

Beyond Muslim-Friendly Amenities: Advancing Elderly Accessibility for Pilgrims

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Abstract

The Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang is a religious tourism destination frequently visited by Muslim pilgrims. The increasing number of elderly visitors highlights the importance of providing Muslim-friendly amenities and elderly-friendly accessibility at the tourism site. This study aims to analyse the availability of Muslim-friendly facilities and accessibility for elderly visitors at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings show that the tourism destination provides several Muslim-friendly facilities, including prayer rooms, ablution facilities, Qibla directions, and separate restrooms for male and female visitors. However, several accessibility facilities for elderly visitors remain limited, such as uneven pathways, limited handrails, and inadequate resting areas. The study indicates that accessibility facilities are important in supporting the comfort and safety of elderly visitors during pilgrimage activities. Therefore, improvements in elderly-friendly accessibility are needed to support more inclusive religious tourism services.

Keywords: Muslim-Friendly, Amenities, Elderly Accessibility

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Introduction

Religious tourism is a form of travel based on spiritual and religious beliefs within a community. It commonly involves visiting sacred places, tombs of religious figures, houses of worship, and historical sites that possess religious and cultural significance (Saladin Azis, 2023). Beyond fulfilling spiritual needs, religious tourism also provides opportunities for visitors to gain knowledge about history, culture, traditions, and local values. In addition, this form of tourism contributes to local economic development through the growth of service, culinary, and creative industry sectors surrounding tourist destinations.

Muslim-friendly tourism is a form of tourism business development that prioritises Sharia values (Kholili, 2024). This concept goes beyond providing halal food or places of

worship, but also encompasses a travel experience that aligns with Sharia principles. The goal is to ensure tourists feel safe, comfortable, and in accordance with their beliefs, allowing them to enjoy their travels without fear of violating their religious teachings. In this way, Muslim-friendly tourism becomes an inclusive tourism service, adhering to Islamic values as a guideline in managing tourist destinations and the facilities provided.

Central Java Governor Regulation No. 40 of 2023 defines Muslim-friendly tourism as a set of services, amenities, attractions, and accessibility designed to meet Muslim travellers' needs (Gubernatorial Regulation, 2023). With this regulation, local governments provide a clear legal basis for developing competitive Muslim-friendly tourist destinations. The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism focuses not only on the provision of places of worship such as mosques or prayer rooms, but also encompasses other aspects such as halal food, attraction management in accordance with sharia values, and honest and accessible information. This aligns with the growing international trend of halal tourism and represents a potential market in the global tourism industry.

Halal tourism is now a crucial issue in developing Muslim-friendly tourism facilities in Indonesia. In 2019, the Indonesia Muslim Travel Index (IMTI) was officially introduced as a benchmark for standardising halal tourism destinations in Indonesia, ensuring compliance with international standards set by the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI). This standardisation utilises the ACES model, which comprises four main aspects: Aces, Communication, Environment, and Services, as a benchmark for assessing the presence of Muslim-friendly destinations (Mandalia et al., 2022).

ACES in Muslim-friendly tourism is a service standard used to ensure comfort, safety, and compliance with the needs of Muslim tourists. The ACES model includes indicators, including access to tourist locations, communication through promotional media and social media, a safe and comfortable environment for Muslims, and halal services such as halal food and places of worship for Muslim tourists (Gani Rendy Barllian, 2023). With the ACES standards, Muslim-friendly tourist destinations will not only focus on providing halal facilities, but also on a comprehensive, inclusive, and sharia-compliant tourism experience. Therefore, the implementation of the ACES standards can serve as an important reference in the development of religious tourism destinations, especially in Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim. These standards guarantee the quality of service, the completeness of facilities, and the provision of spiritual needs in accordance with sharia. If implemented correctly, in addition to improving tourist comfort and satisfaction, these standards can also

encourage inclusive tourism, enhance competitiveness, and help enhance the positive image of tourist destinations domestically and internationally.

The tradition of pilgrimage is a unique form of religious tourism. The number of pilgrims to graves has increased with increasing sophistication and modernity, and has not decreased over time. Initially, the tradition of grave pilgrimage was prohibited during the time of the Prophet Muhammad, due to the relatively weak faith of Muslims at that time. However, after the Muslim faith had become firmly established, the Prophet Muhammad permitted visiting the graves of his companions and even encouraged it. This not only serves to pray for the deceased but also reminds us of death and the fact that nothing in this world is eternal (Aji et al., 2023).

The tradition of pilgrimage also plays an important role in moral and ethical education within society. Through pilgrimages, people are taught to respect scholars and emulate the noble values they taught. Visits to the graves of saints or scholars are often accompanied by religious lectures, religious studies, and discussions on Islamic teachings. This serves as an excellent way for people to deepen their understanding of religion and apply these values in their daily lives (Ismail, 2016). Furthermore, the pilgrimage tradition also serves as a way to pass on cultural and spiritual values from one generation to the next. This activity strengthens relationships among people in a community because it is carried out together, creating a sense of unity and mutual support. Values such as respecting ancestors, living a simple life, and devotion to worship can be naturally passed down through pilgrimages. Thus, pilgrimages are not merely religious rituals, but also tools for character development, strengthening religious identity, and preserving Islamic traditions that are relevant to today's society. Accessibility in tourism is crucial to supporting inclusivity for the elderly and people with disabilities. To support accessibility for the elderly, it is crucial to provide adequate and comfortable facilities and infrastructure. Elderly individuals often face physical challenges, such as limited mobility, reduced vision, or hearing impairments, so facilities in religious tourism need to be adapted. Therefore, the availability of elderly-friendly facilities such as safe paths, comfortable seating, easily accessible ablution and restroom areas, prayer rooms, and clear and easy-to-understand information is paramount (Rahayu, 2019). Fulfilling these needs not only ensures the safety and comfort of seniors but also creates a more peaceful atmosphere for worship and pilgrimage, allowing every visitor to fully benefit from the religious tourism experience (Besri, 2024).

Referring to Minister of Transportation Regulation No. 98 of 2017 concerning the provision of accessibility in public transportation services for users with special needs, seniors are categorised as service users with special needs due to their limitations, especially those aged

60 and over. Thus, the elderly have the right to receive facilities and support to remain independent in carrying out their activities (Lativa et al., 2021). This provision explains that the elderly are considered a group that requires special attention in terms of accessibility, both in transportation and tourist attractions. Therefore, elderly-friendly accessibility principles must also be applied to religious tourism sites, including the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin, so that the elderly can continue to make pilgrimages safely, comfortably, and meaningfully. Social facts evident at the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin include inadequate accessibility for the elderly at the tomb's religious tourism destination. Facilities at the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin do not fully support the needs of the elderly, such as uneven or slippery paths, a lack of handrails, a lack of seating for resting, and a lack of directional signs and senior-friendly information.

Therefore, this study aims to determine Muslim-friendly facilities and accessibility for the elderly at the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang. Therefore, the researchers chose the title of the journal "*Muslim-Friendly Amenities and Elderly-Friendly Accessibility at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang.*"

Literature Review

Muslim-Friendly

Muslim-friendly tourism refers to tourism activities and services designed to accommodate the religious needs of Muslim travellers in accordance with Islamic principles. These services include halal food, prayer facilities, ablution areas, and Sharia-compliant amenities that support Muslim tourists during their travel activities (Battour & Ismail, 2016). In addition, Muslim-friendly tourism emphasises the provision of a comfortable, safe, and inclusive travel environment for Muslim visitors.

The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism is closely related to the Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI), which evaluates tourism destinations based on several indicators, including access, communication, environment, and services for Muslim travellers. Similarly, the ACES framework highlights the importance of accessibility, communication, environmental support, and tourism services in improving Muslim tourists' travel experiences. Therefore, Muslim-friendly tourism is not only associated with religious facilities but also with the quality and inclusiveness of tourism management, especially for elderly visitors.

Battour and Ismail (2016) explain that Muslim-friendly tourist destinations must provide prayer facilities, halal food, Sharia-compliant hygiene facilities, and an environment that supports spiritual activities. The concept of Muslim-friendly tourism also emphasises the

provision of appropriate amenities, such as mosques, prayer rooms, ablution facilities, halal restaurants, and accommodations with prayer facilities.

Accessibility

Accessibility in tourism refers to the availability of facilities, infrastructure, and services that enable visitors to access and use tourism destinations safely, comfortably, and independently (Candra & Sari, 2024). In tourism destinations, accessibility includes supporting facilities such as proper pathways, transportation access, handrails, seating areas, and directional signage that facilitate visitor mobility, particularly for elderly tourists and individuals with limited physical abilities.

Accessibility in tourism refers to the availability of facilities and infrastructure that enable visitors to reach and utilise tourism destinations safely, comfortably, and independently (Islam & Savitri, 2023). In the context of religious tourism, accessibility includes supporting facilities such as pathways, transportation access, handrails, seating areas, and directional signage that facilitate visitor mobility, particularly for elderly tourists and individuals with physical limitations. Accessibility in tourism destinations is closely related to visitors' ease of movement and their ability to reach tourism sites conveniently. Good accessibility can support smoother tourism activities and improve visitors' travel experiences, especially for elderly visitors who require supportive facilities during religious tourism activities (Aprisia et al., 2024).

Candra and Sari (2024) explain that accessibility plays an important role in improving tourism service quality because it influences visitor comfort, safety, and overall travel experiences. Adequate accessibility facilities also support inclusive tourism development by ensuring that tourism destinations can accommodate visitors from different age groups and physical conditions. Therefore, elderly-friendly accessibility is essential in creating safe and comfortable religious tourism activities for elderly visitors.

Research Methods

This study used a qualitative research approach to analyse Muslim-friendly tourism and elderly-friendly accessibility at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pematang. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to understand social phenomena and conditions in depth through direct interaction with participants and the research environment (Charismana et al., 2022).

Data collection techniques in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly at the research site to identify the

availability of Muslim-friendly facilities and accessibility infrastructure for elderly visitors. Interviews were carried out with several informants, consisting of site management, tourism staff, elderly visitors, and tourists visiting the destination. In addition, documentation such as photographs and related records was used to support the research findings.

The informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement and understanding of tourism activities at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin. The collected data were analysed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing related to Muslim-friendly tourism implementation and elderly-friendly accessibility at the research site. To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation.

Result and Discussion

Muslim-friendly Facilities at The Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin

The tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang is an important religious pilgrimage site for Muslims in Indonesia. The complex features a variety of Muslim-friendly facilities to support Muslim visitors, including a prayer room, Qibla markers, a Muslim-friendly shop, and clean, separate restrooms for men and women. The ablution area also features separate, clean areas for men and women. These facilities are equipped with numerous faucets, ensuring visitors don't have to wait long to perform their ablutions. The visitor-friendly restrooms available at the tomb are designed to meet hygiene and comfort standards. Based on the research standards for Muslim-friendly facilities, the following is a checklist of amenities available at the cemetery:

Table 1. Checklist of Amenities: The Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin in Pemalang

No	Amenity	Yes/ No
1	Separate toilets for men and women	Yes
2	Islamic prayer room	Yes
3	Washing facilities	Yes
4	Halal shopping facilities	Yes

Source: Documentation, 2025.

The development of these amenities involves several parties, including the local government, cemetery managers, and the local community. The local government plays a role in providing budget and infrastructure support, while the cemetery managers are responsible for day-to-day operations. The local community is also involved in this process, both as volunteers helping to maintain the cleanliness and security of the area and as a source of input

to improve service quality. This collaboration is crucial to ensure that the facilities provided truly meet visitor needs.

The facilities at the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin are strategically located and easily accessible within the cemetery grounds. The ablution area, restrooms, and restrooms are located near the entrance, allowing visitors easy access without having to walk far. The wide, flat access path is also designed to facilitate visitor movement. Clear signs along the path point to the various locations within the tomb, including restrooms and ablution areas. This arrangement not only facilitates visitors but also creates a more organised and comfortable atmosphere within the cemetery grounds.

The findings indicate that the Muslim-friendly facilities available at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin generally support the religious needs of visitors. The provision of prayer rooms, ablution facilities, and separate restrooms for men and women enables Muslim pilgrims to perform worship comfortably during their visit. These findings are consistent with the concept of Muslim-friendly tourism, which emphasises the availability of facilities that accommodate religious obligations and enhance visitor comfort (Battour & Ismail, 2016). From the perspective of the ACES framework, the existing facilities contribute to service quality and environmental support for visitors, while also fulfilling basic physiological and spiritual needs as described in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. However, the findings also reveal several limitations, including inadequate rest areas and limited halal culinary information. These shortcomings indicate that although the destination has implemented key elements of Muslim-friendly tourism, further improvements are required to achieve a more comprehensive and inclusive tourism experience. Therefore, strengthening supporting facilities would not only improve visitor satisfaction but also enhance the destination's competitiveness as a sustainable religious tourism site.

Elderly-friendly Accessibility of The Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin

In this accessibility study, many visitors provided positive feedback regarding the facilities at the tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin. They appreciated the clean ablution area and user-friendly restrooms. However, several elderly visitors noted that while the access to the tomb is quite good, several facilities still need improvement, particularly the road surface in front of the tomb's entrance.

During peak visitation periods, such as holidays, weekends, and religious commemorations, the number of visitors to the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin increases significantly, creating greater demands on both facilities and accessibility services. The findings

indicate that the management responds by increasing staff availability, assisting elderly visitors, and ensuring that essential facilities, including restrooms and ablution areas, remain clean and functional. In addition, accessibility features such as nearby parking areas, handrails, and seating facilities help support the mobility and comfort of elderly pilgrims. These measures demonstrate that accessibility is not limited to physical infrastructure but also involves effective management practices that enhance visitor safety, convenience, and overall pilgrimage experiences. Therefore, the integration of adequate facilities and responsive management plays an important role in creating a more inclusive religious tourism destination for elderly visitors. Accessibility facilities for the elderly are strategically located within the cemetery complex. Parking is also conveniently located near the main entrance, minimising the need for visitors to walk long distances. Handrails are installed near the main entrance to the cemetery. Comfortable seating is also provided in several locations, such as near the prayer area, to provide additional support.

Accessibility for the elderly reflects respect for visitors who come to make pilgrimages. By providing adequate facilities for all visitors, cemetery management can ensure their comfort and safety. With Muslim-friendly amenities, all visitors can perform their religious duties properly. Facilities such as ablution areas and clean restrooms are essential for maintaining purity during worship. Furthermore, good accessibility ensures that all visitors to the cemetery, including the elderly and people with disabilities, can enjoy their pilgrimage without any obstacles. Furthermore, providing good facilities can also enhance the cemetery's image as a quality pilgrimage site.

Accessibility is crucial for creating an inclusive and equitable environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities and the elderly. The aging population continues to increase worldwide, and with age, many individuals experience physical decline. Therefore, senior-friendly accessibility is crucial to ensure they can actively adapt to society and travel to places like tombs. Senior-friendly accessibility encompasses several aspects, including physical infrastructure, technology, and public services. Cemetery managers should conduct routine maintenance on existing accessibility facilities, including regular inspections of walkways, handrails, and seating. Cemetery managers also actively gather visitor feedback through surveys and suggestion boxes provided within the cemetery. This way, they can identify areas for improvement and better understand visitor needs. They also conduct staff training to provide excellent service to senior visitors, ensuring they feel comfortable and safe during their visit. Through this approach, they hope to create a positive and memorable pilgrimage experience for all visitors, especially seniors. The elderly-friendly accessibility at the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana

Syamsuddin complies with universal design standards and the principles of inclusive tourism accessibility and is relevant to inclusive tourism theory.

Conclusion

This study found that the Tomb of Sheikh Maulana Syamsuddin has implemented several Muslim-friendly amenities, including prayer facilities, ablution areas, and separate restrooms, which support the religious needs of Muslim visitors. The findings also indicate that accessibility for elderly visitors has been partially accommodated through the provision of parking areas, handrails, seating facilities, and visitor assistance services. However, several challenges remain, particularly regarding pathway conditions, rest areas, and supporting information facilities. These findings demonstrate that the integration of Muslim-friendly amenities and elderly-friendly accessibility plays an important role in enhancing visitor comfort and supporting the development of inclusive and sustainable religious tourism destinations. Spiritual values also increase comfort, affordability, and inclusiveness for tourists.

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