

Understanding the Challenges and Potentials of Tourist Mosque Development in Malaysia: A Supply-Side Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The increasing prominence of tourist mosques in Malaysia has expanded the role of mosques beyond their traditional religious functions, creating both opportunities and challenges for mosque institutions. While previous studies have mainly focused on tourist motivation, satisfaction and behavioural intention, relatively less attention has been given to the perspectives of mosque stakeholders responsible for managing tourism-related activities. This study examines the development of tourist mosques in Malaysia from a supply-side perspective, exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by mosque stakeholders. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed involving ten selected tourist mosques in Peninsular Malaysia. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 key informants and complemented by site observations and documentary sources. The data were analysed using thematic analysis and cross-case comparison. The findings suggest that tourist mosque development is supported by three interrelated institutional dimensions, namely heritage and religious assets, institutional capacity for visitor engagement, and institutional sustainability. The study also found that mosque stakeholders continue to face challenges related to governance coordination, operational readiness and balancing tourism activities with the mosque's primary religious and community functions. Sustaining tourist mosque development, therefore, depends on strengthening institutional leadership, collaborative networks and continuous *imarah*, rather than increasing visitor numbers alone. By focusing on the perspectives of mosque stakeholders, this study contributes to the growing literature on mosque tourism by extending discussion beyond visitor-centred approaches and providing a better understanding of how tourist mosque development is realised and sustained within contemporary mosque institutions in Malaysia.

Keywords; Tourist Mosque development; mosque tourism; supply-side perspective; institutional capacity; *imarah*; Malaysia.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, mosque tourism has emerged as an important segment of religious tourism in Islam, attracting visitors not only for spiritual reasons but also to engage in cultural learning and appreciate Islamic heritage (Kessler, 2016). This interest has highlighted the wider role of mosques in the community, especially as spaces that facilitate interaction across religious, cultural, and educational levels (Raj & Kessler, 2018). At the same time, the presence of visitors introduces additional institutional challenges for the mosque, requiring a more coordinated effort in managing tourism-related activities.

Interest in mosque tourism is not entirely new, as mosques have historically served broader community functions beyond worship, including education, welfare, administration, and support for travellers (Asif et al., 2023). From this perspective, tourism-related activities may offer renewed opportunities for mosques to enliven and strengthen the functions that have become less prominent in recent practice. At the same time, tourism supports the broader *imarah* by reinforcing the mosque's religious and social roles.

In Malaysia, the growth of Islamic tourism has further increased the visibility of selected mosques, especially those located in major urban localities and recognised tourism destinations (Abdul Aziz et al., 2016). Beyond their religious function, they are increasingly involved in hosting and managing visitors, providing educational exposure and supporting public engagement. As tourism continues to grow, mosque institutions are also expected to take on broader responsibilities in managing these activities.

Despite this growing institutional involvement, existing studies on mosque tourism have largely focused on visitor motivation, visiting behaviour and satisfaction (Azizan et al., 2023; Moghavvemi et al., 2021). However, discussion in the existing literature has largely focused on visitors, with relatively less emphasis on governing and sustaining tourism-related activities. As a result, the institutional issues faced by mosque stakeholders remain underexplored, particularly related to tourism activities (Tengku Mansur et al., 2024).

The growth of mosque tourism cannot be explained solely by visitor interest; it is equally shaped by the capacity of mosque management to transform tourism potential into a sustainable practice. This requires the mosque to manage increasing visitor demand across facilities management, staffing, visitor movement, and service quality. In the Malaysian context, many mosques operate with limited organisational capacity while responding to increasing tourism-related activities. The challenge extends beyond physical readiness, involving governance coordination, operational planning, and the ability to balance the tourism activities with primary religious and community functions. Without a clear understanding of these practical realities, discussions on mosque tourism may remain focused on its symbolic appeal rather than its operational sustainability (Wong, 2021; Yusoff, 2026).

This study, therefore, examines the development of tourist mosques in Malaysia from a supply-side perspective by exploring the challenges and opportunities faced by mosque stakeholders. Rather than focusing on visitor perceptions, greater attention is given to the institutional realities faced by mosque management, particularly regarding governance coordination, operational readiness, and service delivery. By focusing on the perspectives of mosque stakeholders, the study aims to provide a more grounded understanding of how tourism potential is realised and sustained within contemporary mosque institutions in Malaysia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourist Mosque Development within Religious Tourism

Tourist mosque development may be understood within the broader discourse of religious tourism, in which places of worship are increasingly recognised not merely as sacred spaces for spiritual devotion, but also as sites of cultural learning, heritage appreciation and public engagement (Kessler, 2016; Kessler & Raj, 2018). Within the wider landscape of halal tourism, this development also reflects a growing interest in destinations that offer religious meaning alongside rich cultural experiences (Battour & Ismail, 2016). In this context, mosques occupy a distinctive position because they function simultaneously as religious institutions, community spaces and public landmarks.

In the Malaysian context, Abdul Aziz et al. (2016) observe that mosque visitation is increasingly influenced by visitors' expectations regarding accessibility, facilities and educational exposure. Umar & Ashaari (2019) similarly note that a conducive worship environment commonly characterises tourist mosques in Malaysia, as well as the provision of Islamic information and distinctive architectural identity. These perspectives suggest that tourist mosque development involves more than physical visitation; it also reflects engagement with the religious, social and cultural meanings embedded within mosque institutions.

Beyond tourism, mosques have historically served broader communal roles, including religious education, welfare, administration and support for travellers (Asif et al., 2021). As such, tourist mosque development should not be seen as introducing entirely new responsibilities but rather as an adaptive process through which mosques negotiate sacred, social and tourism-related functions while preserving their core religious responsibilities.

Potentials of Tourist Mosque Development

Tourist mosque development offers important opportunities to strengthen the mosque's educational and outreach functions. Raj & Kessler (2018) argue that mosque visitation creates opportunities for intercultural dialogue and wider public understanding of Islam. Similarly, Mohammed (2024) suggests that meaningful visitor engagement in mosque spaces may foster interreligious understanding, particularly when visitors are exposed to Islamic values and practices firsthand. Umar & Ashaari (2019) further highlight the importance of guided explanations and informational support in helping visitors understand mosque etiquette and religious practices. However, the educational value of tourist mosques does not emerge automatically from visitor presence alone; it depends on how effectively mosque institutions transform visitation into meaningful engagement, reflection and dialogue.

Tourist mosque development also provides opportunities to revitalise broader mosque functions that have become less visible in contemporary practice. Asif et al. (2021) emphasise that hospitality, social support and service to travellers have long been embedded within mosque institutions. Oktapiansyah & Masruroh (2026) similarly argue that tourism may strengthen socio-religious roles rather than displace them. In this sense, the development of tourist mosques may reinforce the broader agenda of *imarah* (the holistic development and flourishing of the mosque through its religious, educational, social, and community functions) by renewing the mosque's social relevance in contemporary society.

Beyond educational and socio-religious contributions, the development of tourist mosques also encourages greater institutional preparedness, particularly by strengthening management practices and service quality. Taken together, the literature suggests that the potential of tourist mosque development extends beyond conventional tourism benefits. Rather than serving solely as visitor destinations, tourist mosques may serve as platforms for dakwah, educational engagement, social interaction and institutional strengthening.

Challenges in Tourist Mosque Development

Despite these promising potentials, translating tourist mosque aspirations into sustainable practice remains far from straightforward, as mosque institutions must navigate multiple institutional, religious, and operational constraints. The most distinctive concerns involve balancing openness with sacredness. Mosques are increasingly encouraged to remain open and welcoming to visitors as part of educational outreach and cultural engagement. At the same time, mosques remain sacred spaces where worship, religious discipline and spiritual decorum must continue to be prioritised.

This tension becomes particularly evident in matters concerning visitor access and behavioural boundaries. Mohammed (2024) highlights the value of openness in fostering intercultural understanding, whereas Utaberta et al. (2015) stress the importance of behavioural boundaries intended to preserve sanctity, particularly for non-Muslim visitors. These include appropriate dress, respectful conduct and sensitivity towards ongoing religious activities. Farrag (2017) further suggests that sacredness is embedded not only in religious practice but also in the mosque's spatial experience. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the central challenge lies not in choosing between openness and restriction, but in continuously negotiating both within a sacred institutional setting.

Beyond sacredness-related concerns, governance and resource limitations present another major challenge. Wong (2021) notes that administrative arrangements and governance structures may significantly influence the implementation of mosque tourism in Malaysia. In practice, many mosques continue to operate with limited financial resources while relying heavily on committees or volunteers to sustain daily operations. Hamid et al. (2023) also emphasise that institutional effectiveness depends strongly on management capability and leadership capacity. Under such circumstances, expanding tourism-related responsibilities may place considerable pressure on existing management structures, particularly when institutional capacity remains limited.

Operational and facility-related issues further complicate the development of tourist mosques. From a facilities management perspective, the sustainability of tourism-related activities depends not only on visitor demand, but also on the mosque's ability to maintain physical infrastructure, ensure cleanliness, manage visitor circulation and sustain service readiness. Muin et al. (2024) argue that ineffective facilities management may weaken visitor experience and undermine the long-term sustainability of mosque tourism. Harahap et al. (2022) further highlight that the physical, environmental and functional performance of mosque facilities, including thermal comfort, sanitation, spatial adequacy and circulation, directly influence user comfort and facility effectiveness. Although these issues may appear largely technical, they often become immediate operational burdens for mosque management, particularly when visitor numbers increase without corresponding expansion in financial resources, workforce or maintenance capacity. Seen from this perspective, facilities management is not merely a technical concern but a practical determinant of whether tourist mosque initiatives can be sustained over time.

Taken more broadly, the development of tourist mosques requires continuous negotiation among institutional capacity, sacred values, and operational sustainability. The challenge lies not merely in attracting visitors, but in ensuring that tourism-related activities remain manageable, respectful of religious sanctity and sustainable within the mosque's existing organisational capacity.

Supply-Side Research Gaps

Although existing literature has contributed considerably to the understanding of mosque tourism, several important gaps remain. Much of the existing mosque tourism literature remains centred on visitor experience, particularly regarding motivation, behavioural intention, perceived quality, satisfaction, and loyalty (Moghavvemi et al., 2021; Navajas-Romero et al., 2020). While these studies offer valuable insights into tourist expectations and behavioural outcomes, they provide a comparatively limited understanding of how mosque institutions manage tourism-related activities in practice.

Recent studies have begun to acknowledge the importance of governance, institutional capacity, and long-term sustainability in supporting the development of tourist mosques (Tengku Mansur et al., 2024; Wong, 2021). Nevertheless, the institutional realities underpinning the development of tourist mosques remain comparatively underexplored. As a result, relatively little attention has been given to how mosque institutions experience, manage and respond to the operational demands associated with tourism-related activities.

This gap is particularly evident in the limited representation of mosque stakeholders within the existing literature. As individuals directly involved in planning, coordination, and day-to-day operational management, mosque representatives possess valuable experiential knowledge of the opportunities and challenges involved in developing tourist mosques. Their perspectives provide important insights into how tourism initiatives are negotiated, implemented and sustained within contemporary mosque institutions. Without these institutional perspectives, important aspects of governance, operational readiness and service delivery remain insufficiently understood.

Accordingly, this study adopts a supply-side perspective to examine how mosque representatives understand, negotiate, and manage the practical realities of developing tourist mosques in Malaysia. By focusing on institutional experiences rather than visitor perceptions, the study seeks to contribute a more practice-oriented understanding of how tourism potential translates into sustainable institutional practice within Malaysian mosques.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory qualitative multiple-case study design to examine the challenges and potentials of tourist mosque development in Malaysia from a supply-side perspective. A multiple-case study design further enabled comparative analysis across different mosque settings, providing richer insights into how

tourist mosque development is shaped by varying governance structures, institutional capacities and operational contexts (Yin, 2018).

Ten tourist mosques in Peninsular Malaysia, primarily located in Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, were selected through purposive sampling. The initial selection was informed by the Islamic Tourism Centre's publication documenting mosques of tourism, historical and cultural significance in Malaysia (Islamic Tourism Centre, 2025). The final selection considered the presence of tourism-related characteristics, including visitor presence, heritage or architectural significance, and inclusion in local tourism narratives. Variation in tourism visibility, management arrangements and operational readiness was also considered to capture different institutional experiences. To ensure robust stakeholder representation, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 21 key informants purposively selected across the ten selected mosques. Depending on each mosque's organisational structure and the availability of relevant stakeholders, each site contributed between one and four participants, comprising mosque chairpersons, imams, committee members, administrators, and individuals directly involved in tourism-related planning or operations. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perspectives on the potential, challenges, management practices, and sustainability of tourist mosque development. Interview data were complemented by site observations and documentary materials, including official websites and social media content, to provide contextual information and support data triangulation.

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The interview data were analysed manually using thematic analysis, guided by Braun & Clarke (2006) together with cross-case comparison. Analysis began with repeated reading of the interview transcripts and field notes to develop familiarity with the data. Meaningful segments of the transcripts were then manually coded according to issues emerging from participants' accounts. The initial codes were compared across interviews and grouped according to similarities, differences and recurring patterns. Related codes were subsequently organised into broader categories from which candidate themes were developed.

The candidate themes were repeatedly reviewed against the coded extracts and the wider dataset to ensure they accurately reflected participants' accounts and remained conceptually distinct. The analysis then compared emerging patterns across the ten mosque settings to identify experiences that recurred across multiple cases as well as variations associated with particular institutional contexts. Observational and documentary data were used primarily to contextualise and corroborate the interview findings rather than as separate units of thematic analysis. Through this iterative process of manual coding, categorisation, theme development and cross-case comparison, the analysis generated the three principal thematic domains presented in the findings: institutional potentials, institutional challenges, and the conditions required to sustain tourist mosque development.

Trustworthiness was supported through data triangulation, repeated engagement with the interview data and iterative comparison between the developing themes and the original transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The inclusion of participants holding different management roles and the comparison of perspectives across multiple mosque settings further strengthened the credibility of the analysis. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the study aimed to develop a contextually grounded understanding of the institutional realities shaping tourist mosque development.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Potentials of Tourist Mosque Development

Interview data revealed that mosque stakeholders consistently viewed the development of tourist mosques as creating opportunities that extend beyond attracting visitors. Across the selected cases, mosque stakeholders consistently viewed tourism as a means of strengthening the mosque's religious, educational and community functions rather than as an activity driven solely by visitor numbers. From a supply-side perspective, three institutional strengths were found to support the development of tourist mosques, namely existing heritage and religious assets, institutional capacity for visitor engagement, and institutional sustainability.

Many respondents considered the existing heritage, religious identity and architectural significance of their mosques as important foundations for tourism development. Rather than creating new tourism products, these mosques already possessed distinctive historical and religious characteristics that attracted visitors while preserving their primary function as places of worship. This was particularly evident among heritage mosques, where historical value was perceived as an institutional asset that could support tourism-related activities.

A representative from Masjid Kampung Laut explained that the mosque's historical significance remains one of its main attractions:

"It is under heritage... the age is estimated at about 552 years." (Participant 4)

Similarly, respondents from other heritage mosques described their historical background, royal identity and traditional architecture as features that naturally attracted visitors. These findings suggest that heritage serves as an important institutional resource for the development of tourist mosques. However, respondents also emphasised that historical value alone is insufficient unless supported by active religious programmes that maintain the mosque as a living institution rather than merely a heritage attraction.

Beyond heritage assets, institutional capacity emerged as the most significant factor supporting the development of tourist mosques. Across the selected mosques, respondents consistently emphasised that tourism depends on committed leadership, organised management and active community participation. The findings indicate that successful tourist mosques are characterised not only by attractive buildings but also by their ability to organise visitor engagement through structured programmes, dedicated personnel and volunteer participation.

Several mosques have established dedicated mechanisms to manage visitors and educational activities. At Masjid Abidin, for example, the establishment of the Mosque Tour Guide (MTG) reflects a structured approach to visitor management with a strong emphasis on religious outreach.

"The objective of MTG is to provide understanding and convey preaching to tourists, especially non-Muslims." (Participant 9)

Similarly, respondents from Masjid Tengku Mahkota Tengku Hassan Ibrahim Alam Shah highlighted that tourism activities were developed through active community participation rather than relying solely on mosque committees.

"The guest squad is not only from the committee; it comes from our congregation, using the skills they have." (Participant 18)

The role of community participation was further reflected in how respondents described the appeal of their mosques. Rather than focusing only on physical appearance, several participants argued that visitors were equally interested in experiencing the mosque's religious life and community activities.

"The attraction is not only the building; they want to see why people like to pray Subuh here." (Participant 18)

These findings demonstrate that institutional capacity extends beyond administrative management. Effective tourist mosque development depends on the ability of mosque stakeholders to mobilise volunteers, organise educational programmes and create meaningful interactions between visitors and the mosque community. From a supply-side perspective, these organisational capabilities transform existing heritage and religious assets into authentic visitor experiences while strengthening the broader agenda of *imarah*.

The findings also indicate that the development of tourist mosques contributes to institutional sustainability. Respondents generally viewed tourism not as a commercial activity but as an opportunity to strengthen the mosque's long-term capacity by diversifying income sources and expanding institutional collaboration. Several mosques have introduced initiatives such as room-stay facilities, cooperative activities and rental of telecommunication towers to support mosque operations and community programmes.

As explained by one respondent:

"We rent a telecommunication tower for RM2,000 per month, and we are developing three room-stay units."
(Participant 18)

Such initiatives were not intended to commercialise the mosque but to generate additional resources that could support maintenance, religious activities and community welfare. Respondents also highlighted the importance of collaboration with universities, government agencies, NGOs and local communities in expanding educational programmes, visitor activities and knowledge sharing. These partnerships strengthen the institutional capacity of mosques while reducing dependence on a single source of financial or organisational support.

Overall, the findings suggest that the development of tourist mosques is shaped by more than just visitor demand. The development of tourist mosques depends on how mosque institutions utilise their existing heritage assets, strengthen organisational capacity and sustain their operations through community participation and collaborative support. These institutional strengths provide an important foundation for developing tourist mosques while ensuring that tourism activities remain consistent with the mosque's primary religious and social responsibilities.

Institutional Challenges in Tourist Mosque Development

Despite the institutional strengths identified in the previous section, respondents consistently acknowledged that developing tourist mosques involves a range of practical challenges. Across the selected cases, these challenges were not confined to physical facilities but also reflected broader institutional realities, including governance coordination, operational readiness, and the ongoing need to balance tourism activities with the mosque's primary religious functions. From a supply-side perspective, the findings suggest that the sustainability of tourist mosque development depends largely on how mosque institutions respond to these interconnected challenges.

One of the most frequently discussed challenges concerns governance and institutional coordination. Although several mosques had been recognised as tourism destinations by government agencies or included in tourism promotion initiatives, respondents explained that such recognition was not always accompanied by clear implementation strategies or financial support. The involvement of multiple authorities, including state religious councils, tourism agencies and local governments, often resulted in overlapping responsibilities and lengthy administrative procedures that delayed tourism-related initiatives.

A respondent explained that although the mosque had been promoted as a tourism destination, any physical development or programme implementation still required approval from several authorities.

"Every proposal has to go through several levels of approval. Even if there is a good idea, implementation takes time because different agencies are involved." (Participant 7)

Similarly, another participant highlighted the absence of direct financial assistance despite the mosque's tourism role.

"People expect the mosque to receive many visitors, but the tourism status does not automatically come with funding or additional manpower." (Participant 14)

These findings indicate that governance challenges arise not from a lack of institutional commitment but from fragmented administrative arrangements that limit the ability of mosque management to respond efficiently to tourism-related demands.

Operational readiness emerged as another major challenge. Respondents consistently emphasised that increasing visitor numbers placed additional pressure on existing facilities, maintenance requirements and human resources. Several mosques reported difficulties in maintaining parking areas, toilets, accessibility facilities, signage and other visitor-related infrastructure while continuing to prioritise the needs of worshippers. Limited financial resources further constrained the ability of mosque committees to undertake major improvements or employ dedicated personnel to manage tourism activities.

As one respondent noted:

"We are still improving our facilities. Some upgrades have to be carried out gradually because everything depends on the mosque's financial capacity." (Participant 5)

Another participant described the challenge of managing visitors with limited manpower.

"We are still developing the necessary organisational capacity to receive visitors effectively." (Participant 16)

The findings suggest that operational readiness should not be understood solely in terms of physical infrastructure. Rather, it also involves the availability of trained personnel, effective visitor management and continuous maintenance that enables the mosque to accommodate visitors without affecting its daily religious activities.

Beyond governance and operational issues, respondents consistently highlighted the need to preserve the sanctity of the mosque while welcoming visitors from diverse backgrounds. Although mosque stakeholders generally supported educational engagement and interfaith interaction, they also acknowledged concerns regarding visitor behaviour, appropriate dress, photography during prayer times and access to prayer spaces. These concerns were particularly evident in mosques that regularly received non-Muslim visitors.

One participant explained:

"We welcome everyone, but visitors must understand that this is first and foremost a place of worship. Respect for the mosque's etiquette is essential." (Participant 9)

Similarly, another respondent observed that differences in opinion among committee members occasionally influenced decisions regarding visitor access and tourism programmes.

"Some members are supportive, while others remain cautious because they are concerned about preserving the sanctity of the mosque." (Participant 10)

These findings illustrate that tourist mosque development requires continuous negotiation between openness and sacredness. Rather than representing conflicting objectives, respondents generally viewed both as complementary responsibilities that require careful management. Maintaining this balance was considered essential to ensuring that tourism activities enhance rather than diminish the mosque's religious identity.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the principal challenges of tourist mosque development are institutional rather than tourism-related activities. While heritage assets, community participation and organisational initiatives provide a strong foundation for tourism development, their successful implementation depends on effective governance, operational preparedness and the capacity to balance visitor engagement with the mosque's primary religious responsibilities. These institutional realities explain why the development of tourist mosques varies across cases despite sharing similar tourism potential. They also highlight the importance of strengthening institutional capacity as a prerequisite for sustaining tourist mosque development in Malaysia.

Sustaining Tourist Mosque Development: A Supply-Side Perspective

The preceding findings demonstrate that tourist mosque development is supported by considerable institutional strengths but simultaneously constrained by governance, operational and socio-cultural challenges. Across the selected cases, respondents consistently emphasised that sustaining tourist mosque development requires more than attractive architecture or increasing visitor numbers. Instead, long-term sustainability depends on the continuous strengthening of institutional capacity through committed leadership, collaborative partnerships and active *imarah*. These interrelated elements enable mosque institutions to respond to tourism-related demands while preserving their primary religious and community functions.

One recurring finding concerns the importance of institutional leadership and organisational commitment. Respondents consistently associated successful tourist mosques with proactive mosque committees that were willing to initiate programmes, mobilise volunteers and respond to changing community needs. Across the selected cases, tourism-related activities were driven not solely by formal policies but by the commitment of mosque leaders who viewed tourism as part of the mosque's broader religious and social responsibilities. This commitment encouraged continuous programme development, strengthened volunteer participation and created a more organised approach to visitor management.

A participant explained that the success of tourism activities depends largely on the willingness of mosque leaders and committee members to work collectively.

"Everything depends on the commitment of the committee. If the committee is active, programmes continue, and visitors also receive a better experience." (Participant 18)

This finding suggests that leadership extends beyond administrative responsibility. It reflects the capacity of mosque stakeholders to coordinate resources, encourage community participation and maintain the continuity of tourism-related programmes despite limited institutional resources.

Respondents also emphasised that collaboration with external stakeholders is essential to sustaining the development of tourist mosques. Although mosque committees remain the principal managers of tourism activities, many acknowledged that long-term development cannot rely solely on internal resources. Partnerships with organisations such as the Islamic Tourism Centre (ITC), state religious councils, universities, government agencies and non-governmental organisations were regarded as important in providing technical support, volunteer training, promotional opportunities and programme development.

One respondent highlighted the value of collaborative initiatives in expanding the mosque's outreach activities:

"We work together with universities, government agencies and NGOs because each organisation contributes different expertise that benefits the mosque and the visitors." (Participant 18)

These collaborative arrangements strengthen institutional capacity by enabling mosques to share expertise, expand educational programmes and improve visitor management without placing excessive pressure on existing mosque resources.

Beyond leadership and collaboration, respondents consistently viewed continuous *imarah* as the foundation of sustainable tourist mosque development. Across the selected cases, participants stressed that visitors were attracted not merely by architectural beauty but by the presence of active religious and community life within the mosque. Regular religious classes, congregational prayers, community activities and hospitality programmes were regarded as the distinguishing characteristics of successful tourist mosques because they reflected the mosque's continuing relevance as a living religious institution.

This perspective was clearly expressed by one participant:

"The attraction is not only the building; they want to see why people like to pray Subuh here." (Participant 18)

Rather than viewing tourism and *imarah* as separate agendas, respondents consistently perceived them as mutually reinforcing. Active religious programmes created meaningful visitor experiences, while visitor engagement provided additional opportunities to strengthen religious outreach, public education and community participation. These findings suggest that *imarah* should not be regarded simply as a religious activity but as an institutional mechanism that sustains the long-term development of tourist mosques.

Viewed collectively, the findings indicate that sustaining tourist mosque development depends on the interaction of institutional leadership, collaborative networks and continuous *imarah*. Heritage assets and tourism recognition provide an important foundation, but they are insufficient without organisational commitment and active community participation. From a supply-side perspective, tourist mosque development should therefore be understood as a process of institutional strengthening, where tourism serves to reinforce rather than redefine the mosque's religious, educational and social functions. This perspective extends existing mosque tourism literature by demonstrating that the sustainability of tourist mosques depends not only on visitor demand but also on the institutional capacity of mosque stakeholders to manage and sustain tourism-related activities within the broader framework of *imarah*.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the development of tourist mosques in Malaysia from a supply-side perspective, exploring the opportunities and challenges faced by mosque stakeholders. Unlike previous studies that have largely focused on visitor motivation and satisfaction, this study foregrounded the institutional realities faced by mosque management in developing and sustaining tourism-related activities. The findings demonstrate that tourist mosque development extends beyond visitor attraction and is supported by three interrelated institutional dimensions, namely heritage and religious assets, institutional capacity for visitor engagement, and institutional sustainability. At the same time, mosque stakeholders face persistent challenges related to governance coordination, operational readiness and balancing tourism activities with the mosque's primary religious and community functions.

The study further shows that sustaining tourist mosque development depends not only on tourism demand but also on the institutional capacity of mosque stakeholders to mobilise leadership, community participation, collaborative networks and continuous *imarah*. These findings contribute to the growing literature on mosque tourism by shifting attention from visitor-centred perspectives towards the institutional processes that shape tourist mosque development. In doing so, the study provides a more contextual understanding of how mosque institutions negotiate tourism while maintaining their religious identity and social responsibilities.

Although this exploratory multiple-case study provides rich, contextually grounded insights into tourist mosque development across ten selected settings in Peninsular Malaysia, several limitations should be noted. The findings reflect specific regional institutional frameworks and may not be directly generalizable to other geographical areas, rural contexts, or countries with differing cultural and administrative structures.

To address these limitations and advance the field, future research could incorporate a larger number of mosques across diverse regions for comparative analysis. Additionally, employing mixed-methods approaches that integrate qualitative stakeholder interviews with quantitative visitor surveys and institutional performance metrics would provide stronger evidence of the effectiveness of tourist mosque initiatives. Further empirical investigation into financial models, digital engagement strategies, tailored training programmes for mosque staff, and formal partnerships with tourism organisations would also offer valuable avenues for strengthening the sustainable development of tourist mosques.

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