



Motivations and Experiences of Religious Tourism in Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious pilgrimage has increasingly attracted attention within tourism studies; however, existing scholarship has largely interpreted pilgrimage through the pilgrim-tourist dichotomy or emphasized destination management and visitor experiences. These perspectives provide a limited understanding of how Muslim pilgrims negotiate religious devotion, cultural participation, and leisure within the context of Islamic pilgrimage. This study investigates the motivations and lived experiences of Indonesian Muslims undertaking *ziarah wali* to the Wali Songo shrines and examines how these experiences contribute to a broader conceptualization of religious tourism. Employing a qualitative design with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, the study draws on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving first-time pilgrims, regular pilgrims, pilgrimage tour operators, shrine managers, and religious leaders across major Wali Songo pilgrimage sites in Java, Indonesia. The findings reveal that *ziarah wali* is characterized by seven interconnected motivations: religious devotion, the pursuit of *barakah* (divine blessing), spiritual renewal, historical consciousness, cultural participation, family and social connectedness, and leisure integration. Rather than representing opposing identities, pilgrims negotiate religious and touristic roles simultaneously, while pilgrimage experiences facilitate enduring spiritual transformation reflected in strengthened faith, moral commitment, and attachment to Islamic heritage. Building on these findings, the study proposes the concept of The Spiritual Tourist, a conceptual model that integrates Islamic theological concepts, including *niyyah*, *barakah*, and sacred mobility, with contemporary religious tourism theory. By introducing *barakah* as a distinctive theological motivation within tourism studies, this article contributes to expanding global understandings of Muslim pilgrimage beyond predominantly Western conceptualizations and offers implications for the sustainable management of religious tourism destinations in Indonesia and other Muslim societies.

Keywords: Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, Ziarah Wali, Spiritual Tourist, Sacred Mobility, Spiritual Transformation, Islam Nusantara.

Introduction

Pilgrimage has long been an integral part of religious traditions, serving not only as an act of worship but also as a form of cultural mobility, identity formation, and spiritual transformation (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Within Islam, besides the obligatory *hajj* and recommended *'umrah*, the tradition of *ziarah* (visiting the graves of prophets, saints, and righteous scholars) occupies an important place in Muslim religious life. Classical scholars explain that *ziarah* encourages remembrance of death, moral reflection, and spiritual purification, while practices such as *tabarruk* and *tawassul* demonstrate that pilgrimage is understood as a multidimensional practice integrating theology, spirituality, and communal memory (Al-Nawawī, 2017).

Indonesia represents one of the richest expressions of this tradition through *ziarah wali*, particularly to the tombs of the Wali Songo (Geertz, 2013; Ruslan & Nugroho, 2007). Millions of Muslims visit these sacred sites annually for religious devotion, historical learning, and cultural engagement, making *ziarah wali* both an important expression of lived Islam and a major component of Indonesia's religious tourism industry (Chambert-Loir & Guillot, 2007; Uyuni et al., 2024). At the same time, broader developments in tourism have shifted travelers' interests from leisure-oriented consumption toward authenticity, self-discovery, and spiritual fulfilment, resulting in increasing convergence between pilgrimage and tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2019).

Although religious tourism has become an important field of study, existing research has focused largely on pilgrimage motivation, destination management, visitor satisfaction, heritage preservation, and revisit intention (Handriana et al., 2019). Theoretical discussions have also been dominated by the Pilgrim, Tourist Continuum, which argues that religious and recreational motivations coexist within pilgrimage (V. L. Smith, 1992; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). However, these perspectives remain largely derived from Christian pilgrimage traditions and provide limited explanation of how Muslim pilgrims simultaneously negotiate religious devotion, cultural participation, family travel, leisure activities, and the pursuit of *barakah* during pilgrimage.

At the national level, studies on *ziarah* in Indonesia illustrate a parallel, though more fragmented, gap. Arifuddin (2016) and Anam (2015) revealed that the pilgrimage tradition in Indonesia sits at the intersection of spirituality, *da'wah*, and tourism, yet did not explain how these three dimensions are simultaneously negotiated by pilgrims within a single travel experience. Similarly, Saefullah and Cahyadi (2023) found that pilgrims' motivations at the tomb of Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari Tegalsari encompassed mystical beliefs, worship, and appreciation for *ulama*, while Marbun (2019), in a study of the *Ziarah Kubra* in Palembang, highlighted the tension between religious consciousness and economic potential surrounding pilgrimage sites. On the conceptual-theological dimension, Asmaran (2018) and Jamhari (2001) explained that the practices of *tabarruk*, *tawassul*, and *barakah* in Indonesian *wali* pilgrimage cannot be separated from the framework of *tawhid*. Faletahan (2019) proposed a model of serenity, sustainability, and spirituality in religious tourism management, while Widagdo and Rokhlinasari (2017) and Mujib (2016) highlighted the dimensions of commercialization and the contestation of piety that accompany the development of pilgrimage

tourism. In the study examining tourism moving beyond dichotomies, Yasin (2025) addresses how non-Muslim tourists experience halal tourism in Lombok.

Taken together, both the international and Indonesian bodies of literature remain partial in scope: the former is largely derived from Christian pilgrimage traditions and offers limited explanation of distinctly Islamic motivations such as *barakah*, while the latter tends to focus on a single site, a single motivational dimension, or a single management aspect, without integrating religious devotion, cultural participation, family travel, leisure, and the pursuit of *barakah* into one coherent conceptual framework. This study addresses that combined gap by examining how Indonesian Muslim pilgrims simultaneously negotiate these dimensions during *ziarah wali*, and by developing the concept of The Spiritual Tourist as an integrative model grounded in the Indonesian context.

The Indonesian experience offers an important opportunity to extend these discussions. Pilgrims commonly describe *ziarah wali* not only as an act of worship but also as a journey for spiritual renewal, historical learning, cultural appreciation, family togetherness, and recreation. These multidimensional experiences suggest that the binary distinction between pilgrims and tourists is insufficient for understanding contemporary Muslim pilgrimage. Instead, *ziarah wali* represents a form of sacred mobility in which religious, cultural, educational, and recreational dimensions mutually reinforce one another.

Against this background, this study explores the motivations and lived experiences of Indonesian Muslims undertaking *ziarah wali* and proposes The Spiritual Tourist as a conceptual framework for understanding contemporary Islamic pilgrimage. By integrating theories of religious tourism, spiritual tourism, tourist motivation, and Islamic spirituality, this study contributes to the literature in three ways: (1) providing empirical evidence from the underrepresented context of Indonesian Islam; (2) introducing *barakah* as a distinctive Islamic motivation in religious tourism; and (3) developing the concept of The Spiritual Tourist to explain how religious devotion, cultural participation, leisure practices, and spiritual transformation converge within contemporary Muslim pilgrimage.

Literature Review

Religious Tourism

Religious tourism refers to travel motivated wholly or partly by religious interests, including pilgrimage, visits to sacred sites, participation in religious festivals, and spiritual learning (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Wibawa & Nurbaeti, 2025). Contemporary studies argue that pilgrimage and tourism are no longer separate categories but exist along a continuum, where travelers often combine religious devotion with cultural, educational, and recreational activities (Collins-Kreiner, 2019; Sumandi, 2024).

Within Islam, religious travel is grounded in the concepts of *hajj* and *ziarah*. Classical scholars such as al-Ghazālī (2021), al-Nawawī (2017), and Ibn Qudāmah (2025), explain that visiting the graves of righteous people encourages remembrance of death, moral reflection, and spiritual purification. In Indonesia, pilgrimage to the Wali Songo represents a distinctive

expression of Islamic religiosity that integrates faith, local culture, and historical memory (Ilahi, 2016; Nuruddin et al., 2026)

Despite extensive research, existing literature has focused primarily on destination management, heritage preservation, and visitor behavior, while giving limited attention to pilgrims' lived spiritual experiences and the dual identity of pilgrims as both religious devotees and tourists (Collins-Kreiner, 2019; Handriana et al., 2019). This gap underpins the need to conceptualize contemporary Muslim pilgrimage from a broader experiential perspective.

Spiritual Tourism

Spiritual tourism emphasizes travel as a process of seeking meaning, inner transformation, and personal wellbeing, extending beyond formal religious obligations (Bardan et al., 2026; Norman, 2013). Although distinct from religious tourism, the two frequently overlap, as travelers combine religious practices with self-reflection, cultural exploration, and existential experiences (Rifa'i & Kamaludin, 2021; Sharpley & Jepson, 2011).

The concept of existential authenticity explains that meaningful travel is created not only through authentic destinations but also through visitors' personal transformation (Sumandi, 2024; Wang, 1999). Within Islamic thought, spirituality (*rūḥāniyyah*) is closely linked to *tazkiyat al-nafs*, *dhikr*, and moral refinement, making pilgrimage or *ziarah* a journey toward greater awareness of God (Al-Nawawī, 2017; Bardan et al., 2026; Raditiya & Affandi, 2025)

Current scholarship remains largely centered on Christian and New Age contexts, with relatively limited discussion of Islamic concepts such as *barakah*, *tawassul*, and *dhikr* in shaping spiritual tourism experiences. This limitation provides the theoretical basis for developing the concept of The Spiritual Tourist within Indonesian Muslim pilgrimage.

Tourist Motivation

Tourist motivation explains why individuals travel and how they choose destinations. The most widely used framework is the Push-Pull Theory, which distinguishes internal motivations (e.g., spirituality, escape, self-development) from external destination attributes such as sacred places, cultural heritage, and accessibility (Dann, 1977; Yuliar & Azhari, 2026). Motivation is increasingly understood as dynamic and evolving through travel experience (Imron et al., 2026; Pearce & Lee, 2005).

In religious tourism, motivations are multidimensional. Pilgrims seek spiritual fulfilment, gratitude, repentance, family togetherness, historical learning, and cultural appreciation simultaneously (Nuruddin et al., 2026; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Within Islam, the concept of *niyyah* (intention) gives religious meaning to travel, while pilgrimage is regarded as a means of strengthening faith and moral character (Al-Ghazali, 2021; Al-Nawawī, 2017).

Studies of Indonesian *ziarah wali* similarly show that pilgrims combine devotional motives with educational, social, and recreational interests (Chambert-Loir & Guillot, 2007; Handriana et al., 2019; Mishra & Maheshwari, 2024). Existing motivation theories therefore

require further refinement to explain how Islamic spirituality and tourism motivations interact in contemporary pilgrimage.

Tourist Experience

Tourist experience focuses on what travelers feel and learn during their journey. The Experience Economy perspective argues that tourism creates value through memorable emotional and personal experiences rather than simply providing services (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Likewise, Memorable Tourism Experience (MTE) highlights dimensions such as meaningfulness, learning, local culture, involvement, and social interaction (Bardan et al., 2026; Kim et al., 2012).

In religious tourism, experience is strongly associated with existential authenticity, where visitors evaluate journeys through inner transformation rather than the objective authenticity of sacred places (Wang, 1999; Wibawa & Nurbaeti, 2025). Pilgrimage therefore becomes an emotional, spiritual, and identity-forming process rather than merely a visit to a religious destination.

Although tourist experience has received considerable scholarly attention, research on Muslim pilgrimage has rarely examined how spiritual transformation emerges through interactions among rituals, sacred places, historical narratives, and social encounters. This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived experiences of Indonesian Wali pilgrimage and proposing the concept of The Spiritual Tourist.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the motivations and lived experiences of Indonesian Muslims undertaking ziarah wali. IPA was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of how pilgrims construct meanings, interpret spiritual experiences, and negotiate the relationship between religious devotion and tourism through their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Tresnawaty & Risdayah, 2025). The research was conducted at five major Wali Songo pilgrimage sites in Java; Sunan Ampel (Surabaya), Sunan Bonang (Tuban), Sunan Giri (Gresik), Sunan Kudus (Kudus), and Sunan Kalijaga (Demak), which were purposively selected due to their historical significance and high pilgrimage activity.

Participants were recruited through purposive and maximum variation sampling to capture diverse pilgrimage experiences (Patton, 2015). The study involved pilgrims who had previously undertaken ziarah wali, complemented by pilgrimage guides, shrine caretakers (*juru kunci*), religious leaders, tourism managers, and local community members to enrich data triangulation. Data collection continued until sufficient depth and richness of experience were achieved, consistent with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).

The data were analyzed following the six stages of IPA, including repeated reading of transcripts, exploratory noting, theme development, thematic clustering, cross-case analysis,

and theoretical interpretation (J. A. Smith et al., 2009). Findings were interpreted through the lenses of religious tourism, spiritual tourism, tourist motivation, tourist experience, and Islamic spirituality to develop the conceptual framework of The Spiritual Tourist. To ensure trustworthiness, the study adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through triangulation, member checking, reflexive analysis, and audit trails. Ethical approval, informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' religious beliefs were maintained throughout the research process.

Result and Discussion

Negotiating Religious and Touristic Identities: Beyond the Pilgrim-Tourist Dichotomy

One of the most significant findings of this study is that Indonesian Muslims undertaking ziarah wali do not perceive pilgrimage and tourism as two opposing forms of travel. Across all participant groups, including first-time pilgrims, regular pilgrims, pilgrimage organizers, shrine caretakers, and religious leaders, ziarah wali was consistently understood as a multidimensional journey in which worship, historical learning, cultural appreciation, social interaction, and leisure coexist within a single travel experience. Participants rarely distinguished between being a pilgrim and being a tourist. Instead, they regarded both identities as complementary expressions of a religious journey whose ultimate orientation remained devotion to Allah. This finding suggests that the dichotomy frequently assumed in tourism studies does not adequately explain the lived experience of contemporary Muslim pilgrimage in Indonesia.

For first-time pilgrims, the journey was often described as the realization of a long-held religious aspiration. Many participants explained that their knowledge of the Wali Songo had been shaped through family traditions, pesantren education, religious sermons, and digital media long before they physically visited the shrines. Consequently, arriving at these sacred sites generated a profound sense of emotional closeness to the historical figures who introduced Islam to the Indonesian archipelago. Several participants emphasized that standing in places where the saints had preached Islam enabled them to experience history in a more meaningful way than reading books or attending religious lectures. One participant explained that the visit was intended "not to ask anything from the wali, but to pray for him and learn how Islam was spread peacefully." Such narratives demonstrate that pilgrimage serves not only as an act of devotion but also as an embodied encounter with Islamic history.

This finding extends Richards' (2018) argument that contemporary heritage tourists increasingly seek meaningful engagement with historical narratives rather than merely consuming cultural attractions. Within the context of ziarah wali, however, historical consciousness is inseparable from religious devotion. Pilgrims do not visit the shrines simply because they are historically significant sites, but because they represent sacred spaces where Islamic history, collective memory, and religious identity converge. Consequently, heritage appreciation functions as an extension of religious commitment rather than an independent tourism motive.

A different pattern emerged among regular pilgrims. Unlike first-time visitors, whose narratives centered on discovery, experienced pilgrims described *ziarah* as a recurring religious practice embedded within their everyday spiritual lives. Many participants reported visiting Wali Songo shrines annually or several times each year, often during particular religious months or family occasions. Rather than seeking novelty, they returned because each pilgrimage generated renewed feelings of tranquillity, gratitude, and spiritual reflection. One participant remarked that "every visit brings a different lesson according to the circumstances of life," while another explained that periods without pilgrimage created a sense of spiritual incompleteness. These accounts suggest that pilgrimage meanings are continuously reconstructed through changing personal experiences rather than remaining fixed over time.

This observation supports Pearce and Lee's (2005) Travel Career Pattern, which proposes that travel motivations evolve alongside accumulated experience. Nevertheless, the present findings indicate that repeated pilgrimage involves more than changes in travel motivation. Recurrent visits gradually strengthen emotional and spiritual attachment to sacred places, transforming pilgrimage into an enduring religious practice. Participants rarely associated repeat visitation with destination attractiveness or tourism novelty. Instead, they emphasized *tuma'ninah* (inner tranquillity), gratitude, remembrance of Allah, and continuity in their relationship with the sacred landscape. Such experiences closely correspond with Al-Ghazālī's conception of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, in which repeated acts of worship cultivate purification of the soul through continuous remembrance of God (Al-Ghazali, 2021).

The integration of religious and touristic identities was equally evident from the perspectives of pilgrimage organizers (Kusumaningtyas & Ulfah, 2024). Rather than marketing their services as conventional tourism packages, tour operators consistently described their programs as guided religious journeys. Participants explained that every itinerary incorporated religious instruction concerning the etiquette (*adab al-ziarah*) of visiting graves, the historical contribution of the Wali Songo, and theological clarification regarding practices such as *tawassul* and prayers for the deceased. Religious guidance accompanied almost every stage of the journey, ensuring that participants understood pilgrimage primarily as an act of worship while simultaneously appreciating its historical and cultural dimensions.

The role of pilgrimage guides illustrates an important characteristic of Indonesian religious tourism. Unlike guides in conventional heritage tourism, who primarily provide historical interpretation, pilgrimage guides also function as religious educators. They actively shape pilgrims' theological understanding of *ziarah*, reminding participants that all prayers are directed exclusively to Allah while the saints are remembered as exemplary Muslims whose lives inspire faith and moral conduct. In this respect, tourism practices are mediated by religious authority, ensuring that increased visitor mobility does not diminish the spiritual integrity of the pilgrimage. This finding supports Timothy and Olsen's (2006) proposition that religious tourism involves both physical mobility and spiritual learning, while further demonstrating the active role of religious authority in maintaining the balance between tourism development and Islamic orthodoxy.

Similar perspectives emerged from shrine caretakers (*juru kunci*) and local managers, who acknowledged that pilgrimage practices have changed considerably over recent decades.

They observed that contemporary visitors increasingly combine religious rituals with culinary tourism, photography, souvenir shopping, and visits to nearby historical attractions. However, these developments were rarely interpreted as signs of secularization. Instead, shrine managers emphasized the importance of preserving the sacred atmosphere while accommodating the practical needs of growing numbers of visitors. As one caretaker explained, the shrine "must remain a sacred place before becoming a tourist destination." This statement reflects an understanding that tourism should support, rather than replace, the primary religious function of the sacred site.

The coexistence of commercial activities and religious devotion also challenges common assumptions regarding the commodification of pilgrimage. Previous scholarship has frequently interpreted the expansion of tourism infrastructure around sacred destinations as evidence that commercialization threatens religious authenticity (Collins-Kreiner, 2019). The present findings suggest a more nuanced relationship. Participants generally regarded accommodation, transportation, local markets, and culinary businesses as legitimate components of pilgrimage provided that they remained compatible with the ethical norms of *ziarah*. Commercial facilities were understood as supporting pilgrims' journeys rather than transforming sacred places into purely recreational destinations. It is undeniable that the large number of pilgrims has a positive economic impact on the surrounding community (Choe & Bagadion, 2024). Thus, commercialization does not necessarily erode religious meaning; instead, its legitimacy depends upon whether the sacred character of the destination continues to be respected.

Religious leaders provided perhaps the clearest theological explanation for this integration. Across interviews, *kiai* consistently argued that the validity of *ziarah wali* depends upon the pilgrim's *niyyah* (religious intention). Visiting the graves of righteous Muslims was regarded as a recommended practice because it encourages prayer for the deceased, remembrance of death, gratitude for the spread of Islam, and commitment to emulating the moral virtues of the Wali Songo. Participants repeatedly rejected practices that attributed independent supernatural power to the saints or transformed pilgrimage into magical ritual. Instead, they emphasized that the ultimate purpose of *ziarah* is to strengthen *tawhīd* by drawing believers closer to Allah through remembrance of His righteous servants.

These interpretations are closely aligned with classical Sunni scholarship. Al-Nawawī (2017) explains that visiting graves reminds believers of the Hereafter while encouraging supplication for the deceased and moral reflection. Likewise, Ibn Qudāmah (2025) argues that *ziarah* cultivates humility and inspires believers to imitate the piety of righteous Muslims. Al-Ghazālī (2021) further maintains that remembering the lives of the pious contributes to *tazkiyat al-nafs* by strengthening religious consciousness and ethical commitment. The findings therefore demonstrate that Indonesian understandings of *ziarah wali* remain firmly rooted in the broader intellectual tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah, despite the increasing integration of pilgrimage within contemporary tourism.

Collectively, these findings challenge one of the most influential assumptions in pilgrimage studies, the distinction between pilgrims and tourists. Turner and Turner (1978) portrayed pilgrims primarily as religious seekers whose journeys differ fundamentally from

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tourism, while Smith (1992) later proposed the influential Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum, suggesting that travelers move along a spectrum between sacred and secular motivations. Although Smith's framework successfully recognizes that pilgrimage and tourism are not entirely separate phenomena, the Indonesian case indicates that the relationship is better understood as simultaneous integration rather than movement between two identities. Participants did not alternate between being pilgrims and tourists according to particular moments of the journey. Instead, worship, historical learning, family travel, cultural participation, culinary experiences, photography, and leisure were experienced as mutually reinforcing aspects of a single pilgrimage.

Accordingly, this study argues that *ziarah wali* should be understood as a form of sacred mobility in which religious and touristic identities are integrated rather than negotiated as competing categories. Pilgrims remain fully committed to religious devotion while simultaneously engaging with history, culture, family relationships, and leisure activities. These dimensions are not perceived as contradictory because they are unified by a common religious intention (*niyyah*) and guided by Islamic ethical principles. This finding extends existing theories of religious tourism by demonstrating that the lived experience of Indonesian Muslim pilgrimage transcends the linear logic of the Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum and instead reflects a holistic form of sacred travel rooted in the theological, historical, and cultural traditions of Islam Nusantara (Moeliono & Nisa, 2024; Pramezwary et al., 2026; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). The following section further explores how this integrated identity is expressed through the multidimensional motivations and spiritual experiences that ultimately culminate in the emergence of The Spiritual Tourist.

Multidimensional Motivations and Spiritual Experiences

The findings reveal that the motivations underlying *ziarah wali* are far more complex than the conventional distinction between religious pilgrimage and leisure tourism. Across all participant groups, pilgrimage emerged as a multidimensional practice in which religious devotion, the pursuit of *barakah*, historical learning, cultural participation, family togetherness, and recreational activities coexist within a single journey. Rather than functioning as separate or competing motives, these dimensions interact dynamically throughout the pilgrimage process and ultimately shape pilgrims' spiritual experiences. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that contemporary religious tourism integrates multiple forms of motivation (Collins-Kreiner, 2019; Pramezwary et al., 2026), while also demonstrating that Indonesian Muslim pilgrimage is grounded in theological values that remain underexplored within mainstream tourism literature.

Religious devotion (*ta'abbud*) constituted the primary motivation expressed by almost all participants. Pilgrims consistently described *ziarah wali* as an opportunity to pray for the deceased saints, remember their contribution to the spread of Islam, and strengthen their relationship with Allah through reflection on the exemplary lives of the Wali Songo. Participants clearly distinguished this practice from worship directed toward the saints themselves. Religious leaders repeatedly emphasized that the validity of pilgrimage depends upon maintaining *tawhīd*, with all prayers addressed exclusively to Allah while the saints are honored as righteous servants whose lives provide moral inspiration. This understanding

closely corresponds to classical Sunni scholarship, which regards grave visitation as a recommended practice that encourages remembrance of death, supplication for the deceased, and moral purification (Al-Ghazali, 2021; Al-Nawawī, 2017).

Beyond religious obligation, participants consistently identified the search for *barakah* (divine blessing) as an important motivation for undertaking pilgrimage. Although expressed in different ways, *barakah* was never understood as an autonomous power possessed by the saints. Instead, pilgrims regarded blessing as originating solely from Allah, while the Wali Songo function as exemplary believers whose remembrance strengthens faith and inspires righteous conduct. Pilgrimage guides and religious scholars reinforced this theological understanding by explaining that *ziarah* should cultivate greater obedience to Allah rather than encourage dependence upon supernatural powers (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Consequently, *barakah* was interpreted through its spiritual and ethical consequences, including inner tranquillity, gratitude, stronger family relationships, consistency in worship, and renewed commitment to Islamic values. Unlike conventional tourism theories that emphasize psychological fulfilment or destination attractiveness, this finding highlights *barakah* as a distinctive Islamic travel motivation rooted in the concepts of *niyyah*, *tabarruk*, and *tazkiyat al-nafs*. It therefore introduces a theological dimension largely absent from contemporary religious tourism scholarship (Collins-Kreiner, 2019; Rohwati & Hamdani, 2025).

Historical learning also emerged as a prominent motivation, particularly among first-time pilgrims. Participants frequently explained that they wished to experience directly the historical legacy of the Wali Songo, whose stories they had previously encountered through family traditions, pesantren education, and religious gatherings. Visiting the shrines enabled them to transform historical knowledge into lived experience by encountering the physical landscapes where Islam developed through peaceful preaching, education, and cultural accommodation. This finding resonates with Richards' (2018) argument that heritage visitors increasingly seek meaningful engagement with history rather than passive sightseeing. However, the present study demonstrates that within Indonesian Muslim pilgrimage, historical consciousness functions simultaneously as religious learning and cultural appreciation. The historical dimension also reflects the educational function of pilgrimage in preserving collective Islamic memory (Azra, 2022). Learning about the Wali Songo was perceived as part of strengthening Islamic identity rather than merely satisfying historical curiosity.

Family participation and social relationships likewise constituted important motivations. Participants rarely travelled alone; instead, pilgrimage was commonly undertaken with family members, pesantren communities, or religious organizations. Beyond facilitating collective worship, these journeys provided opportunities to strengthen intergenerational relationships, introduce younger family members to Islamic history, and reinforce shared religious identity. Tour operators similarly explained that pilgrimage packages were intentionally designed to combine religious instruction with communal travel experiences, allowing participants to worship, learn, and socialize simultaneously. These findings support Pearce and Lee's (2005) Travel Career Pattern, which recognizes relationship enhancement as a stable travel motivation,

while extending the model by demonstrating that family togetherness in ziarah wali is embedded within the transmission of religious values and collective memory.

Participants also openly acknowledged leisure-related motivations. Visiting local culinary destinations, purchasing souvenirs, taking photographs, and exploring nearby heritage attractions were considered natural complements to pilgrimage rather than distractions from religious devotion. Shrine managers observed that such activities have become increasingly common as pilgrimage destinations develop their tourism infrastructure. Nevertheless, participants consistently emphasized that recreation should remain secondary to the primary purpose of worship. Leisure therefore did not diminish the sacredness of the journey because it was framed within *niyyah* and guided by *adab al-Ziyārah*. This finding illustrates that religious commitment and recreational activities are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing dimensions of sacred travel, consistent with Smith's (1992) critique of rigid distinctions between pilgrims and tourists.

While participants began their journeys with diverse motivations, the interviews consistently reveal that these motivations converged in a common outcome: spiritual transformation. Pilgrims repeatedly described feelings of inner peace (*ṭuma'nīnah*), emotional relief, gratitude, renewed enthusiasm for worship, and stronger commitment to Islamic values after completing their journeys. Importantly, these experiences were not portrayed as extraordinary mystical events but as gradual processes emerging through prayer, *dhikr*, Qur'anic recitation, reflection on the lives of the Wali Songo, and participation in collective religious rituals. Regular pilgrims frequently explained that each pilgrimage produced different lessons depending upon their life circumstances, indicating that spiritual meaning continued to evolve through repeated visits.

These experiences correspond closely with Al-Ghazālī's (2021) concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs*, which views repeated acts of worship and remembrance as means of purifying the heart and strengthening awareness of Allah. Similarly, Al-Nawawī (2017) explains that visiting graves reminds believers of mortality and encourages repentance, humility, and preparation for the Hereafter. From this perspective, the transformative experiences described by participants should not be understood as incidental consequences of pilgrimage but rather as one of its principal religious objectives. The findings therefore position ziarah wali as an educational and spiritual practice through which pilgrims continuously reconstruct their religious identity.

Transformation was further reinforced through pilgrims' encounters with sacred history and collective religious practice. Standing within the historical landscape of the Wali Songo enabled participants to experience Islam Nusantara as a living tradition rather than an abstract historical narrative. Likewise, communal activities, including *tahlīl*, *dhikr*, collective prayers, and shared reflection, generated strong emotional bonds among participants. These findings support Turner's (1978) concept of *communitas*, while suggesting that social cohesion within Indonesian pilgrimage is sustained through shared religious practices, ethical guidance, and historical consciousness rather than merely temporary suspension of ordinary social structures. In addition, the findings extend Wang's (1999) concept of existential authenticity by demonstrating that authenticity in Islamic pilgrimage is expressed through renewed

commitment to religious values and communal identity rather than individual self-expression alone.

An equally important finding concerns participants' understanding of *barakah* as the culmination of spiritual experience. Rather than expecting miraculous intervention or material gain, pilgrims interpreted divine blessing retrospectively through positive changes experienced after returning home, including greater patience, emotional stability, improved family relationships, honesty in daily work, and increased consistency in worship. Religious leaders similarly argued that the success of pilgrimage should be measured not by the number of sacred sites visited but by the continuity of ethical conduct after the journey. Thus, *barakah* functions as the theological mechanism through which pilgrims interpret spiritual transformation as an expression of Allah's grace.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that *ziarah wali* is best understood as an integrated process in which multidimensional motivations culminate in enduring spiritual experiences. Religious devotion initiates the journey, the pursuit of *barakah* provides its distinctive theological orientation, while historical learning, cultural engagement, family participation, and leisure enrich pilgrims' encounters with sacred places. These dimensions do not operate independently but converge in spiritual transformation, producing stronger religious commitment and lasting attachment to sacred destinations. This integrated process provides the empirical foundation for the following section, which develops The Spiritual Tourist as a conceptual model for understanding contemporary Muslim pilgrimage in Indonesia.

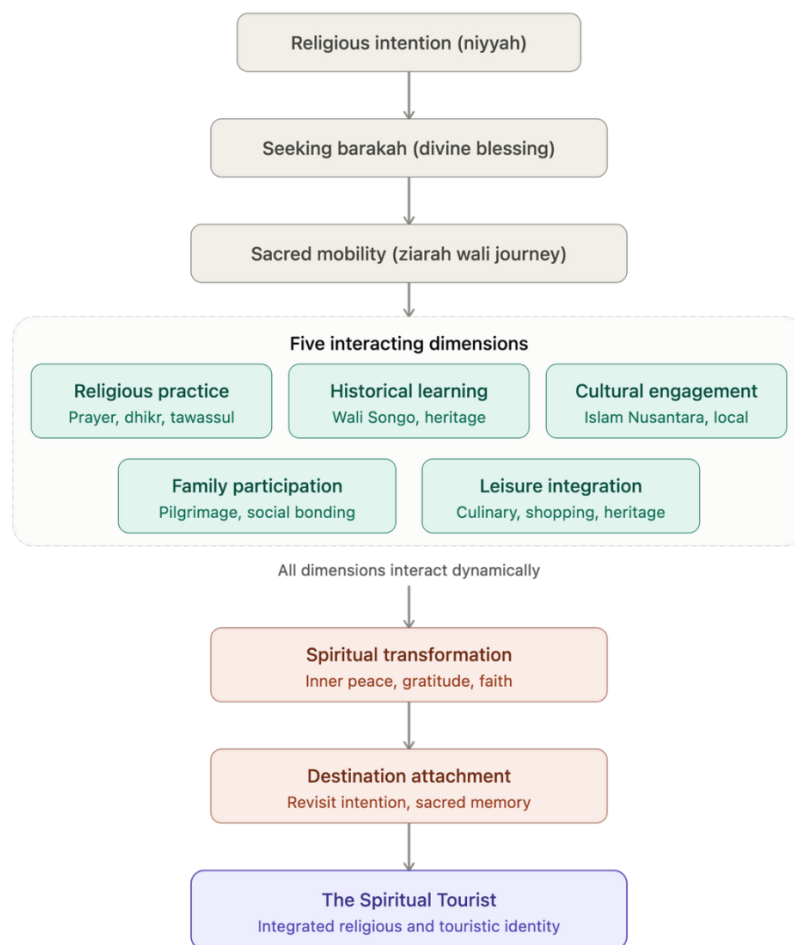
The Spiritual Tourist: A Conceptual Model from Indonesian Islam

The findings of this study indicate that contemporary *ziarah wali* cannot be adequately understood through the conventional distinction between pilgrims and tourists. As discussed in the previous two sections, participants did not separate their identities as religious pilgrims and tourists; instead, they integrated worship, historical learning, cultural appreciation, family togetherness, leisure, and spiritual reflection into a single pilgrimage experience. Religious intention (*niyyah*) initiated the journey, while the pursuit of *barakah* became a uniquely Islamic motivation that connected sacred practices with everyday life. Ultimately, these multidimensional motivations converged in spiritual transformation, manifested through stronger faith, inner peace, moral commitment, and continued attachment to Wali pilgrimage. These findings support the view that pilgrimage is a form of sacred mobility, where religious devotion and tourism practices reinforce rather than contradict one another (Collins-Kreiner, 2019; Pramezwary et al., 2026). However, existing theories remain insufficient to explain this complexity. Smith's (1992) Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum successfully challenged the dichotomy between pilgrims and tourists but remains overly linear, assuming movement between two identities rather than their simultaneous coexistence. Likewise, Timothy and Olsen's (2006) concept of religious tourism broadens pilgrimage beyond ritual obligation but focuses primarily on destinations and visitor motivations, while transformative tourism emphasizes psychological change without incorporating Islamic theological concepts such as *barakah* (Kirillova et al., 2017). Consequently, this study argues that Indonesian Muslim pilgrimage requires a conceptual framework that integrates Islamic theology with tourism studies.

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Based on these findings, this study proposes the concept of The Spiritual Tourist, defined as a Muslim traveler whose journey integrates religious devotion, the pursuit of *barakah*, historical consciousness, cultural participation, leisure practices, and transformative spiritual experiences, resulting in a sustained religious identity and attachment to sacred destinations. The model is built upon four interrelated propositions: (1) religious intention (*niyyah*) initiates sacred mobility; (2) seeking *barakah* integrates religious devotion with everyday life; (3) spiritual transformation mediates pilgrimage experiences through religious practice, historical learning, cultural engagement, family participation, and leisure; and (4) repeated pilgrimage strengthens destination attachment and constructs the enduring identity of The Spiritual Tourist.

The proposed conceptual model can be summarized as follows:



Theoretically, this study contributes to religious tourism literature in four ways: extending Smith's (1992) Pilgrim-Tourist Continuum by demonstrating simultaneous religious and tourist identities; introducing *barakah* as a distinctive Islamic travel motivation; integrating Islamic theological concepts into tourism studies; and developing The Spiritual Tourist as a conceptual model for understanding contemporary Muslim pilgrimage. The model further broadens discussions of religious tourism beyond predominantly Western perspectives by demonstrating that Indonesian *ziarah wali* is best understood as a multidimensional process of sacred mobility and spiritual transformation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ziarah wali in Indonesia cannot be adequately understood through the conventional distinction between pilgrimage and tourism. The findings reveal that pilgrims undertake their journeys through multiple and interconnected motivations, including religious devotion, the pursuit of barakah, spiritual renewal, historical consciousness, cultural participation, family togetherness, and leisure experiences. Rather than existing as competing motives, these dimensions form an integrated framework through which pilgrims construct the meaning of their journeys. Moreover, the study shows that the significance of ziarah wali lies not merely in travel motivation but in its capacity to facilitate spiritual transformation, reflected in stronger religious commitment, greater appreciation of the legacy of the Wali Songo, renewed moral awareness, and a deeper sense of belonging to the Islamic tradition of Indonesia.

The principal theoretical contribution of this study is the development of the concept of The Spiritual Tourist as a framework for understanding contemporary Muslim pilgrimage. Unlike the traditional pilgrim, tourist dichotomy, this concept explains that Indonesian Muslim pilgrims simultaneously negotiate religious and touristic identities without perceiving them as contradictory. Religious intention (*niyyah*), the pursuit of barakah, sacred mobility, historical engagement, communal participation, and spiritual transformation interact to shape a distinctive form of religious travel rooted in Islamic theology and lived religious practice. By introducing barakah as a theological motivation within tourism studies, this article extends existing discussions of religious tourism and contributes an Islamic perspective that complements predominantly Western conceptualizations of pilgrimage and transformative travel.

From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that the sustainable development of Wali Songo pilgrimage destinations should prioritize not only tourism infrastructure but also the preservation of sacred atmosphere, historical authenticity, religious education, and community participation. Although this study focuses on selected pilgrimage sites in Java, the proposed conceptual model provides a foundation for future comparative studies across different Muslim pilgrimage traditions and cultural contexts. Ultimately, this study argues that ziarah wali represents a form of sacred mobility in which faith, history, culture, and everyday life converge, offering a broader understanding of contemporary Islamic pilgrimage and enriching global scholarship on religious tourism.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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