# ECO-RELIGIOUS TOURISM BASED ON SAUJANA IN TURGO-MERAPI TOURISM VILLAGE

# WISATA EKORELIGI BERBASIS SAUJANA DI DESA WISATA TURGO-MERAPI

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explain the eco-religious tourism model in the Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village area which is part of the Gunung Merapi National Park (GMNP) in Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method to explore the implementation of ecotourism and religious tourism concepts in the Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village area. The data collected are primary and secondary. Primary data were collected through observation and interviews, secondary data were collected through document studies. The results of the study indicate that eco-religious tourism based on saujana is a model that is considered to be able to link tourism developments planned in local government policy (ecotourism) and developments occurring in the field (religious tourism) as well as accommodating the economic and conservation interests. Eco-religious tourism based on saujana model provides a broad idea that not only has a positive impact on environmental conservation, but also strengthens the social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of communities in areas that still practice religious values. This research is still limited to the southern side of GMNP which is located in Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. Further research is needed with the same theme in Magelang Regency, Boyolali Regency, and Klaten Regency so that it can complete the results of this study.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Religious Tourism, Eco-religious Tourism, Tourism Village

**Abstrak**

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menjelaskan model wisata ekoreligi di kawasan Desa Wisata Turgo-Merapi yang merupakan bagian dari Taman Nasional Gunung Merapi (TNGM) di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi konsep ekowisata dan wisata religi di kawasan Desa Wisata Turgo-Merapi. Data

yang dikumpulkan terdiri dari data primer dan sekunder. Data primer diperoleh melalui observasi dan wawancara, sedangkan data sekunder diperoleh melalui studi dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa wisata ekoreligi berbasis saujana merupakan model yang dianggap mampu mengaitkan pengembangan pariwisata yang direncanakan dalam kebijakan pemerintah daerah (ekowisata) dengan pengembangan yang terjadi di lapangan (wisata religi), serta mengakomodasi kepentingan ekonomi dan konservasi. Model pariwisata ekoreligi berbasis saujana memberikan gambaran yang luas bahwa tidak hanya memiliki dampak positif pada konservasi lingkungan, tetapi juga memperkuat aspek sosial, budaya, dan spiritual masyarakat di daerah yang masih mempraktikkan nilai-nilai religius. Penelitian ini terbatas di sisi selatan TNGM yang terletak di Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan dengan tema yang sama di Kabupaten Magelang, Kabupaten Boyolali, dan Kabupaten Klaten agar dapat melengkapi hasil penelitian ini.

**Kata Kunci:** Ekowisata, Wisata Religi, Wisata Ekoreligi, Desa Wisata

## 1. INTRODUCTION

National parks are the mainstay of the protected area system and the role of local communities must be the concern of various parties (He et al., 2020). The role of this community is important because most of the national parks are an integration of various protected area concepts that previously existed (He et al., 2020).

The designation of a national park in a location almost always comes later after the location is inhabited by humans. The people who inhabit this location are Indigenous people who often live-in isolation and depend on the products of the national park (Rhama & Reindrawati, 2023) so the designation of protected areas such as national parks often gives rise to conflicts. This kind of conflict can occur when parties representing conservation interests try to impose restrictions on the use of forest resources or displace and remove local populations from their habitats due to the creation of protected areas (Soliku & Schraml, 2020).

The establishment of national parks is often accompanied by the issue of not siding with the local community. One of the issues is the restriction of indigenous peoples' access to their traditional territories (Mason et al., 2022). In Indonesia, restricting access to national parks was once a serious issue when Gunung Merapi National Park (GMNP) was to be established. One of the issues that arises in the community is that a fence will be built around the GMNP area so that the community cannot access the natural resources in it and the community's land will be taken over as part of the GMNP area (Wijayati & Rijanta, 2019). Although it was not proven, the controversy in the community regarding this access restriction caused the establishment of the GMNP, which was originally planned to be declared in October 2002, to be postponed until early May 2004.

Although in the end the issue of restricting access was not proven, problems in the Turgo area which is part of the GMNP still emerged a few years later. This problem arises because the development of tourism in this region is not ecotourism as regulated in local government policies, but religious tourism that has existed in the community first. This study tries to explore the dynamics of tourism development between what is planned in local government policies and the development that occurs in Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village using the eco-religious model, a tourism concept that combines ecotourism and religious tourism.

This study uses a phenomenological approach. This approach is aimed primarily at describing the best socio-cultural phenomenon from the point of view of the subject being

studied (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012). This approach was chosen because to realize ecotourism that is economically and environmentally sustainable, local communities must be involved (Sumarmi et al., 2024; Sutrisno et al., 2024). Community participation is also important because it can support efforts to conserve nature and culture and improve welfare (Chang et al., 2018). Thus, the perspective of local communities as the subjects of research must receive more attention.

There are two main things that are the focus of phenomenological research, namely textual description and structural description (Nuryana et al., 2019). Textural description refers to what the research subject experiences about a phenomenon (objective aspect, factual data, empirical occurrence). The structural description refers to how the subject experiences and interprets his experience (subjective aspects related to opinions, judgments, feelings, expectations, and other subjective responses of the research subject related to his or her experience).

In the context of this study, the researcher's main attention will be directed to awareness, the knowledge of the subject being researched about two things, namely the concept of ecotourism and the concept of religious tourism. The knowledge of the subject who is researched on these two concepts will then try to be presented as well, as completely, as suitable as possible to what is meant by the subject being researched. In order to achieve this goal, the researcher puts himself as a "student" who wants to know as well as possible the knowledge possessed by the subjects studied about the symptoms they are involved in. The researcher does not attempt to determine the "truth" or "fallacy" of the consciousness or knowledge that the subjects studied have about the phenomenon (Ahimsa-Putra, 2012).

The object being studied (the concept of ecotourism and the concept of religious tourism) as a knowledge belonging to the subject being studied must be seen as a holistic phenomenon. This makes it possible if the components of the object being studied are presented as a saujana, which refers to the formation resulting from human interaction with the natural environment as a place of life that is influenced by local culture continuously over a long period of time (Sugiarto, 2024).

Ecotourism is a dynamic field and has grown rapidly in recent years (Sutiksno et al., 2024). In simple terms, the definition of ecotourism is a travel activity carried out by a person or a group of people to a natural area with the aim of admiring and enjoying the beauty of nature, animals, or plants in their natural environment while participating in being responsible for the preservation of the area, providing economic benefits and maintaining the cultural integrity of the local community, and containing elements of interpretation and education (Sugiarto, 2019). Ecotourism is more than just sightseeing. It is an experience. For many ecotourists and others involved in the ecotourism industry, this experience differs fundamentally from the mass tourism experience (Blamey, 2001).

Meanwhile, religious tourism is defined as a tourist trip intended to carry out religious worship, including visiting religious sites that are considered sacred or sacred as well as doing recreation (Sugiarto, 2019). Pilgrimage activities are one of the specific forms of religious tourism (Jackowski, 1998).

In the concept of ecotourism, there are at least five components that need to be considered, namely conservation, education, participation, recreation, and economy (Sugiarto, 2018). These five components will be ecotourism variables in this study.

In the concept of religious tourism, the religious ceremony system is one of the things that receives a lot of attention and is generally raised as a tourist attraction. In the religious ceremony system, there are at least four components that can be used as the center of attention,

namely the place of the ceremony, the time of implementation, the objects and tools of the ceremony, and the people who perform and lead the ceremony (Koentjaraningrat, 2002). These four components will be the variables of religious tourism in this study.

## 2.  RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-qualitative method. The data collected are primary and secondary. Primary data were collected through observation and interviews, while secondary data was collected through document studies.

Because it is descriptive-qualitative research, data analysis has been carried out in the data collection stage. Data analysis uses the Miles and Huberman analysis model, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification which are temporary several times until conclusions and recommendations are made.

## 3.  RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted in the Turgo area which is part of the Gunung Merapi National Park. The Turgo area is located on the south side of the slopes of Mount Merapi which includes Turgo Hill and Padukuhan Turgo (Turgo Sub-village), Kalurahan Purwobinangun (Purwobinangun Village), Kapanewon Pakem (Pakem District), Sleman Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta. This area is about 30 kilometers from the Yogyakarta Palace.

The population of Padukuhan Turgo in 2024 is 902 people with a balanced composition of male and female residents, 443 male and 459 female. Based on religion, 703 people are Muslim, 166 people are Catholic, and 33 people are Christian (Table 1).

**Table 1. Population of Turgo Based on Religion**

| No. | Religion | Population | Male | Female |
|-----|----------|-----------|------|--------|
| 1 | Islam | 703 | 355 | 348 |
| 2 | Catholic | 166 | 72 | 94 |
| 3 | Christian | 33 | 16 | 17 |
|  | TOTAL | 902 | 443 | 459 |

Source: Interview Results and Population Statistics Report of Padukuhan Turgo, 2024

Like most Javanese people who are inseparable from traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation (Moertjipto et al., 1996), the Turgo community also routinely holds rituals for various purposes. Although based on the religion they adhere to they can be grouped into three religious adherents in their daily lives they still carry out traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation that are part of their religion. Moreover, they live on the slopes of the mountain.

As a society that is part of the imaginary axis of Mount Merapi-Keraton Yogyakarta-Laut Selatan, the Turgo community is also inseparable from traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. There are at least three traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation and are routinely held every year, namely the Mapag Tanggal ritual which is held the day before the 1st of Sura (new year in the Javanese calendar), Haul Syekh Jumadil Kubro which is held on the 10th of Sura, and Merti Bumi which is held on the 15th of Sapar (the 2nd month in the Javanese calendar).

The Turgo area has natural tourist attractions and is known as a religious tourism destination because of the existence of maqam or petilasan that is sacred by the community,

namely the Maqam Syekh Jumadil Kubro at the top of Turgo Hill. He is known as a figure who spread Islam in the early period on the island of Java (Hidayah et al., 2022). The term "petilasan" is taken from the Javanese language, namely "tilas" which means 'used'. Thus, petilasan is a place that has been visited or occupied by someone important.



Figure 1. Visitors are Praying in Petilaan Sheikh Jumadil Kubro at The Top of Turgo Hill

Religious rituals do not only worship God but also include worship of natural and human powers that are considered sacred (Sirait, 2024). This kind of thing also happens in Turgo.

Pilgrimage activities have long been practiced by residents in the Turgo area, especially at the top of Turgo Hill. When the area was designated as a national park under the name Gunung Merapi National Park (GMNP) in 2004, it was included in the religious, cultural, and historical zones. In the same year, a regulation was issued on the Establishment of Buffer Villages Around Mount Merapi National Park. This new regulation caused Turgo to be categorized as a buffer village. The buffer village concept was initialized by Gunung Merapi National Park Authority (Balai Taman Nasional Gunung Merapi) by prioritizing conservation aspects.

One of the functions of national parks that is currently gaining priority is the cultural function. The cultural function arises from the fact that the designation of a national park in a location almost always comes later after the location is inhabited by humans (Rhama, 2019).

In 2008, the concept of a tourism village began to be recognized in Turgo. The concept of a tourism village was initialized by the Tourism Office of Sleman Regency by prioritizing economic aspects.

Since the concept of tourism village was implemented in Turgo, pilgrimage activities that had been practiced by local residents and visitors began to shift towards religious tourism. This form of tourism refers to travel based on religious motives. Pilgrimage activities are one of the specific forms of religious tourism (Jackowski, 1998).

The application of the concept of a buffer village (with a conservation orientation) and a tourism village (with an economic orientation) in Turgo simultaneously by two different institutions make pilgrimage travel activities in the Turgo area also interpreted differently by local residents. In the context of buffer villages, pilgrimage activities are maintained solely as pilgrimage activities, while in the context of tourism villages, pilgrimage activities have shifted towards religious tourism.

This research tries to combine the concept of ecotourism and the concept of religious tourism into a new entity called "eco-religious tourism". Because the initial tourism that developed in Turgo was religious tourism, the concept of religious tourism tried to be integrated with the concept of ecotourism that followed later. The concept in religious tourism that is of concern is the ritual component which includes the place, the time of implementation, the objects and tools used, as well as the people who perform and lead the ritual. Meanwhile, the concepts in ecotourism that are of concern are the principles of conservation, education, participation, recreation, and economy.
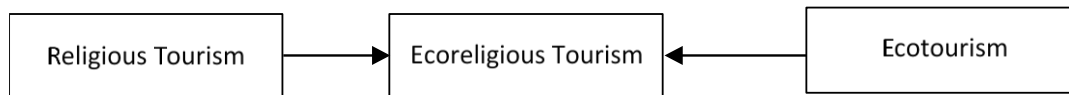


Figure 2. Eco-religious Tourism Model

The results of the observations, interviews with informants, and studies of various literature sources that have been successfully traced show that the tour packages offered in Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village, both religious tour packages and special interest tour packages, have adopted the basic principles of ecotourism. Both conservation, education, participation, recreation, and economy have been identified, although not all are in one tour package. Thus, eco-religious tourism based on saujana is a model that is considered to be able to link tourism developments planned in local government policy (ecotourism) and developments occurring in the field (religious tourism) as well as accommodating the economic and conservation interests of tourism villages and buffer villages. This model can be seen in the table below (Table 2).

**Table 2. Eco-religious Tourism Based on Saujana in Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village**

| No | Religious Tourism | Turgo-Merapi Tourism Village | Ecotourism |
|----|-------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Place | Turgo's natural areas and religious sites are the main sites for conservation activities as well as religious rituals. | Conservation |
| | | Specific locations such as petilasan, rivers, springs, Turgo peaks, and forests are not only for ritual activities as well as for educational activities. | Education |
| | | The management of places in the Turgo area involves local communities (local residents, religious leaders, and various local communities) and is a means of community empowerment through active involvement in management, supervision, and interaction with tourists. | Participation |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | | Interesting places in the Turgo area are not only for ritual activities but also an attraction that supports recreational elements. | Recreation |
| | | The Turgo area provides sustainable economic opportunities for the local community by connecting tourist attractions and local products and taking advantage of the momentum of tourist arrivals in various existing ritual activities. | Economy |
| 2 | Time | Time determines the rhythm of conservation activities to ensure that environmental conservation runs sustainably according to the season. The regular schedule for disaster mitigation in the region also supports environmental conservation. | Conservation |
| | | Time as a strategic factor in education. Example: disaster mitigation education can not only be delivered when the rainy season is approaching, but can also be delivered during the 1 Suro, 10 Suro, or 15 Sapar ritual events. In addition to being held on weekends or during the holiday season to reach more participants, ecoprint training can be done before or after the implementation of the ritual. | Education |
| | | Time as a framework for community participation. The scheduling of local community participation is carried out according to their needs and abilities so that tourism activities do not interfere with their daily activities or main work. | Participation |
| | | Time as a guide for recreational activities to optimize the comfort and safety of tourists. Example: trekking and bird watching are held in the morning or evening to avoid the hot weather and ensure the best experience. Special recreational events such as cultural arts performances associated with rituals can be held in the evening leading up to or after the ritual or during the holiday season. | Recreation |
| | | Time as a trigger for economic activities that can maximize community income opportunities according to the tourist visit cycle. Example: sales of local products such as ecoprints or specialty foods and homestays increase during national holidays or major events such as 1 Suro. | Economy |
| 3 | Ritual Objects and Tools | The use of natural materials in ritual objects and tools can support the preservation of natural resources. | Conservation |
| | | Ritual objects serve as a means of cultural and religious learning that can provide insight to tourists about the symbolic and ecological meanings behind the ritual objects and tools used. | Education |
| | | The process of making and using ritual objects and tools that actively involves the local community (local communities, religious leaders, and tourists) can create a collaborative experience. | Participation |

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|---|---|---|---|
| | | Ritual objects and tools become interesting visual and cultural elements that can enrich the tourist leisure experience. However, in the context of Turgo, ritual objects and tools have not been used as part of tourist attractions. | Recreation |
| | | The integration of ritual objects and tools with economic concepts can provide economic opportunities through ritual-based production, sales, and services. Because ritual objects and tools have not been used as part of tourist attractions, the economic benefits of ritual objects and tools have also not been felt by the Turgo people. | Economy |
| 4 | People | People or actors can play the role of protectors and managers of the ecosystem. | Conservation |
| | | People or actors can act as a source of knowledge and a learning facilitator for tourists and local communities. | Education |
| | | People or actors can play an active role in every tourism activity. | Participation |
| | | People or actors can act as service providers and participants in recreational activities. | Recreation |
| | | People or actors can play a role as the main driver in creating economic benefits from ecotourism activities, both through direct services and related products. | Economy |

Source: Data Analysis, 2024

Ecotourism prioritizes conservation, education, community participation, recreation, and sustainability-based economic development. The Turgo area, which is part of Mount Merapi National Park, offers a variety of ecotourism activities, including trekking, learning about coffee and tea, and seeing the natural phenomenon of lava flows. Environmental conservation principles are used in all these activities and tourists are educated about the urgency of preserving the ecosystem.

Religious tourism focuses on pilgrimages to places considered sacred by the local community. Tourists can see traditional rituals at these sacred places at certain times. Some examples are the Mapag Tanggal Ritual on 1 Suro, Haul Syekh Jumadil Kubro on 10 Suro, and the Merti Bumi Ritual on 15 Sapar. Visitors' spiritual experiences are complemented by ceremonies such as the presentation of ingkung, tumpeng, and offerings. However, because these rituals have not been packaged into tourist attractions, their economic value is not yet visible. In fact, one of the factors that needs to be considered in religious tourism is the economic factor (Datta, 2024). The development of religious tourism in areas with religious rituals and customs has a positive impact on job creation, increased income, and economic welfare (Budovich, 2023).

The main characteristic of the eco-religious model is that it can combine ecotourism and religious tourism into one complementary entity. Eco-religious tourism not only provides a spiritual experience through pilgrimage, but also allows tourists to participate in activities that support nature conservation, including participating in education about orchid conservation or learning about ecoprint, coffee and tea education, education on farms, and so on. On the other hand, special interest tourists such as trekking, lava flows, bird watching, and so on can respect pilgrims and the beliefs of local communities with various rituals that they do.

Active involvement of various stakeholders is the key to the success of this eco-religious tourism model. Local communities, religious leaders, communities, academics, and the government (through Gunung Merapi National Park Authority and Tourism Office of Sleman Regency) need to work together to ensure that environmental conservation, local culture, and economic growth can be in harmony. Pilgrims and donors, by providing direct donations to local communities, also have an important role in driving economic growth. Therefore, eco-religious tourism based on saujana model provides a broad idea that not only has a positive impact on environmental conservation, but also strengthens the social, cultural, and spiritual aspects of communities in areas that still practice religious values.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Turgo is part of the Gunung Merapi National Park (GMNP) area. Tourism in Turgo has been around for decades. In the context of tourism village, pilgrimage activities in this area have given rise to the pilgrimage tourism model which became the initial tourism model in Turgo. This model then developed into religious tourism and subsequently developed into special interest tour packages. Meanwhile, in the context of the buffer village of the national park, a form of special interest tourism has emerged that is completely unrelated to pilgrimage activities in Turgo Hill. This gives rise to two categories of tourism actors in Turgo, namely groups that are active in the tourism village and groups that are active in the buffer village. However, these two groups agreed that Turgo Hill and Petilasan Syekh Jumadil Kubro which are part of the GMNP have been a religious tourism attraction on the southern slopes of Mount Merapi for a long time.

Although it has not brought significant economic benefits, all residents agree that the existence of this maqam (petilasan) can be one of the media to introduce tourism activities in Turgo. From religious tourism activities, local people can introduce other special interest tour packages, for example, river and forest trekking tours and gardens around Turgo, Turgo tea and coffee processing educational tours, orchid education tours, bird watching, dairy goat agrotourism, Mount Merapi and incandescent lava tourism, as well as various other tourism potentials that are still being developed. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that eco-religious tourism based on saujana is a model that is considered to be able to link tourism developments planned in local government policy (ecotourism) and developments occurring in the field (religious tourism) as well as accommodating the economic and conservation interests of tourism villages and buffer villages. Thus, eco-religious tourism based on saujana refers to a tourism approach that integrates environmental conservation practices, ecosystem-based education, community participation, and appreciation of spiritual values sourced from religion to create a holistic tourism experience. This approach creates a balance between ecological sustainability and spirituality by involving local communities as key actors.

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