

# Development of Religious Tourism as an Alternative for Increasing the Sustainable Economy of Rural Communities (An Analysis of the Review of Potentials, Constraints and Solutions in Jambi Province)

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## Abstract

This study aims to describe an analysis of the potential, challenges and obstacles to developing religious tourism in Jambi Province as an effort to improve the economy of rural communities. The approach used in this research is qualitative with data collection techniques through interviews, observation and documentation. The results of the study show that Jambi has good potential to develop religious tourism as an alternative in improving the sustainable economy of rural communities. Furthermore, alternative strategies that need to be considered for developing religious tourism include: 1) through exploration activities, 2) variety of objects and supporting facilities, 3) massification of information on religious tourism objects, 4) optimization of human resources managing tourism objects, 5) building adequate infrastructure, and 6) develop supporting policies as well as a legal umbrella. Several tourist objects that can be used as religious tourism icons in Jambi Province include: 1) Mosques, there are several historic mosques in Jambi that can be developed as religious tourism destinations including: ancient mosques, namely: Pondok Tinggi Grand Mosque, Central Island Sacred Mosque, The Nurul Mosque on Jalan Tanjung Pauh, the Ancient Lempur Tengah Mosque in Kerinci which was built during the Dutch colonial era, the 1000 pillar mosque in Jambi City and so on, 2) Temples, there are several temples that have the potential to be developed, including: Muaro Jambi Temple, Kedaton Temple, Pagoda, in Jambi there is a historic temple built around 1800 AD and has the potential to become a tourist attraction, namely the Siu San Teng Temple or the familiar Hok Tek Temple located in Jambi City, and 4) Al-Quran Village located in Penegah Village, Kec. District Warriors Sarolangun was founded in 2018.

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, rural communities, sustainable development.

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## INTRODUCTION

Law No. 32 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, as the legal basis for the implementation of the decentralization system and regional autonomy in Indonesia. Based on this Law, each region has the authority and power to manage and regulate its own region (Purnamawati & Sugianto, 2022). This is a very strategic opportunity for the region to explore, develop, manage its assets and natural resource potential to develop the local area, including observing strategic sectors such as potential resources that can be optimally utilized to support regional development as a whole. sustainable (Mebri, Suradinata, & Kusworo, 2022).

One sector that plays a role in sustainable development and regional development is tourism activities (Ardiansyah & Iskandar, 2022). The development of tourist objects and attractions is the main driver of the tourism sector (Rizki and Fikri Virgiawan, 2022). Therefore, the development of tourist objects and attractions as one of the main sectors driving the community's economy needs to be carried out. The development of the tourism sector requires the cooperation of all interested parties, including the public and the government, as well as direct cooperation from the business sector and from the private sector. Cooperation between parties in tourism development is intended so that the development is right on target, running optimally in accordance with local culture.

Tourism activities have many positive impacts, both for the government, local communities and even society at large. This is proven by results; research that has been done by experts. Arum, Padmaningrum, & Winarno (2022) stated that tourism activities can have a positive impact on economic, social, cultural, environmental and political activities. In addition, tourism activities also have the potential to increase local sources of original income (Mebri et al., 2022), the natural environment is better preserved (Putra & Ariana, 2022), maintain cultural values (Pujiastuti, et al. 2022), improve health and physical and mental fitness (Chen & Petrick, 2013). Apart from that, according to the European Travel Commission (2022) tourism also has a positive impact on the formation of a green economy. Thus it can be said that tourism objects have a broad impact on human life.

The positive impact of tourism on the government and society in general can be realized if the development of these tourist destinations is carried out in a systematic and sustainable manner. In Jambi, the empowerment of tourist objects and destinations (especially religious tourism) as a source of PAD and the economic empowerment

of local people is still not optimal. Several tourism objects in Jambi have not been developed and managed effectively. Therefore, it does not provide space for the emergence of appreciation and internalization of the wisdom and values contained in tourist objects, whether in the form of nature, history or culture.

Tourism is often associated with religion, history, customs, beliefs of people or groups in society or what is known as identity tourism (Muliadi, Fasya, & Ilham, 2020). Identity tourism is a characteristic inherent in an area/region or certain objects, both material and non-material, that are used as tourism centers (Burns & Novelli, 2006), (Rozman Cafuta, 2022) and (Saputro, 2022). Thus it can be understood that in general religious tourism activities are included in identity tourism and are closely related to human life itself, both material and non-material.

Currently, traveling or tourism has become a hobby that is of interest to the public and has become a distinct trend for the younger generation (Jovan Abdul, A., 2022). According to research (Salam & Mutaqqin, 2022) there has been an increase in tourism activities in Indonesia with a figure of 20,000-30,000 foreign tourists and 300,000-400,000 domestic tourists. This means that the interest of the Indonesian people in tourism activities is getting better. The trending tourist destinations in the pandemic era, namely 2020-2021, are nature tourism, extreme activities (outbound, horror and so on) as well as culture, culinary and religion (Gunawan & Rachim, 2022). Therefore the development of tourism in various regions including Jambi Province is still very promising and has the potential to become a flagship program for the local government (Arsvendo, Khotimah, & Fitrianto, 2022).

Referring to the explanation above, apart from natural attractions such as beaches and mountains, religious tourism seems to be a tourist destination that is also of great interest. This is proven by the influx of tourists to religious tourism sites such as the Walisongo tombs on the island of Java. This is in line with the opinion of Waluyo, et al., (2022) that religious tourism is still an interesting issue in Indonesia given the large Muslim population. Religious tourism is a religious trip aimed at meeting spiritual needs, so that the soul becomes calm, humbled by religious wisdom (Mukhirto & Fathoni, 2022). In Jambi province the potential for the development of religious tourism is very large, but it has not been managed properly and systematically.

Religious tourism has a special attraction for tourists with spiritual values and inter-religious tolerance which can be a guide for life. Culture and religion (especially Islam) leave various important historical relics, including: tombs, mosques, former kingdoms, jewelry, customs and so on which can be used as potential and attractiveness for religious tourism (pilgrimage). Religious tourism is a tour or trip that is carried out for religious or general nuances, capable of arousing public awareness of the Almighty Allah SWT and religious awareness (Mustika, Srisusilawati, 2020). Therefore, Widodo & Indriyanto (2022) state that the purpose of religious tourism is to get enjoyment, satisfaction and knowledge. Thus it can be understood that the motive of religious tourism is to fill free time, to have fun, relax, study and religious activities to spread Islam.

In Jambi Province, religious tourism is actually well known by the public in general, even though it is not yet a trend. However, in general the people of Jambi have a positive attitude towards religious tourism activities. This is as stated by Rahman (2022) that the people of Jambi (Sarolangun Regency) in general have positive attitudes and responses to sharia (religious) tourism. The results of this study are also reinforced by the research of Firsty & Suryasih (2019) which states that in general the community has positive attitudes and perceptions and supports the development of the Muaro Jambi Temple as a religious tourism destination. Therefore, the Jambi community's positive response to religious tourism needs to be utilized to support the development of tourist destinations, with the ultimate goal of increasing the community's economy in a sustainable manner.

The response and positive attitude of the community towards religious tourism and the diversity of religious tourism objects in Jambi have not been fully manifested in the form of real tourism activities. Some existing religious tourism objects and systems have not been managed systematically, and some of them tend to be neglected. This has an impact on the not yet optimal positive impact of these religious tourism objects and tourism destinations on government revenues and the economy of the surrounding community. Therefore, this study seeks to provide an analysis of the development of religious tourism as an alternative in improving the sustainable economy of rural communities in Jambi. This is based on the idea that tourism objects and religious tourism destinations are generally located in rural areas.

## **METHODS**

The approach used in this research is qualitative with the literature review method. Literature review is a term used to refer to certain research or research methodologies and developments carried out to collect and evaluate related research on a particular focus topic (Triandini, 2019). The literature reviews used in this study are various sources of literature (encyclopedias, research reports, scientific articles, reference books and so on, both on an international, national and local scale). In addition, the nature of the literature used in this study is manual literature (printed sources) and digital literature (non-printed). Literature review is all efforts made by researchers to obtain relevant and up-to-date information on the topic or problem being studied (Hamidi, 2007). This research was conducted in three stages namely; first: collect various reference sources (literature) that are considered appropriate to the topic discussed, namely related to religious tourism, second: do reduction, namely selecting and sorting and classifying references into main sources, supporting sources and sources that are less relevant. Sources that are considered

less relevant are not included in this study. third; data triangulation, namely comparing one reference with another. This is done to ensure the validity of the reference data used in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### a. The Potential of Religious Tourism in Improving the Sustainable Economy of Rural Communities

Religious tourism, like other tourism has the potential to improve people's welfare. The development of religious tourism has the potential to increase Local Original Income (Yusef Firmansyaha, 2020), (Mebri et al., 2022), (Pratiwi, 2022), and (Najjah, Fadliyanti, & Suriadi, 2022), increasing the welfare of rural communities (Habibi, 2022), (Putri & Hilman, 2022), (Yanto et al., 2008). Thus it can be understood that the development of religious tourism has a positive impact on the government and the welfare of rural communities in general.

The positive impact of tourism (including religious tourism) on the welfare or improvement of the economy of rural communities occurs continuously and continues as long as the tourism object exists. This is based on the research results of Nisa, Usrah, & Saputra (2022) which showed that the Java-Bali Emergency PPKM Policy during the pandemic which was implemented on 3 – 20 July 2021 had generally brought about significant changes in the behavior of the people of Demak, including in the Sunan Kalijaga tourist area, both individual and communal obedience. The closure of religious tourism, especially tombs, has had a distinct impact on traders. However, when the new normal era arrived, the tomb manager again opened Sunan Demak religious tourism. This is because pilgrims are required to implement health protocols. When on pilgrimage, visitors are required to apply 4M, namely maintaining distance, wearing masks, washing hands and avoiding crowds with a limited number of visitors. However, after the new normal era and the re-opening of religious tourism, the economy of the surrounding community has recovered. Therefore, it is clear that as long as these tourism objects exist, during that time the potential for the welfare of the local community will improve.

From the point of view of religious tourism trends, the research results of Bid & Geki (2019) state that every year the number of tourists visiting religious buildings and events increases, such as the Sarena Mosque in Travnik, the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Spirit in Fojnica or Ajvatovica in Prusac and the St Ivo pilgrimage to Podmilacje center of religious tourism is world famous. The research results of Mahmoudi et al. (2021) show that the average values of religious tourism, experimental marketing, and entrepreneurial sport opportunities and their components are relatively good. Therefore, religious tourism is a relatively promising destination. From this point of view, Jambi province, which has many religious tourism objects and is supported by the positive attitude of the people towards religious tourism, can optimally take advantage of this trend so that it has a positive impact on the welfare of rural communities.

From the point of view of the potential of religious tourism objects and destinations in Jambi Province, Jambi is classified as very good. This is based on the results of Utari's research (2017) which states that cultural potential as a religious tourism object in Jambi City includes: 1) Tomb of Habib Idrus Bin Hasan A-jufri (Prince Wiro Kusumo) and Tomb of the Sacred Tambak Habib Husein Bin Ahmad Baragbah Jambi Seberang City, 2) Al-Falah Mosque (Thousand Pillar Mosque), 3) Kompangan Bedana Dance and, 8) Haul. Reinforcing the above opinion, Fradesa, Arzuna, & Sawitry (2022), Shaputra, Mursalin, & Syaiful (2022) in their research also stated that the Muarai Jambi Temple has the potential to become a religious tourism destination in Jambi. In addition, there are still many locations or religious tourism objects in Jambi that have not been explored optimally, for example the grave of Sulthan Thaha Saifudin Jambi, "Quran Village" and the Tomb of the Jambi Province Major Ulama, namely KH Muhammad Saleh or better known as Buya Salek in Penegah Village, District Pelawan Sarolangun Regency.

In addition to the several potentials mentioned above, there are still several other potentials that can be developed into religious tourism destinations in Jambi, including: diversity of customs, museums and Islamic boarding schools in Jambi province. If these objects can be explored and developed properly and systematically then religious tourism can be realized. As it is understood that these objects are directly or indirectly related to the religion of the people of Jambi with the term "land choose *pesako betuah*". Thus the development of religious tourism objects and destinations, in addition to increasing PAD, the welfare of rural communities in a sustainable manner can also be used as a medium of Islamic da'wah.

The diversity of religious tourism objects and community responses to religious tourism objects/destinations in Jambi have not been fully manifested in the form of real tourism activities. The results of preliminary observations by researchers indicate that there are several obstacles or causes of not optimal management of religious tourism objects and destinations in Jambi Province, namely: 1) all the potential for religious tourism objects and destinations in Jambi has not been explored, 2) publications on religious tourism objects and destinations are still very limited, both through print and electronic (digital) media, 3) several religious tourism objects and destinations have not been supported by various facilities or infrastructure, 4) rural communities around religious tourism objects/destinations in terms of human resources are still inadequate and not actively involved in developing these objects, 5) most of the objects/destinations of religious tourism are in rural areas and have not been supported by adequate road infrastructure. Therefore, a strategy for developing religious tourism is

needed as an alternative in improving the sustainable economy of rural communities in Jambi.

### **b. Strategy for Development of Religious Tourism in Jambi**

Referring to the description above, that the potential for religious tourism in Jambi Province is quite high and relatively diverse. However, the development of religious tourism as an effort to increase PAD as well as an alternative effort to improve the sustainable economy of rural communities has not been optimally implemented. Real integrated efforts are needed so that the development of religious tourism destinations can run well and optimally. This is as stated by Washil (2022) that in the context of tourism development it is necessary to take strategic steps, including: a.) Government support by building adequate facilities and infrastructure in the form of access roads, buildings (congkop tombs), and adequate vehicle parking, b) Effective promotion that must be carried out by the government of Cg. Disporahub and tour operators (private parties) through promotions through mass media, electronics and so on, c.) The government and the private sector can work together, especially in providing transportation, restaurants, restaurants (if necessary), and guides (muthawwif).

In line with the description above, this research describes several steps as an alternative strategy in the development of religious tourism in Jambi Province. Some of these strategic steps are as follows:

#### **1. Exploration of the potential for religious tourism**

Exploration of the potential of religious tourism is the first step that aims to find everything that has the potential to become a religious tourism object. Through these exploration activities, the advantages and disadvantages of an object from a tourist point of view will be known. In other words, potential exploration activities are efforts to find and analyze a particular object and determine its feasibility as a religious tourism object. Therefore, through this exploration activity it is possible to find new religious tourism objects or new perspectives, new ideas and so on which can be used as a rationale for the development of this tourism.

In carrying out exploration activities, it needs to be carried out in an integrated manner by involving various existing elements. Some elements that should be involved in exploring religious tourism objects include; central government, local/regional government, experts/academicians, related study centers, indigenous peoples and local communities. With the involvement of these elements, exploration activities will be able to run better, that is, more planned and more optimal.

The end result of the exploration of the potential for religious tourism is a feasibility study of the object. Feasibility studies can be carried out in a group discussion forum (FGD), scientific reports and so on. If an object has been declared fit to be used as an icon or religious tourism object, then it needs to be supported with other supporting facilities and infrastructure.

#### **2. Variety of objects and supporting facilities**

A tourist object will become a broad attraction and satisfy visitors if it has its own uniqueness and impression. Regarding the main objects of religious tourism, Sarker (2021) states that several objects that can be used as religious tourism objects include: mosques, temples, pagodas, churches, religious festivals, various religious rituals. Darchashvili (2020) states that several interesting potential religious tourism objects include Sanctuaries (such as Christ's robes) which in this case can be interpreted as clothes that have been worn by the main characters at certain events, other historical objects.

In the province of Jambi religious tourism as mentioned by the researchers above is still very possible. Some religious tourism objects in Jambi that have the potential to be developed include:

- a. Mosques, there are several historic mosques in Jambi that can be developed as religious tourism destinations including: ancient mosques, namely: Pondok Tinggi Grand Mosque, Central Island Sacred Mosque, Nurul Mosque on Jalan Tanjung Pauh, Ancient Lempur Tengah Mosque in Kerinci which was built during the Dutch colonial era, the 1000 tinga Mosque in Jambi City and so on.
- b. Temples, there are several temples that have the potential to be developed, including: Muaro Jambi Temple, Kedaton Temple.
- c. Temple, in Jambi there is a historic temple which was built around 1800 AD and has the potential to become a tourist attraction, namely the Siu San Teng or the Temple which is known as the Hok Tek Temple which is located in Jambi City.
- d. Kampung Al-Quran is located in Penegah Village, Kec. District Warriors Sarolangun was founded in 2018

In addition to the main tourist objects, a religious tourism destination will be even better if it is supported by adequate facilities. This is as stated in the research results of Widiyanti, et al. (2016) that complementary facilities have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction. Ardiansyah & Iskandar (2022) also stated that one of the factors that determine the success of developing tourism objects is supporting facilities. Yunanda (2022) also states that a good tourist area should have a number of adequate supporting facilities. Some of the supporting facilities needed in order to develop tourism objects include: places to eat, places of worship, parking lots, public toilets, adequate security and so on. The more various supporting facilities, the better the tourist destination will be.

#### **3. Massification of information on religious tourism objects**

Massification of information or marketing of religious tourism objects is the third step after exploration activities and variety of objects. Massification of information or marketing activities is one of the efforts to introduce tourism

objects that have been explored and developed so that they are known by the wider community. This introduction, of course, aims to increase the interest and number of tourists (Wijaya, et al., 2022). This is in line with the opinion of Manafe, et al., (2016) that marketing activities aim to influence/persuade, and/or remind target markets for their products to be willing to accept, buy and be loyal to the products offered. This information massification activity is also in the framework of forming branding (Laksana, et al., 2013) of tourist destinations that are being developed. If this activity is not carried out, no matter how good the tourist objects and areas are, they will not be known by the public and ultimately the number of visitors will not be optimal. Therefore information massification activities are one of the best steps in developing tourist destinations.

Massive information on tourist areas or certain tourist objects is not too difficult in this era and is one of the important points. Various digital facilities are available in a variety of ways, for example Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter and even the WA group. According to Arofah & Achsa (2022) digital marketing in the current era is very important, especially in marketing a product, especially tourism. Afina et al., (2022) in his research stated that digital marketing strategies that can be used to market tourism products can be in the form of website platforms, social media and mobile applications. Saniati, et al., (2022) marketing through digital media called E-tourism has the potential to increase tourism activities. Séraphin & Jarraud (2022) also stated that digital publications have a positive impact on traditional pilgrims (religious tourists) and also on participant satisfaction. Thus it can be understood that the massification of information through manual and digital promotions is a real effort to increase the potential for tourist visits to religious tourism destinations in Jambi Province.

#### **4. Optimization of human resources managing tourism objects**

One of the efforts to improve the quality of tourism objects, management, marketing and maintenance of tourist destinations is to optimize their human resources. Quality resources will be able to manage, maintain and market tourism products effectively and efficiently. Human resource development activities in order to improve the ability to manage, maintain and market tourism products effectively and efficiently can be carried out with tour guide training (Santoso et al., 2022).

#### **5. Build adequate infrastructure**

Widodo & Indriyanto (2022) the existence of a clear and easy-to-see gate and identity, directions will attract pilgrims to go to the Sentono Tomb location. In addition, the attractiveness of religious tourism will also increase if it is integrated with culinary tourism based on local specialties. This is in accordance with the research of Ariani et al. (2022) that traditional culinary tourism can be developed to support tourist villages, such as cassava (mocaf), bananas (chips) and other food plants. Therefore, religious tourism in Jambi will be more interesting and growing, given the culinary potential of Jambi which is also diverse. Apart from that, other infrastructure that can support the successful development of religious tourism is houses of worship. According to Pasi et al. (2021) integration between tourist objects and houses of worship will be a special attraction for tourists, especially what is being developed is religious tourism, of course closely related to houses of worship.

Some additional infrastructure to increase the number of tourist visits according to Lin et al., (2021) is a large parking area, providing comfortable resting places, transportation, establishing low-cost tourist camps and adding religious and historical monuments. According to Balabeikina & Yankovskaya (2022) religious tourism will be even more interesting if it is expanded into scientific religious tourism, namely combining religious tourism objects with education and scientific expeditions. This activity can be carried out by providing a building for conferences or scientific discussions related to religion or figures in the main objects of religious tourism. The implementation can be carried out by spiritual education organizations, academics or community leaders in the religious tourism location.

#### **6. Develop supporting policies as well as legal umbrellas**

Srichai et al. (2021) states that improving the quality of religious tourism can be done by: 1) building strong relationships between formal institutions (government) and non-formal institutions (community), 2) the need for coordination between institutions to utilize knowledge, skills and 3) the need for education and training for managers of religious tourism sites. Thus, the development of religious tourism needs to be supported by the development of policies that support as well as a legal umbrella for the development of religious tourism destinations in Jambi.

In addition to developing legal umbrella policies, building community awareness of the urgency of religious tourism also needs to be improved. This is in line with the opinion of Ali et al. (2019) that one alternative strategy that needs to be considered includes improving existing tourism management, building local community awareness of the importance of religious matters in tourism, creating simple promotional activities that can be carried out in a religious tourism destination as is in the research This.

## **CONCLUSION**

Referring to the above description at the end of this study it can be concluded that the potential for the development of religious tourism as an alternative to improving the sustainable economy of rural communities in Jambi Province is relatively very good. Some alternative strategies that need to be considered for developing religious tourism

include: 1) through exploration activities, 2) variety of objects and supporting facilities, 3) massification of information on religious tourism objects, 4) optimization of human resources managing tourism objects, 5) building adequate infrastructure, and 6) develop supporting policies as well as a legal umbrella. Some tourist objects that can be used as religious tourism icons in Jambi province include:

- a. Mosques, there are several historic mosques in Jambi that can be developed as religious tourism destinations including: ancient mosques, namely: Pondok Tinggi Grand Mosque, Central Island Sacred Mosque, Nurul Mosque on Jalan Tanjung Pauh, Ancient Lempur Tengah Mosque in Kerinci which was built during the Dutch colonial era, the 1000 tinga Mosque in Jambi City and so on.
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- d. Kampung Al-Quran is located in Penengah Village, Kec. District Warriors Sarolangun was founded in 2018

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