



## Exploring Halal Tourism in Indonesia's Super-Priority Destination: Muslim Travelers' Needs in Labuan Bajo

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** This research aims to explore the needs of Muslim travelers who visit the Super-Priority Destination of Labuan Bajo. Labuan Bajo is considered one of the potential destinations for developing halal tourism in Indonesia. However, the predominance of a non-Muslim population in the region presents a distinctive challenge in the implementation and promotion of halal tourism practices.

**Methods:** The approach used is qualitative, with data collected through in-depth interviews with Muslim Traveler informants who had visited Labuan Bajo. The in-depth interview questions are based on the extension of the theory of travel.

**Results:** The research results show that the main motivations for Muslim travelers visiting this place are recreation and work, where natural beauty and ease of access are the main factors attracting Muslim tourists to visit this place. However, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed, such as the limited availability of prayer facilities in some island destinations, the lack of halal-certified food options, and the insufficient communication between tour providers and tourists.

**Conclusion and suggestion:** This study concludes that Labuan Bajo is a Muslim-friendly destination, but the improvement of worship facilities and halal food must be optimized. This research is expected to serve as a foundation for the development of halal tourism in predominantly non-Muslim destinations that are inclusive and sustainable.

**Keywords:** Halal Tourism, Labuan Bajo, Muslim Traveler, Super-Priority Destination, Tourist Needs

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## A. INTRODUCTION

In its journey, halal tourism has gradually recovered post-pandemic, as reflected by the increasing number of international Muslim arrivals. Based on data released GMTI (2024), the motivations of Muslim travelers in their journeys are diverse, not only for worship but also for business, education, medical purposes, and leisure Huda et al., (2022). Therefore, Muslim travel destinations are not limited to places where most population is Muslim Adel et

al., (2020). When traveling to predominantly non-Muslim destinations, the availability of facilities for worship, halal services, and halal food and beverages is crucial in shaping Muslim tourists' perceptions Al-Ansi et al., (2019). Although research on halal tourism is still in its early stages, this topic is very interesting and continues to be developed in the discourse on global tourism Moshin et al., (2020). Halal tourism has a long history and attracting international tourists potentially Kusumaningtyas (2023).



Figure 1. Strategic Development Areas for Tourism Destinations in West Manggarai

Source: Gai et al. (2025)

The Indonesian government has established 10 priority destinations: Mandalika, Likupang, Labuan Bajo, Lake Toba, Borobudur, Wakatobi, Tanjung Kelayang, Morotai Island, Mount Bromo, and the Thousand Islands ([kemenpar.go.id](http://kemenpar.go.id)). Figure 1 shows the area of strategic tourism development in West Manggarai. UNESCO, through the Man and Biosphere Program, has designated Komodo National Park as a Biosphere Reserve, which is a conservation area for biodiversity consisting of terrestrial, marine and coastal regions. The tourist destinations available in this authoritative area are also diverse, including Bukit Cinta, Komodo Island, Pink Beach, Rinca Island, Padar Island, Manjarite, Kanawa Island, Gili Lawa, Gunca Wulang Waterfall, and Rangko Cave. Not only does it offer natural beauty, but UNESCO has designated the Labuan Bajo authority area as a World Heritage Site, where its nature and culture become a legacy for future generations.

In recent years, research related to halal tourism, Muslim-friendly tourism, and religious tourism has experienced rapid growth. However, the existing research tends to focus on destinations that are predominantly Muslim, which inherently already have halal principles (Chantarungsri et al., 2024; Supardin et al., 2023; Yagmur et al., 2020). The current research gap in halal tourism research, as outlined by Fauzi & Battour (2024), which is the current direction of halal tourism research is toward destinations that are predominantly non-Muslim. On the other hand, in-depth studies related to religious needs to enhance the experience and satisfaction of Muslim tourists are still quite limited and need to be examined more thoroughly (Abdul Shukor & Kattiyapornpong, 2024; Oktadiana et al., 2016). Therefore, the research will focus on the area where the exploration of Muslim Traveler preferences can reduce the gap in halal tourism in Indonesia.

According to data released by BPS (2024), Labuan Bajo is a destination that is predominantly non-Muslim. The percentage of Muslims in Manggarai Barat is only 9.01%. Based on data released by the Labuan Bajo Flores Authority Executive Agency (BPOLB), the number of visitors in the past five years has fluctuated, with the highest number being in 2023, totaling 596,683 visitors. Meanwhile, the target set by the Ministry of Tourism is 1.5 million visitors. Sometimes, when offering the halal tourism concept to society there is rejection from several parties, especially in the non-Muslim majority area. Therefore, collaboration among stakeholders to inform about halal inclusivity is needed as stated by Aslikhah (2023).

Based on the official website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of East Nusa Tenggara, Labuan Bajo has become the center for accelerating halal certification in East Nusa Tenggara, as evidenced by the mandatory halal campaign organized by BPJPH in 2004. As of May 2024, the number of halal certifications in East Nusa Tenggara is only at 4,000 halal certificates. Based on the KNKS Guide in 5 Muslim-friendly destinations (Widiargo et al., 2021), there are currently 4 mosques, 7 halal restaurants, and 4 hotels that provide facilities for Muslims. In building halal tourism, halal awareness is greatly needed by stakeholders in providing the necessities for Muslim tourists (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

In contributing conceptual ideas, this research provides significant contributions to the concept of Muslim Friendly tourism by expanding the understanding of how halal attributes and standards can be applied in predominantly non-Muslim destinations. Specifically, this research will develop a conceptual model that integrates the preferences of Muslim tourists visiting the Super Priority Destination of Labuan Bajo. As a practical contribution, this research also adopts halal values and attributes applied in island destinations with a majority Muslim population, such as the Maldives, which stakeholders can implement in the predominantly non-Muslim tourist destination of Labuan Bajo. (Adham et al., 2025; Muneeza et al., 2020). This research identifies the inclusivity of halal hospitality, thereby enriching existing studies on how halal tourism can be implemented while respecting cultural values and local residents (Adham et al., 2025).

When offering the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism to stakeholders of destinations that are predominantly non-Muslim, many obstacles occur. In some cases, there is an outright rejection of the halal tourism concept by the community and tourism operators, one example being the conflict at Lake Toba (Safitri, 2021). Very sensitive issues, such as concerns about the loss of local culinary wisdom, have become the main issues, even though the goal of offering the halal tourism concept is to create a sense of safety and comfort for Muslim travelers visiting the area. (Manurung et al, 2024). Therefore, a sustainability and measurable strategy is strictly needed to promote halal products so they can be accepted by the community. Nizar et al., (2022). Good communication among stakeholders in offering halal tourism concepts is important to anticipate conflicts that may arise in the future (Rahayu & Abbas, 2024).

This research will produce several outputs that are beneficial conceptually and practically. The scientific benefit is to fill the research gap in examining the needs of Muslim travelers, especially in areas dominated by non-Muslims, and to enrich the literature on halal tourism in Indonesia. The practical benefit of this research is to provide a comprehensive overview for managers and players in the tourism industry in developing and promoting the

Muslim-friendly destination of Labuan Bajo to Muslim travelers. Which, if done effectively, can ultimately increase the number of incoming tourists to meet the set targets. In the social aspect, this research helps create a more friendly and inclusive tourism environment for Muslim tourists. Furthermore, if tourism in the Labuan Bajo region is managed well, it can reduce the poverty rate (Gai et al., 2025). Generally, the results of this research are expected to increase the number of Muslim tourists to other predominantly non-Muslim destinations in Indonesia.

## B. THEORITICAL STUDY

### 1. The Concept of Halal Tourism

The word halal is derived to Arabic language that means everything allowed and permissible in shari'a law in Islam (Kasri et al., 2023; Mukhtar et al., 2012). Initially, halal tourism was introduced as sharia tourism, but over time the nomenclature of the term changed to halal tourism (Chantarungsri et al., 2024). However, some countries adopt different terminology, such as halal heritage, Islamic tourism, halal holiday, Muslim-friendly, and Muslim tours. (Khan & Callanan, 2017) Halal tourism is often understood as Islamic tourism where all aspects must comply with Islamic laws. However, referring to Battour & Ismail (2016), halal or Muslim-friendly tourism is not limited to religious destinations or predominantly Muslim destinations. What is most important is that the destination offers halal facilities that enable Muslims to fulfill their obligations.

In its development on the global stage, greater attention to halal tourism is being given by developed countries (Amalia & Gunawan, 2023; Marlinda et al., 2023; Shakona et al., 2015). This is caused by the increase in halal tourism year by year. In 2022, global halal tourism expenditures amounted to 133 million and are predicted to reach 174 billion USD by 2027. (State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, 2023). This potential should be recognized by stakeholders in optimizing the number of visitors coming to all destinations. However, in Indonesia, policies related to halal tourism are still very minimal and highly dependent on local governments and the culture of the region. (Hennida et al., 2024) Misconceptions in realizing an inclusive halal concept still frequently occur. Strategies for offering the halal concept are important to implement (Safitri, 2021).

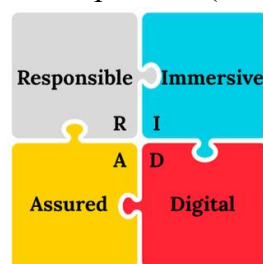


Figure. 2.1 RIDA Halal Tourism Framework

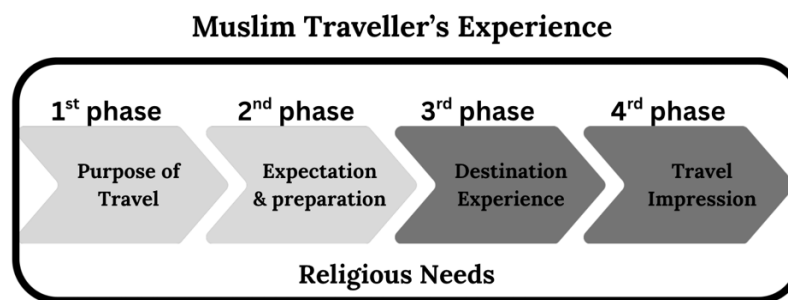
Source: GMTI, 2024

The Responsible, Immersive, Digital, and Assured (RIDA) framework can serve as an effective strategic guide for developing halal tourism in Indonesia. Figure 2.1 illustrates the RIDA framework. This framework integrates the principles of responsible tourism without neglecting the role of the latest technology in preparing journeys for Muslim travelers. The representation of an image as puzzle pieces signifies the interconnectedness of its dimensions. This implies that the strength of this framework lies in each element that

reinforces one another. The Super Priority Destination of Labuan Bajo has the potential to become an attractive destination for Muslim travelers by adopting the RIDA framework. Labuan Bajo, as a destination that offers meaningful immersive experiences, uses digital technology, provides security guarantees in all its services, and is responsible for both tourists and the environment.

## 2. The Theory of Travel

Based on the research conducted by Martin & Woodside (2012), the theory of travel is classified into four stages. (1) Travel motivation, (2) preparation, (3) destination experience and (4) post-travel impressions and decisions. It is used to explore the tourism process experienced by tourists visiting certain tourist destinations. This theory was then developed by Said et al. (2022) to understand the needs of Muslim travelers in predominantly non-Muslim areas, namely Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. Similarly, Shakona et al. (2015) with a focus on studying the habits of Muslim travelers in the United States.



**Figure 2.2 Travel theory process in exploring the needs of Muslim travelers.**

The theory of travel is used as a basic reference in exploring the religious needs of Muslim travelers. Starting from the motivation for travel, expectations and preparations for the journey, experiences during the visit to tourist destinations, and post-journey reflections. The purpose of this theory is to satisfy of Muslim travelers visiting the super-priority destination of Labuan Bajo, by identifying their religious needs. In evaluating satisfaction, expectations and experiences can be used as parameters to improve it, similar to the evaluation conducted at the super-priority destination of Mandalika, Lombok (Pattaray & Sumaryadi, 2024). Based on that, it is important to serve as the foundation for its use in this research. Referring to (Lada et al., 2024) The exotic natural beauty has become one of the strengths in widely promoting halal destinations, Labuan Bajo, which is famous for its beauty. However, research focusing on mapping the needs of Muslim travelers at this destination has not yet been conducted. Therefore, this research attempts to study the religious needs of Muslim travelers to enhance their satisfaction while traveling using this theoretical approach.

## C. METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative methods to obtain an in-depth explanation of the potential development of halal tourism in Labuan Bajo based on the needs of Muslim tourists. Qualitative methods serve as tools used to understand complex phenomena and gain deep insights. Qualitative research explores the depth of social phenomena so that researchers can connect with the subjective experiences of participants (Lim, 2024). This method was chosen because the qualitative approach enables the researchers to understand the subjective meanings of experiences undergone by Muslim tourists within their travel context. The

interpretation of participants lived experiences forms the core of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018), making this methodology relevant for exploring the spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions that cannot be adequately captured by quantitative approaches. Therefore, qualitative research typically involves the process of observing a population through in-depth interviews or Focus Group Discussions (FGD) (Corner et al., 2019).

Data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews are the optimal method for collecting historical data, perspectives, and human experiences, especially on sensitive topics (Oranga & Matere, 2023). In-depth interviews were conducted with informants selected through purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research needs, specifically seven individuals who had traveled to Labuan Bajo. Table 1 displays the characteristics of the seven research informants who traveled to Labuan Bajo. A total of seven informants were selected based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when additional interviews no longer yield new information or themes relevant to the research focus. As explained by (Hennink et al., 2017), saturation is reached when no new information emerges from the data, and this condition served as a guideline for determining the adequate number of participants in this qualitative study. The selection of informants also considered diversity in characteristics, including gender, occupation, and travel purpose, to obtain a rich and representative understanding of the experiences of Muslim tourists in Labuan Bajo. Table 1 presents the profile of the seven informants.

Table 1. Informant Profiles

Informant	Gender	Occupation	Purpose
A Putri	Female	Employee	Recreation
B Haura	Female	Employee	Work
C Ihsan	Male	Employee	Work
D Rovi	Male	Employee	Recreation
E Hamdi	Male	Student	Recreation
F Hafizh	Male	Student	Recreation
G Afifah	Female	Student	Recreation

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the data, this study employed source triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data and information from multiple informants with diverse backgrounds and experiences regarding their travel to Labuan Bajo. This technique was used to assess the consistency of the findings and enhance the credibility of the obtained data. Triangulation is a crucial strategy in qualitative research for enhancing the reliability and validity of findings (Noble & Heale, 2019).

In this study, an in-depth interview guide was used to ensure the reliability of the research, thereby creating consistency in the process. The interview guide contains topics taken from previous research relevant to this study. The in-depth interview questions are based on the research by Said et al. (2022), which is an extension of the theory of travel used in the study by Martin & Woodside (2012). Here is a list of interview questions that have been adjusted to align with the objectives of this research:

1. What is the purpose of your visit?
2. What is the main thing you pay attention to when traveling to Labuan Bajo?
3. What are your expectations for Labuan Bajo?
4. What are the main preparations before departing for Labuan Bajo?

5. If the main preparations include gathering information, what specific information did you collect before the trip?
6. What activities did you do during the trip?
7. What do you like about Labuan Bajo?
8. What do you not like about Labuan Bajo?
9. Are you considering returning to Labuan Bajo in the future?

The results of the in-depth interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify emerging themes based on the research questions. According to Grbich (2013), thematic analysis is the process of data reduction prior to final interpretation and serves as a descriptive strategy for identifying patterns within qualitative data. Guest et al. (2012) emphasized that thematic analysis requires significant researcher involvement and interpretation to uncover both explicit and implicit meanings within the transcribed material.

The process of thematic analysis typically involves six distinct phases, as outlined in (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, researchers familiarize themselves with the data through transcription and repeated reading to gain a comprehensive understanding and generate initial ideas. Second, initial codes are developed by identifying meaningful features across the dataset and organizing them accordingly. In the third phase, these codes are grouped into potential overarching themes. The fourth phase entails reviewing themes to ensure coherence with both the coded data and the entire dataset, often with the aid of a thematic map. Next, themes are refined and named through continuous analysis in the fifth phase. Finally, the sixth phase involves writing the report by selecting compelling data extracts, conducting a final analysis, and linking the findings to research questions and relevant literature.

In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyze the information provided by the informants as well as the meanings interpreted from their narratives. The data analyzed included travel purpose, primary concerns, expectations, preparation activities, actual experiences in Labuan Bajo, and the informants' reflections after the trip. From this information, research findings were developed to identify key elements that could be further developed or adjusted to align Labuan Bajo more closely with the principles of halal tourism.

## **D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Research Findings**

The research findings in this study, based on interviews with Muslim travelers, provide a comprehensive and clear picture of the halal tourism situation in the super-priority destination of Labuan Bajo. The results of the exploration will be presented in four main sections: the first section summarizes travel motivations, the second section covers travel preparations, the third section explores during the trip, and finally, post-trip and loyalty to the tourist destination.

#### **a. Travel Motivation**

In addition, although Labuan Bajo, which is located in East Nusa Tenggara, is a destination with a majority non-Muslim population, many Muslim travelers visit there with different motivations. Based on the in-depth interviews conducted with the informants, the main motivations of Muslim travelers visiting the Muslim-friendly destination of Labuan Bajo can be broadly divided into two categories: first, for recreation, and second, for work. However, both categories have different underlying motivations. As done by informant A,

where the purpose of the trip to Labuan Bajo was for recreation, while accompanying their parents for work.

Informant E has a unique motivation, where he chooses Labuan Bajo as a recreational place because it is a Super Priority Tourism Destination designated by the government, which is very famous for its natural beauty. The same informant also mentioned that by enjoying the natural beauty and contemplating nature while remembering Allah, it is also considered an act of worship. Meanwhile, Informant F, who is a student, was invited by a friend to vacation in Labuan Bajo, in contrast to Informant D, who instead invited a friend to vacation in Labuan Bajo. The informants who traveled to Labuan Bajo for work were Informants B and C, each with different work scopes.

In this case, informant C conducted a workshop at one of the hotels in Labuan Bajo and did not worry too much about the halal food and facilities because they were already prepared by the office. On the other hand, the business trip to Labuan Bajo undertaken by informant B pays great attention to halal aspects, both in terms of dining places and halal facilities. This is related to the informant as a worker at the Halal Product Assurance Organizing Agency (BPJPH) and the goal is to socialize with MSME actors, especially food business operators in the Labuan Bajo area.

According to (Huda et al., 2021) from the Islam perspective, one of the motivations for traveling is to know the Creator, as mentioned in the Quran. *“Do you not see that the ships sail through the sea by the grace of Allah, so that He may show you some of His signs? Truly in that are sign for whoever is steadfast and grateful”* (Quran, Luqman[31]:31). Labuan Bajo is a place where ships are the main mode of transportation, therefore Labuan Bajo is the right destination to practice this verse. An important aspect that shapes the motivation of Muslim travelers in visiting tourism is its natural beauty (Lada et al., 2024). Labuan Bajo is an exquisite tourist destination, as evidenced by its nomination by Time Out Travel, which named Labuan Bajo the most beautiful destination in 2025. This supports the potential of international tourists, allowing them to meet the set targets.

## **b. Travel preparation**

### **1) Expectations of Muslim Travelers before departing to Labuan Bajo**

The expectations of travel play an important role in Muslim travelers when visiting tourist destinations (Pattaray & Sumaryadi, 2024). Informant D prioritizes beautiful island and beach views as well as comfortable accommodations near the beach. Meanwhile, Informant G, who is part of Generation Z, desires an impressive and memorable marine tourism experience away from the hustle and bustle of the city. This aligns with the research (Ilhan et al., 2023), which indicates that the main goal of Generation Z travelers is to escape the daily grind. As for informant C, who aims to perform work activities, they have low expectations due to the business trip, but still hope to enjoy the beauty of Labuan Bajo in between work activities.

Although informant B also has work-related goals, they still want to maximize their sightseeing. Informant B also hopes to have easily accessible worship facilities. Informants B and G pay attention to the environmental aspects and the friendliness of the local residents, while informant D places more emphasis on the beauty of the tourist destination. On the other hand, informant E prioritized the spiritual aspect. Among the informants, there was a commonality in appreciating natural beauty, including beaches, islands, unique flora, and the

view of island clusters. Most informants considered halal food and worship facilities with varying levels of priority.

From the Islamic perspective, there are principles that must be upheld while Muslims are traveling. These principles include performing obligatory worship and avoiding what is forbidden. *The Prophet Muhammad mentioned a traveler, his hair disheveled, dusty, raising his hands to the sky, and saying, "O my Lord, O my Lord!!" while his food was unlawful, his drink was unlawful, his clothing was unlawful, and he was nourished by what was unlawful, how could his prayer be answered* (Hadist narrated by Muslim [1015]). Therefore, during a journey, a Muslim must intend to uphold the principles related to worship and halal food.

## **2) Preparations made before traveling to Labuan Bajo**

During the journey, the Muslim traveler as an informant prepares the necessities for the trip. As done by Informant E, who from the beginning had a religious motivation, creating an itinerary that considers prayer times and avoids long boat trips to perform prayers comfortably. This contrasts with Informant F, who instead bought a full trip ticket on the boat. As for performing prayers, the informant did not prepare much for it; as long as they covered their aura and could pray on the boat, it was not a major issue. In terms of prayer, each Muslim traveler has their own preferences.

During the preparation of the trip, the informants chose tourist destinations, as done by informant D, who used social media to select good tourist spots, such as beaches and islands. This informant also prepares clothes, content creation tools, prayer tools, and money. Unlike informant A, who focuses more on selecting a travel agency for convenience in tourism, other preparations are more geared toward clothing such as swimwear, snorkeling, and hiking gear. Based on the travel style, informant A chose a full sailing trip on a ship, while informant G preferred to avoid the ship to prevent the mixing of men and women. In one hadith narrated by Ibn Abdilbarr, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "*Seeking what is lawful is obligatory for every Muslim.*" In the context of travel, a Muslim is obliged to seek halal food and drink.

In preparing halal food, informant B had thorough preparations by searching for information on the internet, while informant F did not prioritize food much because most of the food on the ship was seafood, and he assumed that seafood was halal. In preparing tickets, accommodations, and tour packages, most informants used the Traveloka and Google Maps applications, according to (Puspita & Andni, 2024) Electronic Worth to Mouth (E-WoM) in digital applications to promote halal product affects consumer decision significantly. As for the itinerary, the Instagram and TikTok applications serve as the main references for viewing travel testimonials from the content provided by influencers. All informants also considered and prepared during the trip, and the average trip duration was three days to one week.

### **c. Dynamics of the Journey**

#### **1) Access to Worship Facilities and Halal Food**

The informant faces challenges in practicing their faith in Labuan Bajo, where the Muslim population is a minority. Informant C feels that there is still a lack of attention to the needs of Muslims in terms of places of worship or adjustments to social norms. This makes the travel experience in Labuan Bajo feel like being abroad. On the contrary, informant G stated that although Muslims are a minority, the people of Labuan Bajo already have an understanding and readiness to welcome Muslim tourists, such as the availability of prayer

facilities and halal food. Informant G compared Labuan Bajo, which has a Muslim minority, with non-Muslim countries like Japan. In Japan, informant G finds it more difficult due to the lack of knowledge and facilities that support Muslim needs.

In addition, informant F felt the lack of worship facilities for Muslim tourists, especially while on the tourist ship, which serves as the main place to stay and engage in activities. Facilities for prayer, such as a prayer room and a qibla indicator, are not available, so the informant has to pray in their room and determine the qibla direction themselves. Additionally, although the port city has mosques, their number is limited compared to the predominantly Muslim areas. Although limited, informant D did not have difficulty finding large mosques in the harbor area, including for Friday prayers. Informant B also stated that places of worship are still relatively easy to find and the sound of the call to prayer can still be heard from the hotel where informant B is staying.

As for obtaining halal cuisine, informant D experienced difficulties because not all eateries explicitly label themselves as halal. Informant D feels quite helped because many migrants from Java have opened culinary businesses featuring their regional specialties, making halal food options quite available, especially around the Labuan Bajo harbor. Informant B also experienced difficulty in finding restaurants or hotels with halal certification, even though the hotel had provided transparent information regarding the separation of kitchens and cooking utensils. On the other hand, informant B acknowledged that halal food is relatively easy to find, especially in Kampung Ujung, which has halal-certified MSMEs, even though the presence of the Muslim community is not visually dominant.

These findings reflect the diversity of Muslim experiences in fulfilling their spiritual needs and halal consumption while traveling in predominantly non-Muslim areas. While some informants reported ease, other experiences indicated challenges due to the absence of standard prayer facilities and limited assurance of food halalness. This aligns with the findings of (Battour et al., 2011), who emphasized the importance of halal-friendly attributes in attracting Muslim tourists, including accommodation, food, and prayer facilities. Compared to destinations that have systematically developed in halal tourism aspects, Labuan Bajo is still in the early stages of developing an inclusive tourism ecosystem for Muslim travelers. These findings support previous studies indicating that the perception of spiritual comfort is a significant factor in Muslim tourists' travel decisions (Mohsin et al., 2016). From an Islamic perspective, travel or *safar* is a permissible and even encouraged activity to gain worldly and otherworldly benefits, provided it adheres to Sharia principles. The Quran states: "*It is He who made the earth easy for you, so walk through its regions and eat from His provision...*" (Quran, Al-Mulk [67]:15). Therefore, the ease of performing religious duties such as prayer and obtaining halal food during safar is part of safeguarding the spiritual rights of Muslim tourists.

## **2) The Role of Communication in Tourist Interactions**

Informant G emphasized that although Labuan Bajo is quite Muslim-friendly, with facilities available for prayer, tourists still need to proactively inform the travel organizers of their worship needs. Thus, obligations as a Muslim, such as prayer, can still be fulfilled even with a packed travel schedule. The limited availability of facilities such as mosques makes communication with the travel organizers important to ensure that religious obligations are

still fulfilled. Additionally, informant F stated that if the trip is conducted on a cruise ship, the need for halal food can be anticipated through initial communication with the ship's crew.

The same was stated by informant B, that it is important for tourists to communicate from the beginning with the travel provider, especially if using a ship or speedboat, so that the food prepared adheres to halal principles. If not communicated beforehand, non-halal food, including ham or alcoholic beverages, will usually still be provided as part of the travel package. This shows that the readiness of facilities and good communication are key to ensuring comfort for Muslim travelers, allowing them to enjoy a trip that meets their worship needs.

This finding illustrates a recurring theme of self-advocacy and religious responsibility among Muslim travelers when engaging with the mainstream tourism infrastructure. As (Henderson, 2010) notes, Muslim tourists often adopt adaptive strategies in navigating secular travel environments that may not fully accommodate their needs. This supports the view that halal tourism is not only about physical infrastructure but also about information transparency and mutual awareness between providers and Muslim consumers (Stephenson, 2014). Thematically, the accounts point to the significance of halal assurance through active dialogue, suggesting that Labuan Bajo's halal tourism development should include mechanisms to facilitate this communication, such as halal travel guidelines or checklists for operators and visitors alike. The Quran commands Muslims to uphold acts of worship even during travel: *"Indeed, prayer has been decreed upon the believers a decree of specific times"* (Quran, An-Nisa [4]:103). The obligation to seek halal consumption also reflects the Quranic instruction: *"Eat of what is lawful and good (halalan tayyiban)"* (Quran, Al-Baqarah [2]: 168), highlighting that ensuring halal food is not only a preference but also religious duty, even in a leisure context.

### 3) Adaptation to the Local Environment

Informant B felt very helped because the local community was friendly and informative, especially when asked for assistance or directions. Informant G also believes that the hospitality and respectful attitude of the local community toward tourists are important factors that make tourists feel comfortable. On the other hand, informant D noted the lack of hospitality from some local residents and the prominent presence of alcohol in the tourist area. As a Muslim tourist, informant D felt the need to initiate interactions so that the locals would respond warmly. This shows a thematic pattern of perceived social acceptance and respect as central to the travel experience of Muslim tourists. The divergent views on local hospitality highlight that perceptions of friendliness are subjective and depend on context, personal initiative, and mutual understanding. This supports the findings of (Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010), who argue that Muslim tourists seek not only physical amenities, but also emotional and spiritual comfort rooted in the behavior and atmosphere of the destination.

Informant C explained that the open tourism culture in Labuan Bajo, especially from foreign tourists, is not in line with the dress norms and etiquette upheld in Islam. Informant C feels uncomfortable with some things that contradict Islamic views, such as the open dressing style of some tourists. This is considered morally and spiritually disturbing, and it raises concerns because it can cause sin. Additionally, informant D feels that the easy availability of

alcohol is somewhat uncomfortable for Muslim tourists, even though it is considered a common occurrence in tourist areas like Labuan Bajo. These concerns reflect the broader theme of moral dissonance, where Muslim travelers are caught between enjoying natural attractions and facing social behaviors that conflict with Islamic values. This aligns with (Mohsin et al., 2016), who identified moral and ethical barriers as key considerations in halal tourism, beyond logistical concerns like food and prayer spaces.

On the other hand, informant G felt uncomfortable walking while sightseeing in Labuan Bajo because there are many stray dogs that cause fear of being bitten. However, informant F feels that it is not a significant issue. In terms of safety and environmental cleanliness, including the presence of impure animals, Labuan Bajo is considered safe and comfortable for Muslim tourists. This contrast reveals a pattern of individual tolerance thresholds among Muslim travelers. While Islamic jurisprudence acknowledges dogs as *najis mughallazah* (major impurity), it also promotes balance and reason, especially when facing conditions beyond one's control.

#### **4) Physical Readiness in performing Tourism Activities**

Informant G felt a physical challenge to enjoy the natural beauty of Labuan Bajo. Although reaching the beauty of Labuan Bajo requires exhausting effort, the experience feels very satisfying and memorable. Informant E also greatly enjoyed the natural beauty, the uniqueness of the local culture, and the hospitality of the people of Labuan Bajo. Informant A explained that during the sailing trip, phone signals were limited. However, Informant A found this beneficial because it allowed for a more meaningful travel experience and a stronger connection with nature and fellow travelers. The inter-island journey, which takes a long time, and the full activity schedule from morning to night, can be quite exhausting for tourists. This indicates the need for good time and energy management, as well as the importance of physical readiness for tourists, especially those choosing a sailing trip. Similarly, as stated by informant E, several tourist locations in Labuan Bajo have quite challenging terrains such as steep hills and full-day sea trips that are less suitable for young children. Although the tour was conducted efficiently by visiting various popular destinations in one day. This causes rest time and the performance of worship to be limited.

These findings reflect the broader theme of physical and spiritual challenges in adventure tourism, especially for Muslim travelers. In the context of halal tourism, (Battour et al., 2014) emphasized that access to worship facilities and spiritual comfort are essential to a positive travel experience. The demanding itinerary and energy depletion may hinder regular worship activities, as also highlighted by (Henderson, 2010), who stressed the need to integrate spiritual considerations into tourism planning, particularly in non-Muslim destinations. From an Islamic perspective, travel (*safar*) is acknowledged as a part of life that comes with both rewards and challenges. The Quran states, “*And when you travel throughout the land, there is no blame upon you for shortening the prayer*” (Quran, An-Nisa [4]:101), highlighting that physical difficulty during travel grants dispensations (*rukhsah*) in religious practice. Muslim tourists should be physically prepared and spiritually conscious, ensuring that their travels do not compromise their obligations or well-being.

#### **5) Cost Challenges during Travel**

According to informant A, the prices of seafood, which should be affordable because Labuan Bajo is a coastal area, are actually considered high, and hotel rates are also quite

expensive. Informant D also felt that food prices in Labuan Bajo tended to be high, especially for local cuisine and seafood sold on the roadside. As for informant G, they felt that the limited shopping options contributed to the high prices of basic necessities in Labuan Bajo. Informant G explained that in Labuan Bajo, there are no major supermarket chains, so tourists have to buy goods at small convenience stores with relatively high prices. However, informant G did not highlight this issue as something too bothersome, but rather as an additional note regarding the condition of the facilities in Labuan Bajo.

Additionally, informant A considers the high cost of living less in line with expectations regarding accessibility and local affordability. Informant A felt the absence of online transportation services, so they had to rely on local taxis with quite expensive fares even for short distances. Informant B also considers the absence of online car taxi services to be an obstacle, especially when traveling in a group, as transportation options are only available through online motorcycles or offers from local residents.

These findings reflect broader themes of accessibility and economic sustainability in emerging halal-friendly destinations. The perceived disconnect between local economic conditions and tourism pricing has also been discussed in previous studies. For example, (Mohsin et al., 2016) highlight that in halal tourism development, the perception of fairness in pricing greatly influences Muslim tourists' satisfaction. When basic services such as food and transport are considered overpriced, it can diminish the overall travel experience, especially for value-conscious travelers. From an Islamic perspective, affordability and fairness in economic transactions are emphasized in the Quran. Allah says: *“And give full measure and weight in justice. We do not burden any soul beyond what it can bear”* (Quran, Al-An'am [6]:152). This principle reflects the importance of fairness and transparency in pricing, which should be extended to Muslim-friendly tourism services. In addition, the absence of affordable and convenient transportation may hinder access to places of worship or halal food, indirectly affecting the ability to fulfill religious obligations.

#### **d. Post-Trip Reflection**

Almost all informants expressed a desire to visit Labuan Bajo again. Informant B explained that information about destinations, facilities, and special needs, such as halal food and places of worship, is easily accessible through the internet. This makes the journey feel more comfortable and practical, and it makes Labuan Bajo a destination worth recommending and revisiting for Muslim tourists. According to informant G, the effort to enjoy the natural beauty of Labuan Bajo and the warm social interactions became the main memorable experiences during the trip. Labuan Bajo is very vast and holds many natural beauty that are not widely known, which adds to the interest in returning to visit Labuan Bajo.

Informant E found the trip enjoyable and memorable, especially due to the well-organized travel arrangements and supporting facilities such as rest stops. Although there were some technical issues such as slow vehicles, informant E did not consider them a significant drawback. The time constraints that prevented some destinations from being visited, especially those requiring a long land journey, were the reasons for informant E to plan a return visit. Informant F also expressed a strong desire to revisit Labuan Bajo due to its

natural beauty and unforgettable travel experiences. In addition, informant F is concerned about the potential decline in the quality of the destination if it is not well-maintained.

Informant A explained that there are still places that have not been visited yet. A different travel experience when going with family, which tends to be more relaxed, makes the informant want to return with friends to experience a more active and challenging adventure. Similarly, informant D, who has visited Labuan Bajo twice, feels it is sufficient to do it alone. However, informant D has a desire to return, especially with a partner, so that the next trip can be more meaningful. This shows that the aspects of novelty and companionship during the trip are important factors in determining the desire to return to the same destination. On the other hand, informant C felt that the high costs incurred for personal travel made them reluctant to return to Labuan Bajo, except in the context of mandatory business trips funded by the institution.

These findings reflect common themes in travel motivation among Muslim tourists, such as emotional fulfillment, destination uniqueness, and the availability of religiously appropriate services. The desire for repeat visitation is in line with findings by (Battour et al., 2011), who argue that satisfaction with halal services and emotional experiences are strong predictors of revisit intention among Muslim travelers. The notion of companionship as a spiritual and emotional enhancer also aligns with previous literature emphasizing the role of shared travel in increasing spiritual well-being (Henderson, 2010). From an Islamic perspective, travel (*safar*) is encouraged as a means of gaining knowledge, spiritual reflection, and deepening social bonds. The Quran says: “*Travel through the land and observe how He began creation*” (Quran, Al-‘Ankabut [29]:20), highlighting the value of travel for contemplation and understanding. Therefore, both the physical beauty and the spiritual-social dimensions of travel in Labuan Bajo resonate strongly with Islamic values and principles.

## **2. Aspects that Need Development**

Based on the research findings, several development initiatives are needed to help Muslim tourists plan more comfortable and peaceful trips, as well as to encourage the overall improvement of halal service standards in the Labuan Bajo tourist area. Thus, Labuan Bajo can become a halal tourism destination that not only highlights natural beauty but also provides spiritual comfort for Muslim travelers. Here are some aspects that need to be developed in Labuan Bajo:

### **a. Availability of Halal Certified Food**

To develop halal tourism in Labuan Bajo, the availability of halal-certified food is a crucial aspect. This is based on Labuan Bajo being a destination with a Muslim minority, which can create doubts among Muslim tourists regarding the food preparations. Even if the food is ensured to be made from halal ingredients and processed in a halal manner, halal certification is still important for culinary entrepreneurs to validate the halal status of their products, not just as a claim. Halal certification becomes crucial because halal is not only free from alcohol, pork, and their derivatives, but also ensures the halal status of the entire process and food ingredients comprehensively. Consumers trust in halal products is not developed randomly, but it is built of awareness based on halal certification from expert and government Mundzir et al., (2024). Research Mannaa (2020) concluded that the availability of halal food influences tourists’ intention to revisit, the duration of their stay, and their choice of

accommodation. Therefore, destination managers need to enhance the promotion and presentation of products that are friendly to Muslim tourists while also expanding non-Muslims' understanding of halal principles.

Then, food stalls or restaurants that are already halal-certified also need to display their halal certification in a large and clearly visible manner, making it easier for Muslim tourists looking for halal cuisine. This aims to ensure that Muslim tourists feel safe and comfortable. Thus, the aspect of providing halal-certified food needs to be further developed to support Labuan Bajo as a halal tourism destination. In addition, it is also recommended to have an integrated information map or roadmap that includes the locations of halal food stalls or restaurants, as well as hotels that have halal certification.

#### **b. Adequate Worship Facilities**

In addition to the availability of halal-certified food, it is also necessary to increase the number of worship facilities for Muslim tourists in Labuan Bajo. The availability of prayer facilities specifically for Muslim tourists can be a motivating factor for them to revisit a destination (Hanafiah, 2022). It is not necessary to have a large mosque; providing prayer rooms or small prayer spaces at strategic tourist points in Labuan Bajo is essential so that Muslim tourists can worship comfortably. Thus, Muslim tourists can receive prayer time reminders through the call to prayer (azan). In addition, worship facilities are also important to provide in hotels and ships where Muslim tourists stay, including the availability of prayer tools, information on the direction of the Qibla, and prayer schedules. For travel organizers, it is important to create a travel itinerary that considers the prayer times for Muslims.

### **3. Practical Contribution**

The findings of this study suggest several actionable recommendations for destination managers:

- a. Collaborate with the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH) to support halal certification processes for local food vendors and hotels.
- b. Install proper prayer facilities at major tourist spots, ports, and accommodations.
- c. Develop and maintain a digital platform or tourism app listing Muslim-friendly services and halal-certified businesses.
- d. Train hospitality service providers about basic halal and Islamic requirements to foster inclusive and respectful service delivery.
- e. Include Muslim prayer times and Qibla directions in the printed and digital travel guides.

### **4. Theoretical Contribution**

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Muslim-friendly tourism, particularly in non-Muslim majority destinations. While much of the existing research (Battour & Ismail, 2016; Mohsin et al., 2016) focuses on Muslim countries or regions with an Islamic heritage, this study highlights how Muslim-friendly tourism can be promoted in emerging destinations like Labuan Bajo, where the Islamic infrastructure is limited.

It also proposes a preliminary model of Muslim-friendly tourism in non-Muslim areas, emphasizing the role of proactive communication, localized infrastructure development, and culturally respectful service design. This contributes to the discourse by shifting attention from purely supply-driven halal tourism to more demand-responsive and context-sensitive approaches, especially in regions with religious and cultural diversity. Hence, Labuan Bajo can serve as a case study in extending Muslim-friendly tourism

practices to new geographical contexts, providing both theoretical insights and practical frameworks for future development.

## E. CONCLUSION

This research provides an overview of the situation of Muslim-friendly tourism in Labuan Bajo, designated as a super-priority destination by the government. In this study, the motivations of Muslim travelers in visiting Labuan Bajo are categorized into two categories: recreation and work, with various underlying motivations ranging from contemplating nature to simply enjoying the natural beauty. Although Labuan Bajo is predominantly a non-Muslim area, Muslim travelers do not mind making it their primary destination due to its natural beauty, as stated by several informants. In addition, the designation of priority destinations by the government also plays an important role for Muslim travelers in choosing Labuan Bajo as a tourist destination.

In preparing their trips, Muslim travelers have unique preferences, such as choosing itineraries that consider prayer times, access to halal food, and travel comfort. Technology plays an important role in the planning process, with many travelers using platforms such as Traveloka, Gmaps, Instagram, and TikTok to seek travel reviews. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed, especially regarding worship facilities and halal food. Some informants complained about the lack of places of worship, particularly at tourist destinations on the island, and finding restaurants with halal certification. Although there have been efforts from business operators to provide halal menus, the presence of halal certification is still lacking. This indicates the need for further development to enhance the Muslim-friendly tourism experience, including optimizing worship facilities and clearer promotion of halal food in the Labuan Bajo destination.

The number of informants in this study is only a few, so the results are unlikely to represent all the needs of Muslim travelers in this destination. This study only focuses on one super-priority destination that has received more attention from the government, compared to other non-Muslim majority destinations in Indonesia. The approach in this study is qualitative which focuses on in-depth understanding but is less able to provide qualitative trends for larger populations. Therefore, future research is expected to use quantitative methods and compare several other non-Muslim majority destinations such as Likupang and Raja Ampat. Future research can also consider AI technology that makes it easier for Muslim travelers to explore tourist destinations in non-Muslim majority areas.

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