

## The Role of the Menara Kudus Mosque in Promoting Religious Moderation in Society

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### Abstract

*Research on religious tourism in Indonesia has predominantly focused on socio-economic impacts and destination governance. However, scholarly attention that links religious tourism management with the cultivation of religious moderation values remains relatively limited, particularly in historically significant religious sites such as the Menara Kudus Mosque complex. This study seeks to explore the management practices of religious tourism at the Menara Kudus Mosque and to examine how these practices contribute to fostering values of religious moderation among pilgrims and the surrounding community.*

*This research employs a qualitative descriptive method, with the study conducted in the Menara Kudus Mosque complex, including the Menara Kudus area and the tomb of Sunan Kudus. The participants of this study consist of foundation administrators, religious leaders, local traders, pilgrims, and residents living around the site. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, direct observation in the field, and documentation. The collected data were then analyzed using an interactive analysis model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data validity was examined through source triangulation and methodological triangulation.*

*The findings indicate that religious tourism management at the Menara Kudus Mosque is implemented through a balanced integration of sacred religious functions, preservation of cultural heritage, and local economic activities. This integrated management approach creates a conducive environment for spiritual reflection while maintaining social harmony in the surrounding community. Furthermore, the values of religious moderation are reflected in several aspects, including the architectural acculturation of the mosque complex, the management of religious traditions, and socio-religious practices that promote tolerance and respect for diversity. These values are closely connected to the historical legacy of Sunan Kudus' preaching, which emphasized cultural accommodation and harmonious coexistence.*

*This study highlights the strategic role of religious tourism in supporting sustainable religious moderation education. In addition, the findings may serve as*

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*a reference for tourism managers and policy makers in formulating religious destination management strategies that uphold religious values while also contributing to community welfare.*

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**Keywords**



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*Religious Tourism Management; Menara Kudus Mosque; Religious Moderation; Sunan Kudus.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, religious tourism is growing to become an important segment of the tourism industry because it is able to integrate the spiritual dimension with travel activities, while providing an economic impact to local communities and supporting the preservation of religious cultural heritage. (Kusumaningtyas & Ulfah, 2024; Rianse, 2025). The diversity of religions and the large number of believers in Indonesia make this country have great potential in the development of religious tourism. This potential is also a concern of the government, especially the Ministry of Tourism, which encourages the strengthening of religion-based tourist destinations through various socialization and community empowerment programs. (Azhaari, 2024; Alkautsar et al., 2024). From the perspective of Indonesian society, religious tourism not only functions as a recreational activity, but also has a strong spiritual dimension, such as an effort to get closer to God, gain inner peace, strengthen faith, and become a form of spiritual healing in the midst of the complexity of modern life.

A number of experts place religious tourism as a socio-religious phenomenon related to pilgrimage traditions, local culture, and the spiritual needs of the community. Pilgrimage to the graves of saints and scholars, for example, is seen as part of the practice of religious tourism because it contains a religious as well as a cultural dimension that is now a spiritual need across social strata. (Divinity, 2016). Religious tourism is also interpreted as a trip to places of worship, the tombs of saints, or historical sites of Islam to gain religious experiences, deepen a spiritual sense, and refresh the soul from worldly routines (Mahardini, 2024).

A number of studies in Indonesia have examined religious tourism and its impact. The study of the Menara Kudus Mosque area shows that good management of religious tourism not only maintains the uniqueness and uniqueness of the site, but can also increase the comfort of pilgrims and the income of traders and business actors around pilgrimage objects (Munzaroh, 2023). Other studies also highlight that the development of Menara Kudus tourism contributes to economic recovery and

requires a good structuring strategy, cultural events, and governance (Praatmana & Arsyad, 2022). Other studies also highlight the socio-economic impact of religious tourism on the tombs of Sunan Muria and Sheikh Jumadil Kubro, especially on community empowerment and the management of mosque and tomb foundations (Ibriza, 2016). However, most of the studies are still focused on the socio-economic dimension and practical management, not yet comprehensively integrating aspects of religious values such as religious moderation in the framework of religious tourism management of the Menara Kudus Mosque.

This gap is important considering that the Holy Tower and the Al-Aqsa Mosque The Holy Tower is a symbol of Islamic-Hindu-Buddhist acculturation as well as the cultural heritage of Sunan Kudus which is full of the value of tolerance and respect between religions (Kharis, 2020; Azzaki et al., 2021; Aan & Nindita, 2025). Management theory (planning, organizing, mobilizing, supervising) provides a foundation to see how the management of religious tourism can be directed effectively and efficiently (Muslimah & Sukardi, 2023). Meanwhile, the concept of religious tourism as a journey to quench spiritual thirst and deepen the religious experience reinforces the argument that destination governance must simultaneously preserve the spiritual and cultural quality of the site (Silaban et al., 2023). On the other hand, the discourse of religious moderation that emphasizes an attitude of not being excessive, balanced, and respecting differences is an important normative framework for reading the practice of religious tourism in Kudus as a space for tolerance learning (A. Salim et al., 2023).

Departing from this context, this study focuses on the management of religious tourism of the Menara Kudus Mosque by examining how destination management (facilities, services, spatial planning, religious and cultural traditions such as pilgrimage, iftar luwur, dancing) contributes to the spiritual experience of visitors, strengthening the value of religious moderation, and improving the welfare of the surrounding community. This study aims to describe in depth the practice of religious tourism management in the Menara Kudus Mosque, explain the role and potential of the Menara Kudus in building the value of religious moderation, and identify opportunities for destination development as a religious, inclusive, and sustainable religious tourism icon for the Kudus community and its surroundings.

## **2. METHODS**

The research method should be included in the Introduction. The method contains an explanation of the research approach, subjects of the study, the conduct of the research procedure, the use of materials and instruments, data collection, and analysis techniques.

The research method used is qualitative descriptive with the aim of describing in depth the management process of religious tourism of the Menara Kudus Mosque and its role in building the value of religious moderation. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to trace facts through direct interaction (*face to face*) with the subject of the research in a natural context, as well as compiling data in a descriptive-analytical manner based on observations, interviews, photographs, and document analysis (H. Salim, 2019). The research location is focused on the area of the Holy Tower Mosque, the Holy Tower, and the Sunan Kudus Tomb as a unit of cases that are intensively studied related to religious tourism management and religious moderation practices.

The research subjects consist of foundation administrators/tourism managers, religious leaders, traders/business actors, pilgrims, and local residents who understand the problem and are directly involved in the management and religious tourism activities of the Holy Tower. Primary data is obtained from informants who directly understand the research problem, while secondary data is obtained from relevant books, journals, archives, reports, and official documents (Jannah & Pratama, 2025; Primary, 2024). Data collection techniques include in-depth interviews with religious tourism administrators and related parties, observation of pilgrimage activities and area management, as well as documentation in the form of photos, pilgrim data, and pilgrimage provisions at the tomb of Sunan Kudus (Ahmad, Pratama, Nusaibah, et al., 2025).

The validity of the data was tested by a credibility test through the extension of observations, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, the use of reference materials (photos, interview recordings, documents), and dependability tests through an audit of the entire research process (Ahmad et al., 2024). Data analysis is carried out interactively through three stages, namely data reduction (summarizing, focusing on important things and setting aside irrelevant), presentation of data in the form of narratives, and drawing conclusions verified with field evidence until a steady answer to the formulation of problems about the management of religious tourism of the Holy Tower Mosque and its contribution to the value of religious moderation (Ahmad, Pratama, & Jannah, 2025).

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. RESULTS**

The side of the struggle for Islamic da'wah that was the first to preach or spread Islam in the land of Java was Walisongo. Walisongo played an important role in Islamization in the land of Java, around the 15th century AD - 16th century AD. Wali songo means nine guardians. The title of wali given by the Javanese people is called sunan from the abbreviation *susuhunan* which means one who

is upheld or a place to ask for something. Mbah Sunan Kudus is one of the nine guardians who preach in the northern part of Java. His role in spreading Islam in the northern part of Java.



**(a) Tomb of Sunan Kudus**

In the spread of Islam by Sunan Kudus, it was carried out in a slow approach and way with self-adjustment, tolerating existing cultures, namely the culture of the people who at that time still held to Hinduism. As evidenced by his adaptation to the art of architectural building in mosques and holy towers, he also forbade his followers to slaughter cows as a form of his tolerance with the Hindu culture at that time which considered cows to be sacred animals.

The mosque and tower are a relic and proof that he has succeeded in spreading Islam peacefully by acculturating the existing culture with the teachings of Islam. In addition to the Holy Tower Mosque as a means of worship for Muslims, the Holy Tower Mosque is also quite known for its uniqueness and beauty so it is not surprising that the Holy Tower Mosque is also visited by many tourists both domestic and foreign, meaning that the Holy Tower Mosque is also a religious tourist attraction for Muslims. The Holy Tower Mosque or Al-Aqsa Mosque even though the existence of the mosque has two versions, the first is that the Holy Tower is a relic of the Hindu community and the second is the relic of Sunan Kudus which is a belief until now for three reasons that corroborate. First, the mosque building of the holy tower faces the qibla, second, there are no carvings or reliefs on the walls of the tower, and the last is that there are no statues or statues in the tower or the environment around the mosque. Currently, the mosque is a holy tower that has become an icon of the city of Kudus.

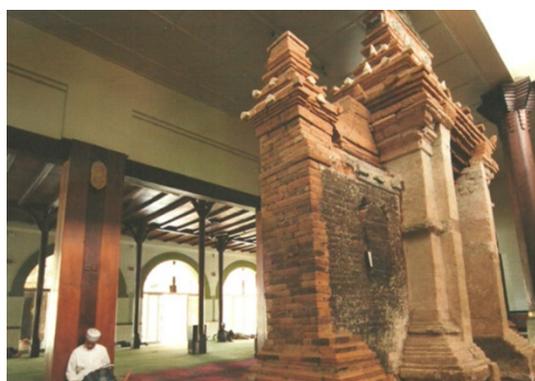


**Figure (b) The Holy Tower Building**



**(c) Mosque and Holy Tower Complex**

Based on the stone inscription located on the mosque's mihrab, the Holy Tower Mosque was built in 956 H or 1549 AD. It is said that the stone was imported from Jerusalem, Palestine, which then became the beginning of the emergence of the name Kudus, which means holy. Judging from its architecture, the Menara Kudus Mosque represents a fusion of Islamic and Hindu cultures. The mosque building currently has ten doors. Five doors on the right and left of the mosque and five large doors and four windows, which are decorated with eight large pillars made of teak wood. In the front porch of the mosque, there is a gate, called "Lawang Kembar". For ablution places for women, they still use the original heritage building, while the male ablution place has used a new building.



**(d) Relics of the Gate of the Holy Tower Mosque  
Hindu-Javanese-Islamic Architecture**



(e) Relic of the Ablution Place

### The Holy Tower Mosque Has Hindu-Javanese-Islamic Architecture



(f) Legacy of the "Kalachakra Twin Gates"

#### Hindu-Javanese-Islamic Architecture

The shape of the tower that became a tourist destination resembling a temple building is proof of the da'wah strategy carried out by Sunan Kudus in spreading Islam where it became an attraction for the community at that time. The roof structure of the mosque in the style of three overlaps represents the architectural style of the Hindu art tradition. However, the ornaments attached to the mosque building are very thick with Islamic elements. One of them is clearly seen in padasan or water tubs as an ablutation place that has a knot weaving pattern. So, the impression that arises from this religious tourist attraction is an Islamic mosque and cemetery complex, but with a Hindu style.

The existence of the Menara Kudus Mosque as a religious tourist attraction as well as a cultural heritage provides its own blessings for local residents. How could it not? The large number of tourists who visit certainly increases the demand for adequate facilities and other needs. It is clear that the existence of this religious tourist attraction has a positive impact on the economy of local residents in particular, as well as the people of Kudus and its surroundings in general.

Every day the religious tourism of the Holy Tower is always visited and attended by tourists or pilgrims from within the city to outside the city. The two places, whether the Holy Tower or the Tomb of Sunan Kudus, cannot be separated from each other, besides because they are close to each other and

it is always a destination for people to visit for worship purposes, tourism is also a consolation for the heart who wants to be calm, peaceful and happy. Sunan Kudus and Menara Kudus are always crowded with visitors who have the same intention to seek the pleasure of Allah SWT and can enjoy natural tourism as well. Various visitors come from various regions. On certain days such as weekends or holidays and before the holy month of Ramadan, the number of tourists and pilgrims alternates twenty-four hours and doubles from ordinary days.

The increasing number of visitors in visiting tourist destinations and religious tourism is due to good tourism management packaged with religious nuances in the environment around the Holy Tower so that in the good management of tourism makes visitors feel comfortable and always want to visit on other occasions. The existence of tourism management can increase faith and devotion to Allah swt and be a comfort to the inner happiness of visitors.

## **3.2. DISCUSSION**

### **Religious Tourism Management**

Management is a process that consists of planning, organizing, movement, and supervision to achieve set goals (Silaban et al., 2023). Meanwhile, tourism is one of the travel activities that are carried out voluntarily and temporarily to certain places with the aim of recreation or tourism or healing to enjoy certain tourist attractions in tourist destinations (Praatmana & Arsyad, 2022). Religion is a religious ritual that is carried out with the aim of satisfying spiritual thirst so that the soul of the drought becomes wetter with religious policies (Holis et al., 2025).

The management of religious tourism at the Menara Kudus Mosque shows a management pattern that seeks to balance sacred functions (worship and pilgrimage) with tourism and economic functions. Structured management through foundations, annual traditions (dandangan, iftar luwur, distribution of cricket rice), as well as the arrangement of pilgrimage and local economic activities, is in line with the concept of religious tourism management as a process of planning and utilizing social, cultural, economic, and religious resources in an integrated manner (Silaban et al., 2023).

The application of the principle of "sapta pesona" (safe, orderly, clean, cool, beautiful, friendly, and memorable) shows that the manager not only pursues visits, but also the quality of the pilgrims' experience through security, order, and comfort of the tourist space (Amar et al., 2023). This practice corroborates the findings of previous research on the management of the Tomb of Sunan Muria and Sheikh Jumadil Kubro which emphasizes the importance of management to increase attraction and visitation, but in Menara Kudu, aspects of quality of religious experience and social order seem to be more explicitly integrated (Ibriza, 2016).

However, on the other hand, the development of motorcycle taxi services, parking, and traders also raises spatial planning challenges such as congestion, limited parking spaces, and the need to relocate traders. At this point, the practice of the Holy Tower emphasizes that economic success without a policy of traffic engineering and careful spatial planning has the potential to reduce comfort, so the management of religious tourism must always be read as a dynamic process between sacred, economic, and urban planning.

### **The Role and Potential of the Holy Tower in Building Religious Moderation**

The Holy Tower has a distinctive role as a laboratory for religious moderation. Architectural acculturation, namely temple-patterned towers, bendar gates, Kalachakra symbols, padasan with Buddhist nuances is evidence of the integration of Islamic values with Hindu-Buddhist traces without eliminating Islamic identity. This is in line with the concept of religious moderation as an attitude of not exaggerating, balanced, and favoring equality in viewing adherents of other religions (A. Salim et al., 2023).

The prohibition of slaughtering cows in Kudus Kulon as a tribute to Hindus is often cited as a concrete example of moderation that this practice shows how local fatwas can be used as a socio-religious mechanism to prevent conflict and foster mutual respect (Rachmayanti & Bissalam, 2025). If previous research on other sites such as Sunan Muria highlighted more economic or social, this study shows a novelty by placing Menara Kudus as a means of moderation education that works through space (architecture), tradition (grooming, buka luwur), and social fatwa (prohibition of slaughtering cows) (Ibriza, 2016).

The findings of interviews with pilgrims show that a visit to the Holy Tower not only adds to the spiritual experience, but also reinforces a practical understanding of moderation as an attitude of "believing in one's own religion and at the same time making room for other religions". This resonates with the national literature on religious moderation which emphasizes four indicators, namely national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture which in Kudus is reflected in respect for old traditions as well as strengthening Islamic identity (A. Salim et al., 2023).

### **Development Opportunities as Religious and Sustainable Destinations in Building Religious Moderation**

Economically, the Menara Kudus Mosque has proven to be a motor of people's livelihoods through MSMEs, motorcycle taxi services, parking, lodging, and creative services (photos, tambourines), and contributes to reducing local unemployment. Strengthening village policies *Heritage* around the Tower (e.g. Janggalan Village) shows the opportunity for synergy between

historical, cultural, and religious tourism to build a destination that is not only a point of pilgrimage but also a multicultural educational space (Marsono et al., 2018).

However, sustainability demands more inclusive and participatory management. The experience of relocating traders to the Bakalan Krapyak Terminal, which actually reduced turnover, confirms that the policy of structuring without sufficient involvement, mapping the flow of pilgrims, and layered promotional strategies can marginalize vulnerable groups. Therefore, the integration of spatial planning, traffic, and parking that is pilgrim-friendly but still protects cultural heritage needs to be considered.

In addition, the mechanism for distributing fair economic benefits through the arrangement of traders, MSME capacity building, and support for local services also needs to be considered considering the experience of relocating traders to the Bakalan Krapyak Terminal. Strengthening religious moderation education programs for visitors (e.g. interpretive about acculturation, Hindu-Islamic symbols, and Gusjigang values) to highlight the religious and inclusive character of the destination. For future research, comparative approaches with other guardian sites on the impact of visits on tolerance attitudes, and *multistakeholder governance* studies are important to be further researched in formulating truly religious and sustainable religious tourism management practices.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This research shows that the management of religious tourism at the Holy Tower Mosque plays an important role in building spiritual experiences as well as instilling the value of religious moderation for pilgrims and the surrounding community. Destination management that integrates worship functions, cultural preservation, and socio-economic activities is able to create an orderly, inclusive, and meaningful religious space. The value of religious moderation is manifested through the practice of cultural acculturation, management of religious traditions, and respect for differences that are characteristic of Sunan Kudus' da'wah heritage, so that this area not only functions as a pilgrimage destination, but also as a medium for learning tolerance and balance in religious life.

The implications of these findings confirm that religious tourism can be developed as a strategic instrument to strengthen religious moderation if it is managed in a planned, participatory, and socio-cultural sustainability manner. However, this study is still limited to a qualitative approach with a focus on one location, so it has not been able to describe the variation of religious tourism management practices in the broader context or its measurable impact on changes in visitor moderation attitudes. Therefore, further research with a more diverse range of locations and a more

comprehensive methodological approach is needed to enrich understanding of the role of religious tourism in building religious moderation in multicultural societies.

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