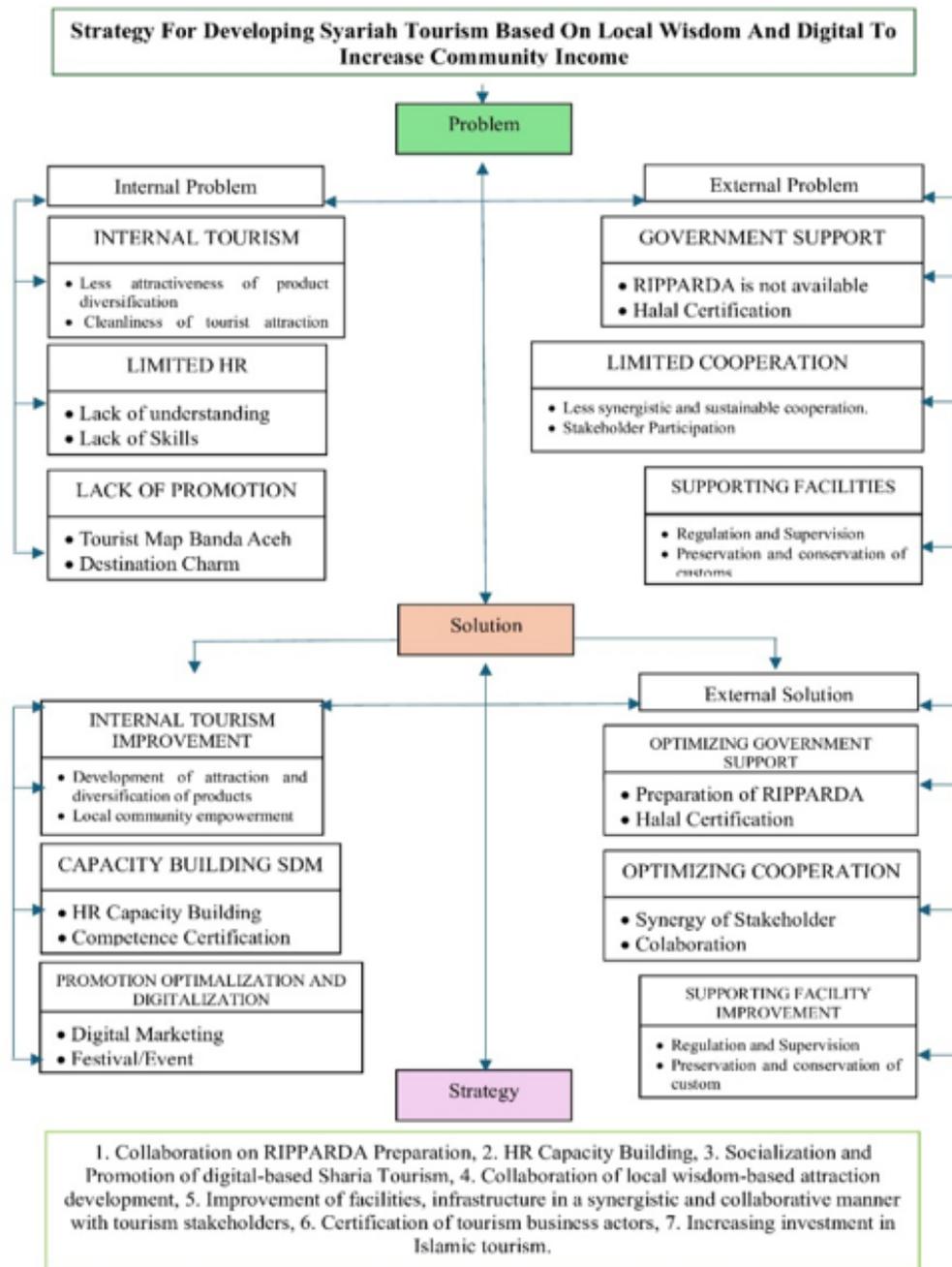


Figure 4. Framework for Identifying Problems, Solutions, and Strategic Priorities in Halal Tourism Development  
(Source: Author's elaboration based on research findings)

### Discussion

The findings reveal a complex relationship of internal and external factors affecting the development of halal tourism in Banda Aceh. These factors



highlight critical areas that need attention to ensure the sector's sustainability, competitiveness, and contribution to community welfare. Drawing from qualitative data and supported by existing literature, this discussion addresses four core dimensions: internal challenges, external barriers, strategic solutions, and implications for community income.

### *Internal Challenges*

The research identifies a pressing need for innovation in halal tourism products, as many existing attractions are perceived as monotonous and insufficiently differentiated. The lack of diversified tourism offerings limits the city's appeal, particularly to repeat and international Muslim travelers seeking immersive, authentic, and value-driven experiences. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that diversified tourism products—especially those integrating spiritual, cultural, and recreational dimensions—enhance destination competitiveness (Amri et al., 2022; Kim & Oh, 2021).

Inadequate human resource capacity emerged as another significant challenge. Many tourism professionals and stakeholders lack a comprehensive understanding of sharia-compliant tourism concepts, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery. This reinforces the importance of structured and competency-based training programs, as noted by Draskovic and Dzunic (2020) and Ferdiansyah (2020), which argue that human capital is a cornerstone of service quality and destination branding in halal tourism.

Further, the study found that digital promotion remains underutilized, with limited availability of essential materials such as tourist maps and destination profiles. Despite the potential of digital marketing to increase reach—especially among tech-savvy Muslim travelers—tourism actors in Banda Aceh have not fully adopted digital platforms for strategic promotion. This supports prior findings by Darussalam et al. (2021), who emphasized the need for digital engagement as part of smart tourism transformation.

### *External Barriers*

On the external front, the absence of a formal Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPARDA) has hindered strategic coordination and policy direction. Without this guiding document, efforts across government bodies, businesses, and communities lack alignment and long-term vision. This is consistent with Perkins et al. (2022), who emphasize the role of strategic



planning in consolidating tourism development efforts, especially in culturally sensitive domains like halal tourism.

Additionally, weak stakeholder collaboration was frequently cited. Tourism development in Banda Aceh suffers from fragmented initiatives, with limited inter-organizational synergy. Manan et al. (2023) and Syaripuddin (2020) argue that successful halal tourism systems require inclusive and sustained collaboration among local government agencies, private actors, religious authorities, and civil society.

Another recurring theme is the deficiency in supporting infrastructure, such as transportation, accommodations, and digital connectivity. Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in shaping tourist satisfaction and access to services (Dalimunthe et al., 2020). Moreover, the lack of preservation efforts for cultural heritage sites and insufficient regulation were seen as threats to the authenticity and sustainability of halal tourism offerings in Banda Aceh.

### *Strategic Solutions*

To address these gaps, informants proposed several internal solutions, starting with the strengthening of human resource capacity through targeted training and educational programs. These initiatives should focus not only on technical skills but also on understanding the principles of halal tourism, hospitality ethics, and cultural sensitivity. As supported by Sharma et al. (2016) and Belias et al. (2020), human capital development is a key enabler of professionalism in tourism services.

Secondly, stakeholders emphasized the importance of digital transformation in marketing, promotion, and service delivery. Smart tourism tools—including mobile apps, virtual tours, and real-time halal service locators—can enhance visibility and traveler satisfaction. Prior studies (Li & Zhang, 2022; Chandrasekaran et al., 2023) have noted the value of interactive digital platforms in shaping modern tourism experiences, especially post-COVID-19.

Externally, a priority solution is the preparation and adoption of RIPPARDA in collaboration with local and provincial stakeholders. This planning document is critical for formalizing halal tourism development goals and ensuring resource allocation. Research by Duadji and Tresiana (2020) supports this view, highlighting the value of participatory planning for tourism governance.



Additionally, stakeholder collaboration should be institutionalized through formal agreements and joint action plans. This includes cooperation between religious institutions (e.g., MUI, MPU), local government, private enterprises, and academic institutions. Such integration is vital for sustaining halal certification, monitoring compliance, and building collective ownership of tourism initiatives (Lundsgaarde & Keijzer, 2019; Santoso et al., 2021).

### *Tourism and Community Income*

The findings also underscore a critical gap in the distribution of economic benefits from halal tourism. Income generation is currently concentrated among a small subset of actors—namely, business owners and individuals directly engaged in the tourism value chain. Broader community members, particularly in peripheral areas, remain marginalized from tourism-generated income streams.

This mirrors concerns raised by Budiman (2019) regarding economic inequality in the halal tourism sector. Inclusive growth requires community-based tourism models that empower local artisans, food vendors, and service providers. Programs that encourage participation in hospitality services, cultural performances, and souvenir production can help diversify income sources. Digital platforms and e-commerce integration can also expand market access for small-scale producers (Arbainah et al., 2020; Maquera et al., 2022).

The integration of local wisdom with sharia values offers unique opportunities to differentiate Banda Aceh as a destination. However, realizing this potential requires deliberate investment in local capacity, heritage preservation, and ethical tourism standards that honor both Islamic principles and community traditions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the development of sharia-based tourism in Banda Aceh through the integration of local wisdom and digital innovation, with a focus on its potential to enhance community income. The analysis identified four main thematic areas: internal problems, external problems, internal solutions, and external solutions. Key internal challenges include limited diversification of tourism products, lack of innovation, inadequate human resource capacity, and underutilized digital promotion. External barriers consist of the absence of a formal tourism master plan (RIPPARDA), weak inter-stakeholder



collaboration, and insufficient supporting infrastructure. The proposed solutions include capacity-building initiatives, digital marketing strategies, infrastructure improvements, and policy formulation supported by inclusive stakeholder cooperation. The study also highlights a critical gap in the equitable distribution of tourism-generated income, emphasizing the need for broader community participation in the tourism value chain.

The findings offer several practical and theoretical implications. First, they underline the importance of institutional coordination and strategic planning, such as the immediate need for a comprehensive RIPPARDA for Banda Aceh. Second, the integration of local cultural identity with digital tools presents a promising avenue to differentiate Banda Aceh's tourism offerings in the growing halal tourism market. Third, the study demonstrates that tourism development cannot be separated from human resource investment, especially in regions where knowledge of sharia-compliant tourism practices remains limited. Lastly, the emphasis on inclusive economic impact contributes to broader discourses on sustainable and community-based tourism models.

This research is limited by its qualitative design and geographical scope, focusing exclusively on Banda Aceh. As such, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regions with different socio-cultural or economic contexts. Additionally, while the study included multiple stakeholder perspectives, the sample size was relatively small, and certain stakeholder groups (e.g., tourists and investors) were not represented. The analysis also relied heavily on interview data and did not include quantitative measures to assess tourism income or economic impact directly. Future research should consider conducting comparative studies across different provinces or Muslim-majority regions to examine how local wisdom and digital innovation interact under varying governance and socio-economic conditions. Further studies could employ mixed-methods approaches that combine qualitative insights with quantitative data on tourist satisfaction, spending behavior, or community income levels. Additionally, research into the development and effectiveness of smart tourism technologies tailored to halal tourism could provide actionable insights for destination managers and policymakers. Longitudinal studies tracking the outcomes of policy implementations, such as RIPPARDA and community-based tourism initiatives, would also offer valuable evidence on the sustainability and scalability of these strategies.



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