



Development Strategy of the Spice Route in the West-South Region of Aceh as a Halal Tourism Destination: A SWOT Analysis

Strategi Pengembangan Jalur Rempah di Wilayah Barat-Selatan Aceh sebagai Destinasi Wisata Halal: Analisis SWOT

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Abstract

The Spice Route should serve as the main driver for developing tourism based on history, culture, and economy in Aceh, particularly in the West-South region. However, this area still faces limitations in infrastructure, a lack of digital promotion, and suboptimal management of its historical and cultural potential. This study aims to formulate strategies for developing the Spice Route in the West-South region of Aceh as a halal tourism destination, focusing on enhancing competitiveness, sustainability, and community empowerment. This article employs a descriptive qualitative approach, collecting data through document studies, non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with traditional leaders, policymakers, academics, and communities across five districts in the region. SWOT analysis was used to map the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the area's development. The study recommends strengthening the branding of the Spice Route, revitalizing historical sites, improving infrastructure, and fostering Penta Helix collaboration to position the area as a center of history-based halal tourism.

Kata Kunci:

Pariwisata
Halal;
Pengembangan
Jalur Rempah;
Analisis SWOT.

Abstrak

Jalur Rempah seharusnya menjadi penggerak utama pengembangan pariwisata berbasis sejarah, budaya, dan ekonomi di Aceh, khususnya kawasan Barat Selatan. Namun, kawasan ini masih menghadapi keterbatasan infrastruktur, minimnya promosi digital, dan belum optimalnya pengelolaan potensi sejarah serta budaya yang ada. Penelitian ini bertujuan merumuskan strategi pengembangan Jalur Rempah di kawasan Barat Selatan Aceh sebagai destinasi pariwisata halal, dengan fokus pada peningkatan daya saing, keberlanjutan, dan pemberdayaan masyarakat. Artikel ini menggunakan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif dengan pengumpulan data melalui studi dokumen, observasi non-partisipan, dan wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap tokoh adat, pemangku kebijakan, akademisi, dan masyarakat pada lima kabupaten di kawasan ini. Analisis SWOT digunakan untuk memetakan kekuatan, kelemahan, peluang, dan ancaman pengembangan kawasan. Hasil penelitian merekomendasikan penguatan branding Jalur Rempah, revitalisasi situs sejarah,

pembangunan infrastruktur, dan kolaborasi Penta Helix guna menjadikan kawasan ini pusat pariwisata halal berbasis sejarah.

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INTRODUCTION

Aceh has been known as one of the important centers in the world trade network for centuries. Its strategic position at the western tip of Indonesia has made Aceh a gateway for international trade routes, particularly the Spice Route connecting Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The prosperity of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate from the 16th to the 18th centuries demonstrates how the management of key commodities such as pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and camphor enabled this region to become a regional center for trade and diplomacy (Hing, 1995). This prominence made Aceh not only an economic hub but also a center for the dissemination of knowledge, culture, and Islamic civilization that significantly influenced Southeast Asia.

The southwestern region of Aceh, which includes Aceh Jaya, Aceh Barat, Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh Selatan, and Aceh Singkil, has a long history as a producer of high-quality spices. In Aceh Barat, for example, pepper plantations have flourished since the era of Sultan Iskandar Muda, while Aceh Barat Daya is known for the glory of the Kuala Batee and Bandar Susoh kingdoms as trading hubs. Aceh Selatan has a history of pepper and nutmeg trade through the Trumon Kingdom, while Aceh Singkil is famous for its high-value camphor and cloves. These regions once served as the main drivers of Aceh's economy through spice production and distribution, but their prosperity has gradually faded due to shifts in the economic orientation of the community and weak management of local resources (Inayatillah et al., 2024).

The development of spice potential in this region now requires a strategic approach that can revive past glory in a modern context. Utilizing the Spice Route as a halal tourist attraction is a promising option, given the growing global trend of halal tourism. Data from the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) shows that the number of Muslim travelers worldwide continues to grow, making the development of tourism destinations based on local wisdom and Islamic values a significant opportunity for Aceh (Rahmi, 2020). With its status as an Islamic sharia region and a long history of spice trade, the Southwest region holds a strategic position to build unique, competitive, and sustainable tourism destinations.

In fact, this significant potential has not been managed optimally. Tourism development in the Southwest region remains fragmented, primarily focused on natural attractions such as Pulau Banyak in Aceh Singkil, without integrating the historical and cultural potential that constitutes the region's strength. Many historical sites related to the spice trade and cultural heritage have not been packaged as tourist attractions, and most of the local community has not been fully involved in tourism management. This situation has prevented tourism from having a significant impact on local economic growth, even though this sector has the potential to become a major source of regional income (Junaedi et al., 2020).

Another issue that has arisen is the lack of supporting infrastructure and clear policies for the development of tourism based on the Spice Route. Limited access to tourist sites, a lack of facilities, and weak promotion make it difficult for potential destinations to become widely known (MA, 2024). In addition, the absence of specific regulations

governing the development of halal tourism in this region adds to the complexity of the issue. The lack of an integrated development strategy means that the potential of spices as a commodity and cultural identity has not been maximized as a valuable tourism product (Inayatillah et al., 2023).

The importance of formulating a development strategy for the Spice Route in the Southwestern region lies in how this great potential can be harnessed to create a competitive advantage. The right strategy can guide tourism development not only in terms of destination promotion, but also in strengthening infrastructure, empowering communities, preserving culture, and ensuring sustainable management (Gardjito et al., 2018). Through a SWOT analysis-based approach, the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the region can be comprehensively identified, resulting in realistic and applicable recommendations. The Southwest Aceh region requires a development strategy that prioritizes multi-stakeholder collaboration. The Penta Helix concept, which involves government, academia, businesses, communities, and media, can serve as an effective model for this approach. This strategy enables each stakeholder to actively participate according to their capabilities, from policy formulation, infrastructure provision, academic research, promotion, to the development of competitive tourism products. Through this collaboration, the development of the Spice Route is not merely a government program but a collective movement that brings widespread benefits to the community (Usman, 2003).

Based on this background, this study aims to formulate a development strategy for the Spice Route in the southwestern region of Aceh as a halal tourism destination. The analysis focuses on identifying the region's key strengths, the challenges it faces, and the formulation of development strategies oriented toward competitiveness, sustainability, and community empowerment. Using SWOT analysis, this study presents a mapping of the current conditions that can serve as a basis for decision-making by local governments and relevant stakeholders.

The research results are expected to contribute to the development of halal tourism based on the Spice Route in Aceh, both theoretically and practically. Academically, this research can enrich the literature on strategies for developing tourism based on culture and history in Islamic regions. Practically, the research findings are expected to serve as a reference for local governments, educational institutions, and businesses in designing policies, programs, and tourism innovations that can improve community welfare while strengthening Aceh's Islamic identity. The significant potential of the Southwest Aceh region demands a strategic approach to transform it into a premier halal tourism destination. With thorough planning and strong collaboration, the development of the Spice Route as a culture-based tourism product not only revives past glory but also presents new inclusive economic opportunities for the community. The success of this strategy will position the Southwest Aceh region as a model for integrating historical preservation, strengthening Islamic identity, and sustainable tourism development at both regional and national levels.

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Aceh has been known as one of the important centers in the world trade network for centuries. Its strategic position at the western tip of Indonesia has made Aceh a gateway for international trade routes, particularly the Spice Route connecting Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. The prosperity of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate from the 16th to the 18th centuries demonstrates how the management of key commodities such as pepper, nutmeg, cloves, and camphor enabled this region to become a regional center for trade and diplomacy (Hing, 1995). This prominence made Aceh not only an economic hub but

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RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of exploring in depth the potential, challenges, and opportunities for developing the Spice Route in the southwestern region of Aceh as a halal tourism destination. Through this approach, data is obtained from the experiences, views, and knowledge of informants who have a direct connection to the research subject. The research subjects were selected purposively, involving traditional and religious leaders, local policymakers, academics, and community members who understand the history and dynamics of the Spice Route's development. The research focus is directed at five districts: Aceh Jaya, Aceh Barat, Aceh Barat Daya, Aceh Selatan, and Aceh Singkil, as representatives of the Southwest Aceh region, which holds historical significance and potential for halal tourism development.

Data collection was conducted through document studies, non-participatory observation, and semi-structured interviews. Document studies included reviewing archives, reports, statistical data, and policy documents related to tourism and the management of the Spice Route. Observations were conducted to identify the factual conditions of objects along the Spice Route, such as historical sites, land use patterns, and tourism support infrastructure. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather more in-depth information from various informants using flexible interview guidelines to explore their ideas, experiences, and aspirations regarding the development strategy for the Spice Route. This approach enabled researchers to obtain richer and more contextual data, thereby uncovering issues comprehensively.

The data obtained was then analyzed through the stages of reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The reduction process was carried out by summarizing, selecting, and focusing the data so that it was relevant to the research objectives. The data was then systematically organized into patterns of relationships that facilitated interpretation,

including mapping the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the region through SWOT analysis. The final stage involves drawing conclusions and verification to ensure the accuracy of the findings, including through peer debriefing to enhance the validity of the research results (Sugiyono, 2017). Through this data processing, raw information is transformed into structured findings and prepared to be compiled into a research draft that can be published as recommendations for developing a halal tourism strategy based on the Spice Route in Southwest Aceh.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Strategic Concepts in Halal Tourism Development

Strategy is essentially a fundamental concept in modern management that serves as a guide in achieving long-term goals. Etymologically, the word “strategy” comes from the Greek word *strategos*, which means “general,” and was originally used in a military context (Carter, 2013). However, with the passage of time, the term has expanded in meaning and begun to be applied in various fields, including business, government, and tourism management. Chandler defines strategy as the establishment of long-term goals and objectives, the determination of actions, and the allocation of resources to achieve them (Fuertes et al., 2020). This definition emphasizes that strategy is not merely a plan but also involves an execution dimension that requires comprehensive coordination.

Andrews' view, as quoted by Fuertes et al., expands the scope of strategy as a model of goals, policies, and plans used to determine the direction and type of business an organization will undertake. Porter adds a competitive dimension by describing strategy as the selection of unique activities that enable an organization to differentiate itself and create sustainable advantage in the market (Fuertes et al., 2020). Porter's perspective is particularly important in the context of halal tourism, as its success depends on a destination's ability to differentiate itself from conventional tourism through the application of Islamic values in all its services.

However, a overly mechanistic view in formulating strategies is considered to have limitations. Farjoun emphasizes the need for a more organic, dynamic approach. Strategy is not just a linear plan, but also an interactive process that must consider intangible variables such as cultural values, community beliefs, and political factors that influence decision-making (Farjoun, 2002). In the context of halal tourism, this approach is relevant because destination development is not only focused on profitability but also on compliance with sharia norms, social acceptance, and cultural sustainability. Halal tourism strategies require adaptation to local conditions and responsiveness to global environmental changes.

Chiavenato identifies four key elements that form the strategy, namely mission, business area, products and services, and public image (Fuertes et al., 2020). These four elements are complementary pillars in formulating a halal tourism strategy. A clear mission will guide the development of the destination, while the business area determines the scope of the segment being served. Halal tourism products and services must meet sharia standards while also being commercially attractive, while public image will influence tourists' perceptions of the destination's strengths. The integration of these four elements ensures that the formulated strategy is not merely a formal document but truly serves as an operational guideline.

In the development of halal tourism, the implemented strategy should present a series of steps that can provide unique value to stakeholders. This uniqueness can be achieved by providing tourism experiences that combine spiritual fulfillment, physical comfort, and the natural beauty and cultural richness of the destination. Failure often occurs when

development efforts focus solely on the “halal” label without fully integrating Islamic values into the facilities, services, and social interactions at the tourist destination.

In the context of halal tourism, strategy can be understood as an effort to connect destination development goals with the utilization of available resources. These resources include physical infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, and transportation, as well as non-material assets such as local wisdom, destination reputation, and tourist trust. Proper strategic analysis enables stakeholders to optimize this potential in order to create a superior destination. Thus, halal tourism strategies need to be designed in such a way as to maximize existing strengths while overcoming various limitations, such as accessibility, funding, and the quality of human resources.

A more holistic approach places strategy as a process that includes assessment, intuitive vision, learning, transformation, and preservation. Strategy is not only related to technical planning but also involves the dynamics of individual cognition and social interaction, which include elements of cooperation and potential conflict. In the development of halal tourism, this perspective requires the active involvement of various stakeholders, namely the government, business actors, religious leaders, and local communities, to create tourism products that comply with sharia principles while building cross-sectoral understanding for the success and sustainability of the strategy.

The concept of halal tourism refers to the organization of tourism activities in accordance with Islamic law. In Indonesia, this term is often used interchangeably with sharia tourism, which refers to travel activities supported by facilities and services that meet Islamic standards. The application of this concept is becoming increasingly relevant as global Muslim tourists show growing interest in destinations that offer safe, comfortable, and religiously appropriate experiences. In other words, halal tourism is not only a necessity but also a strategic opportunity to expand the tourism market.

Duman, as cited by Sánchez et al., explains that halal tourism encompasses a broad ecosystem of services, ranging from hotels, airlines, restaurants, tour packages, to Islamic financial services (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2020). This indicates that the development of halal tourism cannot be done partially, but requires a systemic approach involving various sub-sectors. This approach emphasizes the need for an integrated strategy so that all supporting components can provide a complete tourism experience in accordance with halal principles.

However, Moufakkir reminds us that Muslim tourists are a heterogeneous group. Their motivation for traveling is not only driven by spiritual reasons, but also by recreational, health, and socio-cultural factors (Moufakkir et al., 2018). Halal tourism development strategies must be able to respond to this diversity of needs without losing the substance of Islamic values. Proper market segmentation will help destinations tailor their product and service offerings to tourists' expectations, thereby increasing their appeal and satisfaction.

Vargas-Sánchez identifies three main dimensions of halal tourism: spiritual, ecological, and health. The spiritual dimension ensures that Muslim tourists' religious needs are met, such as the availability of prayer facilities and halal food. The ecological dimension emphasizes the importance of environmental conservation as part of moral responsibility in tourism. The health dimension covers the provision of services that support the physical and mental well-being of tourists (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2020). These three dimensions must be integrated into development strategies so that destinations can offer comprehensive, sustainable, and sharia-compliant experiences.

In its implementation, the halal tourism strategy must also take into account the characteristics of the destination. Chukaew emphasizes the need to fulfill eight important characteristics, such as services that comply with Islamic principles, staff discipline,

Islamic activity arrangements, and the availability of worship facilities. In addition, supporting aspects such as location, transportation, consumption, and accommodation must also be designed in accordance with sharia standards (Yuliaty, 2020). Thus, the halal tourism development strategy is not just a matter of concept, but a real transformation of every element of the destination. A successful strategy is one that is able to unite the spiritual, social, and commercial dimensions in a single framework of sustainable tourism management.

Principles of Halal Tourism Development in the Spice Route of Aceh

The development of the Spice Route based on halal tourism in Aceh must be based on the principles of sustainable tourism development. The Spice Route in the southwestern region of Aceh has strategic value, both in terms of trade history and the Islamic identity of its people. The development of this region is not only seen as an economic endeavor, but also as an instrument for the preservation of culture, historical values, and the environment. This concept aligns with the mandate of Aceh Regulation No. 8 of 2013 on Tourism, which emphasizes the importance of using tourism as a means to preserve Islamic culture, strengthen local wisdom values, and enhance community well-being in a sustainable manner.

According to Ardiwidjaja, the development of sustainable tourism along the Spice Route must adhere to five core principles: culturally appropriate, socially accepted, people-centered, non-discriminatory, and environmentally sound (Ardiwidjaja, 2024). These principles not only serve as technical guidelines but also as an ethical framework for developing tourism that aligns with Aceh's social and cultural context. By adhering to these principles, the development of the Spice Route will proceed harmoniously, be accepted by the community, and provide equitable benefits. This also represents the practical application of Islamic Sharia values as stipulated in Aceh Regulation No. 8/2013.

The first principle in developing tourism along the Spice Route is to ensure that all development is culturally appropriate. This principle means that all development programs must respect the customs, traditions, and values of the local community. In the context of Aceh, the application of this principle also includes compliance with Islamic law, which is the guiding principle of the community. Aceh Qanun No. 8/2013 concerning Tourism explicitly mandates that all tourism policies must be based on Islamic values and local wisdom. By adopting a cultural approach, the development of the Spice Route will gain community support, strengthen a sense of ownership, and prevent social conflicts that often hinder development.

The second principle is social acceptance, which requires that tourism development provide tangible benefits to the community in their daily lives. Tourism should not have negative impacts such as increasing social inequality or disrupting the lives of local communities. Instead, tourist destinations must be able to contribute through job creation, increased income, and improved quality of life. The Aceh Qanun emphasizes that the community is the main actor in tourism development. Thus, this principle requires development policies to be more oriented toward social justice rather than merely pursuing economic growth, so that the community feels the direct benefits of the development of the Spice Route.

The third very important principle is to make the community the center of development (people-centered). In this approach, the community is not only a passive beneficiary, but also a key actor in managing, supervising, and developing tourist destinations. Strengthening community capacity through training, mentoring, and providing access to capital is an urgent matter mandated by the Qanun Aceh. Community empowerment will

strengthen their bargaining power with investors while ensuring that cultural identity is preserved. With the active involvement of the community, the Spice Route will grow as a tourist destination that reflects the unique characteristics of the Acehnese people, making it more authentic and attractive to tourists.

The fourth principle is non-discrimination, which emphasizes inclusivity in every aspect of tourism development. Aceh, as a region with social diversity in terms of religion, economic status, and community background, requires a fair and equitable development approach. Aceh Qanun No. 8/2013 stipulates that tourism must prioritize the principle of equality and respect for human rights. By avoiding all forms of discrimination, the development of the Spice Route will become a space accessible to all segments of society. This principle also creates broader opportunities for participation from various groups, enabling halal tourism development to proceed harmoniously amidst the diversity of society.

The fifth principle is to ensure that tourism development is environmentally sound. The environment is an important asset in the development of sustainable tourist destinations. Every development of facilities, attractions, and infrastructure must take into account the carrying capacity of the environment so as not to damage existing ecosystems. The Aceh Qanun emphasizes that conservation principles must be an integral part of tourism development, including the protection of historical sites and areas with high ecological value. By making conservation part of the tourist attraction, the Spice Route not only provides recreational experiences but also education on the importance of preserving the environment.

The integration of these five principles forms an important foundation for developing tourism strategies along the Spice Route. These principles emphasize that tourism destination development is not merely about pursuing economic gains but also considers social well-being, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability. The Aceh Regulation serves as the legal foundation providing direction and certainty for all development policies. Development strategies must be comprehensively designed, taking into account all these dimensions, to ensure that the development of the Spice Route truly brings long-term benefits to the people of Aceh.

In terms of implementation, the development of the Spice Route requires a clear and measurable strategic framework. This strategy includes strengthening the branding of the Spice Route as a halal tourism destination, improving the quality of infrastructure, and developing attractions rooted in local culture. The involvement of stakeholders, ranging from the government, religious leaders, traditional leaders, to business actors, is an important requirement in the formulation of this strategy. This participatory approach not only strengthens the legitimacy of development but also minimizes the risk of rejection from communities who feel excluded from the policy-making process.

Additionally, given that the Spice Route spans various administrative regions in Aceh, inter-regional collaboration is needed to create destination integration. The Aceh Qanun provides space for inter-regional cooperation to strengthen the promotion and management of tourism destinations. This cooperation can be realized through the development of integrated tourism packages that connect various historical sites, halal cuisine, and cultural attractions. Through such collaboration, the appeal of the Spice Route will increase, expanding the tourism market and strengthening Aceh's position as one of the leading halal tourism hubs at both the national and international levels.

From a policy perspective, oversight of tourism development is a crucial aspect. The Aceh Qanun mandates Sharia-based oversight to ensure that all tourism activities comply with Islamic law. In this regard, the role of the Ulama Consultative Assembly (MPU) needs to be strengthened as a supervisory body to ensure that tourism programs align with sharia

principles (Azmi, 2022). An effective oversight mechanism will ensure that the development of the Spice Route remains within the framework of Islamic law while also addressing the needs of modern tourists.

The sustainability of the Spice Route's development also requires regulatory support that is adaptive to the global dynamics of halal tourism. The Aceh Qanun must be optimized as a legal framework that provides certainty for investors while protecting the interests of local communities. Revisions and improvements to regulations may be necessary to better align with the evolving global trends in halal tourism. With appropriate regulatory support, the development of the Spice Route will have a clear, measurable direction and be able to compete with other halal destinations in Indonesia and abroad.

The development of the Spice Route based on sustainable halal tourism in Aceh is not only an economic project, but also an effort to revitalize the cultural and spiritual identity of the community. The application of development principles that focus on culture, society, inclusivity, and the environment makes the Spice Route a unique destination of high value. By using the Qanun Aceh as the main guideline, this development can strengthen Aceh's position as a globally competitive halal tourism center, while also bringing positive impacts on the welfare of the community in the Southwestern Aceh region.

Development Strategy for the Spice Route in the Southwestern Aceh Region as a Center for Sharia Tourism

The development of the Spice Route in the West-Aceh Selatan region as a center for sharia tourism requires a comprehensive strategy, given that this region has a rich historical heritage of spice trade, natural beauty, and a strong Islamic identity. This strategy must be able to integrate destination management with the preservation of sharia values and the empowerment of the local economy. This cannot be achieved solely through physical approaches such as infrastructure development, but must also include the revitalization of the history of the spice route, mapping of tourism potential, and strengthening of the sharia tourism brand. With the right strategy, the Aceh spice route can become a model for destination development that harmoniously combines history, culture, and Islam.

An initial strategy that can be implemented is to strengthen the identity of the Spice Route as a history-based tourist destination by making it the main differentiation of destination development. This approach views history and culture as the core attractions that can provide meaningful experiences for tourists (Kumoratih, 2022). This is reflected in the potential of historical sites such as Trumon Fort, the tombs of the Trumon kings in Aceh Selatan, and the sites of Hamzah Fansuri and Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili in Aceh Singkil, which hold significant historical value. Revitalizing these sites through the construction of museums, providing historical information plaques, and re-mapping spice trade routes will strengthen Aceh's position as a tourist destination that not only offers natural beauty but also revives its historical narrative within the context of past international trade networks.

In addition to revitalizing historical sites, an integrated halal tourism promotion strategy is a must. Local governments in each district need to develop creative digital promotion campaigns, involving local media, influencers, and tourism communities to expand the reach of promotions (Muhajarah & Hakim, 2021). An example of successful promotion can be seen in Aceh Selatan's efforts to use online media to attract domestic tourists. However, other districts such as Aceh Barat and Singkil are still lagging behind in this regard, as their promotions rely heavily on conventional methods. A promotion strategy based on experience—one that not only sells destinations but also the journey, cuisine,

and culture—needs to be prioritized to ensure that the spice route tourism has a clear differentiation in the eyes of tourists.

The next strategy is to strengthen tourism support infrastructure. Good access is key to attracting tourists to areas such as Rawa Singkil, Benteng Trumon, or tourist destinations in Aceh Jaya and Aceh Barat Daya Regency (Abdya). Local governments need to strive to build roads, repair ports, and provide public facilities such as prayer rooms, clean toilets, changing rooms, and tourist information centers. A concrete example is the extension of the runway at Teuku Cut Ali Airport in Aceh Selatan, which is expected to open up connectivity to other regions. With adequate infrastructure, tourists will have a more comfortable experience, which will increase the likelihood of repeat visits and enhance the reputation of the destination.

Cross-sector collaboration strategies are also a must. Local governments cannot go it alone in developing the spice route as a sharia tourism destination. Collaboration with relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the Ministry of Environment, is needed to support funding, promotion, and management of sensitive areas such as the Pulau Banyak and Rawa Singkil nature parks. This approach aligns with the Penta Helix model, which emphasizes synergy between government, academia, businesses, communities, and media to create sustainable, inclusive, and competitive sharia tourism. By involving all stakeholders, the development of the spice route will be more effective, sustainable, and capable of delivering tangible benefits to the community.

In addition to collaboration, community empowerment is an integral part of this development strategy. Villages around tourist destinations need to be developed into tourist villages managed by the local community. This model has already begun to be implemented in Aceh Singkil through the establishment of tourist villages around Rawa Singkil, although it still requires more intensive guidance. Empowerment can also be achieved through training in destination management, culinary business management, and sharia-based tour guiding. With active community involvement, the benefits of tourism can be felt directly, both in the form of increased income and the growth of collective awareness to preserve tourist destinations.

From an economic perspective, the development strategy for the spice route must revive local commodities as part of sharia-based tourism. Aceh Selatan, which was once a center for nutmeg production, and Trumon, a former pepper-producing area, can develop spice-based products such as nutmeg oil, pepper-based products, and spice-inspired cuisine for tourists. This strategy not only adds value to local commodities but also strengthens the branding of the spice route as a unique tourist destination. Local governments can collaborate with SMEs to develop distinctive products that can be marketed as souvenirs, while also penetrating regional and international markets.

Another strategy that needs to be considered is the formulation of supporting regulations and policies. Several districts, such as Aceh Selatan, face retribution constraints due to the absence of regulations governing entrance tickets to tourist destinations. Without clear regulations, the potential for local revenue (PAD) from the tourism sector cannot be optimized. The formulation of qanun or regional regulations governing the management of sharia tourism is an important step. These regulations must also ensure that destination management aligns with Islamic principles, thereby providing legal certainty for the government, businesses, and tourists.

Research and historical documentation strategies are also crucial. Many prominent figures associated with the spice route, such as Hamzah Fansuri and Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili, lack comprehensive biographies or clear site mapping. Local governments need to involve academics, historians, and researchers to systematically document this

historical legacy. With robust data, tourism narratives will be richer and more engaging, enabling tourists to gain meaningful educational experiences. This approach also helps avoid simplifying history, which could diminish the significance of Aceh's spice route in the eyes of the world.

In addition, the development of ecology-based tourism is also part of this strategy (Bibin & Ardian, 2020). Rawa Singkil, with its abundant biodiversity, can be developed into a sharia eco-tourism destination that combines natural beauty with environmental education. However, to make this a reality, careful planning is needed to ensure that tourism does not damage the ecosystem. Local governments can set visitor limits, build environmentally friendly facilities, and educate tourists about the importance of maintaining ecological balance. This strategy also addresses global challenges related to sustainable and responsible tourism development.

The next strategy is to strengthen the halal culinary sector as a tourist attraction. Culinary plays an important role not only in fulfilling consumption needs but also as a medium for introducing the cultural identity and history of the Spice Islands (Rustam et al., 2025). Traditional dishes such as *Roti Jala* with curry sauce from Aceh Singkil, *Lolak* satay from Aceh Selatan, and freshwater fish dishes from Abdya need to be promoted as the culinary identity of the Spice Route. The government can facilitate halal certification, improve presentation quality, and promote it through tourism festivals. Unique and halal-certified cuisine will enrich the tourist experience, strengthen the destination's image, and expand the market for local products.

Enhancing human resource capacity is also a top priority. Intensive training for tour guides, destination managers, and tourism business operators is needed to enhance service professionalism. Many regions, such as Abdya and Aceh Barat, still lack training for tourism business operators. Without competent human resources, efforts to develop sharia tourism will struggle to meet expected standards. Collaboration with educational institutions and training organizations is a crucial component in developing reliable and competitive tourism human resources.

In the context of branding, the spice route development strategy must package a strong narrative that is easily understood by tourists. The spice route is not just a destination, but a journey through history, spirituality, and culture that shapes the identity of a region (Suryandari et al., 2024). This narrative needs to be conveyed in various forms of media, such as guidebooks, documentaries, and digital tourism applications. With an engaging storytelling approach, tourists will feel more connected to the meaning of each destination they visit, making their travel experience more profound and memorable.

All these strategies require strong political commitment from the local government. The development of the spice route as a center for sharia tourism will not be effective without adequate budget allocation, consistent policy oversight, and a willingness to empower local communities. The government must ensure that every tourism development program truly prioritizes the interests of the community and supports environmental sustainability. With clear commitment, Aceh's Spice Route has a great opportunity to rise again as a center of trade and tourism that combines natural beauty, history, and Islamic values.

SWOT Analysis

Halal tourism has become one of the strategic sectors that various regions in Indonesia are beginning to look to as a driver of economic development and cultural preservation. The Southwestern region of Aceh has a comparative advantage due to the existence of Islamic law as its legal foundation, as well as its abundant natural, cultural, and historical

wealth. However, this significant potential has not yet been fully optimized. This is reflected in the lack of clear policies, limited promotion, and inadequate infrastructure in several destinations. The development of halal tourism in this region requires a thorough analysis of internal and external conditions through a SWOT approach—Strengths (potential), Weaknesses (limitations), Opportunities (potential), and Threats (risks)—to develop targeted and sustainable strategies (Sari et al., 2024).

SWOT analysis plays an important role in identifying the dynamics that influence the development of the tourism sector in Aceh, particularly in the southwestern region. Each district has its own unique strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This approach emphasizes the importance of leveraging each region's distinctive advantages as the primary competitive edge in destination development. With this understanding, the development of halal tourism is expected to be more than just ceremonial; it should serve as a new economic driver that strengthens Islamic identity, preserves local culture, and improves the well-being of the community.

Aceh Jaya Regency has strengths in the marine tourism and ecotourism sectors. Beaches such as Lhok Geulumpang and Lhok Rigaih offer natural panoramas with potential to be developed as leading halal tourism destinations. The religious character of the community is also an added value, so that destination development can be directed in accordance with sharia principles. From a destination development perspective, the combination of natural uniqueness and religious values constitutes a differentiation that could be Aceh Jaya's primary competitive advantage (Husna & Fahrimal, 2024). However, this significant potential is not supported by adequate infrastructure, including transportation access and tourism facilities, resulting in tourism development remaining localized and lacking competitiveness at the regional level.

The main weakness of Aceh Jaya is the absence of a comprehensive strategic plan for halal tourism development. Limited budgets, minimal digital promotion, and low human resource capacity have caused this sector to stagnate. This situation highlights a gap between internal potential and effective management. The government needs to strengthen regulations, develop branding strategies, and collaborate with investors to optimize the potential of ecotourism and marine tourism in Aceh Jaya and compete with other regions that are more aggressive in promotion.

Aceh Barat Regency, known as the “City of *Tauhid Tasawuf*,” has great potential to develop historical and religious tourism through the implementation of a differentiation strategy, as explained by Porter, who states that uniqueness that is valuable to tourists is the key to building competitive advantage (Abdul et al., 2024). The presence of the graves of heroes such as Teuku Umar and Pocut Baren, the Old Gunong Kleng Mosque, and the Grand Baitul Makmur Mosque can be optimized as key attractions that distinguish Aceh Barat from other destinations. Local culinary specialties like khop coffee further strengthen the region's identity, which holds high market value. Government initiatives such as the development of 15 tourist villages, the formation of tourism awareness groups (*Pokdarwis*), and collaboration with banks through QRIS services reflect the implementation of a community-empowerment-based approach.

The challenges faced are quite complex, ranging from limited access to destinations in the village, lack of supporting facilities, to low digital promotion that hinders tourism appeal. Several beaches with strong currents that pose a risk to visitors and low awareness of cleanliness indicate the need for better risk management. External threats such as competition from other destinations, beach pollution caused by industrial waste, and the loss of iconic features like *rumbia* candy underscore the importance of mitigation strategies. Referring to the theory of integrated destination development, a planned multi-stakeholder collaboration is needed to overcome these obstacles. Strengthening regulations, developing infrastructure, and promoting digital initiatives based on

historical narratives and religious values will be key steps to making Aceh Barat more competitive in the tourism sector.

Aceh Barat Daya Regency has great potential for the development of integrated halal tourism that combines the plantation and culinary sectors. As one of the main production centers for palm oil and cocoa, Abdya has the opportunity to introduce an educational plantation tourism concept that combines recreation and learning (Azizah et al., 2024). This approach aligns with the destination differentiation strategy, where local uniqueness is highlighted as the primary selling point to strengthen the competitiveness of the tourism area. The well-preserved cultural traditions and arts in Abdya can also be incorporated into halal tourism packages. Its strategic geographical location along the West-South Sumatra corridor further enhances accessibility, positioning Abdya as a prime destination to attract visitors from various regions.

However, tourism development in Southwest Aceh still faces fundamental obstacles. Limited supporting facilities, lack of digital promotion, and low public awareness of tourism potential as a new source of income are factors that hinder the utilization of strategic opportunities. The relatively small tourism sector budget also slows down development programs. In the context of destination branding, Abdya needs to build a strong tourism identity to compete with other regions that are more aggressive in their promotions. Therefore, a regional-based planning approach involving the government, local communities, businesses, academics, and the media is needed to strengthen program integration and make tourism one of the region's development priorities. This effort is crucial to ensure that tourism is not merely ceremonial but can increase local revenue (PAD) while improving community well-being.

Aceh Selatan Regency has a competitive advantage in the nutmeg-based agro-tourism sector and natural beauty that combines mountains, rivers, and beaches. As one of the largest nutmeg producers in Aceh, this region has the potential to offer educational plantation tours that provide visitors with firsthand experience of nutmeg processing and utilization. This approach reflects the concept of integrated rural tourism, which emphasizes the utilization of local resources to strengthen identity and enhance the competitiveness of the destination (Rizkwanti & Kurniawan, 2025)vv. The pristine natural beauty further enhances the appeal of tourism, making Aceh Selatan ideal for the development of sustainable halal ecotourism. On the other hand, Trumon's rich history and cultural traditions, such as dance and handicrafts, can be packaged into festivals and cultural tourism packages, thereby enriching the tourist experience and expanding the market.

However, this sector still faces a number of obstacles that need to be addressed immediately. Limited facilities and infrastructure, low promotion intensity, and weak coordination among stakeholders hinder the optimal utilization of its potential. Another challenge lies in enhancing human resource competencies to manage tourist destinations in accordance with halal principles while also boosting regional competitiveness. Therefore, strong collaboration between the government, community, businesses, academics, and media is needed to support the development of halal agro-tourism in Aceh Selatan. This collaborative approach is expected to optimize natural and cultural resources as drivers of economic growth and strengthen the region's Islamic identity.

Aceh Singkil Regency has made Pulau Banyak a premier destination that is known internationally. The beauty of marine tourism, the presence of the tombs of great scholars such as Syekh Abdurrauf As-Singkili, and the Rawa Singkil Wildlife Reserve showcase the diversity of attractions that can strengthen the identity of halal tourism in this region. The open and tourism-conscious character of the community is also an important social asset. Supported by Syekh Hamzah Fansuri Airport and a ferry port, accessibility to Aceh Singkil is relatively better compared to other regencies in the

Southwest Aceh region. By adopting an integrated destination approach, as emphasized in the theory of integrated tourism area development, Aceh Singkil has the potential to become a competitive hub for marine tourism, historical tourism, and halal ecotourism.

However, serious challenges such as limited transportation access, inadequate health and tourist safety facilities, and unintegrated promotion need to be addressed immediately. External threats such as damage to marine ecosystems, plastic waste, and competition from more established marine destinations also hinder competitiveness. Therefore, a sustainable development strategy is needed, focusing on ecosystem conservation, improving transportation infrastructure, and digital promotion targeting both domestic and international tourists. As a result, Pulau Banyak can develop into a premier marine destination that is highly competitive and sustainable.

The development of halal tourism in the southwestern region of Aceh shows great potential as a driver of the regional economy as well as a means of preserving culture and strengthening Islamic identity. Each district has its own unique characteristics that can be optimized through cross-regional collaboration, ranging from marine tourism potential in Aceh Jaya and Aceh Singkil, historical and religious tourism in Aceh Barat, plantation and culinary tourism in Southwest Aceh, to nutmeg agro-tourism in Aceh Selatan. However, various challenges remain, such as inadequate infrastructure, limited promotion, low human resource capacity, and the absence of comprehensive policies governing the development of halal tourism. Therefore, a planned effort involving local governments, academics, businesses, communities, and the media through the Penta Helix strategy is needed to ensure that the tourism sector in this region can develop in an integrated and sustainable manner, thereby delivering tangible benefits for community well-being.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The Spice Route in the southwestern region of Aceh has great potential to be developed as a halal tourism destination rooted in the history of the spice trade, Islamic values, and rich local culture. A SWOT analysis reveals strengths such as the historical traces of Islamic scholars and kingdoms, the beauty of marine destinations such as Pulau Banyak, and the potential for agro-tourism and unique culinary experiences. However, various challenges remain, including inadequate infrastructure, limited digital promotion, low human resource capacity, the absence of comprehensive regulations, and the threat of environmental degradation in conservation areas. The development of halal tourism along the Spice Route must be based on sustainability principles emphasizing cultural appropriateness, social acceptance, community empowerment, inclusivity, and environmental protection, as mandated by Aceh Qanun No. 8 of 2013 on Tourism.

The development strategy offered includes strengthening the Spice Route branding as Aceh's halal tourism identity, building supporting infrastructure that improves connectivity, revitalizing historical sites and manuscripts of Islamic scholars, developing conservation-based ecotourism, and digital promotion that highlights historical and cultural narratives. The implementation of these strategies requires a collaborative approach through the Penta Helix model, which involves the government, academia, businesses, communities, and the media, thereby enabling the creation of competitive, sustainable tourism that empowers local communities. With these steps, the Spice Route in the southwest region of Aceh has the potential to become an economic driver for the region while strengthening Aceh's position as a center for halal tourism with historical and spiritual value.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors made substantial and complementary contributions to the completion of this study. Inayatillah conceived the research idea, formulated the problem statement, developed the theoretical and methodological framework, supervised the overall research process, and finalized the manuscript for journal submission. Junaidi played a key role in coordinating data collection across multiple districts, conducting SWOT analysis, and developing the results and discussion sections to ensure methodological rigor and contextual accuracy. Fadhlur Rahman Armi contributed to literature review and synthesis, assisted in processing and interpreting qualitative data, refined the structure and language of the manuscript, and ensured adherence to academic writing standards. All authors participated in the critical review and revision of the article, approved the final version of the manuscript, and agreed to be fully accountable for the integrity, accuracy, and scholarly quality of the research.

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