



# TOURISM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN DEVELOPING HALAL TOURISM IN THE LAKE TOBA TOURISM AREA OF NORTH SUMATRA

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**Abstract:** *This research discusses the concept and implementation of halal tourism in the Lake Toba Tourism Area, particularly in Tomok and its surroundings. The research highlights the barriers in implementing the halal tourism concept, especially in non-Muslim majority areas. One of the main obstacles is the fear of losing local wisdom, especially in the area of non-halal culinary, which can trigger local community rejection. However, the research also emphasizes the importance of the halal tourism concept in providing a sense of security and comfort for Muslim tourists, as well as boosting the local economy. The research method involves literature review and data analysis from previous studies, such as Rose Emmaria's research, Kemenparekraf, and other relevant studies. The results show that intensive communication between the government, community, and related parties is key in overcoming resistance to the concept of halal tourism. In addition, clear regulations and involving various parties are also needed to strengthen the implementation of halal tourism.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism Communication, Strategy, Halal Tourism Concept.*

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini membahas tentang konsep dan implementasi wisata halal di Kawasan Wisata Danau Toba khususnya di Tomok dan sekitarnya. Penelitian tersebut menyoroti hambatan dalam penerapan konsep wisata halal, khususnya di wilayah mayoritas non-Muslim. Salah satu kendala utamanya adalah ketakutan akan hilangnya kearifan lokal, khususnya di bidang kuliner non-halal yang dapat memicu penolakan masyarakat setempat. Namun penelitian tersebut juga menekankan pentingnya konsep wisata halal dalam memberikan rasa aman dan nyaman bagi wisatawan muslim, serta meningkatkan perekonomian lokal. Metode penelitiannya meliputi tinjauan pustaka dan analisis data dari penelitian-penelitian terdahulu, seperti penelitian Rose Emmaria, Kemenparekraf, dan penelitian lain yang relevan. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi intensif antara pemerintah, masyarakat, dan pihak terkait menjadi kunci dalam mengatasi resistensi terhadap konsep wisata halal. Selain itu, regulasi yang jelas dan melibatkan berbagai pihak juga diperlukan untuk memperkuat implementasi wisata halal.

**Keywords:** strategi komunikasi pariwisata, pariwisata halal, konsep pariwisata halal

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

One of the sources of regional finance regulated in Law No. 12 of 2019 Article 30 is from Regional Original Income (PAD) which consists of regional taxes, regional levies, the results of the management of separated regional assets, and others are legitimate regional original income. One of the included regional own- source revenues (PAD) in the category of regional taxes and levies is income from the tourism sector. In addition to being a source of income for regional income, the tourism sector is also a huge potential in reviving and improving the economy of the community, especially those around the tourist area, as well as the surrounding area. Therefore, the management of the tourism sector needs serious and sustainable attention (UU No. 12, Tahun 2019).

From the results of Fatimah & Jefri's research (2019) showed that the tourism sector in regencies and cities has a positive influence on local revenue. City has a positive influence on local revenue. This can be proven with the results of statistical tests at a confidence level of 95% all independent variables, namely number of attractions, number of tourists, per capita income, and USD exchange rate simultaneously have a significant influence on local revenue. While partially only variables of the number of tourists, per capita income, and USD exchange rates are significant to the local revenue in regencies and cities in East Java (Fatimah et al., 2021).

Based on data obtained from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) 2022, the number of foreign tourist visits (foreign tourists) to Indonesia in August 2021 decreased by 21.19 percent compared to the number of visits in August 2020. Likewise, when compared to July 2021, the number of foreign tourist visits in August 2021 decreased by 6.00 percent. This decline occurred due to the Covid- 19 Pandemic that hit the world including Indonesia. In February 2020, the number of foreign tourists entering Indonesia experienced a drastic decline, and the peak occurred in April 2020 with only 158 thousand tourists (<https://Kemenparekraf/Baparekraf RI>, 2021). However, if we look back at the condition of tourism in Indonesia before the Covid-19 Pandemic, the data shows that the rate of increase in tourism in Indonesia did tend to decline, both for domestic and foreign visits.

In contrast to some foreign countries whose tourism sector experienced a significant increase in the pre-Covid-19 period. Some countries that have experienced an increase in tourism are South Korea, Japan, Turkey, Thailand, Cambodia, and so on. For South Korea and Japan, they carried out halal tourism methods which eventually attracted millions of tourists to visit the

country. In fact, the potential of halal tourism is growing in countries that are not members of the Organization of Islamic Work (OIC), such as Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea. The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) noted that the number of foreign tourists visiting South Korea will reach 17.5 million tourists. This figure is the highest, surpassing the achievement of the highest number in 2016, which was 15.24 million tourists. Interestingly, the majority of tourists visiting South Korea are tourists from Indonesia. In 2018, there were around 249 thousand Indonesian tourists visiting South Korea. In 2019, data Indonesian tourist arrivals until October have reached 225 thousand tourists (Tim SINDO, 2019).

Tourism is travel or traveling recreationally or for research purposes and not for the purpose of earning money, work, or new residence. Teachings Islam regulates when doing tourism so that in accordance with sharia which upholds protection of religion, life, mind, and others (Battour & Ismail., 2010). Halal tourism is part of the tourism industry that aimed at Muslim travelers. Can defined that halal tourism is an object or tourist action that meets the provisions of Islamic law to be used or involved in the tourism industry (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Based on this definition, halal tourism considers Islamic law in determining tourism products and services, such as hotels, food, attractions, and travel itself. This type of tourism does not always aim for religious travel and the location of tourist activities are not limited to Muslim countries or regions Muslim countries or regions only, but also applies in countries or countries or regions where the majority of the population is non-Muslim (Kurniawan & Setiyaningsih, 2023; Widayati et al., 2023).

The purpose of the development of halal tourism is to meet the needs of the market Muslim travelers for the availability of accommodation that is in accordance with Islamic law. In COMCEC report (2016) mentioned several criteria for the needs of Muslim travelers when travel which is called faith based needs. These needs include availability of: (1) halal food, (2) decent worship facilities, (3) services during the month of Ramadan. (2) proper worship facilities, (3) services during the month of Ramadan, (4) toilets that provide water (water friendly washrooms), and (5) recreational facilities that provide privacy, and (6) not recreational facilities that provide privacy, and (6) no non-halal activities.

Other supporting things in realizing this halal tourism is halal certification. certification. Muslim travelers are very critical about food. Muslim tourists tend to choose and trust products and and services with halal logo. Survey Muslim Travel Shopping Index (MTSI) 2015 shows that more than 80% of respondents choose tourist destinations that provide halal food (Pratiwi, et al,

2017). With Thus, halal certification is needed and important to guarantee and convince tourists that the food they choose is halal food.

The concept of halal tourism has a huge attraction for foreign visitors who are Muslim. With a guarantee of culinary halalness, availability of worship facilities and infrastructure, acceptance of Muslim visitors, ultimately fostering a sense of comfort for visitors to come back to the country. Based on the results of Adinugraha's research (2018), the terminology of *Islamic* tourism in several countries tends to use various terms, such as *Islamic Tourism*, *Halal Tourism*, *Halal Travel*, or even *As Moslem Friendly Destination*. For local tourism in Indonesia itself, the concept of halal tourism has not been implemented optimally.

Some areas in Indonesia that have the potential to become halal tourism areas are Aceh, Riau, Jakarta, and West Sumatra. Actually other tourist areas also have a great possibility to implement halal tourism. However, the concept that has not been prepared and supporting facilities (facilities and infrastructure) are not yet available, causing this not to be realized properly. One of the tourist areas that has high potential, but has not yet implemented the concept of halal tourism is the Lake Toba tourist destination (*Toba Lake*). The location of Lake Toba, which is predominantly inhabited by non-Muslim residents, basically has not implemented the concept of halal tourism. This situation can be seen from tourist sites that have not provided worship facilities in the form of mosques, halal labels on restaurants, and other basic concepts related to the concept of halal tourism. In the record of global tourism development, Lake Toba tourist attraction is one of the most attractive tourist areas of 10 other tours in Indonesia.

It is necessary to know that the word halal among the Batak tribe is strongly opposed, because they are very thick with cultural customs. The community around Lake Toba firmly rejects the plan to declare halal tourism for the Lake Toba tourist area. In this case, the community cannot accept the term "halal". Public opinion also moves freely on social media, such feuds cannot be controlled. In fact, the local government intends to increase and improve the economy of the people around Lake Toba (Rose, 2020).

This certainly needs serious attention from various elements, including the government and the community to immediately prepare halal tourism in order to boost the number of tourists, both foreign and domestic. The concept is also intended to take the current growing tourism market, namely halal tourism. In 2018 alone, the number of foreign Muslim tourists visiting Indonesia amounted to 140 million. Based on data from the 2019 Global Muslim Travel Index, by 2026 it is estimated that the number will grow even

larger to 230 million. In addition to the estimated increase in the number of tourists,

Other aspects feel the influence of the concept of halal tourism are related to the increase of Economy. The revenue from Muslim tourist visits to Indonesia reached US\$1.5 billion. \$300 million to the global economy. This opportunity will greatly affect the survival of various sectors of the economy, including community income and other service businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, transportation, and so on (Sumatra Bisnis, 2019).

## 2 | METHOD

The research will involve a literature review to understand the theories and practices related to halal tourism, tourism management, and its influence on the local economy. The use of surveys and interviews with stakeholders, including local government, tourism industry players, and local communities, to understand perceptions, constraints, and expectations related to the development of halal tourism in Lake Toba. The constructivist paradigm is suitable for this study because it focuses on the construction of shared knowledge between researchers and participants. In the context of halal tourism development, constructivism allows an in-depth understanding of how the perceptions, values and beliefs of local communities influence the implementation of the concept.

## 3 | RESULT DAN DISCUSSION

### Halal Lake Toba and the Obstacles to Halal Tourism

However, the concept of making Lake Toba a halal tourist destination still encounters many obstacles. There are several obstacles faced in implementing the concept of halal tourism in the Lake Toba Tourism Area, especially in the Tomok and surrounding areas, where the majority of the population is still Christian. According to research conducted by Rose (2020), the rejection of certain community groups in non-Muslim areas stems from the assumption that with halal tourism, *local* wisdom in the region, especially for non-halal culinary, will automatically disappear. This is the big fear experienced by people in tourist sites. This fear eventually led them to a congregational rejection effort. In the concept of halal tourism, halal culinary is usually a reinforcement or additional means of support for tourism activities. When halal culinary is served, it means that tourists are well supported and treated as well as possible.

For Muslim visitors, the existence of restaurants with halal labels is important. The halal label basically does not merely mean "Islamizing" all food products sold. Ensuring the understanding that the halal label is the same as Islam actually makes the concept of halal tourism inapplicable in locations where non-Muslims are the majority. The concept of halal tourism with halal food labels actually provides a sense of security for visitors to feel at home and really enjoy tourist food. In this case, embedding the halal label also provides comfort for restaurant owners regarding the skills in serving food menus. Every visitor who comes certainly does not want to be bothered with various things where the food ordered has to wait a long time because it is different from the general menu (due to the halal concept).

Apart from being related to comfort, totality in traveling is also the reason why the concept of halal tourism is applied at Lake Toba. If visitors bring food or supplies from home, it means that the concept of tourism is not total. The visitors are actually imprisoned by inherent needs - due to aspects of religious prohibitions and must divide their time at tourist sites. This situation certainly "interferes" with traveling activities. Aspects like this are categorized as products with halal packaging - providing comfort for visitors who have different religious backgrounds and other elements related to identity. The concept of Lake Toba halal tourism is in the corridor of understanding that guests or visitors are served in total. As servants (managers of tourist areas), we must be able to provide the best *service* to visitors including providing supporting facilities for the *privileges* of visitors

### **Understanding and Indicators of Halal Tourism Concept**

Kememparekraf (2012) defines Halal Tourism as a tourism concept supported by a variety of adequate facilities, as well as other additional services provided for the benefit of visitors and the provisions of sharia regulations. An important point of the definition of halal tourism is related to the availability of service facilities and additional services. Two important things are natural in a tour package. Facilities are expected to be adequate of course with the aim that people or visitors can enjoy tourist attractions comfortably. In addition to supporting facilities, additional service aspects are a form of openness of facility providers to entertain guests who come to visit. According to Andriani (2015), Halal Tourism will basically be utilized for the benefit of many people because of the universal characteristics of its products and services. Tourism products and services, tourism objects, and tourist destinations in Halal Tourism are the same as tourism products, services, objects and destinations in general as long as they do not conflict with sharia values and ethics.

The need for the availability of visitor-friendly facilities, especially for Muslims, is very urgent, because the number of Muslim tourists visiting various regions and countries is increasing. The need for family vacation and recreation, especially after the Covid-19 Pandemic, has experienced a significant increase. For this reason, the increase in tourist visits to various regions should no longer be constrained by the concept of halal and non-halal. The concept of halal and non-halal should be a general concept applied in various tourist destinations. This concept is actually an "alert" for Muslim tourists to dynamize comfortably. The development of technology and information-communication is very swift, of course, increasingly allowing a person or group to explore various parts of the world. It is within this framework that the concept of halal tourism is applied, especially in Lake Toba tourist destinations.

Halal tourism must have criteria that do not offend or damage the general concept of tourism. In implementing the concept of halal tourism, the government is asked to take part in implementing regulations. This is important considering the issue of differences in society sometimes offends certain groups of people. Criteria or indicators related to halal tourism program must involve the spirit of all parties. The criteria built in the application of the concept of halal tourism must pay attention to *local wisdom* and cultural concepts of the local community. This indicator needs to be understood and conveyed to the community.

Chen's research, Chen Lee found that, the perception of perception should be one of the important consideration in development of a tourist destination, given the large potential of potential in the development of tourism today. This is due to the perception of each individual Muslim traveler can be translated into a collective perception perceptions that can provide input and make tourist destinations become more competitive and increase tourists' repeated recurring tourist interactions with the destination tourist destination (Chen et al., 2016; Harrigan et al., 2017). Some research also found that, the concept of halal can be accepted by all groups including non Muslims, because it is known to produce products that are safe, healthy and good (Ambali and Bakar, 2013; Wilson and Liu, 2010). Referring to the fact that the the latter fact, it becomes less reasonable if consider halal tourism as a form of exclusive tourism.

According to Alwafi's research (2018), the indicators of each category of tourist facilities have points that must be explored together. In Alwafi's research, a conclusion was obtained regarding several indicators that can be used as a reference in the application of halal tourism.

**Tabel 1 The Indicators of Each Category of Tourist Facilities**

Category	Indicator
Concept of general tourism that is frequently visited (natural, cultural, man-made tourism).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no shortage of sightseeing, arts and cultural activities available.</li> <li>• It leads to polytheism.</li> <li>• If possible, organize at least one <i>festival halal life style</i>.</li> <li>• Tour guides are dressed and groomed appropriately.</li> <li>• There is a selection of beach and bathing attractions that are separate for men and women and have a no visitor rule and scantily clad.</li> </ul>
Facilities lodging for visitors (hotels, guesthouses, houses residence, apartment, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Halal food is available.</li> <li>• There are facilities that make it easy to worship, such as mosques, prayer rooms, and washing facilities.</li> <li>• Services are available during the month of Ramadan to fulfill suhoor and iftar needs.</li> <li>• Absence of non-halal activities, such as gambling, drinking alcohol, and discotheque activities.</li> <li>• Available facility recreation: pond, swimming, separate <i>fitness/gyms</i> for men and women facility.</li> <li>• If the hotel provides <i>spa</i> facilities, then a male therapist to male customers and female therapists for female customers.</li> </ul>
Travel agency service facilities to facilitate tourist access and <i>safety</i> aspects.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The therapy does not use ingredients that contain pork, alcohol, as well as its derivatives.</li> <li>• Provide tour packages that meet the general criteria of Halal Tourism.</li> <li>• Not offering non-halal activities.</li> <li>• Have a business list of halal food and beverage providers.</li> </ul>

Source: Alfawi, 2018

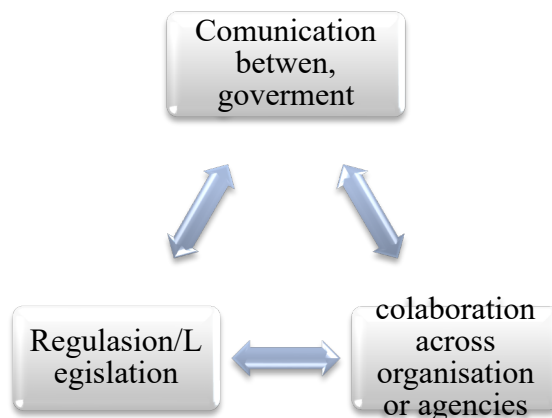
If the Lake Toba tourist area applies the concept of halal tourism, it will not only increase local revenue from the levy and permit sectors, but will also boost the economy of the local community. Because halal tourism can also be enjoyed by other non-Muslim communities. From the results of research conducted by Alfawi (2018), it is stated that halal tourism can be used as an alternative in improving the regional economy because the market potential continues to increase, as well as millennial tourists with these characteristics, such as West Nusa Tenggara meeting indicators in meeting the needs of facilities and services for Muslim tourists. In this case, the indicator is service for guests with the main target market of Middle Eastern tourists who spend money on traveling quite high. However, it should be reminded that halal tourism is not only for Muslim tourists, Non-Muslim tourists can also enjoy halal tourism products, facilities and services.



## Lake Toba Halal Tourism Implementation Strategy

Communication as a form of delivery of information is a very important very important in the organization. However, there are several barriers in communication, so that goals to be achieved are not as as expected. Barriers in communication include, physical barriers, psychological barriers, organizational barriers and language barriers. In overcoming these communication barriers, then the communication strategy is needed as a form of planning to deliver information. This communication strategy is a form of communication that has a specific purpose so that the organization can fulfill its mission Hallahan, (2007), so it is used as foundation in determining communication programs and communication programs and activities that are in accordance with objectives to be achieved Holtshausen, Zerfass (2015).

As explained earlier, Lake Toba tourism is included in the 10 most popular tourist locations in Indonesia. Its natural beauty has its own charm for foreign tourists, as well as domestic tourists. For this reason, it will be very wasted, if the natural beauty of Lake Toba cannot be enjoyed by tourists from outside the region because they feel the unavailability of supporting facilities. The form of rejection carried out by a group of people should not be left unchecked. There must be steps to map the problem, find solutions that are acceptable to all parties.



**Figure 1. The Steps of The Map to Solve The Problem (Process by The Researcher, 2024)**

Some steps that can be taken to overcome such rejection are: communication between government, community, and other relevant parties, making a law and regulation, Involving other parties (collaboration).

## **Communication between Government, Community and Other Related Parties**

The emergence of rejection of the concept of halal tourism is due to concerns that the local wisdom of the Lake Toba tourist area will disappear and the construction of mosques / places of worship for Muslim migrants will shift the existence of Christian communities from the region. Several protests carried out by the local community under the auspices of an alliance, the Alliance of Students Caring for Lake Toba (AMPDT) show the lack of intensity and quality of communication between the local government, the central government and the community. Although the Tourism Marketing Division of the North Sumatra Culture and Tourism Office has clarified these unfounded concerns, the communication is only limited to answering when the community raises objections. The Tourism Marketing Division of the North Sumatra Culture and Tourism Office should work with the government through the Lake Toba Authority Implementing Agency (BPODT) intensely and openly to communicate this to the local community. Well-established communication will be able to facilitate problem solving, because it will be open what the community wants and will synergize with development programs from the government.

Studies that have been conducted by Yousaf & Xiucheng (2018) showed that the internet is one of the tools used to promote halal food and halal tourism services, such as tourism promotion in China, South Korea, Japan and Thailand. Countries these countries have used digital marketing strategy that is quite good in exposing halal tourism. The concept of marketing concept that has been designed is supported by the provision of resources quality human resources. This can be see in the human resource development program human resource development program through 3C, namely curriculum, certificates, and training or education centers. or education center. In every company that provides tour packages have provided human resources that in accordance with the qualifications of tourist services.

In the midst of Indonesia's plural society, public officials (politicians) are required to have competence in political communication, especially the ability to understand their audiences or constituents. The difference in audience background makes this competency very important, so that communicators can design messages well and avoid misinterpretation. From the research conducted by Rosa (2020), it is concluded that in establishing communication with the public about a government policy, the things that are important for the public are the following

It is important to note that in addition to the ability to understand (analyze) the audience, another important aspect is to have evidence in the presentation

represented by *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. With *ethos*, the communicator can become a credible figure (can be trusted) by his constituents so that it will facilitate the delivery of arguments (*logos*) in the atmosphere of persuasion to be built (*pathos*).

Without these competencies, it is very likely to be misinterpreted and has the potential to cause turmoil in the community. The government needs to convey that halal tourism will not eliminate local wisdom, but instead enrich the nuances of tourism and further beautify tourist sites. As mentioned in the research of Hendri, Mila & Ana (2017), the concept and its implementation which concluded that finally, if the concept of Halal Tourism Village has been formed and implemented, then by itself the natural beauty and local wisdom in the village will also be able to become a characteristic that adds benefits to the local community and the surrounding community.

### **Making Laws and Regulations**

In the problem of communication between the government and the community that has not been running optimally, the problem of regulations and assertiveness of the concept of halal tourism has also not been made by the government. Provisions, rules of the game and restrictions that apply to all parties have not been formulated, especially in the Lake Toba tourism area. In terms of regulation, it has not clearly established the rules on halal tourism and its legal basis. In Lukman's research (2020) it is concluded that the Halal Tourism policy is a multi- sector and multi-regional policy. So that it is necessary to formulate a halal tourism policy that is integrated with the vision of *sustainable development*. In research conducted by Fahham (2017), it was concluded that there are 5 (five) obstacles in halal tourism in West Nusa Tenggara, one of which is the absence of support for a set of laws and regulations that allow synergy between stakeholders in the halal certification process. As with the conditions in West Nusa Tenggara, the conditions in the Lake Toba tourist area in North Sumatra are also not much different.

The rejection that arises due to the absence of clear *rules* related to what matters are regulated in the halal tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to compile a provision and explanation of how the description of the halal tourism. Regulations are made that illustrate that the interests of all parties will be met based on clear considerations. Halal tourism does not mean Islamizing the Lake Toba region. The existence of worship facilities for Islamic tourists will not threaten the existence of other tribes, religions or races.

### **Involving Other Parties (Collaboration)**

Collaboration means cooperation between various parties. Meanwhile, according to Dewi (2018), collaboration is a way or method to create a situation where two or more parties contribute to each other in the stages of achieving common goals. Some parties that can be invited to work together to increase tourism potential through the concept of halal tourism are the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf) / Tourism and Creative Economy Agency (Baparekraf), both at the central and regional levels, the Lake Toba Authority Implementing Agency (BPODT), and local traditional leaders who have the authority to convey correct information. The implementation of this collaboration, of course, has several obstacles. From the results of research conducted by Rizka and Nurcahyanto (2018), it was concluded that there were several obstacles faced in the collaboration process, including passive communities and inactive village governments.

Community passivity (*apathy*) can be overcome by involving community leaders, traditional leaders, and individuals who are recognized for their authority in the Lake Toba region, for example with traditional leaders and church leaders (pastors, priests, *sintua*). In general, people will trust the things conveyed by traditional leaders and religious leaders (church). Thus, the right things about halal tourism can be conveyed appropriately to all levels of society. In growing understanding and awareness of the importance of halal tourism, entrepreneurs of goods and services (restaurants, hotels, *travel agents* and others) need to be invited to sit together in order to find a solution and a common perception of the concept of halal tourism.

## **4 | CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The concept of halal tourism is not an easy thing to implement. Communication issues and lack of understanding about halal tourism can be a trigger for the stagnant implementation of halal tourism. The majority of people in Lake Toba, which is mostly Christian, certainly makes sensitive issues under the guise of religion easy to roll out in the community. Supposedly, continuous communication involving the government, community leaders, and religious leaders, the issue of halal tourism on Lake Toba can be implemented properly. Thus, the group suggested that there is a need for intense communication between the community, government, and other parties (cooperation) for explain the concept of halal tourism. In this case, the participation of various groups or organizations is expected to be able to bridge the process of implementing halal tourism - collaboration / cooperation from the government, community, community leaders, and other

tourism entrepreneurs. In addition, the existence of clear regulations can strengthen the implementation of halal tourism.

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