

THE POTENTIAL FOR HALAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATUNA GEOPARK AREA FROM A MAQASID AL-SHARIAH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the halal tourism potential of Natuna Geopark, a National Geopark covering 27,233.85 square kilometers of land and sea in Natuna Regency, Indonesia's northernmost maritime border territory. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, and analyzed following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's interactive model. The study aims to assess the geopark's natural, cultural, and infrastructural potential as a halal destination and to construct a maqasid al-shariah-based development strategy. Findings reveal that the geopark holds exceptional assets, 200-million-year-old geological formations, Srivijaya heritage, and living Malay Islamic identity, yet remains underdeveloped as a halal destination due to the absence of halal certification, Muslim-friendly infrastructure, and an Islamic development framework. In response, this study proposes a five-pillar strategy grounded in maqasid al-shariah: *hifz al-din*, *hifz al-nafs*, *hifz al-aql*, *hifz al-nasl*, and *hifz al-mal*. This framework offers a transferable model for sustainable halal geoheritage tourism in Muslim-majority border communities, aligned with SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 16.

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INTRODUCTION

The Natuna Geopark, located in Ranai, Natuna Regency, Riau Islands Province, represents one of Indonesia's most geologically and culturally significant natural territories. Designated as a National Geopark since 2018 and currently undergoing formal evaluation toward UNESCO Global Geopark status, this territory extends across 27,233.85 square kilometers of land and sea within the North Natuna Sea, Indonesia's northernmost maritime frontier. The geopark features thirteen priority geosites of outstanding geological, ecological, and cultural significance,

including granite rock formations estimated at 200 million years old, scenic coastal landscapes, and historical traces of the ancient Srivijaya maritime civilization.

Beyond its geological assets, the Natuna Geopark is embedded within a community whose identity is deeply shaped by Malay Islamic civilization. Islam is practiced not only as religious conviction but as a cultural framework, expressed through traditional customs, mosque architecture, communal rituals, and everyday social norms. This living Islamic heritage creates a social environment that is organically aligned with the principles of halal and Muslim-friendly tourism, making the geopark a destination where geological spectacle and authentic Islamic cultural identity naturally converge.

Despite these exceptional assets, the Natuna Geopark has not been developed through any structured halal tourism strategy. Infrastructure for Muslim-friendly tourism, including certified halal food access, prayer facilities at geosites, sharia-compliant accommodation, and Islamic cultural interpretation programming, remains underdeveloped relative to the destination's potential. The geopark's thirteen priority geosites and its community's authentic Islamic identity have not been systematically evaluated or positioned through a maqasid al-shariah framework. This gap is consequential: scholars consistently affirm that halal tourism requires a comprehensive development strategy in which natural resource utilization, cultural programming, infrastructure design, and community economic arrangements are all governed by Islamic ethical principles, not merely the provision of halal food and prayer facilities (Saffinee & Jamaludin, 2023; Soehardi et al., 2025). The global halal tourism market, projected to reach USD 300 billion by 2026, presents a concrete economic opportunity that destinations with authentic Islamic identity are best positioned to capture, but only through deliberate, maqasid-aligned strategic planning (Wazin et al., 2024).

Existing scholarship on halal tourism has examined its alignment with maqasid al-shariah as a normative framework (Soehardi et al., 2025; Haerisma, 2023), its integration with sustainability goals (Wazin et al., 2024; Iieta, 2025), and its application in Indonesian regional contexts such as Lombok, Aceh, and West Sumatra (Haerisma, 2023; Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025). Studies on Muslim-friendly tourism in geopark settings have identified stakeholder collaboration and Islamic branding as essential conditions for halal geo-tourism success, with Langkawi's UNESCO Global Geopark serving as a comparative benchmark (Saffinee & Jamaludin, 2023). However, no existing study has examined halal tourism potential and strategy in a geopark that simultaneously possesses UNESCO-trajectory geological heritage, ancient civilizational history, and a living Malay Islamic identity within a maritime border territory. Research on maqasid-based halal tourism in Indonesia has not addressed geoheritage destinations, and no study has developed a maqasid al-shariah strategic framework specifically for an island geopark community in Indonesia's border regions (Haerisma, 2023; Soehardi et al., 2025; Wazin et al., 2024; Adinugraha et al., 2025; Ruiz-Muñoz et al., 2025; Tobroni & Firmansyah, 2022; Firmansyah, 2023; Tobroni et al., 2023; Faridi & Firmansyah, 2024; Khozin & Firmansyah, 2024; Nurhakim et al., 2023; Yazid & Firmansyah, 2022).

This study therefore occupies an unoccupied space in the halal tourism literature. Its novelty lies in deploying maqasid al-shariah not merely as a normative evaluative lens, but as a proactive strategic architecture for destination planning, using the five objectives of Islamic law (hifz al-din, hifz al-nafs, hifz al-aql, hifz al-nasl, and hifz al-mal) as organizing principles for assessing natural resource potential, designing infrastructure, structuring cultural programming, and governing community economic participation in a geopark setting. This framework contributes a transferable halal geoheritage development model aligned with SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 16.

The urgency of this study is tied to a critical institutional juncture: the Natuna Geopark's trajectory toward UNESCO Global Geopark recognition presents a time-sensitive window during which its foundational development framework must be established. Without a deliberate Islamic normative framework, the geopark risks being shaped by conventional tourism planning models that overlook community Islamic identity, Muslim-friendly market requirements, and maqasid standards of environmental protection and equitable benefit distribution.

This study is guided by two research questions: (1) What natural resource, cultural heritage, and infrastructure potentials exist within the Natuna Geopark that are relevant for halal tourism development? (2) What maqasid al-shariah-based development strategy is most appropriate for the Natuna Geopark, and how can the five objectives of

Islamic law be operationalized as a sustainable, Muslim-friendly tourism framework suited to the geopark's specific natural, cultural, and institutional conditions?

RESEARCH MOTHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014) with a case study design (Yin, 2018), selected to enable in-depth contextual examination of the halal tourism potential and maqasid al-shariah-based development strategy within the specific natural, cultural, and institutional setting of the Natuna Geopark.

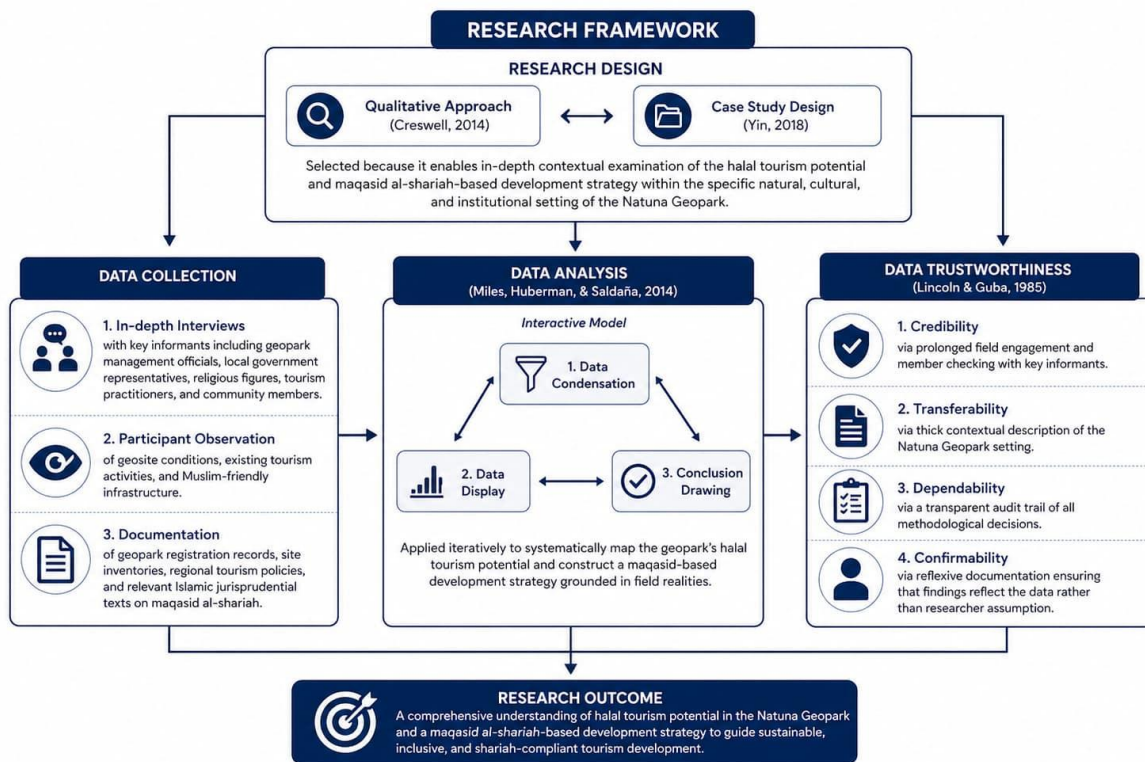


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

Data were collected from March to June 2024 through three primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 key informants selected purposively based on their direct involvement with the geopark and halal tourism ecosystem, including geopark management officials, local government representatives from the Natuna Regency Tourism and Religious Affairs offices, Islamic religious figures (ulama), tourism practitioners, and local community members. Second, participant observation was carried out at seven key geosites, Batu Kasah, Tanjung Datuk, Alif Stone Park, Pulau Senoa, Pulau Sedanau, the Natuna Grand Mosque, and the Geopark Management Center, focusing on geosite conditions, existing tourism activities, and the availability of Muslim-friendly infrastructure such as prayer facilities, halal food access, and wayfinding signage. Third, documentation was gathered from geopark registration records, site inventories, regional tourism policies, and relevant Islamic jurisprudential references on maqasid al-shariah.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles et al. (2014) through three iterative stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, applied to systematically map halal tourism potential and construct a maqasid-based development strategy grounded in field realities. Data trustworthiness was ensured through

member checking with key informants to verify findings (credibility), thick contextual description of the geopark setting (transferability), a transparent audit trail of methodological decisions (dependability), and reflexive documentation to ensure findings reflect the data rather than researcher assumptions (confirmability), following the criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Natural Resource, Cultural Heritage, and Infrastructure Potential of the Natuna Geopark as a Halal Tourism Destination

The findings of this study reveal that the Natuna Geopark possesses a remarkable convergence of geological, cultural, and ecological assets that collectively constitute an exceptional foundation for halal tourism development. At the geological level, the geopark's thirteen priority geosites present a diversity of natural spectacles that is difficult to replicate elsewhere in Indonesia. The ancient granite formations, estimated at approximately 200 million years old, represent some of the oldest exposed geological structures in Southeast Asia, offering geoheritage authenticity of significant educational and experiential value. Sites such as Batu Kasah, Tanjung Datuk, Alif Stone Park, Pulau Senoa, and Pulau Sedanau each present distinctive landscape characters, combining dramatic coastal rock formations, clear marine environments, and biodiversity-rich island ecosystems, that together constitute a geotourism portfolio of genuine international caliber. The geopark's trajectory toward UNESCO Global Geopark status further affirms the scientific significance of these assets and signals growing institutional recognition within the global geoheritage tourism market.

Field observation confirmed, however, that most geosites remain without adequate visitor facilities. At Batu Kasah and Alif Stone Park, for instance, no permanent prayer spaces, waste management systems, or interpretive signage were found during site visits. This physical condition was corroborated by interviews with geopark management officials, one of whom acknowledged: "We have the natural assets, but we have not yet built the supporting facilities that Muslim tourists would expect when they visit." This gap between geological richness and physical readiness is a central challenge that any halal tourism strategy must concretely address.

Beyond its geological richness, the Natuna Geopark's cultural heritage constitutes an equally powerful asset for halal tourism development. The community's Malay Islamic identity, expressed through centuries of cultural practice, traditional architecture, religious observance, and communal life, creates an ambient cultural environment organically aligned with the values and expectations of Muslim travelers. Historical traces connecting the territory to the ancient Srivijaya maritime civilization add a layer of civilizational depth that distinguishes the Natuna Geopark from destinations offering natural beauty alone. The presence of architecturally distinguished mosques, including the prominent Grand Mosque of Natuna, functions simultaneously as a religious facility and a cultural landmark, embodying the community's Islamic heritage in a form that is visually compelling and spiritually meaningful for Muslim visitors. Traditional Malay customs, culinary practices, and arts that remain alive in the community further enrich the destination's cultural offering, providing experiential content that extends well beyond geological sightseeing.

A religious figure interviewed during fieldwork affirmed this dimension clearly: "The people of Natuna live Islam, it is not something they perform for visitors. If tourism is developed correctly, visitors will experience something genuine, not a show." This observation underscores that the cultural asset is authentic but unstructured: its value as a halal tourism offering depends on intentional programming rather than passive exposure. These cultural dimensions align closely with the *maqasid al-shariah* principle of *hifz al-din*, the protection of faith and religious identity, which demands that Islamic tourism destinations actively preserve and express the community's religious and cultural heritage as an integral part of the visitor experience.

The infrastructure dimension, however, presents a more differentiated picture, as illustrated in Figure 2. Physical accessibility to the main geosites has improved with the development of road connections and inter-island boat services. Basic accommodation is available in Ranai, and local restaurants serving food aligned with community

Islamic norms create a foundational level of halal-compatible hospitality. The Grand Mosque and numerous community mosques distributed across the territory ensure that prayer facility access is structurally adequate for Muslim visitors throughout the geopark area.

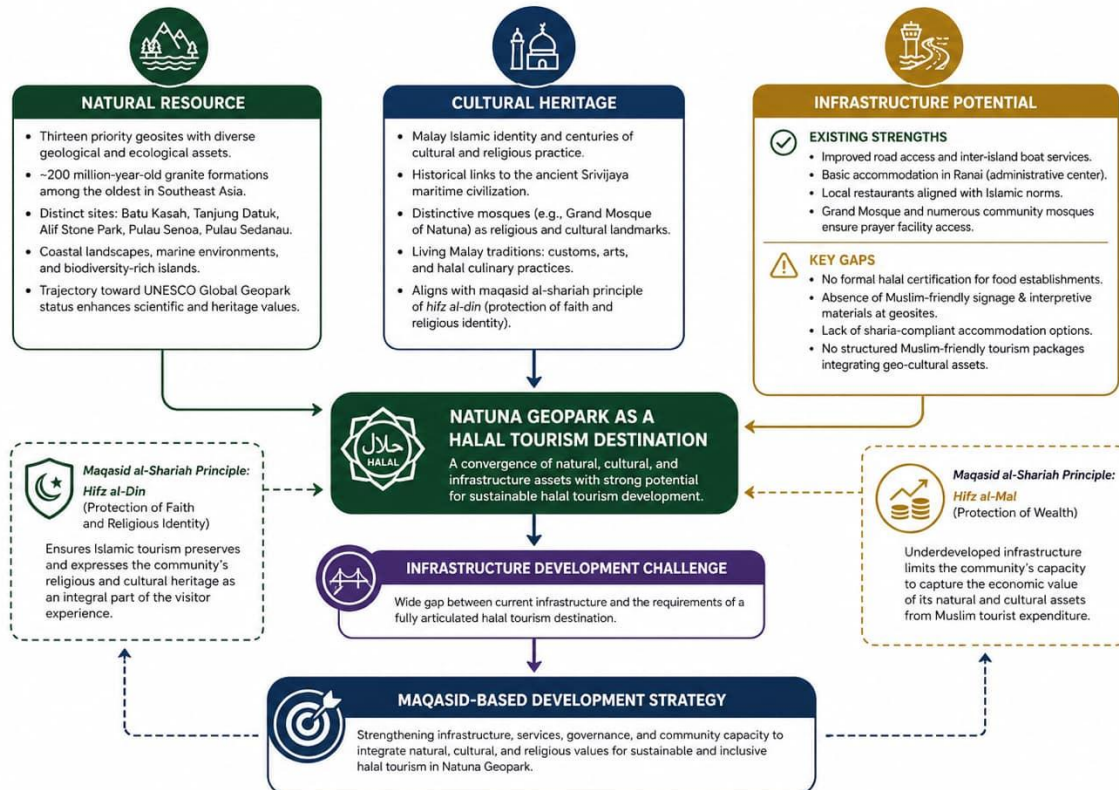


Figure 2. Natural Resource, Cultural Heritage, and Infrastructure Potential

Nevertheless, Figure 2 also maps the significant underdevelopment that fieldwork documented. Formal halal certification for food establishments is entirely absent. Muslim-friendly signage and interpretive materials at geosites do not exist. Accommodation options meeting sharia-compliant standards have not been developed or promoted, and no structured Muslim-friendly tourism packages integrating the geopark's geological and cultural assets have been created. A local tourism practitioner interviewed in Ranai stated: "Tourists who come here, even Muslim ones, have to find their own halal food, figure out where to pray at the sites, and navigate without any Islamic guidance. There is no system for this yet." This testimony illustrates that the infrastructure gap is not merely technical but experiential: it shapes how Muslim visitors encounter the destination and whether they return or recommend it to others. The principle of *hifz al-mal*, the protection of wealth through fair and productive economic arrangements, is directly relevant here, as underdeveloped infrastructure limits the community's capacity to capture economic value from Muslim tourist expenditure.

A Maqasid Al-Shariah-Based Development Strategy for Halal Tourism in the Natuna Geopark

Based on field findings drawn from interviews, observation, and documentation, this study constructs a maqasid al-shariah-based halal tourism development strategy for the Natuna Geopark organized around five strategic pillars, each corresponding to one of the five objectives of Islamic law: *hifz al-din* (protection of faith), *hifz al-nafs*

(protection of life), hifz al-aql (protection of intellect), hifz al-nasl (protection of lineage and community continuity), and hifz al-mal (protection of wealth). This structure ensures that the development strategy is not merely operationally functional but normatively coherent, grounding every dimension of tourism planning in an explicit Islamic legal objective rather than treating maqasid as a rhetorical frame applied retrospectively to a conventionally designed tourism product. The five-pillar framework is illustrated in Figure 3.

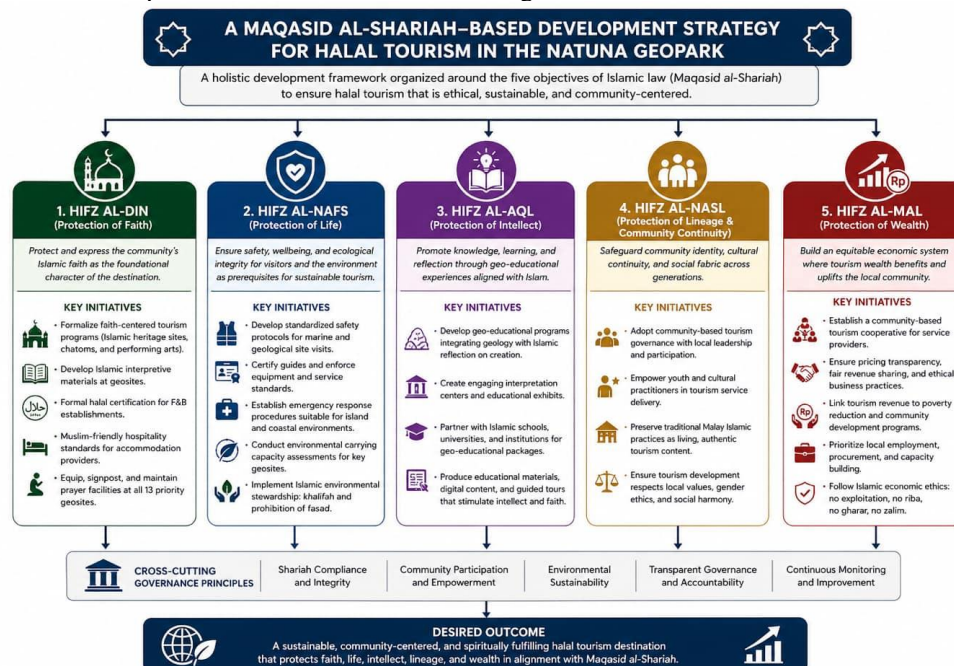


Figure 3. *A Maqasid Al-Shariah-Based Development Strategy for Halal Tourism*

Figure 3 maps each pillar onto its corresponding development domain within the Natuna Geopark. The visual organization is analytical rather than decorative: it reflects the finding that each maqasid objective addresses a distinct but interrelated dimension of the geopark's development deficit, from faith expression and visitor safety to economic governance, and that none of these dimensions can be addressed in isolation without undermining the coherence of the overall framework.

The first pillar, hifz al-din, addresses the protection and expression of the community's Islamic faith as the foundational character of the destination. The strategy calls for the formalization of faith-centered tourism programming, including guided visits to significant Islamic heritage sites, structured engagement with traditional Malay Islamic customs and performing arts, and the development of interpretive materials that reflect the community's Islamic understanding of nature as divine creation warranting reverent appreciation. Formal halal certification for food and beverage establishments is identified as an urgent operational priority, alongside the development of Muslim-friendly hospitality standards for accommodation providers. Prayer facilities at all thirteen priority geosites must be equipped, signposted, and maintained as a baseline service standard rather than an optional amenity.

The implementation challenge here is substantial. As one geopark management official acknowledged during interview: "We do not yet have a mechanism for halal certification at the site level. The authority lies with MUI, but the coordination between MUI, the tourism office, and the geopark management body has not been formalized." This institutional fragmentation, across religious authority, tourism governance, and geopark management, represents the

primary structural obstacle to realizing the hifz al-din pillar and must be addressed through formal inter-agency coordination protocols before certification processes can advance.

The second pillar, hifz al-nafs, addresses visitor safety, physical wellbeing, and the preservation of the geopark's ecological integrity. The strategy recommends standardized safety protocols for marine and geological site visits, including guide certification, equipment standards, and emergency response procedures suited to the island and coastal environments of the geopark. Environmental carrying capacity assessments for the most visited geosites are proposed as a governance tool for preventing ecological degradation. Islamic environmental stewardship principles, the concept of khalifah and the prohibition of fasad on earth, provide the normative foundation for these conservation mechanisms, connecting visitor safety and environmental protection within a single Islamic ethical framework.

Field observation at Pulau Senoa and Pulau Sedanau revealed the absence of formal visitor management systems: boat operators set their own passenger limits, no carrying capacity guidelines are in place, and no emergency communication equipment was observed at either site. A local boat operator interviewed at the Ranai jetty noted: "During peak season, many boats go out and there is no coordination. If something happens at sea, we rely on phone calls between fishermen." This testimony highlights that the hifz al-nafs pillar addresses not hypothetical risks but documented operational vulnerabilities requiring immediate governance intervention.

The third pillar, hifz al-aql, addresses the educational and intellectual dimensions of the geopark tourism experience, consonant with Islamic encouragement of knowledge-seeking. The strategy proposes the development of geo-educational programming that integrates geological learning with Islamic reflection on the signs of creation, making the geopark's ancient rock formations and biodiversity assets the basis for tourism experiences that are simultaneously intellectually stimulating and spiritually resonant for Muslim visitors. Partnerships with Islamic educational institutions, universities, and schools for geo-educational tourism packages are recommended as a mechanism for building a distinctive and recurring visitor segment. A geopark educator interviewed during fieldwork indicated that no formal educational module connecting geological content to Islamic cosmological themes had yet been developed, identifying this as "a missed opportunity, because the story of these rocks, 200 million years old, is also the story of God's creation unfolding over time." Developing this narrative connection is both educationally credible and commercially distinctive.

The fourth pillar, hifz al-nasl, addresses the protection of community identity, intergenerational cultural continuity, and the social fabric of the host community. The strategy emphasizes community-based tourism governance as the primary organizational model, ensuring that local residents, particularly youth and indigenous cultural practitioners, are central actors in tourism service delivery. The preservation of traditional Malay Islamic cultural practices as living tourism content, rather than as staged performances commodified for external consumption, is identified as both a maqasid requirement and a competitive advantage. The implementation risk here, however, is real: interviews with younger community members revealed limited awareness of and engagement with traditional cultural practices, with one youth representative stating: "Many young people here prefer modern entertainment. If there is no economic incentive connected to the traditional arts, they will not continue them." This finding signals that hifz al-nasl requires not only cultural programming but economic incentives that make cultural continuity personally meaningful for the generation that will carry it forward.

The fifth pillar, hifz al-mal, addresses the economic architecture of the halal tourism development strategy, ensuring that wealth generated by tourism activity is distributed fairly within the host community. The strategy recommends the establishment of a community-based tourism cooperative structure through which local accommodation providers, food vendors, transportation operators, and cultural guides are organized and collectively promoted as primary service providers for Muslim visitors. Pricing transparency, fair revenue sharing, and Islamic prohibitions against exploitative commercial practices are proposed as governance standards. Linkages between tourism revenue and local poverty reduction programming, including support for fishermen households whose economic vulnerability was documented during fieldwork, are recommended to ensure that halal tourism development contributes concretely to broader community welfare.

The critical implementation challenge for this pillar concerns governance capacity. Community cooperative structures require administrative infrastructure, legal registration, financial management systems, and training that most community members in Ranai currently lack. As one local fisherman participant noted: "We want to be part of tourism, but we do not know how to organize it. Who manages the money? Who decides the prices? We need help building that system." This testimony indicates that *hifz al-mal* cannot be realized through policy declaration alone but requires sustained capacity-building support from the regency government and partner institutions as a precondition for cooperative formation.

DISCUSSION

Natural Resource, Cultural Heritage, and Infrastructure Potential of the Natuna Geopark as a Halal Tourism Destination

The findings confirm the theoretical proposition of Saffinee and Jamaludin (2023) that halal geo-tourism success depends on the intentional convergence of natural heritage assets, Islamic cultural identity, and stakeholder-driven infrastructure. The Natuna Geopark possesses all three elements, yet none has been deliberately integrated into a halal tourism framework. This adds an important empirical nuance: asset convergence without strategic integration produces latent potential rather than functional destination value.

The infrastructure gap documented in the field, absent halal certification, Muslim-friendly signage, and sharia-compliant accommodation, corroborates Muñoz et al. (2025), who establish that halal tourism requires active, governance-supported service infrastructure. Crucially, the field data suggest this gap reflects institutional coordination failure more than resource scarcity: the assets and community identity exist, but the regulatory mechanisms and inter-agency frameworks to activate them do not.

A Maqasid Al-Shariah-Based Development Strategy for Halal Tourism in the Natuna Geopark

The five-pillar strategy reinforces Soehardi et al. (2025), who argue that *maqasid al-shariah* must function as a proactive organizational framework rather than a retrospective evaluative lens. This study affirms that position by demonstrating that each *maqasid* objective maps onto a concrete and actionable development domain within the geopark.

However, field data reveal that the distance between strategic proposition and practical implementation is significant. Institutional fragmentation, governance vacuums, cultural continuity risks, and community capacity deficits collectively show that a *maqasid*-based strategy is not self-implementing, it requires sustained political will, inter-agency coordination, and capacity-building investment that current governance arrangements in Natuna have not yet mobilized. This finding extends Soehardi et al. (2025) by specifying the implementation conditions, not merely the normative principles, that determine whether a *maqasid* framework translates into a functioning halal destination. The study further contributes the first *maqasid*-based strategy designed explicitly for a geopark setting, demonstrating its applicability to the institutional grammar of geopark governance in ways prior halal tourism studies have not attempted.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Natuna Geopark possesses an exceptional convergence of halal tourism assets, ancient geological formations, Srivijaya civilizational heritage, and a living Malay Islamic cultural identity, that remains structurally latent due to the absence of halal certification, Muslim-friendly geosite infrastructure, and any deliberate Islamic development framework. The gap between potential and realization reflects strategic absence rather than asset deficiency.

In response, this study constructs a five-pillar *maqasid al-shariah*-based development strategy, encompassing *hifz al-din*, *hifz al-nafs*, *hifz al-aql*, *hifz al-nasl*, and *hifz al-mal*, that operationalizes Islamic legal objectives as organizing principles for halal geoheritage destination planning. The framework contributes to SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 16 by promoting community-based tourism employment, equitable benefit distribution, heritage

preservation, and accountable destination governance. As the first maqasid-based strategy designed explicitly for a geopark setting, it offers a transferable model for Muslim-majority border communities across Indonesia and beyond.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are based on a single case study, which, while enabling contextual depth, limits direct generalizability. Future research is recommended to test and refine the five-pillar framework across other geopark destinations in Muslim-majority regions, and to examine the long-term effectiveness of maqasid-based governance mechanisms through longitudinal or comparative study designs.

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