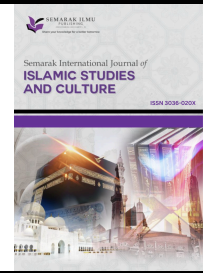




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# The Economic Development of Islamic Tourism in Kelantan, Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Islamic tourism influences Kelantan, Malaysia's economic growth. Kelantan is a state well-known for its rich Islamic identity and cultural legacy. The increasing need for tourism that follows Islamic standards, such as halal service, accommodations that are suitable for religious beliefs, and entertainment that complies with Syariah, has made Kelantan an attractive destination for Muslim tourists. The state's tourism industry is still in its infancy despite its promise, needing infrastructure, coordinated strategy, and stakeholder participation that meet Islamic tourism requirements.

In recent years, the tourism industry has aimed to diversify and accommodate emerging market segments by recognizing the unique needs of different groups [1]. One such group is the 'religious tourist' segment, which includes Muslim tourists who form a significant and rapidly growing market driven by specific religious requirements that heavily influence their choice of travel destinations [2]. Among these, Muslim tourists form a substantial and rapidly expanding market, with their travel decisions strongly influenced by religious obligations and requirements [3].

Islamic tourism has emerged as a dynamic segment within the global tourism industry, offering travel experiences that align with Islamic principles, including halal food, prayer facilities, modest entertainment and an environment free from alcohol and gambling [4]. The availability of Islamic attributes is considered very important when a Muslim decides to travel abroad [5]. In Malaysia, Kelantan stands out as a unique destination that naturally integrates Islamic values into its social and cultural landscapes, making it an ideal model for Islamic tourism development [6].

Known as the "Serambi Mekah" of Malaysia, Kelantan offers a distinct experience where Islamic traditions shape daily life, architecture, arts and local governance [7]. Religion plays an important part in the decision-making process with regard to travel destinations [8]. In Malaysia, Kelantan stands out as a unique destination that naturally integrates Islamic values into its social and cultural landscapes, making it an ideal model for Islamic tourism development [9].

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The growth of Islamic tourism in Kelantan presents significant opportunities for economic development. By leveraging its Islamic identity, Kelantan can attract both domestic and international Muslim tourists, thereby stimulating sectors such as hospitality, transportation, food services and cultural enterprises [10]. The condition of Islamic tourism in Malaysia is still not maximized, whereas if worked more seriously, the potential of Islamic tourism in Malaysia is very large [11]. Thus, focusing on Islamic tourism provides a strategic avenue for Kelantan to enhance job creation, boost small and medium enterprises and increase state revenue while preserving its Islamic heritage [12].

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

Despite Kelantan's strong identity and the potential for Islamic tourism, the state remains economically undeveloped compared to other regions in Malaysia [13]. There is limited empirical evidence on how Islamic tourism contributes to economic indicators such as employment, income generation and local business development [14]. In Kelantan, economic imperatives exist, but serious obstacles such as limited infrastructure, conservative socio-cultural conditions, and weak marketing continue to frustrate growth in the tourism sector [15]. This study seeks to bridge the gap by investigating the influence of Islamic tourism on economic development, thereby assisting policymakers in harnessing the state's cultural-religious assets more effectively [16].

However, despite Kelantan's inherent advantages, the potential of Islamic tourism to drive significant economic development has not been fully realized. The condition of Islamic tourism in Malaysia is still not maximized, whereas working more seriously, the potential of Islamic tourism in Malaysia is very large [17]. In Kelantan, many tourism initiatives continue to focus on conventional attractions and there is a lack of integrated, systematic promotion and development of comprehensive Islamic tourism packages that align with Syariah principles [18].

Furthermore, the awareness and participation of local businesses in offering Syariah-compliant tourism services remain limited [19]. Not many companies and agencies organize trips that pack an inbound trip with a halal travel package [20]. This gap in supply and the lack of strategic promotion prevents Kelantan from fully capitalizing on the growing demand for Islamic tourism, both domestically and internationally.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to explore the extent to which Islamic tourism initiatives in Kelantan contribute to the state's economic development, particularly in areas such as local business growth, employment creation and community empowerment. Understanding these dynamics will provide valuable insights for policymakers, tourism stakeholders and entrepreneurs in formulating strategies to optimize the economic impact of Islamic tourism in Kelantan.

### *1.2 Literature Review*

#### *1.2.1 Understanding Islamic Tourism*

Islamic tourism, also known as Muslim-friendly tourism, goes beyond offering conventional travel services by establishing an all-encompassing setting that conforms to Islamic law [21]. The goal is to make it easier for Muslim tourists to enjoy their travels without sacrificing their religious convictions and customs [22]. Access to halal dishes, specific prayer spaces, facilities that are gender-segregated, moderate entertainment alternatives, and spaces free from alcohol and gambling are all crucial elements of Islamic tourism [22]. These features are designed to meet the unique needs of Muslim tourists and provide a travel experience that respects their cultural and religious values [23].

Tourism destinations are increasingly incorporating Islamic-compliant amenities to attract and satisfy the growing segment of Muslim travellers who seek services aligned with their religious values

and lifestyle preferences [24]. The demand from Muslim tourists looking for travel experiences that reflect their cultural and religious beliefs has been driving the recent explosive rise of the worldwide Islamic tourism business [25]. Muslim travellers spent over USD 194 billion in 2022, and this expenditure is projected to reach USD 225 billion by 2025 [82]. This significant growth highlights the rising need for travel services that adhere to Islamic principles, ensuring that offerings are not only religiously compliant but also provide comfort, safety, and family-friendly environments [26]. The expansion of Islamic tourism thus represents a lucrative and evolving segment within the global travel industry, encouraging destinations and service providers to innovate and adapt their offerings to meet these specific needs [27]. Scholars and industry experts emphasize that understanding the preferences of Muslim travellers is crucial for capitalizing on this market potential and for fostering inclusive tourism development worldwide [28].

Malaysia, which routinely ranks first on the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), has made a name for itself as a leading figure in the Islamic tourism industry [29]. This success is largely attributed to the country's stringent adherence to halal regulations, respect for Islamic cultural values, and inclusive tourism policies that cater to Muslim travellers worldwide [30]. The opportunity to lead the way in Islamic tourism is even more apparent in Malaysian states like Kelantan, where people's daily lives are strongly influenced by Islamic values [31].

Malaysia's rise in Islamic tourism promotes economic inclusion in addition to improving the nation's reputation abroad. By encouraging local communities and entrepreneurs to provide tourism services that reflect their Islamic identity, this sector fosters sustainable economic development while promoting a deeper appreciation for Islamic heritage and values [32]. Consequently, Islamic tourism emerges as a vital vehicle for both economic empowerment and cultural preservation in Malaysia, particularly in regions with strong Islamic traditions.

### *1.2.2 Halal Certification and Economic Development*

Halal certification is one of the main pillars of Islamic tourism and is an essential assurance system for Muslim travellers looking for goods and services that adhere to Islamic law [33]. In the tourism industry, halal certification extends beyond food and beverages to include accommodations, travel packages, transportation, spa services, and wellness centres [34].

The availability of halal-certified establishments has a big impact on Muslim travellers' choices since it gives them peace of mind, confidence, and religious observance all along the way [83]. This not only enhances their overall travel experience but also contributes to longer stays and increased expenditure [35]. In states like Kelantan, where businesses largely operate within an Islamic framework, expanding halal certification across various tourism-related services could become a strategic advantage to attract both domestic and international Muslim travellers [36].

Furthermore, halal certification is important for socioeconomic growth, as it enhances Malaysia's competitiveness in the global halal industry, supports SMEs, and contributes significantly to national GDP through export expansion [37]. In particular, it creates immediate opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship in the food, lodging, and hospitality industries [38], the implementation of consistent halal standards can empower rural and semi-urban communities by stimulating micro-enterprises and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), thus contributing to grassroots economic growth [39]. Consequently, the socio-economic fabric of local communities is strengthened by halal certification, which also makes Islamic tourism destinations more competitive.

### *1.2.3 Islamic Values and Economic Development*

Islamic values play a pivotal role in shaping the travel preferences of Muslim tourists, particularly in relation to modesty, prayer obligations, and family-oriented experiences [40]. Muslim tourists are more likely to visit places that provide infrastructure that reflects and integrates these ideals, such as areas for prayer, halal cuisine, gender-sensitive amenities, and suitable entertainment [41]. These travellers not only seek leisure but also alignment with their religious identity, creating a unique niche within the broader tourism economy [42].

Kelantan, as a state that embeds Islamic values in its daily governance and social conduct, has the inherent potential to position itself as a hub for Islamic tourism [43]. Islamic principles are organically reflected in its laws, regional traditions, and cultural history, providing a genuine experience that is frequently absent from other travel locations [44]. However, for Islamic values to truly drive economic development, these cultural and religious elements must be systematically embedded into tourism planning, service delivery, and promotional strategies [45].

The integration of Islamic values in tourism not only enhances visitor satisfaction and trust but also encourages repeat visits, longer stays, and positive word-of-mouth, all of which contribute to local economic growth [46]. By participating in training and awareness initiatives that emphasise Islamic service excellence, Kelantan's tourism operators may further leverage this potential [47]. Travelling becomes a more spiritually rewarding and financially significant experience when religious principles are respected at every stage of the trip, from reservations and check-in to lodging, dining, and entertainment [48].

### *1.2.4 Halal Travel and Economic Development*

Halal travel is becoming more widely acknowledged as a driver of regional economic growth [49], particularly in places like Kelantan where the overwhelming population is Muslim. For Muslim visitors to have a smooth and stress-free trip, halal services, such as halal cuisine, places for prayer, and lodging that complies with Shariah must be backed by sufficient travel infrastructure [50]. Halal travel infrastructure encompasses not only transportation facilities but also multilingual signage, clean and accessible prayer areas, digital visibility, and hospitality services aligned with Islamic values [51].

Muslim-friendly infrastructure is a key determinant of a destination's competitiveness, strongly influencing tourist satisfaction and repeat visits [83]. Despite Kelantan's strong Islamic identity and cultural appeal, the state continues to face critical gaps in its travel infrastructure [52]. Challenges such as underdeveloped transportation systems, a lack of upscale halal-certified accommodations, and minimal online presence have contributed to a less favourable perception among international Muslim travellers [53]. Due to these issues, Kelantan might not be able to make full use of the financial advantages of halal travel.

The link between halal travel infrastructure and economic development has also been supported found that targeted investments in Shariah-compliant facilities and mobility infrastructure led to measurable increases in tourist arrivals and tourism revenue in several Malaysian states [54]. When destinations strategically enhance their halal travel ecosystem, including digital platforms for travel planning and information access, they attract high-value Muslim tourists who contribute significantly to local economic activity [55].

### *1.2.5 Cultural Sensitivity and Economic Development*

Cultural sensitivity entails a profound regard for the social and religious traditions of Muslim guests and goes beyond simply providing halal cuisine or prayer mats [56]. Destinations that demonstrate cultural sensitivity, such as offering halal-certified food, prayer facilities, and culturally appropriate services tend to foster greater visitor satisfaction and loyalty, resulting in increased tourist spending and repeat visits that boost local economies [57]. If effectively promoted, Kelantan's rich Islamic culture which is reflected in its architecture, traditional crafts, Islamic festivals, and local customs can be a powerful draw. These features are frequently not adequately highlighted in tourism advertising. This represents a lost chance to set Kelantan apart as a place of spirituality and culture. Building a culturally sensitive tourism environment involves more than compliance, it requires empathy, storytelling, and local involvement [58]. In addition to giving tourists a more memorable and meaningful experience, tourism that honours and reflects local culture also empowers the community and supports local economic growth [58].

### *1.2.6 Economic Development*

Economic development refers to the process by which the overall health, well-being, and academic standard of living of a region improve through increased economic activity, employment, and investment [59]. The process by which a nation or region raises the standard of living and economic prosperity of its citizens is referred to as economic development [60]. This process typically involves efforts to increase employment opportunities, enhance infrastructure, stimulate business activity, and raise income levels over time [61]. It involves structural adjustments that raise living standards, lessen poverty, and guarantee long-term economic viability in addition to economic growth [62].

According to recent studies, successful economic development relies heavily on good governance, infrastructure development, education, and technological advancement [63]. Additionally, integrating sustainable practices into economic policies ensures that growth does not come at the expense of environmental degradation [64]. Therefore, economic development is a multi-dimensional process that aims to improve the overall quality of life by addressing economic, social, and environmental factors simultaneously. In recent years, many studies have highlighted the importance of inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society, emphasizing gender equality, social inclusion, and environmental protection [65].

### *1.2.7 Kelantan, Malaysia*

Kelantan is one of the states located in the northeastern region of Peninsular Malaysia, bordering Thailand to the north. It is known for its strong Islamic identity, traditional Malay culture, and deeply rooted religious values. The majority of Kelantan's population are ethnic Malays who predominantly practice Islam, and this religious orientation is deeply reflected in the state's governance, social norms, and tourism offerings [66].

Kelantan, which is frequently called the "Cradle of Malay Culture," is home to numerous traditional arts, including batik, wayang kulit (shadow puppetry), and dikir barat (traditional singing). In recent years, Kelantan has embraced Islamic tourism as a key driver for socio-economic growth, with attractions that include Islamic-themed museums, historic mosques, halal food markets, and cultural festivals aligned with Islamic values [67].

In contrast to other Malaysian states, Kelantan offers a distinctive Islamic tourism experience since it adheres to Syariah law in its governing structure. This approach aligns with the increasing global interest in halal and ethical travel experiences [68]. With strategic efforts by the state government to develop Islamic tourism, Kelantan is becoming a niche destination for domestic and international Muslim travellers, contributing positively to its economic development and local entrepreneurship [69].

### *1.2 Research Gap*

Despite the growing global interest in Islamic tourism, there is a significant research gap concerning its economic impact, especially in the context of Kelantan [70]. Previous research frequently overlooks accurate information regarding the direct contributions of religious tourism to economic variables including employment, income and business expansion [71]. Furthermore, there is still a lack of empirical study on the potential and efficacy of Islamic tourism in Kelantan [72]. The absence of stakeholder viewpoints in tourism planning and development, including those of local companies, governmental organisations and community people is another significant gap [73]. To completely comprehend and maximise the contribution of Islamic tourism to Kelantan's sustainable economic growth, these gaps must be filled [74].

### *1.3 Significant of the Research*

The study on the influence of Islamic tourism on economic development in Kelantan is of paramount importance due to the increasing global demand for tourism that aligns with Islamic principles, often referred to as Islamic tourism [75]. Islamic tourism which integrates elements such as halal certification, Islamic values, halal travel and cultural sensitivity has the potential to contribute significantly to the economic development of a region like Kelantan. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these components can drive economic growth, particularly in tourism-centric areas.

The research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Islamic tourism, especially in the context of Kelantan, a state with a majority Muslim population and a rich Islamic heritage. Muslim-friendly tourism is a valuable resource, especially in Muslim nations with a rich and diverse past culture [76]. By examining the relationship between Islamic tourism components and economic development, the study will highlight the importance of adapting tourism products and services to meet the needs of Muslim travellers. This can assist local stakeholders, including government agencies, tourism businesses and local communities in designing strategies that are in line with international trends while respecting Islamic values. Malaysia has a lot of potential to enhance Islamic tourism for economic sustainability and religious fulfilment [77].

In addition, another important aspect of the significance of this study is its potential contribution to Kelantan's overall economic development. As Islamic tourism grows, it has the potential to create jobs, boost local businesses and generate revenue through various tourism-related activities [78]. One of Malaysia's economic contributions came from the tourism industry [79]. This could lead to increased investments in infrastructure, hospitality services and cultural preservation.

### *1.4 Research Objective*

This study aims to investigate the relationship between Islamic tourism components and economic development in Kelantan. The specific research objectives are stated below:

i. To investigate the relationship between Islamic tourism components and economic development in Kelantan.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employs a correlational research design, which is suitable for investigating the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating them. Correlational research aims to determine whether and to what degree a relationship exists between Islamic tourism components and economic development in Kelantan.

In this context, Islamic tourism components refer to elements such as halal certification, Islamic values, halal travel and cultural sensitivity. Economic development will be measured by indicators like local business growth, employment opportunities, income generation, and tourism-related investments.

This design aims to investigate the type of correlation between these factors, specifically whether the availability and type of Islamic tourism products are positively linked to state and local economic gains. Since it does not directly manipulate or control variables, this method is non-experimental; instead, it looks for trends and patterns that already exist.

The correlational research is particularly useful in social sciences and tourism studies when the goal is to measure associations rather than causation [84]. This design is therefore appropriate for evaluating the relationship between Islamic tourism and economic development in Kelantan, where direct experimental manipulation would not be feasible.

The primary data for this study will be collected through a structured questionnaire survey. This method is chosen for its efficiency in gathering standardized information from a large number of respondents, making it ideal for correlational research where relationships between variables need to be measured consistently [80]. To ensure wider accessibility and efficiency in data collection, the questionnaire will be distributed online using platforms such as Google Forms, WhatsApp and social media channels.

The population for this study consists of tourists who have visited Kelantan and experienced its Islamic tourism offerings. This covers both Muslim tourists from Malaysia and other countries who have visited Kelantan and taken part in tourism-related activities that adhere to Islamic values. These individuals represent a relevant population because they have firsthand experience with the tourism products and services provided in the state. Their perceptions and experiences are crucial in evaluating the relationship between Islamic tourism and local economic development, as they are the direct consumers of these services. Focusing on this population ensures that the research findings will be meaningful and accurate in assessing the relationship between Islamic tourism components and their potential economic impact.

Since the total number of Muslim tourists visiting Kelantan is approximately 7,549,370, determining an appropriate sample size is essential for the accuracy and reliability of the study. To achieve this, the study uses the sample size determination table, which indicates that for a population exceeding one million, the recommended sample size is approximately 384 respondents [85].

The sample size for this study is determined based on the assumption that the target population is large and unknown, which is common in tourism studies where specific visitor data is not readily available. According to the sample size determination table, 384 respondents is the optimum sample size when the population is unknown or very large (over 100,000) [85]. This figure guarantees that

the study's conclusions are reliable and broadly applicable, and it offers a solid foundation for statistical analysis, especially in correlational investigations.

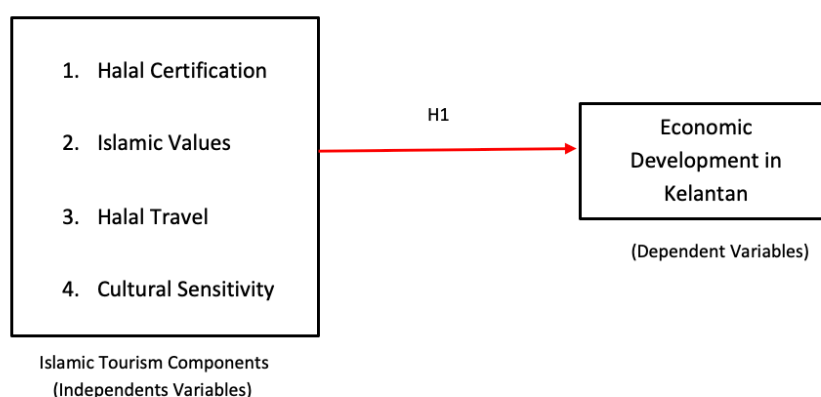
This study adopts the Sustainable Tourism Development Theory as the theoretical framework. This theory is widely used in tourism studies to understand how tourism activities can contribute to long-term economic, social, and environmental sustainability within a destination [81]. In the context of this research, the Sustainable Tourism Development Theory helps explain the relationship between Islamic tourism components and economic development in Kelantan.

This study adopts a non-probability sampling technique, specifically snowball sampling, to identify and reach respondents. This approach identifies and surveys initial responders, or seeds, who meet the selection criteria. Following their initial participation, these participants are asked to recommend or distribute the questionnaire to other qualified members of their personal or professional networks who have also been to Kelantan. The survey will be distributed online using platforms such as Google Forms and shared via social media, WhatsApp, Telegram, and email to initiate the snowballing process. This approach ensures convenience, cost-effectiveness, and accessibility, especially when targeting a geographically dispersed group of respondents.

This research uses SPSS to analyse the collected through the survey. All responses will be compiled in the SPSS file within the data collection period. The data set is manually filtered before running any tests. All invalid samples with missing values will undergo removal from the data set.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 illustrates the study's research framework. There are two variables in this study, which are independent variables and dependent variables. The independent variable is about Islamic tourism components which consist of halal certification, Islamic values, halal travel and cultural sensitivity. Whereas the dependent variable is about economic development in Kelantan. These dimensions were adapted from several studies.



**Fig. 1.** Research framework

### 4. Conclusions

Since this study is still being conducted, it is required that the final results will represent significant research findings. The study aims to give an understanding of the relationship between Islamic tourist elements and Kelantan's economic growth, particularly on how locally driven tourism practices might impact employment, entrepreneurship, and regional revenue growth. It will also give



future researchers a starting point for a more thorough investigation of the function of Islamic tourism, especially in overlooked areas like Kelantan.

From another perspective, this research is expected to make a substantial contribution to the tourism industry, especially in regions with a strong Islamic identity. It will offer valuable input to local government agencies, tourism planners, and entrepreneurs in understanding how Sharia-compliant tourism can be developed and promoted strategically.

This research could potentially support efforts to boost Kelantan's economic growth by improving its tourism sector's competitiveness, enhancing the quality of Syariah-compliant services, and encouraging sustainable development. Ultimately, this study may act as a guide for other states or countries with similar cultural-religious backgrounds to explore Islamic tourism as a viable tool for economic advancement.

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