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From Sustainable to Regenerative Halal Tourism *APostcolonial Framework for Revitalizing Traditional Islamic Heritage*

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ABSTRACT

The current discourse on halal tourism is predominantly anchored in the sustainability paradigm, which primarily focuses on mitigating negative impacts. However, for postcolonial destinations characterized by multi-layered cultural and historical legacies, such as Cirebon in West Java, Indonesia, this approach proves insufficient. It frequently fails to address deep-rooted socio-cultural and ecological vulnerabilities stemming from historical marginalization. Consequently, this paper argues for a necessary paradigm shift from sustainability to regeneration. This study aims to conceptualize a novel framework termed 'Regenerative Halal Tourism,' designed to actively restore and enhance the vitality of heritage destinations. Employing a critical literature synthesis, this research integrates the core tenets of regenerative tourism theory with a postcolonial critique to construct a new theoretical model. The principal finding is a comprehensive framework that transcends the passive objective of 'doing no harm,' advancing towards the active goal of 'making things better.' It proposes actionable principles and operational indicators for revitalizing socio-ecological systems, fostering genuine community empowerment, and preserving spiritual and cultural integrity in strict alignment with Islamic principles. The practical implications of this framework offer a strategic roadmap for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities in Cirebon and similar postcolonial cities. This facilitates the formulation of tourism policies that are not only Sharia-compliant but also profoundly restorative, ensuring that heritage is not merely consumed but actively revitalized for future generations.

Keywords: *Regenerative Tourism, Halal Tourism, Postcolonial Theory, Cultural Heritage, Community Empowerment, Cirebon*

1. INTRODUCTION

The discourse surrounding halal tourism has predominantly been anchored in the sustainability paradigm, which inherently focuses on minimizing the negative impacts of tourism activities on the environment and local communities (1). While sustainable tourism establishes a foundational baseline for environmental and social responsibility, its core objective of “doing no harm” is increasingly viewed as inadequate, particularly in the context of postcolonial destinations. Cities like Cirebon in West Java, Indonesia, possess multi-layered cultural and historical legacies that require more than mere preservation; they demand active revitalization. The historical trauma and cultural displacement experienced during the colonial era have left deep- rooted socio-cultural and ecological vulnerabilities that a conventional sustainability approach fails to adequately address (2).

Cirebon, known as the "City of Shrimp," is a unique mosaic of Sundanese, Javanese, Chinese, Arab, and European influences, reflecting its historical significance as a major port on the Silk Road (3). Its rich Islamic heritage, epitomized by the Kasepuhan Palace, Kacirebonan Palace, and the Great Mosque of Sang Cipta Rasa, stands as a testament to its glorious past. However, the commodification of these heritage sites under conventional tourism models often leads to the dilution of their spiritual and cultural essence. In postcolonial settings, the tourism industry frequently perpetuates colonial power dynamics by presenting heritage as a static product for consumption rather than a living, evolving system (4).

Recognizing these limitations, this paper argues for a necessary paradigm shift from sustainable to regenerative tourism within the halal tourism sector. Regenerative tourism transcends the passive goal of sustainability by aiming to leave destinations in a better state than they were found (5). It operates on the principle of "making things better," focusing on rebuilding ecosystems, restoring communities, and

fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between visitors and the host destination (6). By integrating the core tenets of regenerative tourism with a postcolonial critique, this study aims to conceptualize a novel framework: 'Regenerative Halal Tourism.'

This framework is specifically designed to actively restore and enhance the vitality of heritage destinations. It proposes actionable principles for revitalizing socio-ecological systems, fostering community empowerment, and preserving spiritual and cultural integrity in strict alignment with Islamic principles. The objective is to provide a strategic roadmap for policymakers, destination managers, and local communities in Cirebon and similar postcolonial cities, ensuring that tourism policies are not only Sharia-compliant but also genuinely restorative.

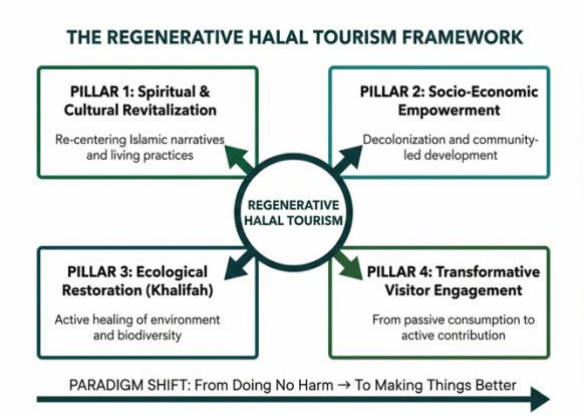


Figure 1. The Regenerative Halal Tourism Framework
Source: Authors (2026)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Shift from Sustainable to Regenerative Tourism

The evolution of tourism paradigms has seen a critical transition from sustainable to regenerative approaches. Sustainable tourism is fundamentally defined as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (7). Its primary mechanism is mitigation—reducing carbon footprints, minimizing waste, and preventing cultural degradation. However, critics argue that sustainability often maintains the status quo, which, in many degraded environments, is no longer sufficient (8).

Regenerative tourism, drawing inspiration from regenerative agriculture, adopts a living systems thinking approach. It views communities and places as dynamic, interacting, and evolving entities (8). The core philosophy of regenerative tourism is to catalyze positive transformation, creating conditions for life to thrive. It seeks "net positive" outcomes, where tourism acts as a restorative force that heals ecological damage and revitalizes local cultures (9). In this paradigm, the environment and cultural heritage are treated as precious assets to be nurtured, rather than mere resources to be exploited.

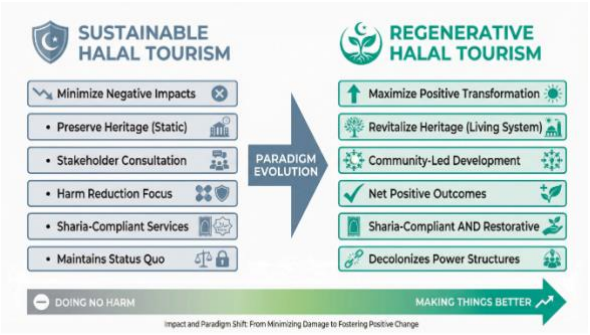


Figure 2 . Paradigm Shift: From Sustainable to Regenerative Halal Tourism
Source: Authors (2026)

Halal Tourism and Islamic Heritage

Halal tourism is a rapidly growing subcategory of the tourism industry, specifically tailored to meet the needs of Muslim travelers who abide by Islamic rules (10) This includes the provision of halal food, prayer facilities, and environments free from alcohol and gambling. Beyond these basic requirements, Islamic tourism often involves travel experiences with religious or spiritual objectives, such as visiting historical Islamic sites and engaging with Islamic heritage (11). The integration of sustainability into halal tourism has been a subject of recent academic interest, with frameworks designed to assess the impact of halal tourism initiatives on local communities across economic, social, environmental, and ethical dimensions (12).

However, the application of regenerative principles within halal tourism remains largely unexplored. A regenerative approach to halal tourism would not only ensure Sharia compliance but also actively contribute to the spiritual and socio-economic upliftment of the host community, aligning perfectly with the Islamic concept of Khalifah (stewardship of the earth) and Rahmatan lil Alamin (a mercy to all creation).

Postcolonial Theory in Tourism Development

Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens through which to examine the power dynamics and historical legacies embedded in modern tourism. Colonialism systematically undermined indigenous identities, alienated traditional cultural norms, and imposed foreign structures, resulting in profound cultural loss and identity crises (13). In the postcolonial era, tourism was often utilized as a mechanism for decolonizationa means to reclaim heritage, restore national identity, and erase the remnants of colonial imposition (14).

However, the tourism industry itself can sometimes replicate colonial structures, a phenomenon known as neo-colonialism. This occurs when heritage is commodied for the "tourist gaze," often prioritizing the expectations of Western or afluent tourists over the authentic lived experiences of the local population (15).

Decolonizing tourism requires desmantling these systems, stopping the romanticization of cultures, and

empowering local communities to control their own narratives and heritage management (16).

2.4 Cirebon: A Postcolonial Heritage Destination

Cirebon serves as an exemplary case study for the application of the Regenerative Halal Tourism framework. As a city with a profound Islamic history and a complex colonial past under Dutch rule, Cirebon's heritage is multi-layered. The city is renowned for its religious moderation and harmonious coexistence of diverse ethnic and religious groups. Its key heritage sites, such as the Kasepuhan Palace, are not merely historical monuments but active centers of spiritual and cultural life.

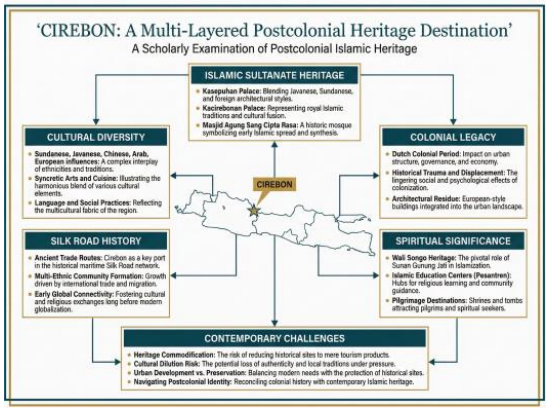


Figure 3 . Cirebon: A Multi-Layered Postcolonial Heritage Destination
Source: Authors (2026)

The challenge for Cirebon lies in managing its tourism development in a way that honors its Islamic heritage while addressing the socio-economic needs of its population. Conventional tourism approaches risk turning these sacred spaces into mere spectacles. A regenerative approach is required to ensure that tourism development in Cirebon actively contributes to the preservation of its intangible cultural heritage, empowers local artisans and communities, and restores the ecological balance of the region.

3. METHOD

This study employs a critical literature synthesis as its primary methodological approach. This qualitative method involves systematic collection, evaluation, and integration of existing literature to construct a new theoretical model. To ensure methodological transparency and analytical rigor, the research process was systematically divided into three main phases: literature identification and selection, critical analysis, and framework conceptualization.

In the first phase, an extensive review of academic literature was conducted using major databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search focused on three key thematic areas: regenerative tourism theory, halal tourism and Islamic heritage management, and postcolonial critiques of tourism development. The inclusion criteria for the literature were: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and authoritative institutional reports; (2) publications written in English or Indonesian; and (3) studies published primarily between 2010 and 2026 to capture the most recent paradigm shifts. Non-academic blogs, opinion pieces, and studies lacking rigorous methodology were excluded. Keywords such as "regenerative tourism framework," "halal tourism community impact," "postcolonial heritage tourism," and "Cirebon Islamic heritage" were utilized, resulting in a final selection of 18 highly relevant and credible sources for in-depth review.

The second phase involved a critical analysis of the selected literature using a thematic synthesis approach. This step aims to identify the limitations of the current sustainable halal tourism paradigm, particularly in postcolonial contexts. The analysis utilized postcolonial theory to deconstruct the power dynamics inherent in conventional heritage tourism and highlighted the necessity for a restorative approach. Data from the literature were coded and categorized into themes such as "community marginalization," "ecological degradation," and "spiritual commodification."

In the final phase, the core tenets of regenerative tourism were synthesized with Islamic principles and postcolonial critiques to conceptualize the 'Regenerative Halal Tourism' framework. The framework was structured to provide actionable principles for revitalizing socio-ecological systems and fostering community empowerment, with a specific focus on its applicability to the city of Cirebon. Operational indicators were also developed to translate the theoretical concepts into practical guidelines.

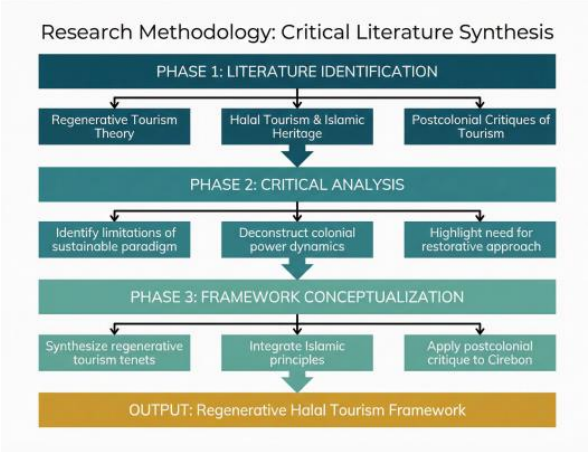


Figure 4 . Research Methodology: Critical Literature Synthesis
Source: Authors (2026)

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Limitations of Sustainable Halal Tourism in Postcolonial Contexts

The critical synthesis reveals that while sustainable halal tourism effectively addresses the immediate religious needs of Muslim travelers and mitigates environmental harm, it falls short in addressing the historical and structural inequalities present in postcolonial destinations. In cities like Cirebon, the

legacy of colonialism has left deep scars on the socio-cultural fabric.

A purely sustainable approach, which aims to maintain the current state, inadvertently preserves these historical imbalances. It fails to actively repair the cultural displacement and economic marginalization experienced by local communities. Furthermore, the commodification of Islamic heritage sites often strips them of their spiritual vitality, reducing them to static attractions rather than living centers of faith and culture.

Conceptualizing Regenerative Halal Tourism

To address these limitations, this study proposes the 'Regenerative Halal Tourism' framework. This novel model integrates the restorative goals of regenerative tourism with the ethical and spiritual mandates of Islam, viewed through a postcolonial lens. The framework is built upon four core pillars, each operationalized with specific practical indicators:

1. Spiritual and Cultural Revitalization:

Moving beyond mere preservation, this pillar focuses on actively restoring the spiritual significance of heritage sites. It involves re-centering Islamic narratives and practices, ensuring that tourism activities enhance rather than dilute the religious atmosphere. In Cirebon, this means supporting traditional Islamic rituals, arts, and education as living practices, not just tourist performances.

- *Operational Indicators*: Number of active traditional rituals supported by tourism revenue; integration of local Islamic scholars in heritage interpretation; visitor adherence to culturally appropriate dress and behavior codes.

2. Socio-Economic Empowerment and Decolonization:

This pillar addresses postcolonial inequalities by placing control of tourism development directly in the hands of local communities. It emphasizes capacity building, fair wealth distribution, and the promotion of local entrepreneurship. By empowering local voices, the framework dismantles neo-colonial power structures and allows communities to dictate how their heritage is shared..

- *Operational Indicators*: Percentage of tourism businesses owned by local residents; establishment of community-led heritage management boards; fair wage indices for local artisans and guides.

3. Ecological Restoration (Khalifah):

Grounded in the Islamic principle of stewardship, this pillar demands that tourism actively heals the environment. It goes beyond reducing waste to initiatives that restore local ecosystems, improve biodiversity, and promote regenerative practices in the supply chain.

- *Operational Indicators*: Measurable improvements in local biodiversity (e.g., restoration of coastal mangroves in Cirebon); percentage of tourism revenue reinvested in ecological healing projects.

implementation of zerowaste policies in halal food supply chains.

4. Transformative Visitor Engagement:

The framework redefines the tourist experience from passive consumption to active contribution. Visitors are encouraged to engage in meaningful, educational interactions that foster crosscultural understanding and respect. The goal is to facilitate a mutually benecial exchange where tourists leave the destination better than they found it, both physically and spiritually.

- *Operational Indicators*: Number of volunteer hours contributed by tourists to local projects; qualitative assessments of cross-cultural understanding post-visit; development of educational tourism packages focusing on postcolonial history.

Table 1 . Paradigm Shift: Sustainable vs. Regenerative HalalTourism

Dimension	Sustainable Halal Tourism	Regenerative Halal Tourism
Core Objective	Minimize negative impacts ("doing no harm")	Actively restore and enhance ("making things better")
Heritage Focus	Preservation and protection of static assets	Revitalization of living cultural and spiritual systems
Community Role	Stakeholders to be consulted	Primary drivers and beneficiaries of tourism
Environmental Approach	Mitigation and conservation	Active ecological restoration and stewardship (*Khalifah*)
Visitor Experience	Sharia-compliant consumption	Transformative engagement and contribution
Postcolonial Stance	Often maintains status quo	Actively decolonizes narratives and empowers locals

Source: Authors (2026)

Practical Implications for Cirebon

The application of the Regenerative Halal Tourism framework in Cirebon offers a strategic roadmap for destination management. For policymakers, it necessitates a shift from volume-driven tourism metrics to indicators of community well-being and cultural vitality. Policies must be formulated to support local artisans, protect sacred spaces from over-commercialization, and integrate regenerative practices into urban planning..

For destination managers, the focus must shift to curating experiences that educate visitors about Cirebon's rich Islamic history and its postcolonial journey. This could involve community-led heritage walks, participation in traditional crafts, and support for local conservation projects. By adopting this framework, Cirebon can ensure that its traditional Islamic heritage is not merely consumed by tourists but is actively revitalized, providing spiritual and economic sustenance for future generations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The current sustainability paradigm in halal tourism, while foundational, is insufficient for addressing the complex socio-cultural and ecological vulnerabilities of postcolonial destinations like Cirebon. This paper has argued for a necessary paradigm shift towards regeneration, conceptualizing the

novel framework of 'Regenerative Halal Tourism.' By integrating regenerative tourism theory with a postcolonial critique and Islamic principles, this framework moves beyond the passive goal of 'doing no harm' to the active pursuit of 'making things better.'

The proposed framework offers actionable principles for revitalizing socio-ecological systems, fostering genuine community empowerment, and preserving the spiritual and cultural integrity of Islamic heritage. It provides a strategic roadmap for policymakers and destination managers to formulate tourism policies that are not only Sharia-compliant but profoundly restorative. Ultimately, Regenerative Halal Tourism ensures that the rich, multi-layered heritage of postcolonial cities is actively revitalized, allowing local communities to reclaim their narratives and thrive in a decolonized tourism landscape.

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