

# Deconstructing Anthropocentric Sustainability: A Post-Anthropocentric Critique of Halal Tourism Ecosystem

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Halal tourism has expanded rapidly, often adopting the narrative of "sustainable economics" as part of its value proposition. However, the dominant global sustainability paradigm—including that implicit in many *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) frameworks—is fundamentally anthropocentric, prioritizing human economic and social interests above all else. A conceptual paradox arises when this anthropocentric framework is applied to "halal" ecosystems, which are essentially theocentric, positioning humanity as *khalifah* (steward), not owner, of nature.

**Purpose :** The purpose of this study is to deconstruct the "anthropocentric sustainability" concept that has permeated halal tourism models. This research aims to provide a post-anthropocentric critique of how contemporary halal tourism ecosystems operate, highlighting the tensions between human-centric sustainability rhetoric and the imperatives of *Maqashid al-Shariah* (particularly *Hifz al-Bi'ah* or environmental protection).

**Method :** This study uses a library research utilizing a critical conceptual analysis approach. This study systematically reviews, analyzes, and synthesizes interdisciplinary literature across three domains: (1) critical sustainability theory and anthropocentrism, (2) tourism economics, and (3) Islamic economic philosophy and halal tourism.

**Result :** Findings (Arguments) indicate that the adoption of anthropocentric sustainability models often results in "greenwashing" or "halal-washing," where nature remains exploited as a "resource" for human profit, contradicting the principle of *amanah*. As an alternative, this paper proposes a shift towards a post-anthropocentric (theocentric) framework for halal tourism, one that authentically integrates ecological preservation as a spiritual and ethical objective, not merely an economic instrument. This research contributes to a reconceptualization of halal tourism that moves beyond anthropocentrism toward a holistic and theologically authentic sustainability model.

## KEYWORDS

Halal Tourism, Anthropocentrism, Sustainable Economics

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## INTRODUCTION

The confluence of global ethics and commerce has positioned "sustainability" as the definitive socio-economic imperative of the 21st century (Lélé, 2018; Sachs et al., 2019). Concurrently, the halal tourism sector has emerged as one of the most rapidly expanding segments of the global travel industry, demonstrating significant market resilience and growth (Al-Ansi & Olya, 2019; El-Gohary & El-Gohary, 2021).

This growth is predicated not only on demographic shifts but also on a powerful value proposition: that "halal" is an intrinsically ethical, and therefore sustainable, mode of consumption

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(Battour & Ismail, 2016). Consequently, stakeholders in halal tourism ecosystems—from policymakers to service providers—have increasingly adopted the lexicon and frameworks of sustainable economics (Ruhanen & Benckendorff, 2017), often aligning their operations with established global benchmarks (Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2019). This alignment, however, is often assumed to be seamless. The dominant, secular paradigm of sustainable development, institutionalized since the late 1980s, is fundamentally anthropocentric (Crist, 2018; Washington, 2015). It seeks to protect the environment and manage resources primarily to ensure the well-being and continuity of humanity. Nature, within this paradigm, is predominantly valued for its instrumental utility: as a resource to be managed, a sink for waste, or a source of aesthetic pleasure for human constituencies (Kopnina, 2020).

A profound conceptual paradox emerges when this anthropocentric sustainability model is uncritically superimposed onto halal tourism ecosystems. The ethical architecture of Islam (Shariah) is not human-centric; it is theocentric (Ghazi & Al-Turki, 2019). In the Islamic worldview, the environment (al-Bi'ah) is not a mere resource base for human exploitation but a divine creation, a tapestry of signs (ayat) pointing to the Creator (Hassan, 2018). Humanity's role is not that of owner, but of steward (khalifah) entrusted with a profound responsibility (amanah) to maintain cosmic balance (mizan) (Ariffin & Rahmat, 2021). The core problem, therefore, is an epistemological incongruence. The uncritical adoption of anthropocentric sustainability models within halal tourism risks reducing the profound theological imperatives of Hifz al-Bi'ah (Protection of the Environment)—a key objective of the Maqashid al-Shariah (Al-Jayyousi, 2017a)—to a shallow exercise in "greenwashing" or "halal-washing" (De Jong et al., 2020). This creates halal tourism ecosystems that may be "sustainable" in the limited, human-centric sense (i.e., economically viable and socially acceptable) but fail in their theological mandate by perpetuating the very exploitation of nature they purport to avoid. The current discourse lacks a robust critique that challenges this anthropocentric hegemony from a genuine tawhidic (Unitarian) standpoint.

In response to this gap, the primary objective of this study is to deconstruct the anthropocentric assumptions embedded within mainstream sustainable economics and to critically analyze their application within contemporary halal tourism ecosystems. This study moves beyond a simple critique to propose an alternative, post-anthropocentric framework. Specifically, the study aims to critically dissect the anthropocentric biases inherent in dominant sustainable development paradigms; to investigate the manifestation of this anthropocentrism in the theory and practice of existing halal tourism ecosystems; and to develop a post-anthropocentric (theocentric) framework for sustainable halal tourism grounded in the Maqashid al-Shariah, reconceptualizing environmental stewardship as a spiritual, rather than purely economic, imperative.

To achieve these objectives, this study employs a library research methodology, utilizing a critical conceptual analysis approach based on systematic literature review principles (Snyder, 2019). It does not engage in empirical data collection but rather in a rigorous synthesis and critique of existing interdisciplinary literature. The research navigates the intersection of three primary bodies of knowledge: (1) critical sustainability studies and environmental ethics (discourse on anthropocentrism); (2) sustainable tourism and economics; and (3) Islamic philosophy, *usul al-fiqh*, and studies on halal tourism. Through a process of deconstruction and subsequent reconstruction, this study aims to expose the internal contradictions of the current model and build a more authentic alternative.

This research offers a twofold contribution. Theoretically, it challenges the hegemonic, secular-liberal discourse on sustainability within tourism studies (Kothari, 2017), offering a robust theological and philosophical corrective. It enriches the nascent field of post-anthropocentric studies

by providing a perspective from Islamic epistemology, which remains critically underdeveloped in mainstream environmental ethics (Sani & Tarmizi, 2020). Practically, this study provides policymakers, industry practitioners, and certification bodies in the halal sector with a more rigorous and authentic framework. It offers a pathway to design halal tourism ecosystems that transcend mere compliance and marketing, fostering a genuine stewardship (khalifah) model that aligns economic activity with its ultimate theological purpose.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a library research design employing a critical conceptual analysis approach. Rather than conducting empirical or field-based data collection, this research systematically reviews, interprets, and synthesizes existing scholarly works across interdisciplinary domains relevant to the study focus. The methodological orientation is qualitative, analytical, and interpretative, aiming to deconstruct prevailing theoretical narratives and reconstruct an alternative conceptual framework grounded in Islamic epistemology.

The research procedure involved three stages. First, a systematic literature mapping was conducted to identify and collect key scholarly publications from reputable journals, books, and academic reports related to: (1) anthropocentric and critical sustainability theory, (2) sustainable and halal tourism conceptual frameworks, and (3) Islamic economic philosophy, Maqasid al-Shariah, and theological environmental ethics. Second, the selected literature was analyzed using conceptual deconstruction techniques to identify epistemological assumptions, ideological biases, ontological inconsistencies, and discursive contradictions within mainstream anthropocentric sustainability narratives applied to halal tourism. Third, the study synthesized a post-anthropocentric (theocentric) interpretive framework grounded in the principles of tawhid, khalifah, amanah, and Hifz al-Bi'ah, aiming to offer a more coherent, spiritually rooted, and ethically authentic model for halal tourism sustainability.

This methodological approach positions the research as conceptual and theoretical, prioritizing deep epistemic critique and paradigm reconstruction instead of empirical measurement. Thus, the credibility of the findings is derived from the robustness of theoretical reasoning, interdisciplinary knowledge integration, and coherence with Islamic philosophical foundations rather than statistical generalization or field observation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The systematic review and critical conceptual analysis of the literature yielded three primary findings regarding the current state of halal tourism ecosystems. These results highlight the dominance of secular sustainability paradigms, the instrumentalization of religious ethics, and the ontological contradictions embedded within existing models.

#### 1. The Anthropocentric Hegemony in Contemporary Halal Tourism Ecosystems

The first major finding is the pervasive adoption of "strong anthropocentrism" within the foundational literature and operational frameworks of halal tourism. The analysis indicates that despite the sector's religious nomenclature, its approach to sustainability is largely indistinguishable from secular, neoliberal tourism models. The synthesis of tourism governance literature uncovers a rigid hierarchy of values embedded within the sector's operational logic, where the concept of "sustainability" is predominantly filtered through the lens of economic durability and human-centric satisfaction. As highlighted by Ruhanen and Benckendorff (2017) and Bäckstrand and Lövbrand

(2019), the industry consistently prioritizes tourist comfort and financial viability over genuine ecological integrity. Within this paradigm, environmental indicators are rarely treated as independent goals; instead, they are subordinated to performance metrics that serve the market. Consequently, the preservation of nature is not pursued for its own sake but is contingent upon its ability to sustain economic growth, revealing a systemic bias that marginalizes ecological health in favor of short-term commercial success.

This anthropocentric orientation is further entrenched by the way the natural environment (al-Bi'ah) is conceptualized—almost exclusively as an "instrumental resource" rather than a sacred trust. Drawing on the critiques of strong anthropocentrism by Crist (2018) and Washington (2015), the prevailing discourse values natural landscapes primarily for their utility in generating revenue or serving as aesthetic backdrops for leisure activities. Market studies reinforce this utilitarian drift, demonstrating that nature is commodified to service the industry rather than acknowledged for its intrinsic value as divine creation (Battour & Ismail, 2016; El-Gohary & El-Gohary, 2021). This reductionist view strips the environment of its spiritual significance, treating it merely as raw material for the tourism experience rather than a vital, living system worthy of protection.

## **2. The Operationalization of "Halal" as Surface Compliance (Halal-Washing)**

The second finding points to a significant disjunction between the holistic ethical philosophy of Islam and the current market practices of halal tourism. The literature reveals that industry standards have largely succumbed to a reductionist form of compliance, focusing heavily on technical fiqh regulations while neglecting the broader, substantive ethical imperatives of the faith. As noted by Al-Ansi and Olya (2019), certification bodies and operators prioritize tangible, easily measurable attributes—such as the prohibition of alcohol, the separation of genders in swimming facilities, and the provision of prayer rugs—over the complex demands of environmental stewardship. This narrow operationalization severs the legalistic aspects of Halal (permissible) from the qualitative standard of Tayyib (wholesome, pure, and good), effectively ignoring the ecological harm that may be embedded in the supply chain or infrastructure of tourism services.

This selective adherence facilitates a phenomenon theoretically categorized here as "halal-washing," a parallel to the corporate practice of "greenwashing." Drawing on the framework of consumer skepticism and corporate sincerity analyzed by De Jong et al. (2020), the analysis finds a troubling inconsistency between marketing rhetoric and operational reality. While many halal tourism operators aggressively market their services as "ethical," "responsible," and spiritually aligned, there is a notable absence of rigorous ecological auditing or transparency regarding their environmental footprint. The "halal" label is thus deployed as a powerful marketing tool to signal religious affinity, yet it frequently lacks the substance to guarantee that the services provided are free from environmental exploitation or degradation.

Consequently, the current ecosystem allows for a paradoxical reality where the "halal" brand functions primarily as a mechanism for consumer identity verification rather than a guarantor of comprehensive ethical conduct. By failing to integrate ecological preservation into the core definition of compliance, the industry permits practices that degrade the ecosystem—such as excessive water consumption, waste generation, and habitat disruption—to persist under the guise of religious permissibility. This reduces the profound concept of stewardship to a superficial checklist, validating a consumerist lifestyle that satisfies ritual requirements while simultaneously violating the Shariah objective of protecting the environment (Hifz al-Bi'ah).

## **3. The Ontological Divergence: Homo Economicus versus Khalifah**

The final result of the conceptual deconstruction is the identification of a fundamental epistemological void at the heart of the ecosystem. The analysis reveals that the "sustainable human" envisioned in current halal tourism models aligns more closely with the secular Homo Economicus than with the Islamic ideal of the Khalifah (Steward). While the industry leverages Islamic terminology, its underlying anthropological assumption remains rooted in a modern, capitalist worldview where human beings are viewed as the ultimate arbiters of value. This creates a stark ontological divergence, as the operational models of tourism analyzed presuppose absolute human dominion over nature, conflicting directly with the theological imperative of Amanah (trusteeship) which implies restricted ownership and accountability to the Creator (Ghazi & Al-Turki, 2019; Hassan, 2018).

This divergence manifests acutely in the concept of agency within the tourism sector. In the prevailing anthropocentric model, nature is treated as passive and malleable, existing solely to be shaped by human desire. Conversely, Islamic environmental ethics conceptualize agency as a test of stewardship, where the environment is a partner in worship rather than a subordinate entity. By adopting standard industry practices without critical filtration, halal tourism operators inadvertently embrace a framework of mastery rather than servitude. This results in an ecosystem where the limits of ecological exploitation are defined by market tolerance rather than divine restriction, fundamentally negating the spiritual role of humans as custodians of the earth.

Furthermore, the review of Maqashid al-Shariah frameworks highlights a critical imbalance, or the absence of Mizan, in current tourism governance. Although Hifz al-Bi'ah (protection of the environment) is increasingly recognized by scholars as a vital objective of the Shariah (Al-Jayyousi, 2017b), the results show that it is systematically marginalized in favor of Hifz al-Mal (protection of wealth). The drive for profitability in the halal tourism sector frequently overrides the necessity for ecological preservation, creating a quantifiable theological gap. Consequently, current sustainability practices are insufficient to meet the spiritual criteria of the Shariah, as they prioritize the accumulation of capital over the maintenance of the cosmic balance necessary for a truly Tayyib life (Ariffin & Rahmat, 2021).

## Discussion

The findings of this study necessitate a radical re-evaluation of the foundational logic governing the global halal tourism industry. By exposing the anthropocentric biases and theological contradictions within current practices, the discussion moves toward reconstructing a Post-Anthropocentric (Theocentric) Framework. This section synthesizes the implications of the results and proposes a corrective model grounded in authentic Islamic epistemology.

### 1. Deconstructing the "Sustainable" Myth: From Compliance to Conscience

The prevalence of "halal-washing" identified in the results suggests that the global halal tourism industry is currently grappling with a profound crisis of authenticity. By relying on a checklist of surface-level compliance—such as ensuring dietary permissibility and providing prayer facilities—the sector has effectively reduced the rich, multidimensional ethical system of Islam to mere logistical adjustments. This reductionist approach mirrors the critique of "weak sustainability" often leveled against secular economics (Kothari, 2017), where environmental protection is treated as a secondary externality rather than a binding constraint. Consequently, the label "halal" is frequently commodified into a brand differentiator that signals cultural affinity without guaranteeing the holistic wholesomeness (Tayyib) that the faith demands.

In the context of Islamic jurisprudence, this disconnect represents more than a policy oversight; it constitutes a significant theological transgression. The fundamental objectives of the



Shariah (Maqashid al-Shariah) mandate the preservation of life (Hifz al-Nafs) and the protection of the environment (Hifz al-Bi'ah) as essential for human well-being. A tourism model that systematically depletes water tables, destroys biodiversity, or generates excessive carbon emissions inherently violates these sacred objectives. Therefore, an enterprise that causes ecological destruction is arguably Makruh (detestable) or even Haram (forbidden) in substance, regardless of its technical adherence to ritual requirements like the prohibition of alcohol or pork.

The discussion thus argues that the operational definition of "halal tourism" must be radically expanded beyond the facilitation of ritual acts to include rigorous ecological stewardship as a non-negotiable criterion. True compliance cannot be divorced from the environmental footprint of the activity. To restore the ethical integrity of the sector, certification bodies and stakeholders must integrate strict environmental audits into the halal verification process. This shift would transform the industry from one that merely accommodates Muslim consumers to one that embodies the Qur'anic imperative of stewardship, ensuring that economic activities do not compromise the delicate balance of the natural world.

## **2. Re-centering God in the Ecosystem: The Theocentric Turn**

To resolve the ontological divergence between Homo Economicus and Khalifah, this study proposes a fundamental paradigm shift towards a Theocentric (God-centered) Tourism Model. Unlike the prevailing anthropocentric approach which positions human desires at the apex of the ecosystem, this framework decenters the human tourist from the narrative. It necessitates a re-evaluation of the tourist's role, moving away from the identity of a "consumer of landscapes" entitled to extract pleasure, towards that of a "witness to Divine artistry." This ontological reorientation is not merely philosophical but structural, challenging the neoliberal commodification of nature that currently underpins the industry. By acknowledging God as the ultimate owner of the earth, the tourist's presence becomes a privilege rather than a right, conditioned upon their conduct as a respectful guest in a divine sanctuary (Sachs et al., 2019).

In this model, the environment is elevated from a passive "resource" to active Ayat (Signs of God), possessing intrinsic spiritual value independent of human utility. This conceptual shift has profound operational implications for how tourism products are designed and experienced. Activities would no longer be curated primarily for hedonistic consumption or leisure maximization, but rather to facilitate Tadabbur (contemplation) and spiritual reflection. For instance, a nature walk is not just for fitness or sightseeing, but an act of reading the "cosmic book" of creation. This transforms the tourism experience from a transactional engagement—where value is extracted—to a transformational one, where the traveler seeks closer proximity to the Creator through the appreciation and preservation of His creation (Hasan & Farisi, 2022).

Furthermore, this theocentric turn demands a pivot in marketing narratives and industry ethics, moving from promises of unlimited luxury and indulgence to invitations for participating in the maintenance of Mizan (cosmic balance). The "value proposition" of halal tourism thus expands to include the spiritual merit of ecological stewardship. This approach finds resonance with the secular "Deep Ecology" perspective in its rejection of human supremacy, yet it remains distinct by grounding its ethics in the theological concept of Tawhid (Unity). It asserts that the interconnectedness of all life is a reflection of the Oneness of God, and therefore, harming the creation is a direct affront to the Creator (Sani & Tarmizi, 2020). Consequently, environmental degradation in the name of tourism is framed not just as an ecological error, but as a spiritual violation.

## **3. Implementing the Stewardship Model: Amanah over Ownership**

The transition from an anthropocentric to a post-anthropocentric model fundamentally necessitates the operationalization of Amanah (trust) within the governance structures of halal tourism. Current industry models are predicated on a rights-based framework, emphasizing the "right to travel" and the "right to comfort," often at the expense of the host environment. In contrast, a stewardship model prioritizes responsibilities, redefining the tourism operator not as a proprietor of land but as a temporary custodian answerable to Divine authority. This shift demands a radical restructuring of management philosophies, where the primary metric of success is not merely occupancy rates or revenue per available room (RevPAR), but the fidelity with which the Amanah of the natural environment is preserved (Putri & Suwanan, 2025).

Practically, this implies that the scope of halal certification bodies must be rigorously expanded. At present, audits focus heavily on ritual purity—such as the absence of porcine products or alcohol—but often overlook ecological degradation. To rectify this, environmental impact assessments must be integrated into the certification process with the same stringency applied to food safety inspections. A "Halal Hotel" certification, for instance, should be contingent upon tangible evidence of ecological stewardship, such as the implementation of zero-waste systems, the utilization of renewable energy, and advanced water conservation technologies. These elements should not be viewed as optional "green" add-ons or marketing differentiators, but as essential manifestations of Khalifah duties without which the "halal" status remains incomplete (Antonio et al., 2020).

By institutionalizing these requirements, the halal tourism industry can transcend the performative aspects of sustainability that currently plague the sector. Moving beyond superficial compliance allows the ecosystem to embody the true essence of Maqashid al-Shariah, specifically the protection of the environment (Hifz al-Bi'ah). This systemic integration ensures that the pursuit of economic profit does not compromise the spiritual and ecological viability of the earth for future generations. Ultimately, this approach fosters a resilient tourism economy that honors the Creator by protecting His creation, thereby resolving the tension between modern commercial imperatives and timeless spiritual obligations (Al-Jayyousi, 2017b; Ariffin & Rahmat, 2021).

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the hegemony of an anthropocentric sustainability paradigm within the contemporary halal tourism ecosystem constitutes a fundamental ontological failure. Rather than functioning as a genuine ethical alternative, the halal tourism industry remains entrapped in a mimicry of secular models that prioritize human gratification and economic utility over ecological integrity. This alignment has engendered the paradoxical phenomenon of "halal-washing," wherein religious labeling is commodified merely as a marketing strategy, while exploitative practices toward nature persist unchecked, thereby betraying the essence of Maqashid al-Shariah.

The analysis demonstrates an irreconcilable divergence between the concept of Homo Economicus—central to modern tourism narratives—and the Islamic theological concept of the Khalifah (Steward). Halal tourism cannot achieve authentic sustainability as long as it operates within a framework that perceives nature solely as an extractive "resource" rather than a divine amanah (trust) to be safeguarded. Consequently, maintaining the current status quo is tantamount to reducing the Shariah to a ritualistic checklist devoid of its ethical soul.

As a fundamental corrective, this research advocates for a radical shift toward a Post-Anthropocentric (Theocentric) paradigm. Within this framework, the definition of "halal" necessitates a total reconstruction: compliance is no longer sufficient merely through the avoidance of alcohol or illicit consumables but must inextricably include Hifz al-Bi'ah (environmental

protection) as a non-negotiable prerequisite. Future halal certification mandates the integration of rigorous ecological auditing, wherein environmental degradation is recognized as a spiritual defect that invalidates claims of halal status. Only by positioning the Divine—rather than the market—as the gravitational center of the ecosystem can halal tourism transform from a mere travel industry into an act of worship that preserves cosmic balance (Mizan).

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