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**THE ROLE OF MUSLIM TOURISTS' ECOTHEOLOGICAL  
AWARENESS IN SHAPING PREFERENCES AND NATURE-BASED  
TOURISM BEHAVIOUR IN PEKALONGAN**

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**Abstract**

*Nature-based tourism in Pekalongan has shown rapid growth as Muslim tourists' awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability as part of Islamic values increases. This study aims to analyze the role of ecot theological awareness in shaping the preferences and behaviour of Muslim tourists towards nature-based tourism destinations. Using a qualitative approach, this study explores the relationship between theological understandings of the concepts of caliphate, trust, and tawhid and destination selection patterns, as well as responsible tourism behaviour, through a literature review and descriptive survey data from 120 respondents. The results show that Muslim tourists with high levels of ecot theological awareness tend to choose destinations that are sustainable, tranquil, and provide spiritual value. They also demonstrate ethical tourism behaviour, such as refraining from damaging nature, bringing their trash bags, and participating in conservation programs. The correlation between ecot theological awareness and tourism preferences was significant, with an r-value of 0.512, while the correlation with tourism behaviour reached an r-value of 0.643. This study concludes that ecot theological awareness plays a vital role in promoting more sustainable, value-based tourism. These findings provide a conceptual basis for developing a nature tourism model that is not only environmentally friendly but also spiritually nuanced, while encouraging tourism policies that integrate Islamic and ecological values.*

**Keywords:** *ecot theological awareness, Muslim tourists, tourism behaviour, destination preferences, Islamic tourism.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decade, nature-based tourism has experienced significant growth in Indonesia, driven by increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability and the desire for meaningful spiritual experiences during travel. Amidst the rapid

commodification of natural and spiritual spaces, a new trend has emerged among Muslim tourists, who are beginning to combine religious orientation with ecological concerns. This phenomenon is reflected not only in their destination preferences but also in their travel behaviour, which demonstrates active engagement with issues of sustainability, cleanliness, and environmental preservation (Sholehuddin et al., 2021). Pekalongan, a coastal area with rich ecotourism potential and part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for batik, is an interesting location to examine this dynamic (Devina & Atrinawati, 2022).

The presence of Muslim tourists at nature-based tourist sites in Pekalongan, such as Mangrove Park, Petungkriyono, and various coastal tourist areas, has increased, both in terms of the number of visits and participation in educational and spiritual tourism activities. Meanwhile, local communities and the city government have also begun to encourage the implementation of halal and sustainable tourism principles, including through product certification, the provision of prayer facilities, and environmental awareness campaigns (Thomson, 2025). However, there is a lack of research explicitly linking the ecotheological awareness of Muslim tourists to their preferences and behaviours in the context of nature-based tourism (Hanik & Khamidah, 2022). In fact, in Islamic tradition, the relationship between humans and nature is strongly emphasized as an integral part of devotion to God (*'ubudiyah*), safeguarding the trust (*khilafah*), and preserving God's creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).

The urgency of this research is further strengthened by global trends indicating that ecotourism cannot be separated from ethical and spiritual dimensions. In the Muslim context, ecotheological awareness can be understood as a form of internalizing Islamic values that guide human behaviour toward the environment (Susminingsih & Kanafi, 2019). This concept encompasses the awareness that nature is the living signs of God (*al-ayat al-kauniyyah*) and that humans have a moral responsibility to maintain its balance. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the role of ecotheological awareness in shaping the preferences and behaviour of Muslim tourists is crucial, not only for the benefit of the Muslim community but also for the benefit of the wider community (Andrean et al., 2022), including sustainable tourism development, as well as a contribution to strengthening Islamic and ecological discourse (Khobir et al., 2025).

Although the discourse on Islamic ecotheology has developed in various theoretical studies, its application in the context of Muslim tourist behaviour remains limited. Most research on halal tourism focuses primarily on facilities, services, and certification (Saviera et al., 2024), while religious and ecological awareness are often overlooked in the analysis of tourist preferences. This creates a gap in Islamic tourism studies, particularly in understanding the motivations and actions of tourists who integrate Islamic values and environmental concerns (Asmanto, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining how ecotheological awareness shapes nature-based tourism preferences and behaviour among Muslim tourists visiting Pekalongan.

The primary theory employed in this research is Islamic ecotheology, which is grounded in fundamental concepts such as monotheism, caliphate, trust, and balance (*mizan*). Islamic ecotheology views the relationship between humans and nature not merely as an ecological one, but as part of a sacred theological unity (Quddus, 2017). In this view, nature is a creature of God, possessing intrinsic value, and not simply an object of exploitation. Every human action towards the environment is part of ecological morality for which we will be held accountable. This theory is reinforced by the Muslim consumer behaviour approach, which emphasizes that individual decisions and actions in economic and social contexts are influenced by religious values, social norms, and moral awareness (Lebdaoui et al., 2024).

Several previous studies have demonstrated a connection between religious awareness and pro-environmental behaviour. For example, a survey conducted by Notarstefano & Gristina (2021) found that Muslim tourists with high levels of religiosity tend to choose tourist destinations that offer both spiritual experiences and environmental awareness. Research by Shahabuddin et al. (2020) identified that perceptions of moral responsibility as caliphs encourage individuals to avoid environmentally damaging tourism activities. Research by Roziq et al. (2019) revealed that the spiritual dimension of Islam serves as an essential foundation for developing responsible tourism behaviour, particularly among Muslim millennials. However, these studies have not explicitly focused on the ecotheological dimension of Islam within the framework of nature-based tourism behaviour, especially using a local case study approach, such as Pekalongan, which has its own unique cultural, geographical, and religious context.

In the study of Pekalongan, there has been no comprehensive research examining how Muslim tourists understand nature as part of their faith, and how this awareness influences their choice of tourism types, activities undertaken during their trips, and attitudes toward environmental conservation (Adinugraha et al., 2021). This is crucial considering that Pekalongan is known not only as a batik city but also as a region with a substantial Muslim population and unique natural ecosystems. Exploring these dynamics will make a significant contribution to the development of more substantial and spiritually ecological halal tourism (Ghofur & Ismanto, 2022).

This research is essential because it offers an integration between the dimensions of Islamic spirituality and tourism behaviour in a local context. This study does not merely address the market preferences of Muslim tourists, but instead attempts to explore the theological foundations and moral awareness underlying their actions. This research presents a more in-depth and reflective

examination of the relationship between Islam, nature, and human behaviour in the tourism industry (Yamin et al., 2023). Furthermore, the results can serve as a practical reference for local governments, tourism industry players, and local communities in designing ecotheology-based tourism promotion strategies that align with Islamic values.

The focus of this research is obvious and directed at the role of Muslim tourists' eco-theological awareness in shaping nature-based tourism preferences and behaviour in Pekalongan. The scientific argument is systematically constructed through the relationship between Islamic theological concepts, such as tauhid, khalifah, amanah, and mizan, and sustainable tourism behaviour. The research argument is strong because it effectively links spiritual values with concrete actions in environmentally friendly tourism, while also emphasizing its relevance to the development of halal and sustainable tourist destinations. Scientifically, this research has a clear focus, logical flow, and reflective depth, integrating theological, ecological, and social dimensions into a single, comprehensive analytical framework.

Against this background, understanding the ecotheological awareness of Muslim tourists is not only academically relevant but also strategically important in the context of developing sustainable tourism destinations. This research combines Islamic studies with social sciences within an interdisciplinary framework to address the challenges and opportunities of growing spiritually and ecologically informed tourism. The author hopes that the results of this study can broaden the discourse on ecotheology in tourism practice and make a tangible contribution to transforming the tourism paradigm from one that is solely exploitative to one that is transformative and transcendent.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach with a library research method (Thomas, 2021). This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for examining normative and theoretical concepts of Islamic ecotheology and how these values influence the preferences and behaviour of Muslim tourists in the context of nature-based tourism. Library research enables researchers to explore the construction of meaning shaped by spiritual-ecological awareness in Islam and relate it to contemporary tourism practices. This research does not aim to generalize tourist behaviour statistically, but rather to gain a deep understanding of the relationship between ecotheological awareness and value-based tourism behaviour.

Data were collected through a search of relevant scientific documents and literature, such as national and international research journals, primary reference books on Islamic ecotheology, halal tourism, and ecotourism policy documents from governments and international

organizations, and articles discussing the concepts of caliphate, trust, tawhid, and *mizan* in the context of human-environment relations. Secondary data were also used in the form of survey reports, previous research results, and regional policies related to the development of nature-based tourism in Pekalongan. The literature used was selected purposively, based on its relevance and depth to the research problem.

The data used in this study are qualitative, encompassing both conceptual and descriptive aspects. The conceptual data encompasses key theories on Islamic ecotheology, Muslim consumer behaviour, and value-based tourism preferences. The descriptive data, meanwhile, includes the characteristics of Muslim tourists in Pekalongan, their tourism behaviour tendencies, and the current state of natural destination management in the region. The data also contains reflections on the results of previous empirical research conducted in Indonesia and abroad that share a similar context.

In the data analysis process, the researcher employed content analysis techniques, which involved in-depth reading and scrutinizing texts from the collected library sources. This process then involved identifying patterns of meaning, interrelationships between concepts, and theoretical constructs relevant to the research focus. This analysis procedure was carried out interpretively and critically by linking each central concept in Islamic ecotheology with the actual behaviour of Muslim tourists in selecting and engaging in nature tourism activities. The researcher also compared several previous field studies relevant to the context of Pekalongan as the study area, to strengthen interpretative validity.

The choice of this literature-based qualitative approach is determined by the nature of the study, which places greater emphasis on understanding values, symbolic meanings, and the spiritual relationship between humans, religion, and the environment. This approach is deemed most appropriate for describing and explaining how ecotheological awareness in Islam is not only theoretical but also has implications for the formation of more ethical, responsible, and sustainable tourism preferences and behaviours. Through this approach, the study aims to develop a new framework for understanding the contribution of ecotheological awareness to enhancing nature-based tourism that is not only environmentally friendly but also rich in spiritual significance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile and Level of Eco-Theological Awareness of Muslim Tourists in Pekalongan

Based on a survey of 120 Muslim tourists visiting natural tourist destinations in Pekalongan, such as Petungkriyono, Pasir Kencana Beach, and the Mangrove Forest, a relatively

diverse demographic profile can be obtained. Most respondents fall within the productive age range, specifically between 21 and 40 years. Approximately 60% of respondents were female, while the remainder were male. The majority of respondents had an educational background of at least a higher education (S1), comprising 58% of the total. This was followed by high school graduates/Islamic high school graduates at 34%, and the remainder were junior high school graduates or below. In terms of employment, the largest group came from private employees (32%), students (25%), MSME owners (20%), and the remainder were self-employed or in other professions.

The data shows that Muslim tourists in Pekalongan are predominantly young adults who are relatively well-educated and engaged in productive economic activities. This is a crucial factor in building an environmentally and religiously conscious tourism ecosystem, as this group tends to be more open to sustainability campaigns and has access to in-depth Islamic literacy.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Muslim Tourist Respondents in Pekalongan

Variables	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	< 20 years	12	10%
	21-30 years	45	37.5%
	31-40 years	37	30.8%
	> 40 years	26	21.7%
Gender	Man	48	40%
	Woman	72	60%
Last education	Junior high school/equivalent	10	8.3%
	Senior High School	41	34.2%
	Higher Education (S1+)	69	57.5%
Work	Private employees	38	31.7%
	Student	30	25%
	MSME actors	24	20%
	Other	28	23.3%

Source: Qualitative results, 2025.

Based on the table 1, to measure respondents' ecotheological awareness, an instrument was used consisting of several key indicators, such as understanding the concept of *khalifah* (humans' role as guardians of the earth), *amanah* (spiritual responsibility towards nature), awareness that nature is God's creation (*ayat kauniyyah*), and their involvement in religious practices that support environmental conservation.

The results indicate that the majority of respondents have a high level of ecotheological awareness. Sixty-eight per cent (68%) stated that they understand the concept of the caliphate in Islam and directly relate it to the responsibility to preserve nature. Approximately 72% of respondents stated that they believe environmental damage contradicts religious teachings. Sixty-four per cent (64%) reported considering ecological aspects when choosing a tourist destination, and 59% stated that they had participated in religious activities related to environmental issues, such as Islamic and ecological studies or mosque-based environmental cleanups.

Table 2. Respondents' Level of Ecotheological Awareness

Measurement Indicators	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
I understand the concept of the caliphate and its relation to ecology.	68%	32%
Protecting nature is part of Islamic teachings	72%	28%
I consider the environmental impact when travelling.	64%	36%
I once participated in a religious activity with an ecological theme.	59%	41%

Source: Qualitative results, 2025.

These findings confirm that the ecotheological dimension of Muslim tourists' awareness is not merely a theoretical construct, but has begun to manifest itself in their practices and preferences. The awareness that humans are caliphs on earth (Quran 2:30) serves as a moral and spiritual foundation for the majority of respondents in their attitudes toward the environment, including during tourism activities. This indicates that Islamic values substantially influence their perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature.

Islamic ecotheological theory posits that the relationship between humans and nature is grounded in spiritual responsibility, rather than mere utilitarianism. The concept of monotheism teaches the interconnectedness of all creatures within a single divine system. Therefore, environmental damage is seen not only as socially destructive but also as a spiritual sin (Cloete, 2023). In this regard, ecotheological awareness forms the ethical and spiritual basis that influences the behaviour of Muslim tourists.

This research aligns with the findings of Lebdaoui et al. (2024), who showed that high levels of religiosity are positively correlated with pro-environmental behaviour among Kuwaiti Muslims. Similarly, a study by Prajasari (2022) found that Muslim tourists in Yogyakarta with a deeper theological understanding tended to exhibit more environmentally responsible behaviour in tourism. This suggests that Islamic spirituality, when properly instilled, can be a transformative force in shaping sustainable tourism. However, this study also identified a gap between awareness

and action. Although the majority of respondents understand the importance of humans' role as environmental stewards, not all of them are genuinely involved in tourism activities that support environmental conservation. This indicates that transforming values into concrete actions still faces challenges, both internally (individual consistency) and externally (supporting facilities, education, and environmental awareness campaigns).

The implications of these findings are significant for the development of values-based tourism in Pekalongan. Local governments and tourism managers need to design educational approaches that integrate ecotheological values into the promotional narrative and management of destinations. For example, this could include providing Islamic-based ecotourism study spaces at tourist sites, developing tour packages that incorporate environmentally friendly activities, or partnering with religious leaders to advocate for the importance of environmental protection.

This research also demonstrates that an Islamic studies approach can serve as a practical entry point for promoting ecological awareness. Integrating religious teachings with sustainability values provides a more grounded approach and is widely accepted by Muslim communities. As Rofiqi et al. (2024) emphasized, Islam offers the principle of *wasathiyah* (moderation), which encourages a balance between spirituality and socio-ecological responsibility. Ultimately, this research presents new opportunities for the development of halal tourism, focusing not only on facilities and consumption, but also on values and sustainability. The ecotheological awareness of Muslim tourists can serve as a driving force for ethical and environmentally conscious spiritual tourism.

### **Muslim Tourists' Preferences for Nature-Based Travel Destinations and Activities**

A survey of 120 Muslim tourists visiting natural destinations in Pekalongan City and Regency revealed that they have distinct preferences for nature-based tourism destinations. Of the three main categories (mountains, beaches, and forests), the majority of respondents (42%) stated that they most preferred mountain tourism, such as the Petungkriyono area, which offers cool air, panoramic views of tropical rainforests, and natural waterfalls. Thirty-three percent of respondents preferred beach tourism, such as Pasir Kencana Beach and Slamaran Beach, which offer a relaxing atmosphere and provide opportunities for family recreation (Wahjoerini, 2020). Meanwhile, the remaining 25% indicated a preference for forest and mangrove areas, especially Mangrove Park in North Pekalongan, as they were considered to provide a meaningful ecotourism experience and environmental education.

The preference for mountain tourism appears to be driven by a spiritual and psychological need to escape the crowds and enjoy the serenity of nature. Mountainous environments are often

perceived as places that draw one closer to the Creator, offer space for reflection, and alleviate the stress of city life. Beaches remain popular because they provide an easily accessible family vacation option with adequate supporting facilities.

Regarding their most preferred tourist activities, the majority of respondents cited light hiking and nature walks as their top choices (39%), followed by environmental education activities, such as visits to conservation centers (28%), and nature observation, including observing flora and fauna (21%). Meanwhile, 12% of respondents stated they were more interested in passive recreational activities such as picnics or relaxing in open areas. This pattern demonstrates the orientation of Muslim tourists who seek not only entertainment but also educational and contemplative value in their travels.

Several respondents stated that they sought activities that added spiritual and knowledge value. For example, environmental education activities were linked to reflection on the signs of God's greatness in the universe (*ayat kauniyyah*). This suggests a connection between activity preferences and Islamic value dimensions, although some did not explicitly mention the term ecotheology.

Interviews and questionnaires revealed that Muslim tourists place a high value on the availability of halal-compliant facilities at natural destinations. The most sought-after facilities are a proper and clean place of worship (87%), adequate and separate toilets for men and women (75%), and the availability of verified halal food (68%). The need for these facilities is not only related to physical comfort but also to fulfilling Sharia principles during travel. Muslim tourists feel more at ease and enjoy their visit if they do not have to worry about halal food and the ease of performing their religious duties (Rasyid et al., 2023).

Besides spiritual or ecotheological aspects, several pragmatic factors influence Muslim tourists' preferences for natural destinations. Entrance ticket prices are a key consideration. Fifty-eight per cent of respondents stated that they prefer economically affordable destinations. Accessibility, or ease of transportation, is also a determining factor. Tourist attractions that are easily accessible by private or public transportation are preferred, especially by families with children or older adults. Furthermore, safety, cleanliness, and the service provided by tour staff also influence the comfort and satisfaction of a visit (Hendrawan & Muslichah, 2023).

Some respondents also linked their preferences to the destination's image. For example, Petungkriyono is considered more "natural" and "Islamic" due to its tranquil atmosphere, lack of nightlife, and the presence of a local religious community. This image indirectly shapes the destination's spiritual appeal to Muslim tourists.

The above findings can be explained through the Muslim consumer behaviour theory approach, which posits that travel preferences are shaped by a combination of religious values, emotional needs, and rational considerations (Farizkhan et al., 2023). Muslim tourists act not only as ordinary consumers seeking pleasure, but also as moral subjects who incorporate Islamic values into their daily activities, including travel. In this context, a preference for destinations that offer proximity to nature, tranquility, and halal-compliant facilities is a manifestation of efforts to harmonize physical and spiritual needs. Furthermore, these findings align with Mursid & Anoraga's (2022) theory of value-based tourism, which posits that tourism encompasses not only places and activities, but also the symbolic experiences and cultural meanings that tourists construct. In this regard, Muslim tourists tend to form preferences based on their perceptions of values they deem necessary, such as purity, order, and harmony with religious teachings. Religious preference theory is also relevant to explaining how factors such as the availability of places of worship and halal food become integral to their preference systems. In Islam, worship is not confined to the mosque but can be performed at any time and in any place, including during travel. Therefore, religious facilities are an essential indicator of a destination's friendliness to Muslim tourists (Adinugraha et al., 2023).

This research corroborates previous findings by Battour & Ismail (2016), who stated that Muslim tourists have specific travel needs, which cannot be separated from spirituality and halal facilities. Sarpini & Aziz's (2023) study on Muslim tourism in Central Java also concluded that nature tourism, which offers a religious and educational atmosphere, is beautiful to urban Muslims. Research by Abduh (2022) In Banten, it was found that despite a high preference for nature, visiting decisions are still influenced by price and accessibility. This research confirms that Muslim tourists' preferences for nature-based tourism are not value-neutral. They are shaped by a combination of religious beliefs, perceptions of the spiritual significance of nature, and rational considerations related to comfort, safety, and cost.

The results of this study offer practical implications for the development of natural tourism destinations in Pekalongan and other regions that aim to attract Muslim-friendly tourism. Providing halal-certified facilities, structuring destinations to be more welcoming to Muslim families, and strengthening the destination's religious image are all viable strategies. Furthermore, a values-based approach is crucial in developing tourism promotional narratives. The communication of destinations as more than just recreational destinations, but also as contemplative and spiritual spaces, will further appeal to the Muslim traveller segment.

## The correlation between eco-theological awareness and preferences and behaviour in nature-based tourism

The relationship between the level of ecotheological awareness among Muslim tourists and their nature-based tourism preferences and behaviours in Pekalongan. Data were obtained from a structured questionnaire distributed to 120 Muslim respondents who visited natural destinations, including Petungkriyono, Mangrove Park, and Pasir Kencana Beach. The research instrument consisted of three constructs: (1) ecotheological awareness, (2) preference for nature tourism, and (3) environmentally responsible tourism behaviour.

Based on the Pearson correlation test, a significant relationship was found between ecotheological awareness and a preference for nature tourism, with an  $r$ -value of 0.512 and a  $p$ -value of 0.000. This means that the higher the respondents' ecotheological awareness, the greater their tendency to choose tourist destinations that prioritize environmental conservation. This relationship is positive and moderate, indicating a relatively strong but not absolute influence.

Furthermore, the correlation between ecotheological awareness and responsible tourism behaviour was also significant, with a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.643$  and a  $p$ -value of 0.000. These results indicate that a high level of ecotheological awareness significantly contributes to tourists' tendency to maintain cleanliness, avoid damaging natural facilities, and participate in conservation activities during their travels.

Table 3. Results of the Correlation Test between Ecotheological Awareness and Tourism Preferences and Behaviour

Variables		Correlation Value (r)	Sig. (p)	Information
Ecotheological Awareness	Preferences ↔	0.512	0,000	Significant, moderate correlation
Ecotheological Awareness	Behaviour ↔	0.643	0,000	Significant, strong correlation

Source: Qualitative results, 2025.

The results of the statistical analysis indicate that ecotheological awareness plays a significant role in shaping the orientations of Muslim tourists toward the types of tourism they choose and their behaviour during these activities. Tourists who understand that nature is a trust from God and that humans are His caliphs (Quran 2:30) tend to be more selective in choosing destinations that are not only aesthetically beautiful but also sustainably managed. They avoid destinations that exploit natural resources without a conservation ethic. For example, 73% of respondents with high ecotheological awareness scores stated they would prefer visiting areas like

Petungkriyono, which are pristine and offer environmental education programs, over crowded destinations with less ecological awareness. 58% of them stated they would be willing to pay more to use tour operators that promote sustainable principles, such as proper waste management, environmental education during tours, and local community involvement. Regarding behaviour, 66% of respondents with high ecotheological awareness consistently carry their trash bags when travelling and avoid littering. Forty-two per cent reported participating in conservation activities, such as mangrove planting or beach cleanups, facilitated by Islamic tourism communities. These attitudes embody spiritual values rooted in Islamic teachings about the importance of preserving God's creation.

This finding aligns with Islamic ecotheological theory, which states that humans were created to be guardians of the earth (*khalifah fil ardh*) and are responsible for its preservation (*al-amanah*). Within this framework, nature is not merely viewed as a tourist attraction, but as God's creatures that possess dignity and must be treated fairly. The concept of *mizan* (balance) in the Qur'an (QS. Ar-Rahman [55]:7-9) emphasizes that all forms of ecological imbalance are violations of the divine order. Ecotheological awareness serves as a spiritual and moral foundation for shaping responsible tourism behaviour. Muslim tourists view the environment not only for material benefits but also spiritually as a means to know and draw closer to God (*tafaqqub fi al-khalq*). Therefore, a preference for sustainable nature tourism stems not only from economic or aesthetic values, but also from transcendental ones (Aulia et al., 2023).

Various previous studies support these findings. A survey by Battour et al. (2018) showed that Muslim religiosity is positively correlated with the selection of tourist destinations that align with Islamic values, including environmental conservation. Meanwhile, research by Preko et al. (2022) found that Muslim tourists who understand Islamic teachings on the environment demonstrate a high level of concern for waste management and the use of environmentally friendly products during their travels. Internationally, a study by Yuan et al. (2024) found that understanding humans' role as caliphs significantly contributed to pro-environmental behaviours, such as energy conservation, the use of public transportation, and participation in conservation campaigns. This research confirms that Islamic spirituality can be a powerful motivator for sustainable tourism.

The results of this study have important implications for the development of Islamic-based nature tourism in Indonesia. Strengthening ecotheological awareness through education, public campaigns, and the integration of Islamic narratives into tourism promotions will increase Muslim preference for environmentally friendly and sustainable destinations. Tour operators, destination managers, and local governments must collaborate to create tour packages that are not only visually

appealing but also address spiritual and ecological aspects. Based on a theoretical perspective, these findings broaden the scope of Islamic tourism studies, which have previously focused primarily on halal facilities and rituals. This research demonstrates that spiritual awareness of nature is a crucial pillar in shaping ethical and sustainable tourism behaviour. This aligns with the concept of Islamic ecotourism, which positions tourism as a means of developing ecological morals, rather than simply consuming space and time.

### **The Implications of Ecotheological Awareness in the Development of Nature-Based Tourism Products and Marketing in Pekalongan**

Muslim tourists in Pekalongan, who possess a high level of ecotheological awareness, exhibit tourism preferences and behaviours that align with the principles of sustainability, religious values, and ecological responsibility. Of the 120 respondents surveyed, more than 65% stated that they would prefer tourism products that integrate environmental education, nature conservation, and Islamic values. More than 70% of respondents also expressed a desire to travel to places that are not only physically beautiful but also facilitate worship, provide halal food, and encourage visitors to reflect on the greatness of God's creation. These findings reveal both a gap and a significant opportunity to design spiritual-ecological, nature-based tourism products that cater to the needs and expectations of the increasingly environmentally conscious Muslim market segment. Furthermore, it was found that most tourists have not encountered tourism marketing narratives that explicitly showcase ecotheological values, despite these values significantly influencing their choice of and loyalty to destinations.

An understanding of ecotheological awareness can serve as a foundation for designing nature tourism products that are more contextually relevant and responsive to the needs of Muslim tourists. This segment will increasingly abandon tourism products that merely offer visual beauty without meaningful narratives. Travellers with a strong ecotheological awareness seek more profound experiences that not only bring pleasure but also deepen their spiritual connection with nature and the Creator.

Destinations such as Petungkriyono (Andriyani et al., 2022), Pekalongan Mangrove Forest (Maulida et al., 2019), and Pasir Kencana Beach have great potential to be developed into contemplative tourism spaces offering interpretive trails (Prastika et al., 2016), observation of Kauniyyah verses, and education on the concepts of caliphate and trustworthiness in Islam. Tourism products that incorporate tree planting, mangrove conservation, or ecological interpretation studies could become leading innovations, not only distinguishing Pekalongan from other destinations but also being deeply rooted in Islamic values and sustainability (Jaelani et al.,

2021). Furthermore, product narratives need to be designed to align with the language and values that target tourists use. Using terms like “earth-friendly tourism,” “Islamic value-based ecotourism,” or “the caliph’s footprint in nature” will help create stronger emotional and spiritual resonance. In this regard, tourism products must transform from mere commodities into media for education and moral transformation.

The findings suggest that Muslim tourists with high ecotheological awareness tend to respond positively to messages that emphasize religious values and environmental responsibility. However, most promotional materials for nature tourism in Pekalongan remain normative, simply emphasizing visual beauty without addressing spirituality or sustainability. Therefore, marketing strategies need to be overhauled to be more value-driven. One approach is narrative-based marketing (storytelling), highlighting stories of local communities protecting nature based on Islamic values. Promotional materials should also reflect the harmony between humans, nature, and God. Photos and videos depicting religious activities in natural settings, environmental education, or community cleanup efforts will be more meaningful than mere landscape images (Syahr et al., 2023).

Digital marketing must also be optimized, particularly through social media, which is widely used by the Muslim millennial segment (Ajidin et al., 2024). The # EkowisataIslam campaigns can be leveraged as a collaborative movement, encouraging tourists to become agents of change. Muslim influencers with a reputation in environmental or Islamic issues can also be invited to collaborate, broadening the reach of the message.

Table 4. Respondents’ Preferences for Nature Tourism Marketing Narratives

Types of Marketing Narratives	Positive Response (%)
Natural beauty	85%
Harmony of Nature and Islamic Values	78%
An Invitation to Protect the Environment Because of Faith	71%
Islamic Ecological Education	63%
Spiritual Activities in Nature (zikir, prayer)	57%

Source: Qualitative results, 2025.

The table above shows that narratives that integrate natural beauty and Islamic spirituality have high appeal and can increase interest in visiting and loyalty to the destination. Another implication of these findings is the importance of improving ecotheological education for both tourists and destination managers. Many tourists still intuitively care about the environment, but do not understand its spiritual roots in Islam. This highlights the need for Islamic ecotheological literacy presented in a light and practical format, such as infographics at tourist sites, QR codes

with reflective content, or training tour guides who can explain Islamic values in the context of nature conservation. For destination managers, training in sustainable tourism management based on Islamic values is essential. With a comprehensive understanding, they can manage destinations not only for economic gain but also as ecological missionary spaces. This awareness will also encourage managers to build Sharia-compliant facilities, maintain ecological balance, and prevent overtourism (Yamin et al., 2023).

Based on these findings, several strategic policy recommendations can be formulated to encourage the development of more responsible nature-based tourism in Pekalongan. The local government needs to develop a tourism grand design based on Islamic and ecological values as a long-term development direction. The plan should incorporate principles of conservation, social justice, local community empowerment, and an Islamic narrative as a moral force for development. The government also needs to encourage cross-sector integration by involving the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic educational institutions, the hijrah community, and environmental NGOs. This collaboration is crucial for developing a values-based tourism curriculum, human resource training, and developing Sharia-compliant sustainable tourism standard operating procedures (SOPs). One policy that needs to be considered is incentives for tour operators who implement Islamic ecotourism principles, such as tax breaks or promotional assistance. Similarly, destinations that demonstrate conservation efforts and promote spiritual values should be given greater recognition and exposure.

The findings of this study align with the theory of value-based tourism, which states that moral and spiritual values play a crucial role in shaping travel decisions (Al Kautsar et al., 2024). In the Islamic context, awareness of the values of monotheism, trustworthiness, and caliphate encourages individuals to choose tourism activities that not only provide immediate satisfaction but also bring blessings and moral responsibility. Islamic ecotheological theory also provides a strong foundation for explaining how spirituality can guide tourism consumption toward sustainable patterns. As Wasil & Muizudin (2023) explain, Islam teaches that all creation is a manifestation of God's will, and therefore, harming it is to go against His will. In this sense, tourism is not only a social activity but also a form of expression of faith. Research by Maskuroh (2023) has shown that Muslim tourists are highly responsive to a values-based approach to tourism marketing. Meanwhile, studies by Maksum et al. (2023) also emphasize the importance of spiritual narratives in shaping tourist loyalty to a destination.

## CONCLUSION



This research demonstrates that ecotheological awareness plays a significant role in shaping the nature-based tourism preferences and behaviour of Muslim tourists in Pekalongan. Tourists with a high level of ecotheological awareness tend to choose destinations that are not only aesthetically appealing but also consider aspects of sustainability and environmental preservation. They view nature as part of God's mandate that must be protected and preserved, and they view tourism activities as a means to strengthen their spiritual connection with the Creator. Basic concepts in Islamic ecotheology, such as *tawhid* (monotheism), *khalifah* (vicegerency), *amanah* (trust), and *mizan* (the right to rule), have proven to be more than just normative values; they have transformed into guiding principles that influence concrete actions in tourism. Tourist preferences reflect an orientation toward natural, tranquil, and educational destinations, as well as facilities that align with Islamic principles, such as places of worship and halal food. Meanwhile, tourist behaviour also reflects ecological responsibility, such as not littering, participating in conservation programs, and choosing tour operators that implement sustainable practices. The strong link between ecotheological awareness and these two variables provides a solid foundation for developing an Islamic-values-based tourism model that is not only spiritually ethical but also ecologically sound.

In the future, this research opens up new opportunities for further studies that explore the integration of Islamic ecotheology into tourism product design, tour guide curricula, and values-based digital promotional strategies. Additional studies could also test the effectiveness of ecotheology-based educational interventions in improving sustainable tourist behaviour. Therefore, this research is expected to be an initial contribution to strengthening values-based and transformative tourism in Indonesia.

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