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## Converging Faith, Culture, and Nature: Tourism as a Pathway to Togetherness in Multi-Ethnic Lasem, Indonesia

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### Abstract

*Promoting social togetherness through educational institutions in diverse societies often encounters heightened sensitivity and resistance due to differences in religion, belief, culture, environment, and language, compared to approaches rooted in public activities such as tourism. In Indonesia, many tourism attractions originated as places of worship located in culturally significant areas, where local belief systems shape social and cultural practices. This study investigates how values of togetherness are practically manifested at the intersection of belief, nature, and sociocultural patterns in the tourism industry of Rembang, Indonesia. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving tourism practitioners, visitors, site caretakers, and local government officials. Triangulation was employed to ensure data saturation, and analysis was conducted ethnographically using Spradley's domain analysis. The findings reveal that the convergence of religious beliefs, sociocultural activities, and natural attractions fosters social cohesion among individuals from diverse backgrounds. This intersection not only sustains mutual understanding and appreciation of differences but also contributes to social harmony in Lasem, Rembang, enabling respectful interaction within a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multi-racial community.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, multiethnic, culture, nature, togetherness*

### Introduction

This research investigates how the values of togetherness are strengthened within the tourism sector by amalgamating three intersecting potentials of tourism attractions: religion/belief, nature, and the aesthetic appeal of cultural products, referred to as Tripots (Giyoto et al., 2022). This form of integration in tourism serves as an exemplary platform for interaction among religions, beliefs, ethnicities, and civilisations. The variety of religions, beliefs, faiths, and mythologies in Indonesia requires extensive discourse and contact among believers to promote mutual understanding and cohesion. This variety must be thoroughly controlled across all facets of adherents' lives, encompassing economic, social, cultural, educational, and religious spheres (N. Chen et al., 2021; Reisinger, 2009).

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Indonesia has had numerous horizontal conflicts stemming from ideological, belief-based, religious, mythical, and racial divides. Whether referred to as terrorism, radicalism, separatism, blasphemy, or other phenomena that disrupt societal and national cohesion. The tensions compel the Indonesian government to foster unity among followers of many religions and beliefs to manage diversity effectively.

The tourism sector facilitates communication among religious devotees, as most of Indonesia's tourist destinations are places of worship or ritual sites for various faiths (Marlina et al., 2024). The education sector lacks sufficient solutions due to its sensitivity to variety, particularly in religious-based institutions such as madrasahs, Christian schools, and Hindu schools. The institutions enhance diversity and resilience in understanding and acceptance of educational institutions across different religions (Abu Bakar, 2020). Tourism provides a more impartial and authentic comprehension of diversity, as it is enjoyable and voluntary, contingent upon the visitor's personal preferences. The beliefs or narratives associated with destinations serve as tourist attractions that ensure sustainability, as they reflect the daily concerns of local populations, who protect, sustain, maintain, and cultivate their interests regardless of tourist influx.

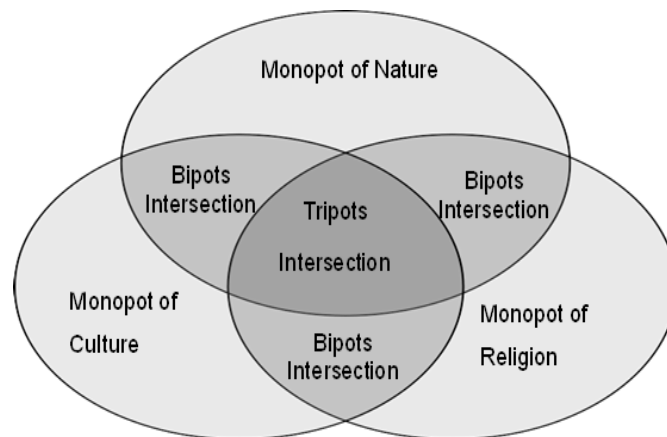
Tourists appreciate the sites by understanding local beliefs within diverse narratives. Consequently, there will be comprehension and forbearance about divergent ideas and religions, rendering social justice in religion a tangible reality, as exemplified by K.H. Abdurrahman Wahid's concept of "Keadilan Sosial dalam Agama," or "Social Justice in Religion" (Ihsani et al., 2021).

Misconceptions about various beliefs or religions can lead to extreme attitudes and behaviours when followers lack understanding or respect for others. Excessive expressions and reactions among religious devotees frequently infringe on human dignity and other fundamental rights. Consequently, it is imperative to devise diverse instruments, strategies, and collaborative efforts from all societal components, including community organisations, governmental institutions, and individuals engaged in activities that promote self-awareness and mutual respect among religious followers (Schiau, 2016).

The differences in knowledge and beliefs among various religions should be acknowledged with appreciation for their uniqueness and appeal, and they deserve respect from all followers. Religions and beliefs influence many cultures through perspectives, principles, and lived experiences. The mindset produces responses evident in daily behaviours, encompassing religious practices, social interactions, economic activities, and engagements with the external natural environment. Participation in religious activities, which also serve as tourist attractions, is an intriguing cultural practice among followers of various civilisations (Luo et al., 2023).

The contribution to sustainability in attractions is significant due to the extensive community involvement in their administration. The tourist sector is an up-and-coming and strategic tool for fostering religious moderation. In Indonesia, physical cultural artefacts, including religious sites such as mosques, temples, pagodas, and monasteries, combined with the natural splendour of mountains, beaches, rivers, caverns, and other natural wonders, make it a compelling tourist destination. Enhancing tourism destinations

involves optimising the three possible offerings: religion, culture, and nature (Giyoto et al., 2022).



**Figure 1 Tripod Model in Intersecting the Nature, Religion, and Culture Attractions (Giyoto et al., 2022)**

Efforts to integrate the three types of potential tourist attractions in Tripots serve to sustain religious harmony. Travelling serves as a means to appreciate the diversity of religious practices, natural landscapes, and cultural traditions that cater to the behaviours of moderate individuals and commercially viable tourist attractions. In 2016, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) concluded that the community's environment, culture, and religion could be used to develop a tourism concept. Furthermore, moderation in the tourism sector can serve as a new forum for government policymakers (Lin, 2021). The notion of fostering religious moderation is not exclusively centred on education and religion, a focus that may be particularly sensitive following the rise of diverse religiously based educational institutions. Religious moderation in tourism is much less sensitive than in other fields, which are usually will-focused, difference-based, voluntary, and pleasure-oriented. Through travel, visitors appreciate differences and gain moderating values, such as realising peace and harmony, a relatively neutral state, and a distance from ideological resistance among various religious adherents (Luo et al., 2023). This is where moderate dialogue occurs in the tourism industry, increasing knowledge and awareness (literacy) of moderation amid Indonesia's diversity.

Java Island is one of the islands in Indonesia, a multi-religious and multicultural country. The diversity of Javanese people stems from their religious, cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and traditional backgrounds, which reflect different patterns of thought and perception and form the basis of their behaviour. Multiculturalism often triggers tensions and conflicts between these differences. This conflict strengthens the division and disharmony of social and national life. This community life requires mutual understanding and awareness of differences in every aspect of life to strengthen respect for differences, pluralism, and fair tolerance. The community has and needs awareness of religious moderation and has respect for differences of opinion with various other people's views by not forcing their will with violence.

Recently, conflicts over religious differences have arisen in tourist destinations. Borobudur, a place of worship and a world tourist attraction, suddenly raised concerns regarding religious issues. The prohibition on tourists visiting places of worship of other religions sparked conflicts in some communities, as visitors sought to conduct religious tours (such as pilgrimages). The substantial prejudice between groups and the low level of mutual understanding among adherents lead to humanitarian conflicts that will trigger further conflicts, spreading in both type and perpetrators (Kreiner et al., 2015; Shtudiner et al., 2018). This wide range of conflict necessitates a long-term process of handling that entails tremendous social, economic, and political losses. Given the various symptoms of conflict and significant horizontal and national threats, it is urgent to undertake activities that explore tourism’s potential to develop the value of moderation.



**Figure 2 Community Involvement in Tourist Attractions**

The main objective of this study is to determine whether integrating religious, cultural, and natural tourist attractions, known as Tripots, is effective. As a moderator, I reinforce interreligious communities. The need for a multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multicultural society icon that serves as a role model and moderator amplifier. Lasem, located on the northern coast of Java, is known for its multi-ethnic and multicultural community life. The Lasem people are primarily of Chinese and Campa ethnic origins. The small town in the district of Rembang is known as the “City of *Santri*,” while Lasem is called “Little China” (Little Chinatown) because it was the first city in Java to receive Chinese immigrants brought by Admiral Cheng Ho, reflected in its historical Chinese settlements and cultural heritage (Wulandari et al., 2024). There is a gold-plated “Reclining Buddha” statue that can be featured in religious, cultural, and natural tourism promotions. Tourism development aims to improve the economies of coastal communities by attracting visitors to modernist areas that offer a mix of religious and cultural attractions, natural beauty, and physical cultural products in a single destination.

The harmony of the Lasem community has long been established, and there has never been any conflict among ethnic groups. Efforts to suppress disputes are carried out by establishing a pattern of attraction that maintains and respects religious and racial

differences, encompassing various religions such as Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other beliefs, as well as diverse racial backgrounds including Chinese, Arabic, Javanese, and others. The people of Lasem are accustomed to differences and have developed moderate values to reconcile them, which are conventionally upheld. The integration of religion, culture, and nature strengthens the moderation in tourism industry activities in Lasem, Central Java. Lasem has appeal, especially for its moderation values upheld by the Lasem community, serving as a role model for pilot community life and as a reference for other areas with plural societies in Indonesia (Widiarini & Respasti, 2020).

In recent years, religious conflicts have increasingly emerged in tourist destinations, exemplified by incidents at Borobudur, where restrictions on visits to places of worship by individuals of different faiths have sparked tensions and prejudice among communities. These conflicts highlight a broader issue of insufficient mutual understanding and tolerance, which can escalate into humanitarian crises with significant social, economic, and political repercussions. Addressing these challenges is crucial for fostering long-term social harmony and national stability. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating religious, cultural, and natural attractions—referred to as “Tripots”—as a unique approach to promoting moderation and interreligious harmony in tourism settings. By examining Lasem, a multi-ethnic and multicultural community renowned for its enduring social harmony and moderate values, this research seeks to identify how such integration can serve as a model for peaceful coexistence in plural societies. The central research question guiding this study is: How does the integration of religious, cultural, and natural tourism attractions in Lasem contribute to the development and reinforcement of moderation values and interreligious harmony, and what lessons can be drawn for other diverse communities in Indonesia?

### **Research Method**

This research employs a qualitative ethnographic method, utilising the Spreadley model. Ethnographic research focuses on describing the values of civilised society, which are arranged hierarchically. Hanurawan, Johnson & Christensen (Wijaya, 2018) stated that the ethnographic model is a qualitative research method that aims to describe the cultural characteristics of individuals or groups who have become members of a cultural community. Tourism research in Lasem is an ethnographic study of traditions, culture, and religion in multi-ethnic, multireligious, and multicultural community groups. All of that diversity fosters values of moderation that characterise Lasem’s community life. The convergence of diverse elements within the same civilisation, combined with its tourist attractions, creates an integrated experience forming “Tripots”. This highlights how varied elements unite to define the region’s unique social and tourism identity. The ethnographic method was employed due to its characteristic of sharp analysis of values, which in turn strengthens the values of religious moderation through tourism (Winarno, 2015). This study employs a purposive sampling method, clustering participants based on their engagement with tourist objects in Lasem that embody the values of religious moderation, focusing on

three key elements: religion, culture, and nature. Samples from eight tourist attractions are listed as follows: 1) Jami' Lasem Mosque Complex, 2) Cu An Kiong Temple Building, east of the Lasem River, 3) Po An Bio Temple Building, north of the Kemendung, 4) Gie Yong Bio Temple Building, west of the Lasem, 5) Vihara Ratanavana Arama, on the Telueng hill of Sendangcoyo village, 6) Laseman Batik Tourism Village, 7) Mak Co Tian Siang Sheng Bo Cultural Carnival.

The researchers conducted direct observations of the Lasem community's activities over a five-month period, focusing on moderation and tourism at sites of worship. These activities reinforce the ideals that tourists uphold in line with the regulations of the tourism industry. Additional data collection methods included in-depth interviews, open interviews, life histories, and document analysis. This study employs data-gathering techniques such as documents, open-ended questions, and interviews to investigate the role of tourism in promoting moderation within communities characterised by diverse racial and religious backgrounds and susceptible to horizontal conflicts. Respondents in this study included managers, visitors, traders, home industries, community members, community leaders, and others with knowledge and skills in developing the tourism industry. The research data were examined ethnographically, as conducted by Spradley (1979). This method employed a hierarchical study: 1) domain analysis, grounded in a complete assessment of the object or social context of each religious tourism attraction. 2) Analysis of taxonomies, derived from the categorisation or domain analysis of an object or social situation, serves as a step to promote open discourse regarding moderation values. 3) Component analysis, conducted by highlighting specific characteristics that reinforce the value of religious moderation in Lasem's tourism and civilisation, 4) Cultural unit analysis, intended to identify the common thread that connects tourism with religious moderation values in Lasem, alongside community life that emphasises moderation values. The data were subsequently examined to identify the infrastructure concepts and configurations associated with variations in visitor beliefs.

## Results and Discussion

Lasem is situated on the northern coast of Central Java, serving as a docking point for traders from diverse directions. Known as the City of Heritage (*Kota Pusaka*), Lasem possesses a unique culture that has endured over time. Lasem's cultural heritage possesses significant value, encompassing three key aspects: Natural Heritage (*Pusaka Alam*), which comprises beaches, mountains, and forests; Cultural Heritage (*Pusaka Budaya*), which includes Lasem arts, such as horse lumping, lion dance, *wayang*, *ketoprak* (*wayang orang*), various dances, Lasem batik, salt ponds, and the seafood industry (shrimp paste and salted fish), alongside the vibrant, tolerant lifestyle of the Lasem populace. Saujana's cultural-landscape legacy encompasses salt ponds, vessels, settlements, and hills. The definition of Lasem as a heritage city is clearly reflected in the Lasem batik pattern brochures, which emphasise the three heritage zones. The community's heritage, whether religious or occupational, does not serve as a distinguishing factor; the relationship is fluid, and the interaction among ethnic groups has persisted for a long time. By embracing tolerance,

Lasem is evolving into a multicultural region. The cultural diversity within the Lasem community represents a social, political, and economic phenomenon that facilitates harmonisation and cultural acculturation (Astuti et al., 2019).

### Religion Domain

In the domain of Islamic practices in Lasem, three events serve as tourism attractions: Haul *Mbah Sambu*, the Commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, and the Commemoration of National *Santri* Day. The Haul *Mbah Sambu* is held annually on the 14th of Dzulhijjah to honour *Mbah Sambu*'s contributions as a significant community leader among the Lasem populace. *Mbah Sambu*, a scholar of the Prophet's lineage, was a prominent figure in the dissemination of Islam in Lasem. During that period, the Lasem region encompassed Sedayu Gresik, Tuban, Rembang, Pati, and Jepara. *Mbah Sambu*, son-in-law of Adipati Lasem, received an inheritance in Kauman village, encompassing the location of the present Jami' Lasem Mosque, for his contributions to security and stability. In commemoration of the birth and grandeur of the Prophet Muhammad. The residents of Lasem exhibit great enthusiasm in disseminating the message of Allah SWT, which is why Lasem is recognised as the city of *Santri* (Islamic school pupils). It is unsurprising that, in observance of *Santri* Day, the students in Lasem convened in the courtyard of the Jami Mosque to conduct the ceremony. The local community assists in preparing facilities and infrastructure for these activities (Astuti et al., 2019).

Islamic religious festivals in Lasem, such as Haul *Mbah Sambu*, the Commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's Birthday, and National *Santri* Day, serve as notable tourist attractions and illustrate broader trends in Indonesia's religious tourism. A recent global study highlights the significance of these traditions in promoting cultural heritage, social unity, and local tourism economies.

Studies demonstrate that commemorative activities such as haul (memorials for religious figures), *maulid* (celebration of the Prophet's birthday), and *Santri* (Islamic student) festivities are vital to religious tourism in Indonesia. These activities attract both residents and visitors from other regions and countries, elevating the area's status as a "city of *Santri*" and strengthening the local economy (Faiz et al., 2023; Rusmana et al., 2024; Uyuni et al., 2024).

Research underscores that these religious celebrations promote societal cooperation, intergenerational learning, and the preservation of Islamic principles. The participation of local communities in the organisation and support of these events fortifies communal ties and underscores the significance of religious leaders (*kyai*) as pivotal individuals in community life (Faiz et al., 2023; Rusmana et al., 2024).

Islamic religious celebrations in Indonesia frequently integrate local cultural aspects with Islamic traditions, resulting in distinctive forms of celebration. Acculturation manifests in the amalgamation of Javanese, Chinese, and Islamic traditions in locales such as Lasem, as well as in the accessibility of holy sites to non-Muslim visitors, fostering inclusion and interfaith appreciation (Kadri, 2022).

In Lasem's religious field, two main activities are considered tourist attractions: the Carnival *Makco* and the Chinese New Year Celebration. This *Makco* carnival was held to commemorate the birthday of *Makco* Tian Siang Sing Bo. This commemoration was held by the oldest temple, Cu An Kiong, in Lasem, and was the largest carnival ever held there. In celebration of the Chinese New Year, people from various religions gather to contribute to the festivities in some way. Although the Chinese New Year is a holiday for the Chinese, the local Muslim community may assist during the procession. In terms of Buddhist activities in Lasem, there are many big day celebrations, such as Maha Puja, Vesak, Asada, and Kathina. In Lasem, the celebration included people from various religions. On Sunday, July 17, 2022, Buddhists perform Asadha. Asadha is one of the Buddhist holidays commemorating the first time Gautama Buddha taught the Dhamma to five ascetics, namely the *Dhammacakka Pavatana Sutta* (The Sermon on the Spinning of the Wheel of Dhamma). Asadha is done on foot in groups. Asadha is performed two months after Vesak, or in July (Mandaka et al., 2024; Sudarwani et al., 2020). The result is based on previous documentation and confirmed by an interview with a staff member of the Regency Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs:

“The 2012 *Kirab Makco* was the most well-attended event, attracting thousands of spectators and featuring a parade of 53 *kiemsien* (deity statues) from various temples across cities in Java, Bali, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi. Community participation played a significant role in enlivening this event. People from diverse religious backgrounds contributed harmoniously and with tolerance, as highlighted in interviews, including Muslim residents who assisted in carrying the sacred heirlooms of the deities and other community members who helped carry the leang-leong or Chinese dragon” (staff of Regency Office of Ministry of Religious Affairs, 26 July 2022).

### **Cultural Domain**

Cultural items are delineated within the cultural domain. Cultural products may manifest as either experiential or tangible items. The outcomes of cultural activities are evident at numerous religious tourism sites (Nuriata, 2014). Lasem hosts numerous cultural activities, including the *Mrico Bandeng* Festival, *Dusun* cleaning, *Sedekah Laut*, blood donation drives, community service prior to Buddhist holiday celebrations, *Bancaan* or Christian *Selamatan*, *Barongsai* performances during Chinese New Year, *Iftar* activities, village cleaning at Oemah Batik Lasem, and *Sedekah Bumi* at *Karas Gedhe*. The second cultural artefact is a tangible product. Lasem Rembang features various physical cultural artefacts, including Oemah Batik Lasem and the architecture of the Jami' Mosque.

The *Mrico Bandeng* Festival in Dasun Village exemplifies the impact of community-driven cultural festivals in maintaining intangible cultural heritage, reinforcing local identity, and promoting sustainable tourism. Dasun, as a Cultural Advancement Village, utilises its marine traditions—encompassing traditional fishing, local cuisine, and artisanal crafts—to promote community engagement and intergenerational knowledge exchange. This aligns with global studies indicating that festivals serve as integrative venues for both tangible and intangible heritage, fostering social cohesion and community pride while also

enhancing local economic development through tourism and creative economy initiatives” (Koumoutsea et al., 2023; Perry et al., 2019; Qiu et al., 2022).

Research indicates that the active participation of local communities in the organisation and engagement of festivals enhances the authenticity of the experience, amplifies emotional involvement, and fosters enduring cultural and social legacies (L.-J. Chen, 2015; Koenig-Lewis et al., 2021; Rodríguez Campo et al., 2024). Moreover, these events can invigorate local economies by attracting visitors, promoting regional products, and bolstering small businesses, as evidenced in several global contexts (Koumoutsea et al., 2023). The incorporation of environmental stewardship initiatives, such as community cleanups, exemplifies best practices in sustainable event management (Qiu et al., 2022).

### **Village Cleaning**

The village cleaning activity in Dasun Village, particularly around the Cu An Kiong Temple and *Babagan* River, exemplifies a collaborative, community-based approach to environmental management in rural tourism development. This initiative involves local leaders and residents from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds, reflecting inclusivity and social cohesion:

“people from all the backgrounds come together to clean the village, streets, bringing cleaning tools; so the streets become clean and neat. The Chinese becomes closed to the local people” (staff of Regency Office of Ministry of Religious Affairs, 27 July).

This moment makes them share togetherness among different ethnicities, religions and sociocultural backgrounds. Such community participation is widely recognized in recent international research as a critical factor for the sustainability and success of rural tourism destinations. In recent studies, community social ties are strengthened, environmental quality is greatly improved, and a sense of ownership is fostered when residents actively participate in environmental governance through activities like planning cleanup days. In rural tourist situations, where environmental cleanliness directly affects the destination’s appeal and competitiveness, these efforts are particularly crucial (Fan et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). Community participation in such programs is primarily driven by motivation, opportunity, and ability; long-term sustainability depends on local leadership and group action (Cvijanović et al., 2025).

Research demonstrates that community-led environmental initiatives, such as frequent village and river cleanups, enhance the physical environment and the tourism communities’ reputation and long-term viability. For rural tourism to grow sustainably, these initiatives must support environmental preservation, uphold cultural values, and improve the overall traveller experience. Additionally, regardless of religion or ethnicity, inclusive involvement ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed equitably and strengthens social cohesion (Cvijanović et al., 2025).

### ***Sedekah Laut***

In Dasun village, fishermen observe a custom known as *Sedekah Laut* (Alms of the Sea) to show their appreciation for the marine resources that have been their primary source of income, as well as for the blessings and nourishment they provide. For the fishermen of Dasun Village, this annual celebration is a religious occurrence. At the exact moment, all 10 of the Dasun fishermen's boats emerged from the river's mouth. Beautiful banners are hung on dozens of boats, painted in a variety of colours. Fish, anchovies, crabs, crab squid, rebon, prawns and other seafood are examples of larung (sea offerings). The *Sedekah Laut* event peaked when it touched down on Gosong Island, which is roughly three kilometres from the Dasun River's mouth. Corals found on Gosong Island, a dead island created by receding tide, are typically taken home by locals following the Lomban procession. In the native tongue, the Alms Sea is called Lomban. Before the *Ketoprak* event, which takes place both during the day and at night, the Lomban procession is held in the morning, around 9:00 WIB. In addition to the Dasun community, several other rural groups in the Lasem District also participate in Lomban. Dozens of competing ships awaited the core ship that had delivered the food. Other boats leave after the offering boat.

"Food was delivered to the burned island by the other boats. The boat circled the burned island after reaching it, tossing offerings in the shape of goat or cow heads. After eating the food and provisions they brought, the group headed back to Dasun hamlet, the river's mouth, with coral souvenirs" (Farah, a local participant of the event, 28 July 2022).

Alms of the Sea, is a deeply rooted annual tradition among the fishermen of Dasun Village, serving as an expression of gratitude for the sea's bounty and a plea for continued blessings and safety. The ritual involves a vibrant procession in which dozens of colourfully decorated fishing boats set out together from the Dasun River, carrying offerings such as fish, shrimp, crabs, and other marine products. The highlight of the event is the communal gathering on Gosong Island, a sandbar formed by receding tides, where offerings are cast into the sea, and participants share food and camaraderie before returning home with coral souvenirs.

In addition to being a holy rite, this custom is a form of social togetherness that preserves cultural legacy, fortifies ties within the community, and strengthens local identity. Its importance in Java's broader coastal culture is evident in the fact that *Sedekah Laut*, also known locally as *Lomban*, is practised not only in Dasun but also in neighbouring villages in the Lasem District.

According to recent research, these maritime rituals are essential for preserving social cohesion, passing on indigenous ecological knowledge, and fostering long-term connections with marine habitats. Additionally, these rituals are viewed as platforms for intergenerational knowledge transfer and as adaptive techniques for managing environmental uncertainties (Prasetyo, 2023; Purmintasari et al., 2025).

## **Blood Donation**

Another routine event held at the Vihara is blood donation. This blood donation is carried out every 3 months at the Ratanavana Arama Vihara. Participants came not only from Buddhist backgrounds but also from various ethnic and religious groups. The following is an excerpt from an interview by *Bhikkhu Piyadhiro Thera*. This blood donation activity was attended by a diverse group of people, not only from the area closest to Lasem, but also by those who were aware of the blood donor activity at this monastery. The result is based on an interview:

“This blood donation activity was attended by members of various communities, not only from areas in proximity to Lasem, but also from those who became aware of the blood donation event held at this Vihara” (Bhikkhu Piyadhiro Thera, 28 July 2022).

Recent studies show that Buddhist holiday celebrations, such as Vesak and Kathina, often involve communal activities, including cleaning temple grounds, preparing food, and organising ceremonies. These acts of service are seen as expressions of *dana* (generosity) and communal harmony, engaging both Buddhists and non-Buddhists in temple activities (N. Chen et al., 2021; Geary & Shinde, 2021).

Research shows that Buddhist temples frequently invite residents, regardless of religious background, to participate in preparations and festivities. This inclusivity fosters social cohesion and mutual respect within diverse communities. Some temples provide compensation or gifts to local helpers as a sign of respect and to acknowledge their contributions, especially when non-Buddhists are involved. This practice strengthens community bonds and supports positive interfaith relations (Geary & Shinde, 2021; Shinde, 2025).

### ***Bancaan or Christian's Selametan***

*Bancaan* is an act of thanksgiving to God for His abundant pleasure. Not only the Muslims who do it, but other people as well, such as Christians. In this event, Christians invite people of other religions to attend. This cultural activity is carried out after the construction of a Christian place of worship is completed. Usually, people of other religions attend this activity. Food from the *Bancaan* activity is served to all attendees. Notably, the food has been categorised by its religious origins. Christians do this to respect the beliefs of other religions.

### ***Barongsai Performances in Chinese New Year Celebrations***

Each Chinese New Year, Oemah Batik Lasem organises a *Barongsai* (Lion Dance) performance. Due to the center's location within a Klenteng (a Chinese place of worship), concerts are occasionally conducted at Oemah Batik and at the Klenteng (pagodas) as well. The deployment of several people makes the operations straightforward, requiring neither committee endorsement nor extensive involvement. This activity aims to participate in the celebration of the significant day; therefore, financial gifts from Oemah Batik Lasem are infrequent, as Oemah Batik Lasem is self-sustaining. This description is based on documentation and interviews:

“The event organisers are of Chinese descent; however, the implementation process involves the local community regardless of their religious affiliation. In addition, the Temple also invites religious leaders from other faiths to participate in and observe the Chinese New Year celebration procession” (Mr Bambang, the manager of Cu An Kiong Temple, 29 July 2022).

### ***Iftar* Activities**

Oemah Batik Lasem, situated in a Muslim community, organises an *Iftar* dinner each year to demonstrate its commitment to Islamic traditions. *Iftar* is reserved solely for the local community and neighbours of Oemah Batik Lasem, and is not available to the general public. The dinner is also prepared in compliance with Islamic regulations.

“this activity is primarily intended for Muslims; however, neighbours of Chinese heritage or from any other ethnic background are also invited to the lunch” (Oemah Batik’s staff, 27 July 2022).

They partake in their meals concurrently, adhering to Muslim practice during the breaking of their fast, ensuring that no one commences before the others.

### **Village Cleaning at Oemah Batik Lasem**

The Oemah Batik Lasem complex also hosts cultural events, such as village cleanups, in which numerous Chinese, indigenous, and student participants often take part. The objective of this village cleaning is to improve the vicinity of Tiongkok Kecil. It is commonly utilised by young males to clear obstructions from roadways, ditches, and vegetation. This prevalent activity fosters harmony by facilitating social connections among the local community. The local community consistently engages in this annual event, held at the Lasem batik home.

“Lion dance performances, primarily executed by non-Chinese individuals, usually interrupt the ceremonies. The dance is accompanied by Javanese instruments ... Gamelan as the combination between Chinese and Javanese” (Oemah Batik’s staff, 27 July 2022).

Moreover, several Javanese arts are often showcased during lion dance performances. Activities are accessible to anyone, regardless of perspective, thanks to the Lasem community’s enduring togetherness. Consequently, they now convene in this shared space, providing mutual support to ensure the event’s success.

### ***Sedekah Bumi* at Karas Gedhe**

The Lasem District and even Rembang Regency have a heritage of *Sedekah Bumi*, or “Alms of the Earth.” Along with the ceremonial procession to the tomb, *Ketoprak*, *Wayang*, and *Dangdut* are also performed.

“to greet visitors from outside the village or other family members, the community typically also opens the home’s door and serve local foods besides meet at the procession” (staff of Regency Office of Ministry of Religious Affairs, 26 July 2022).

The locals have a beautiful customary ceremony called the Alms of the Earth, which expresses respect and appreciation for the community, as they consider the crop and its natural beauty gifts from God. Alms of the earth in Rembang have their own value, as evidenced by the *Dumbek* cake, a special dessert that is the community's favourite. Cuisine that resembles this *Lepet* cake and has a sweet flavour similar to Chinese *Keranjang* cakes or *Dodol* Cina, which are served at Chinese New Year festivities. This big event was visited by all the people from all the different backgrounds having peace, happiness, and relaxation togetherness.

### **The architecture of the Jami' Mosque**

The architecture of the Jami' Mosque reflects the diversity of the Lasem community, comprising various ethnicities and religions. It combines elements from three religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, as well as Chinese elements. The main building is characterised by a blend of Islamic, Chinese, and Buddhist-Hindu ornamentation. The combination of Islamic and Hindu-Buddhist ornaments is evident in the relics of the Mustoko Masjid, a testament to the transition from the classical period (Majapahit) to Islam. According to an interview with Abdullah, Mustoko of the mosque, a Batarakala relief is said to depict the peaceful arrival of Islam in Lasem, coexisting with the previous civilisation. Mustoko mosque consists of three steps that symbolise the unity of Islam's principles: Faith and Ihsan. The Tejokusumo pavilion features a combination of Islamic and Chinese ornaments, culminating in a dragon at its end, which symbolises the mythological animal revered in Chinese beliefs. In addition, a small building in front of the mosque features ornaments typical of China. The result is based on interviews:

“At the end of 2021, the Lasem Mosque complex underwent major renovations, including the addition of several new buildings such as the Nusantara Islamic Museum and other improvements to the mosque itself. As both a place of worship and a site for religious tourism, the Jami' Mosque complex has become increasingly crowded with pilgrims and other visitors who stop by during holidays in Lasem or for various other purposes. Typically, visitors come either to perform prayers and have meals en route, or specifically to make pilgrimages to the graves within the Jami' Mosque complex. Although the Jami' Mosque serves as a Muslim religious tourism destination, there are no restrictions for non-Muslim visitors; in fact, the mosque is very open to those who wish to learn about its history, provided they continue to respect the prevailing norms” (mosque administrators, 27 July 2022).

### **Oemah Batik Lasem**

In contrast to other batiks, Lasem is recognised as the city of Batik Tulis, or hand-made *batik*, which has a distinct personality. Lasem has earned the moniker “city of hand-written batik” for its long history of producing Lasem batik goods. Additionally, there are other batik manufacturing facilities spread across multiple towns in Lasem. Babagan village is home to the Lasem batik tourism hamlet, also referred to as the batik tourism centre. It has a showcase displaying each production house's batik designs. Karangturi is one of the

numerous villages that make batik, though Babagan is the best-known batik tourism village. Oemah Batik Lasem, which is close to Tiongkok Kecil, is frequently visited by tourists due to poor management and organisation within the batik tourism village, as well as the substantial distance between the manufacturing houses. Visitors can experience batik and watch the making process there as an alternative.

On the Oemah Batik Lasem tour, visitors may see how Chinese and Javanese motifs are combined, learn about the intricate history of Lasem batik, and get hands-on experience with batik artisans to gain a thorough understanding of the entire process. The building's design emphasises Chinese architectural style, as Oemah Lasem Batik is situated within a small Chinese compound; nonetheless, Javanese decoration may be integrated into the design. The Lasem batik house employs persons of many social backgrounds, including both Muslim and non-Muslim personnel. Chinese-born entrepreneurs in Lasem founded Lasem Batik. He created a style that blends local Javanese and Chinese cultural influences by making batik for the Chinese community. Even now, batik is still evolving and growing. Consequently, several motifs emerged, including Mount *Ringgit*, *Latohan*, and *Sekar Jagad Tiga Negeri*. The designs and colours of traditional Solo or Yogyakarta batik are very different from the distinctive style and pattern of Batik Lasem.

“The Hong Bird, Liong, or Dragon, Ringgit Mountain, and Kricak, or fractured stone, are the four motifs found in Lasem Batik” (Oemah Batik, 27 July 2022).

In general, Chinese cultural motifs are used, whereas non-Chinese cultural patterns are used by the *Sekar* universe, *Kendoro Kendiri*, *Kricak*, *Grinsing*, and others. This adaptation then manifests as a fusion of Javanese plant themes with animal motifs, such as fish and dragons. This store intersects the different cultures of China, Jogjakarta, and Solo, sustaining and symbolizing their togetherness.

## **Nature Domain**

### **The Natural View of Cu an Kiong Temple as a Religious Tourism Destination**

Dasun Beach, which is currently being turned into a tourist-friendly beach, is next to the temple. Due to its opposite location, Dasun Beach offers a natural vista comparable to Caruban Beach in East Java, and many tourists camp there. Tourists outside the Rembang region are not familiar with this beach, which remains comparatively quiet. Dasun Beach is still under construction and lacks amenities such as restrooms and prayer rooms. Nonetheless, it is pretty close to the locals' homes and the prayer room.

### **Natural View at the Oemah Batik Lasem Tourism Complex**

While Babagan serves as the focal point of this attraction, it has also extended to Soditan, Karangturi, Karas Kepoh, and Karas Gede. Visitors may take rural nature tours at Lengkowo Park in the village of Karas Gedhe if they choose to explore batiks in Lasem independently. Lengkowo Park is a natural attraction with numerous photo spots showcasing its picturesque landscape and traditional Lasem cuisine. One of the cash fields of the Karasgede community is named Lengkowo, meaning “the centre of the village.”

Lengkowo refers to an inherited rice field. As its name suggests, Lengkowo has emerged as the economic hub of the Karasgede Village community. Assisted by village leaders, local institutions, and BUMDes management via *Musdes*, Karasgede Village has emerged as a tourist destination in Rembang Regency. The primary objective is to enhance the village community's revenue for its well-being. The establishment of Lengkowo Park Tourism and a Traditional Market has been resolved. Our observations suggest that Lengkowo has numerous picturesque photo spots. A trip that showcases the village's natural splendour and offers an array of gastronomic delights. On exceptional occasions, these trips generally feature a performance stage with entertainment.

The *Trembesi* tree and Lengkowo Park are two natural attractions within the batik tourism village. This tree species is renowned for its substantial size, numerous branches and twigs, and shady foliage. The *Trembesi* tree is situated next to *Pusaka Beruang*, a batik producer based in Lasem, within the Karasjajar settlement. This site, commonly known as the Giant *Trembesi* Tree, is a prominent attraction in Lasem. A tomb is located in the batik artisans' residence, adjacent to the colossal *Trembesi* tree.

“the pavilion of this tomb functions as a distinctive site for farmers to find solace or rest when fatigued. Entry to the Giant Banyan Tree area is free of charge” (Yanto, Community Leader, 26 July 2022).

The Lasem Banyan tree is around five km from Lasem Market. Santoso, the owner of *Batik Bear*, indicated that “he has orchestrated numerous batik fairs in the area, which have become a significant attraction for both residents and tourists”. This natural beauty is integrated with Batik, a local market visited by various visitors who engage in dialogue about differences in their togetherness.

### **Mountain View at Ratanavana Arama Monastery**

In 1976, Bhante Sudhammo Mahathera founded Ratanavana Arama Vihara. It is located in the community of Dukuh Tluweng in the mountainous area of Lasem City. Lasem was chosen for the temple's construction due to its historical significance as a prominent Buddhist centre in Indonesia since the Majapahit era. The Ratanavana Arama Vihara once encompassed a mere one hectare. Donors facilitated the expansion of the Vihara to 8 hectares, encompassing a 30-by-30-meter Dhammasala.

Unlike previous journeys, this site's natural beauty is the focal point, situated in the highlands and captivating visitors' gaze. Panoramic views of the picturesque city of Lasem and the expansive ocean are seen from an elevated vantage point by people of many different backgrounds. Lasem is at its most beautiful at night, when the city's streets are vibrant with bustle.

### **Discussion**

The tourism sector in Indonesia plays a significant role in promoting religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue by leveraging the country's diverse religious heritage and sacred sites. Religious tourism destinations, such as mosques, temples, and pilgrimage

sites, serve as platforms where visitors from different faiths engage in mutual understanding and respect, fostering social cohesion and religious moderation (Munawar et al., 2021; Safitri, 2024). For example, the establishment of religious tourism villages that represent multiple religions has been shown to reduce conflicts and encourage cooperation among communities through government support and academic involvement (Rahmat et al., 2025). Inclusive Islam is promoted in tourist areas such as Lombok through education and cultural events that integrate tolerant Islamic teachings with tourism activities, highlighting the economic and social benefits of these approaches (Kadri, 2022). Halal tourism management and religiously friendly tourism strategies emphasize religious moderation by balancing respect for diverse beliefs with support for local economic development. Overall, religious tourism in Indonesia not only enhances the country's appeal as a travel destination but also serves as an effective means of fostering religious harmony and unity in its pluralistic society (Abdulahanaa, 2021; Soi et al., 2023).

The population of Lasem is renowned for its ethnic and cultural diversity. Situated on the northern coastline of Java. The predominant immigrant groups in Lasem are the Chinese and Campa populations. The City of *Santri* is an alternative designation for this minor locality in the Rembang area. Lasem is known as "Little China" (or "Little Chinatown") because Admiral Cheng Ho was the first Chinese to arrive in Java. The researcher analyses how the Lasem tourism site and community activities bolster the principle of inter-religious tolerance (Reisinger, 2009). Initially, multiple religions coexist inside Lasem's religious domain. The predominant religions of Lasem are Confucianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism. The findings of our investigation indicate that Lasem's interfaith community is permitted to practise their diverse religions freely. Lasem has a practice called "*Gotong Royong*," where followers of several religions collaborate to commemorate each religion's holidays. This may signify the degree of emphasis placed on interreligious tolerance in that context.

The cultural realm, encompassing cultural activities and tangible cultural artefacts, is where values of unity may be located. The various cultural activities of Lasem, including the *Mrico Bandeng* Festival, *Clean Dusun*, *Sea Alms*, and celebrations of Chinese New Year and Buddhist holidays, embody the principles of moderation. Our observations of these activities clearly indicate the importance of highlighting the collaboration among the racial communities in Lasem in organising these cultural events. This demonstrates the significant moderating influence of the cultural domain, as anticipated by the dialogue among ethnic groups. This conversation promotes an interchange of ideas that strengthens each cultural group in society, leading to moderate values and a harmonious Lasem community (Astuti et al., 2019).

The aforementioned aligns with the natural domain. The buildings and cultural-historical sites intimately linked to the diverse cultures, religions, and ethnicities of the Lasem people are the principal attractions within the breathtaking natural setting that encircles Lasem, a renowned tourist destination. The Lasem community, typically involved in these activities, is reminded of the importance of moderation by the tourism site, which requires maintenance, particularly in the *Gotong Royong* regions where these activities

take place. Tourists from many backgrounds can appreciate the natural beauty while exploring how the local cultural past mirrors their own experiences. Researchers assert that this will enhance tourists' receptiveness to diverse encounters, informed by their personal histories. Consequently, emerging knowledge and insights from tourism will further emphasise the importance of dialogue on togetherness for travellers visiting Lasem.

Recent incidents at Borobudur illustrate that restrictions on access to places of worship for adherents of other faiths have resulted in heightened tensions and prejudice within local communities, leading to an upsurge in religious conflicts at tourist sites. Such conflicts underscore a more pervasive issue: a lack of tolerance and understanding among individuals, which, if neglected, can escalate into humanitarian disasters with significant social, political, and economic consequences. To foster enduring social tranquility and national stability, these matters must be addressed.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on integrating religious, cultural, and natural attractions—termed “Tripots”—as a distinctive approach to promoting togetherness and interfaith collaboration. This corresponds with recent research indicating that social cohesion and interfaith collaboration can be fostered through sustainable tourism development rooted in local knowledge and inclusive cultural values. For example, the Balinese Hindu principles of *Tat Twam Asi* and *Menyama-Braya*, when fostered through active community engagement and an embrace of diversity, have been shown to strengthen social cohesion and facilitate sustainable tourism (Mulyana & Busro, 2025). Research in various Indonesian contexts underscores the significance of religious moderation and indigenous knowledge in promoting interfaith harmony and tolerance, particularly via shared cultural practices and community-oriented activities (Pajarianto et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025; Sulvinajayanti et al., 2025).

Lasem, as a multi-ethnic and multicultural community, offers a compelling model for peaceful coexistence. The integration of religious, cultural, and natural tourist attractions in Lasem facilitates the development and reinforcement of values of togetherness and interreligious harmony. Community activities such as joint religious celebrations, cultural festivals, and collective maintenance of heritage sites exemplify the practice of “gotong royong” (mutual cooperation), which has been identified as a key driver of social cohesion in diverse societies (Pajarianto et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2025; Sulvinajayanti et al., 2025). Empirical studies from Vietnam and other Southeast Asian contexts further support the notion that interfaith interaction, shared cultural values, and strong community leadership are significant predictors of social bonding and trust (Luo et al., 2023; Ngoc, 2025).

Moreover, the tourism sector serves as a strategic platform for dialogue and engagement among religious groups, leveraging the natural and cultural richness of destinations to promote mutual understanding and, ultimately, strengthen values of togetherness. Research indicates that community-based tourism and inclusive management of cultural heritage sites can reduce the potential for conflict and enhance social resilience (Mtapuri et al., 2021; Wakil et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of such approaches depends on the active involvement of local stakeholders, inclusive policies, and the cultivation of empathy-driven communication (Sari et al., 2025; Seran, 2025).

Studies published consistently demonstrate that social harmony in plural societies is cultivated through lived relationships, inclusive communication, and sustained intergroup engagement rather than mere normative discourse. Examining the relationship between the Gusdurian Community and the Gereja Kristen Jawi Wetan, Wijanarka & Anggun Purnama Sari (2023) show that tolerance is practiced through everyday cooperation, mutual recognition, and ethical commitment to human dignity, allowing pluralism to emerge as a shared social experience. At the institutional level, Yusuf & Mutiara (2022) argue that the dissemination of religious moderation through the Ministry of Religious Affairs' digital platforms plays a strategic role in shaping public awareness, framing tolerance and inclusivity as collective responsibilities essential to social cohesion. Complementing this perspective, Syihabuddin et al. (2024) highlight the significance of inclusive religious education rooted in local wisdom, demonstrating how academic spaces can function as dialogical arenas that nurture respect across religious and cultural boundaries. Similarly, Hilmi (2025), a study on social interaction in multicultural Bandung, illustrates that harmony is sustained through frequent interpersonal encounters, community collaboration, and the active involvement of religious leaders in fostering openness and trust. Collectively, these findings affirm that pluralism, moderation, and inclusivity are not abstract ideals but embodied social practices that enable diverse communities to coexist with empathy, respect, and shared commitment to peaceful coexistence.

In summary, integrating religious, cultural, and natural attractions into tourism not only enriches visitor experiences but also serves as a powerful tool for advancing the dialogue of togetherness, strengths, and interreligious harmony. The case of Lasem demonstrates that inclusive, community-driven tourism models can provide valuable lessons for other diverse communities in Indonesia and beyond.

## **Conclusion**

This study suggests that the intersection of religious, cultural, and natural tourism attractions in Lasem has, as a stage of dialogues about differences, promoted togetherness. This fosters mutual respect and social harmony among residents and visitors. Togetherness creates tolerance, fairness, and balance, which are actively fostered through joint festivals, interfaith heritage paths, and inclusive infrastructure. Lasem shows how internalised moderation principles, cultivated through experience tourism and integrated into municipal administration, can convert diversity into a basis for social cohesion and integrated pluralism, providing a reproducible model for peaceful coexistence in heterogeneous communities. Lasem, Rembang, distinguished by its socially heterogeneous society, including several ethnicities, religions, and cultures, including Javanese, Chinese, and Arab ancestors adhering to Islam, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, constitutes an exemplary subject pool for this study. The diversity characterising Lasem, evident in its distinctive architectural fusion of Chinese temples (*klenteng*) alongside historic mosques and dynamic local traditions, makes its social life an intriguing subject of study, especially the cohesion that develops over centuries of interaction and shared history. The research findings indicate that specific tourism destinations in Lasem have successfully

integrated religious, cultural, and natural attractions. This includes heritage walking tours featuring *klentengs*, *masjids*, and batik workshops within coastal landscapes, which promote a sense of togetherness among locals and visitors, thereby enhancing mutual respect during shared experiences. The principles underlying many tourism initiatives and activities in Lasem, such as joint cultural festivals and interfaith history trails, include tolerance, fairness, and balance, as articulated by Shihab (2020). To sustain social cohesion by guaranteeing fair involvement and honouring varied traditions. Multiple tourism sectors in Lasem have adopted these ideals, vigorously advocated by community leaders and tourism operators, promoting harmony and public order among management, tourism advocates, visitors, and communities through continuous discussion and collaborative initiatives.

Therefore, it is essential to use the principles of religious moderation, derived from these microcosms of collaboration, within the broader community to foster a harmonious existence beyond the tourism sphere and tackle larger societal issues. The facilities and infrastructure, comprising well-preserved heritage sites, inclusive visitor centres providing multilingual information, and community spaces designed for interaction, have been established to embody the principles of religious moderation by ensuring that shared spaces are accessible and inviting to all. The ideals of togetherness values become more nuanced and evident when they are understood and internalised through tourism activities that offer experiential learning and a variety of personal interactions. Lasem, as both a community and a tourist attraction, has fostered moderate ideals that effectively promote its vast diversity, transforming potential sources of conflict into possibilities for connection. The values ingrained in local governance and community organisations have elevated Lasem from mere coexistence of diverse groups to a highly functional social order, particularly evident in its tourist attractions, where diverse groups collaborate harmoniously for mutual benefit and cultural preservation, establishing a model of integrated pluralism.

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