

# The Mosque as a Hybrid Space: A Place for Worship and Tourism

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## Research article

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The Mosque as a Hybrid Space: A Place for  
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## Abstract.

Historical and cultural tourism have many benefits, not only for the preservation of objects but also for the tourists as connoisseurs. As the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia has many mosques as places of worship for Muslim people. There are also many mosques that have historical and cultural values. Several mosques in Indonesia are used as religious tourism sites, but their activities are limited to pilgrimages. However, in Malaysia and Singapore, mosques are also used as part of historical and cultural tour packages for anyone, to demonstrate cultural diversity, cultural understanding, tolerance between religions, Islamic history, and the history of mosques and the surrounding Muslim community. This study aimed to examine how the two neighboring countries in Southeast Asia make mosques a hybrid space as a place of worship as well as a tourism location. This research used a case study approach, focusing on two mosques, namely the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque in Johor, Malaysia and the Jamae Mosque in Chulia, Singapore. The results of this study can be used by planners, designers and managers to develop mosques as part of a historical and cultural tourism landscape in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** cultural landscape, historical landscape, Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque Johor, Jamae Mosque (Chulia) Singapore, Southeast Asia mosque

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is the largest archipelago country in the world. Its location between two continents and two oceans makes Indonesia become a country that rich in biodiversity and culture. Moreover, Indonesia is the country that has a largest Moslem in the world even though Indonesia is not a Moslem country.

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The diversity possessed by Indonesia has a great influence on its cultural product included the building places of worship. The mosque is a place of worship for Moslem. As a country with large Moslem population, Indonesia has many mosques throughout the country.

Mosques in Indonesia have a very diverse character due to acculturation and assimilation of local culture and also the influence of styles that developed during the period of their construction. This condition resulted in the visual richness of the mosques building façade. Sometimes it is very modern but some of them is still very traditional.

For example, Menara Kudus Mosque that located in Central Java. It has a strong Hindu architectural style so that it looks like a Hindu temple. There is also Cheng Ho Mosque in East Java that similar to Chinese Temple. The Cipari mosques that was built during the colonial era in Garut West Java, looks like a church. In addition there are also mosques with regional architectural styles such as Asasi Mosque with typical Minangkabau architecture in Padang Panjang West Sumatera, Masigi Ogena or Kraton Buton Grand Mosque that uses typical Buton architectural and Bayan Baleq Mosque with typical Lombok architecture.

The mosques that built in modern era are impressive and even become regional identities. For example Istiqlal Mosque that is the largest mosque in Southeast Asia, The Minangkabau Grand Mosque, The Grand Mosque of Central Java, the 99 Domes Mosque in Makassar, and Al Irsyad Mosque in Bandung. All of these mosques have a very unique characteristic and have their own stories.

Mosques in Indonesia have a great potential to become an alternative tourism. So far, religious tourism activities in Indonesia are mostly carried out by Moslem themselves with very limited activities. For example, recitation groups in Java usually attend religious lectures in other cities and then continue touring around the mosque, as well as making pilgrimages to the graves of religious leaders [1],[2], [3], [4],[5],[6]

“The whole earth is a mosque (place of prayer), except for grave and bathroom – narrated by Ahmad”. The Hadith tell us that a mosque is actually flexible space. Thus, the mosque itself can actually become a hybrid space. A mosque to become a hybrid space is also possible <sup>13</sup> as long as it does not contradict with the teaching of Islam [7]Hybrid space is multifunctional architectural and landscape entities [8]Hybrid space can be optimized as much as possible with a good planning approach [9]

Malaysia and Singapore are two Indonesia's neighbors which have a much higher number of tourists visit than Indonesia. Although their country is much smaller than Indonesia and its culture is not as diverse as Indonesia, they are good managing their limited sources. The places of worship such as mosque in both countries are

one of tourist attractions that they offered. This study aims to introduce how the two neighboring countries in Southeast Asia make mosques a hybrid space as a place of worship as well as a tourist place.

## 2. Methods

This research used a case study approach to <sup>8</sup>two mosques, namely the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, Johor - Malaysia and the Jamea Mosque (Chulia), Singapore. The reason for choosing the two mosques is because they represent two simple mosques type, but they can become tourist attractions in the both two countries. Observation and interview conducted on October 2019 in Malaysia and Singapore. The data collected is in the form of tourism, history, management, visual, architectural, visitor's behavior and motivation, then the data were analyzed by descriptive.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, Johor - Malaysia

This mosque located on hilltop. The view <sup>13</sup>overlooking the scenic Straits of Johor, the southest part of Asia continent. Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque <sup>2</sup>was built in 1891 to 1900 under direction of the late Sultan Abu Bakar when ruled Johor from 1862 to 1895. The architect of this mosque is <sup>2</sup>Tuan Haji Mohamed Arif bin Punak.

The architectural <sup>8</sup>of this mosque influenced by English Victorian Architecture. The significant value of Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque is the feature <sup>2</sup>of the mosque blend of Islamic and colonial design. It looks from its single layer pyramid style roof accompanied by four minartes because <sup>2</sup>mimic an old Victorian clock tower (Fig. 1) [10]. The interior boast Roman pillars and big typical collonial windows in the prayer hall. The materials used in construction were imported from around the world. For example, the caindeliers from Czechoslovakia, the marble form Italy and the arcades from Turkey. The sultan of Johor also has good relationship with the England kingdom. That's why some interior of this mosque were a gift from England (Fig. 2).

Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque, is one of Johor city tourist attractions site. This is evidenced by the <sup>20</sup>fact that this mosque always appears in tourist information in Johor (Fig. 3). In addition, the Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque is also one of the city tour packages in Johor along with other historical places of worship in Johor. This tourist attractions offered not only religious tourism but also historical tourism because of the

high historical value of this mosque. The activities commonly found in this mosque are congregational worship, photography, and sightseeing (Fig. 4).

Interfaith visitors are also allowed to enter the mosque if they wish and are guided by mosque administrators. Mosque administrators who are in charge of explaining the history of mosques and Islam in general. The management emphasized that the introduction of religion is not to influence someone but to foster a sense of love for others because many intelligence phenomena are caused by misunderstanding between groups. It is also said that they care and love one another (humans relationship), starting with a sense of knowing each other.



**Figure 1:** One of Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque Minarates.



**Figure 2:** The Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque's Interior.

The mosque administrator also explains what is allowed and not done in the mosque. The emphasized rules are not to disturb the order of worship, no symbols including

hand gesture when taking pictures (such as symbols of two fingers, thumbs, etc.), and if there are participants who do not wear the proper clothes according to sharia rules, robes are provided for worn (Fig. 5). In the mosque are also provided several brochures containing general introduction to Islam. This brochure consists of several phrases such as English, Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, and many more. Another facility is the provision of drinking water if visitors feel thirsty while on tour in the mosque and are allowed to use the mosque toilets.



Figure 3: Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque in Johor Tourism Brochure.

### 3.2. Jamae Mosque (Chulia), Singapore

Jamae Mosque also known as Masjid Chulia or Chulia Mosque. This mosque is one of the old mosque in Singapore. Located in Chinatown and become a prominent landmark since 1820s. The history of this mosque started when Chulia migrants came to Singapore. Jamae Mosque has an eclectic style on its architectural design [11]. The main gate has South Indian influence (Fig. 6), the windows has Chinese influence (Fig. 7) and the Doric style in the prayer hall (Fig. 8). The Jamae Mosque is so special because it has not been rebuilt like another 19<sup>th</sup> century religious buildings in Singapore. Thus, in the 1974 Jamae Mosque was gazetted as a national monument.

Like the Abu Bakar Mosque in Johor, tourists are also allowed to enter the mosque as long as it does not interfere with worship activities. In fact, the Jamae Mosque in Singapore seems to have prepared more for this. It can be seen from the spatial arrangement and elements of the mosque. The signage system is very informative and universal.

In front of the mosque, you can see brief information about the history of the mosque in four languages, namely English, Tamil, Mandarin, and Japanese. When entering the gate, tourists will see some historical remains of the mosque and also information about clothes when entering the mosque (Fig. 9). Although there is no guide but with clear signage, it is easy for tourists to understand all the do's and don'ts in the mosque.



**Figure 4:** International Tourist Visiting Sultan Abu Bakar Mosque.

Around the prayer thing, there are many posters that explain two main things, namely a general introduction to Islam and science in Islam (Figure 10).

### 3.3. Recommendation for Indonesian Mosque as Hybrid Space

Based on the two examples of mosques described earlier, in fact with all the resources that each mosque in Indonesia has, it can be a special attraction for tourists. Moreover, several mosques in Indonesia are part of the cultural and historical landscape. So far, mosques in Indonesia, even the famous ones, have not prepared things like mosques in Malaysia and Singapore. Even some mosques in Indonesia that have become tourist mosques have not paid attention to the point of view of what tourist needs and wants.

Guides usually come from tour agents but we must not forget that the current tourist paradigm has shifted to a more aloscentric direction. Many tourists are more willing to explore tourist attractions by themself [11], [12]Without clear information on tourist



**Figure 5:** Some International Tourist Wearing The Coat When Enter The Mosque.



**Figure 6:** Main Gate of Jamae Masque.

objects, it is possible that there will be value friction between the hosts and tourists. It does not rule out the possibility that it happened to the mosque. If mosques cannot





**Figure 7:** Jamae Mosque's Window.



**Figure 8:** Jamae Mosque's Prayer Hall.

prepare a guide like the Abu Bakar Mosque, maybe we can learn from the Jamae Mosque with the design of the signage that can guide tourists in exploring space.

What can also be learned from both mosques in Malaysia and Singapore are that mosques can become information centers for all devotees. Information that can be provided is not only about Islam as a religion but also other Islamic cultures such as science in Islam and the local Islamic community. Moreover, the historical and cultural values of Indonesian mosques can be said to be very rich. Through mosques, we can also introduce an Islamic perspective on cultural diversity, cultural understanding, and tolerance between religions. Not only for mosques that already exist, but also for other mosques that will be built. With proper spatial planning and zoning, it can facilitate



Figure 9: Jamae Mosque's Signage and Historical Documents.



Figure 10: Some Posters of All About Islam in Jamae Mosque.

all users, both as a worship place and as a tourism place. However, we must always remember that the cultural and religion could stand together as long as no imbalances between them [7]

## 4. Conclusion

Both mosques in Malaysia and Singapore are examples of mosques as good hybrid spaces. Apart from being able to accommodate their users to worship, the two mosques also act as centers of information about the Islamic world which is not only about the teachings of the Islamic religion itself but also about appreciation and education for cultural diversity, cultural understanding, tolerance between religions, Islamic history, and the history of mosques and the surrounding Muslim community. Indonesia a country with the largest number Moslem community in the world with its resources, should also take part in introducing Islamic culture through mosques. Spatial planning, signage systems, and mosque management need to be a concern if you want to develop mosques as a hybrid space in Indonesia.

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