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Animal Tourism and Ethics: Integrating Islamic Teaching and Ethical Beliefs

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Abstract

Given the remarkable growth of animal tourism worldwide and the increasing concerns about animal welfare, this study was conducted to examine the role of Islamic teachings and ethical beliefs in shaping tourists' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward ethical animal tourism in Iran. The study population comprised all individuals who had experienced animal tourism in the past five years. From this population, 145 participants were selected using non-probability convenience sampling, and a questionnaire was used to collect the data. Data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS software, and structural equation modeling was employed to test the study's conceptual model. The findings showed that Islamic teachings and ethical beliefs have a significant positive effect on awareness of ethical issues and on attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. Moreover, awareness and positive attitudes significantly influenced co-creation behaviors, participation, and behavioral intentions in the context of animal tourism. The results underscore the importance of religious and ethical values in promoting responsible tourist behavior. Strengthening education, raising public awareness, and developing ethical frameworks aligned with Islamic culture can play an effective role in improving animal welfare and supporting sustainable tourism development.

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Introduction

Animal tourism is a major engine of the visitor economy, drawing large audiences, shaping destination images, and generating substantial employment and income. It accounts for an estimated 20–40% of all tourism activity worldwide (Winter, 2020) and, through wildlife tourism alone, supports about 22 million jobs and contributes more than US\$120 billion to global GDP (Sustainable Travel, 2021). Against this scale and influence, concerns about animal welfare and responsible visitor conduct have intensified. In settings such as Iran—where Islamic teachings inform everyday ethics—religious values may play a pivotal role in shaping tourists' awareness, attitudes, and behaviors toward ethical animal tourism. To situate this inquiry within broader sectoral dynamics, it is worth noting that international tourist arrivals have expanded from 25 million in 1950 to 800 million by 2016 (Pei, 2020, p. 169), reaching 1.4 billion by 2024 (UNWTO, 2024).

According to Speiran and Hovorka (2024), animal tourism, a sub-branch of nature-based tourism, emphasizes direct interactions with wild, non-human animals. These interactions can occur with animals in the wild or in captivity, typically within or adjacent to protected areas. Activities such as wildlife safaris, visits to zoos and aquariums, and participation in animal-centric cultural or conservation experiences collectively constitute animal tourism. With the increasing global interest in animal-tourism experiences, animal welfare and husbandry conditions have become a growing concern for experts in the field. Winter (2020) defines ethical conduct in animal tourism as prioritizing animal welfare and participating in wildlife-conservation education, and notes that unethical practices include involvement in or enabling the illegal wildlife trade and the use of animals solely for entertainment (see also Joo et al., 2023).

Scholarly investigations into tourism ethics have employed a wide range of conceptual tools. In recent years, the Value–Attitude–Behavior (VAB) model has emerged as a predominant framework in tourism ethics research, highlighting the link between individuals' values, their resulting attitudes, and subsequent behavioral intentions (Han et al., 2019). Despite the growing popularity of animal-tourism experiences among Asian travelers, few studies have examined animal ethics through the lens of Asian philosophical and religious traditions (Packer et al., 2014; Fakfare et al., 2024). Ethical behavior is strongly shaped by culture and religion (Buijs et al., 2009; Davari et al., 2024; Ooi, 2019). Cultural norms, traditions, and religious teachings shape how individuals perceive and evaluate ethical issues (Hsu & Huang, 2016). In Iran, culture and religion are intertwined, influencing people's ethical principles and behaviors, including their interactions with nature and animals.

From an Islamic perspective, nature is a manifestation of divine creation, and respecting its elements, including animals, is considered a duty for every Muslim. This has fostered a specific focus

on environmental ethics within Islamic societies, instilling a profound sense of respect and affection for animals (Fazli & Alhooii Nazari, 2022). Consequently, applying Islamic teachings within the context of animal tourism can promote and strengthen ethical behaviors towards animals.

Drawing on the Value–Attitude–Behavior (VAB) model, this study integrates constructs related to ethical beliefs and cultural values to examine the role of Islamic teachings in shaping tourists' ethical attitudes and behaviors toward animals. Within this framework, moral beliefs derived from Islamic principles are conceptualized as value-based dimensions that influence tourists' ethical awareness and behavioral intentions in animal tourism. According to Winter (2020), ethical tourist behaviors in this context include actions such as prioritizing animal welfare, participating in educational activities related to wildlife conservation, and supporting humane and responsible interactions with animals.

Iran, with its diverse habitats including forests, mountains, deserts, and protected areas, holds significant potential for attracting wildlife enthusiasts. Animal tourism in Iran includes zoos, dolphin parks, bird gardens, circuses, aquariums, and protected regions such as Touran, Arasbaran, Arjan, and Parishan. Given its high biodiversity and the presence of rare species like the Asiatic cheetah (Iranian cheetah), wildlife tourism in Iran holds particular importance. As the conservation of endangered species is paramount, educating and promoting responsible behavior and ethical principles in encounters with these species is crucial.

Considering the rapid growth of animal tourism and the profound influence of culture and ethical philosophies on tourist behavior, examining Islamic teachings in this area is essential. This study seeks to examine how Islamic teachings influence the ethical attitudes and behavioral patterns of tourists when engaging with the Iranian cheetah, a species of significant cultural and ecological importance. Such an investigation can contribute to developing more ethical approaches in tourism and aid in conserving this endangered species, potentially leading to awareness campaigns and targeted tourist education.

Theoretical Foundations

Animal Tourism

Animal tourism has emerged as one of the fastest-growing yet most controversial branches of the global tourism industry, currently accounting for a significant share of tourism activities worldwide. This form of tourism encompasses a wide range of experiences in which humans interact directly or indirectly with animals in natural, semi-natural, or artificial environments. Examples include safaris, zoo visits, dolphinariums, animal shows, bird-watching tours, and even culinary or cultural experiences involving animals (Fennell, 2013; Winter, 2020). Beyond its recreational appeal, animal tourism provides opportunities for environmental education and for raising awareness of biodiversity.

Applied Ethics and Animal Ethics

Applied ethics spans many domains—business, engineering, medical, and environmental ethics; animal ethics is another branch. This field examines human conduct toward animals and regards behaviors such as hunting, harming, cruel training, and practices that cause death as unethical (Mkono & Holder, 2019; Winter, 2020). The exploitation of animals for entertainment or promotional photography, inadequate living conditions in captivity, and damage to natural habitats are among the key challenges confronting this field (Mkono & Holder, 2019; von Essen et al., 2020).

The central question is whether humans have moral duties to animals. Several positions have been advanced in response. Descartes (1985) portrayed animals as machines without consciousness or the capacity for suffering, implying that humans may treat animals as they wish. Another view, associated with Kant (1963) and Aquinas (1947), discourages violence toward animals because it may cultivate a vicious character that extends to human relations; however, this view grounds duties only indirectly and does not ascribe rights to animals. Other perspectives attribute moral status to animals, either placing them below humans on a moral hierarchy or according them equal moral standing, with no fundamental distinction between humans and animals (Jahed, 2021).

In recent decades, Western perspectives on animal rights have shifted from traditional anthropocentric approaches toward recognizing the moral status and intrinsic value of non-human animals. Scholars such as Peter Singer (2002) have advanced the principle of *sentientism*, arguing that any being capable of experiencing suffering should be considered in ethical deliberations. Singer's utilitarian framework emphasizes minimizing animal suffering as a moral imperative. In contrast, Tom Regan (2004) proposes a *rights-based* approach, asserting that animals are "subjects-of-a-life" with inherent value and, therefore, possess fundamental rights that must be respected independently of their utility to humans.

More recent developments integrate these perspectives with frameworks emphasizing relational and ecological ethics. For example, feminist care ethics highlights responsibility, empathy, and relational duties toward animals (Donovan, 2006), while environmental ethics considers the broader ecological context of human–animal interactions, advocating for sustainable and non-exploitative practices (Attfield, 2014). Collectively, these contemporary Western frameworks signify a paradigmatic shift from viewing animals as mere resources to recognizing their ethical and moral significance, promoting both animal welfare and sustainable human–animal coexistence.

Islamic Teaching on Animal Welfare

Beyond Western perspectives, the treatment of animals is also addressed in religious traditions. Among these traditions, Islamic teachings address animal welfare comprehensively. For example, the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (UDAR) refers to the care of animals; similarly, in Islam, there are explicit

recommendations to provide necessities for animals dependent on humans. It is narrated from Imam ‘Alī that the Messenger of God said: “Cleaning the resting place and giving water, food, and grass to an animal (horse), for the sake of God, will be counted among a person’s good deeds on the Day of Judgment.” (Minaeifar et al., 2020). The Qur’ān, in verse 60 of Sūrat al-‘Ankabūt¹, also mentions provision for the needs and desires of animals and places this alongside provision for human needs (Majlesi, 1403 AH, vol. 64, p. 215; Didar, 2023). These narrations imply a right to maintenance for animals—including adequate food and water, suitable housing, hygiene, and treatment. For wild species, the natural environment remains the most appropriate habitat.

Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights (UDAR) states that animals should not be subjected to ill-treatment or cruelty (Didar, 2023). The Qur’ān, in Sūrat al-Nisā’²(4:119), associates harm, abuse, and mutilation of animals with satanic acts. From these sources, it follows that inflicting pain and suffering on innocent, defenseless creatures—including branding, mutilation, flogging, causing paralysis, overburdening, and similar practices—is impermissible. The Prophet Muḥammad also said: “Do not strike animals on their faces, for every creature glorifies God. Do not brand their faces, for many mounts are superior to their riders and they remember God more than they do.” (Didar, 2023; Majlesi, 1403 AH, vol. 64, p. 215).

Value–Attitude–Behavior (VAB) Framework

The study adopts the VAB model, in which values shape attitudes, and attitudes guide behaviors (Erul et al., 2023; Ajzen, 1991). We treat Islamic teachings as value cues and ethical beliefs as attitudes relevant to animal welfare in tourism contexts. Prior work shows that values and attitudes predict supportive, responsible behaviors in tourism; for example, among Asian travelers, cultural values (e.g., Confucianism) and ethical beliefs were linked to responsible animal-based tourism outcomes (Fakfare et al., 2024).

In our framework, Islamic value orientations are expected to increase tourists’ ethical awareness and foster more favorable attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. In turn, higher ethical awareness and more favorable attitudes are expected to promote responsible behavioral outcomes in animal-tourism settings—specifically co-creation, participation, and behavioral intentions.

H1. Islamic teachings positively influence tourists’ ethical awareness regarding animal tourism.

H2. Islamic teachings positively influence tourists’ attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

¹ How many an animal there is that does not carry its own provision. Allah provides them and you, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing.

² And I will lead them astray and give them [false] hopes, and prompt them to slit the ears of cattle, and I will prompt them to alter Allah’s creation.’ Whoever takes Satan as a guardian instead of Allah has certainly incurred a manifest loss.

Ethical Beliefs and Awareness in Animal Tourism

Ethical beliefs are closely aligned with individuals' attitudes. Ethical beliefs refer to a set of principles, values, and ethical perspectives that determine whether a consumer behavior is considered acceptable or unacceptable in a given context. In the context of animal tourism, ethical beliefs serve as a major determinant of tourist attitudes and behaviors (Blaer, 2024). Flower et al. (2021) examined tourists' attitudes before and after visiting elephant-tourism venues. The results showed that animal welfare was an important consideration for tourists; moreover, increased demand for high-welfare venues has led to improved welfare standards in some areas. Therefore, ethical beliefs are an important antecedent of tourist behavior in animal tourism. On this basis, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3. Ethical beliefs in animal tourism positively affect awareness of ethical issues.

H4. Ethical beliefs in animal tourism positively affect attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

Today, individuals are more aware of environmental issues than in the past, and this awareness has influenced their behavior, leading them to interact with the environment and wildlife with greater sensitivity. They aim to minimize harmful and unwanted consequences while deepening their understanding of animal welfare and ethical issues within the animal-based tourism sector (von Essen et al., 2020). In research on ethical behavior toward environmental products, awareness of ethical issues is treated as a factor that influences consumer attitudes and ethical consumption intentions and behaviors (Chi, 2022) and, in turn, reinforces environmentally friendly actions (Kim et al., 2024). In animal tourism, tourists' awareness of ethical issues is likewise a vital factor in promoting ethical behavior toward animals (von Essen et al., 2020). Flower et al. (2021) found that as public awareness of issues in animal-tourism venues increases, tourists' attitudes toward animal-related issues change, and they exhibit more responsible behaviors. Increased tourist awareness of ethical issues substantially affects the quality of life and welfare of animals, and Blaer (2024) shows that information strategies by tourism organizations—delivered through online and traditional channels—can promote tourists' awareness of animal welfare and help minimize harm to animals. According to Kline and Fischer (2023), tourists' attitudes and awareness strongly influence behavior, fostering committed and active participation in animal-welfare activities. Such proactive, goal-directed actions are often referred to as approach behaviors. In this study, we focus on three components of approach behavior: co-creation, participation, and behavioral intentions (Blaer, 2024; Winter, 2020). Shifts in these behaviors imply that tourists act more responsibly when choosing tours, are inclined to participate in voluntary activities and animal conservation (including financial support), and avoid activities that involve animal exploitation (Bertella et al., 2019; Blaer, 2022; Han et al., 2021).

In recent years, increasing awareness of environmental and ethical issues among individuals has significantly affected their interactions with nature and wildlife. This awareness has strengthened

tourists' ethical attitudes and led them to adopt more responsible behaviors when encountering animals. In animal tourism, ethical awareness is widely recognized as a key factor shaping tourists' approach behaviors—including participation in ethical tourism, cooperation in conservation activities, and avoidance of activities that exploit animals.

H5. Awareness of ethical issues positively affects attitudes toward ethical animal tourism.

H6. Awareness of ethical issues positively affects animal cocreation behavior.

H7. Awareness of ethical issues positively affects involvement in ethical animal tourism.

H8. Awareness of ethical issues positively affects intention toward ethical animal tourism.

H9. Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affects animal cocreation behavior.

H10. Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affects involvement in ethical animal tourism.

H11. Attitudes toward ethical animal tourism positively affects intention toward ethical animal tourism.

Conceptual model of research

Figure 1 illustrates the intricate relationships among Islamic teachings, awareness of ethical concerns, attitudes towards ethical animal tourism, ethical beliefs within animal tourism, animal co-creation behavior, involvement in ethical animal tourism, and intentions regarding ethical animal tourism. This model is adapted from the research conducted by Fakfare, Phucharoen, Kim & Han (2024).

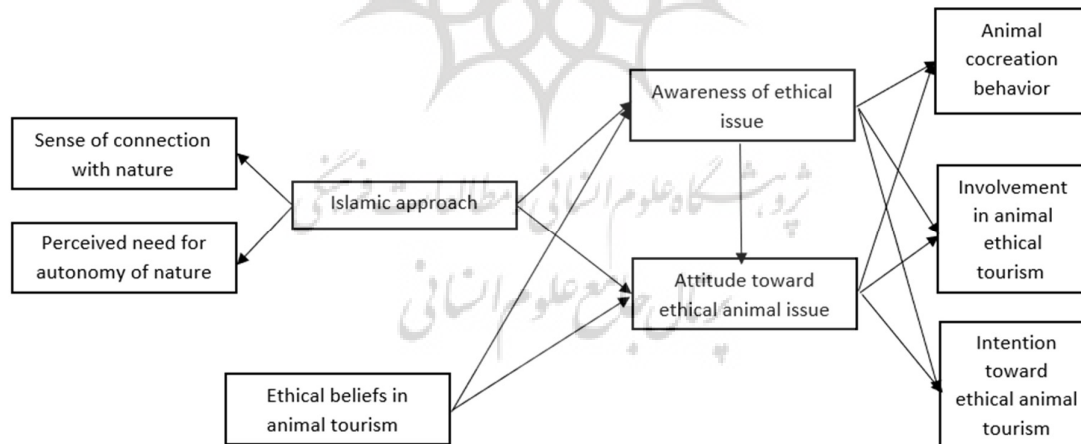


Figure 1. Conceptual model adapted from Fakfare, Phucharoen, Kim & Han (2024)

Methodology

This research is applied in terms of purpose and in terms of methodology in the field of analytical-survey research. Data were collected using an online questionnaire. The statistical population of this study

comprised individuals who had animal tourism experience in the past five years. From among the present population, 145 people were selected as a research sample based on the ratio formula $5Q \leq N \leq 15Q$ in the form of available sampling.

Table 1 presents the distribution of the demographic characteristics of the sample under study. According to this table, the sample consisted of 85 women (58.6%) and 60 men (41.4%), indicating a relatively balanced gender distribution among the participants. In terms of age, the highest frequency belonged to individuals in the 20–25 age group (68 participants, 46.9%), while the lowest frequency was observed in participants older than 30 years (8 participants, 5.5%). With respect to educational level, the highest frequency was related to participants holding a bachelor's degree (72 participants, 49.7%), whereas the lowest frequency belonged to those with a doctoral degree (2 participants, 1.4%). This distribution reflects a relative diversity in the demographic characteristics of the sample, which should be taken into account in subsequent analyses.

Table 1. Distribution of demographic characteristics of the statistical sample

Variable	group	Abundance	percentage
gender	woman	85	58,6
	man	60	41,4
age	Under 20 years old	27	18,6
	20 to 25 years old	68	46,9
	old 25 to 30 years	42	29,0
	Over 30 years old	8	5,5
degree	Diploma	31	21,4
	Bachelor	72	49,7
	Master's	40	27,6
	Ph.D.	2	1,4

Table 2 reports the descriptive indices of the variables under investigation. As shown, the variable prescriptive norms have a mean of 3.45 and a standard deviation of 1.37, while the mean of descriptive norms is 4.85 with a standard deviation of 1.41. The variable subjective norms show a mean of 3.76 and a standard deviation of 1.33. Among the variables, social norms have a mean of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 1.01, which represents the lowest standard deviation. In addition, social identity has a mean of 2.76 and a standard deviation of 0.91. Finally, the variable moral indifference has a mean of 3.39 and a standard deviation of 1.31.

Table 2. Descriptive indices of the studied variables

Variables	Average	Middle	Standard deviation	The last	The most
Sense of Connection with Nature	5,16	5,33	1,18	2,33	7,00
Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature	5,75	6,00	0,93	3,33	7,00
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism	5,76	5,80	0,78	3,60	7,00
Animal Cocreation Behavior	3,90	4,00	1,35	1,00	7,00
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	4,91	5,00	1,54	1,00	7,00
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	5,25	5,67	1,34	1,00	7,00
Awareness of Ethical Issues	5,71	5,75	0,95	2,50	7,00
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	4,61	4,75	1,40	1,00	7,00
Islamic approach	5,46	5,50	0,81	3,17	6,83

Design

The present study employed a descriptive-analytical, correlational research design using structural equation modeling (SEM). To analyze the collected data, structural equation modeling techniques were applied using the SmartPLS software. In evaluating the outer (measurement) models, three main criteria were used: reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, along with composite reliability. In addition, to examine the mediating effect, the bootstrap test was used, and the coefficient of determination was employed to assess the inner (structural) model.

Findings

Model Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

In the present study, data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). To this end, the goodness of fit of the first-order reflective measurement models and the second-order formative measurement models was first assessed in order to evaluate the overall fit of the research model.

To assess the fit of the first-order reflective measurement models, the following indices were used: composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha, factor loadings, convergent validity (AVE), and the Fornell-Larcker criterion (discriminant validity). To assess the fit of the second-order formative construct, the variance inflation factor (VIF) was used.

To evaluate the measurement model of the study, reliability and convergent validity indices were examined. As shown in Table 3, the reliability of all constructs in the model was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs were above 0.70, indicating satisfactory internal consistency of the scales (Hair et al., 2017). Similarly, the composite reliability (CR) values were above 0.70 for all constructs, suggesting that the observed

indicators of each construct were highly correlated and measured the intended construct adequately (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

In addition, convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE values for all constructs were higher than 0.50, which indicates that the variance captured by the indicators of each construct exceeds the variance due to measurement error, and therefore the constructs demonstrate acceptable convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 3. Summary of data analysis steps

External model evaluation	Reliability	Reliability of indicators	
		Check for one-dimensionality	Cronbach's alpha composite reliability
	Validity	Convergent validity (mean variance extracted)	
		Discriminant validity	
Evaluation of the internal model	Estimation of path coefficient		
	Coefficient of determination (R ²) of endogenous latent variables		
	Predictive communication		
Review of model quality indicators	Shared average		
	Moderate redundancy		
Hypothesis testing	Examining the significance coefficients of Z related to each of the hypotheses		

Table 4. Convergent reliability and validity indices

Agent	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	CR	AVE
Animal Cocreation Behavior	0.808	0.837	0.874	0.635
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.901	0.908	0.931	0.770
Awareness of Ethical Issues	0.752	0.756	0.845	0.581
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism	0.794	0.793	0.858	0.550
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.883	0.894	0.927	0.809
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0.895	0.897	0.935	0.827
Islamic approach	0.877	0.883	0.908	0.623
Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature	0.856	0.859	0.912	0.777
Sense of Connection with Nature	0.728	0.742	0.846	0.648

To assess the discriminant validity of the model constructs, the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was used, which has been proposed as an alternative to more traditional approaches for evaluating discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). The goal of assessing

discriminant validity is to ensure that each construct in the model is sufficiently distinct from the others and that it is more strongly related to its own indicators than to the indicators of other constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

The results of the HTMT analysis are presented in Table 5. Overall, in this study, all HTMT values were below 0.90, indicating an acceptable level of discriminant validity for the constructs. This implies that the constructs in the model are well differentiated from one another and capture conceptually distinct phenomena (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 5. Heterotrace-monotrace correlation ratio (HTMT)

	Animal cocreation behavior	Attitude toward ethical animal issue	Awareness of ethical issue	Ethical beliefs in animal tourism	Intention toward ethical animal tourism	Involvement in animal ethical tourism	Islamic approach	Perceived need for autonomy of nature	Sense of connection with nature
Animal Cocreation Behavior	0.797								
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.488	0.878							
Awareness of Ethical Issues	0.481	0.616	0.762						
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism	0.290	0.551	0.666	0.741					
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.533	0.625	0.550	0.423	0.900				
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0.581	0.551	0.570	0.433	0.818	0.895			
Islamic approach	0.339	0.564	0.693	0.527	0.341	0.330	0.789		
Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature	0.238	0.505	0.614	0.465	0.258	0.227	0.900	0.881	
Sense of Connection with Nature	0.408	0.554	0.688	0.527	0.391	0.404	0.925	0.750	0.805

To evaluate the structural model (inner model) of the present study, the significance of the path coefficients was first examined using the bootstrapping procedure and the corresponding t-statistics. This analysis was conducted to determine the statistical significance of the relationships between the latent variables in the model. The results of the bootstrapping procedure, presented in Table 4, indicate that all path coefficients were significant at an acceptable level ($p < 0.05$) and had standardized loadings greater than 0.5. These findings suggest the presence of strong and meaningful relationships between the latent variables in the model (Hair et al., 2017).

In addition, to assess potential multicollinearity among the predictor variables, the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) was calculated. The VIF values for all variables were below 5, indicating the absence of problematic multicollinearity in the model and suggesting that the predictor variables were relatively independent in explaining the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2019).

The structural model of the study, along with standardized coefficients and t-values, is presented below:

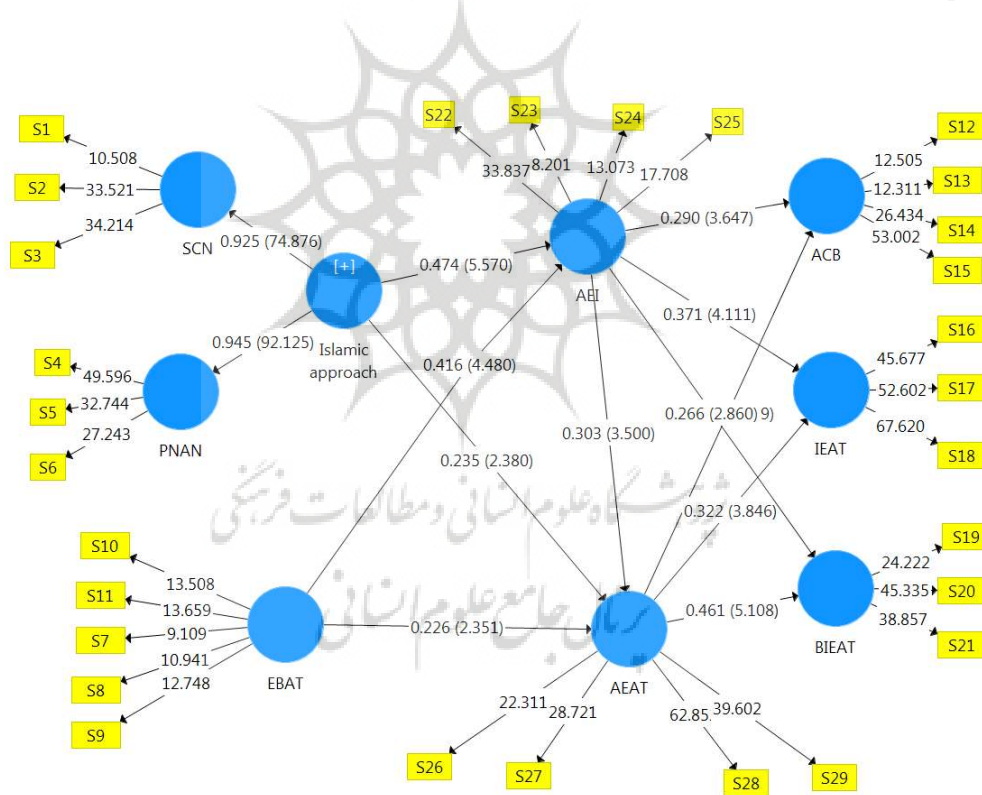


Figure 2. Model diagram showing path coefficients (t-statistics)

Table 6. Factor loading and significance results of the components

Variable	object	factor load	Standard deviation	T-statistics	Significance Level	VIF
Sense of Connection with Nature	S1	0.734	0.069	10.656	0.000	1.315
	S2	0.829	0.025	32.679	0.000	1.524
	S3	0.847	0.023	36.432	0.000	1.559
Perceived Need for Autonomy of Nature	S4	0.900	0.018	50.471	0.000	2.317
	S5	0.868	0.029	30.180	0.000	2.019
	S6	0.875	0.033	26.378	0.000	2.125
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism	S7	0.633	0.073	8.646	0.000	1.194
	S8	0.758	0.073	10.340	0.000	1.969
	S9	0.812	0.063	12.799	0.000	2.333
	S10	0.783	0.057	13.672	0.000	1.908
	S11	0.708	0.052	13.514	0.000	1.494
Animal Cocreation Behavior	S12	0.736	0.060	12.290	0.000	1.699
	S13	0.715	0.056	12.758	0.000	1.533
	S14	0.831	0.032	25.888	0.000	2.247
	S15	0.893	0.017	53.410	0.000	2.668
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	S16	0.888	0.018	48.501	0.000	2.219
	S17	0.913	0.017	53.397	0.000	3.168
	S18	0.927	0.014	68.332	0.000	3.416
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	S19	0.881	0.034	26.171	0.000	2.837
	S20	0.930	0.019	48.708	0.000	3.662
	S21	0.887	0.025	35.866	0.000	2.117
Awareness of Ethical Issues	S22	0.885	0.029	30.361	0.000	2.402
	S23	0.644	0.081	7.958	0.000	1.342
	S24	0.710	0.058	12.246	0.000	1.642
	S25	0.788	0.043	18.334	0.000	1.679
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	S26	0.858	0.038	22.801	0.000	3.825
	S27	0.875	0.031	28.499	0.000	4.220
	S28	0.906	0.014	65.330	0.000	4.477
	S29	0.871	0.023	38.553	0.000	3.914

Figure 2 illustrates the structural model of the study, including the path coefficients and the corresponding t-statistics for each relationship. This diagram visually represents the relationships among

the variables. The numbers displayed on the paths indicate the path coefficients, which reflect the magnitude of the direct effects between variables. The values shown in parentheses for each path are the t-statistics, which indicate the statistical significance of each relationship.

Positive coefficients represent a direct positive effect of one variable on another, whereas negative coefficients indicate an inverse (negative) effect. In the table that follows, the path coefficients and their significance levels are reported.

Table 7. Their direct and significant paths in the model

Path	Path coefficient	Standard deviation	t-statistics	Significance Level	Result
Islamic approach -> Awareness of Ethical Issues	0.474	0.088	5.394	0.000	accepted
Islamic approach -> Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.235	0.093	2.529	0.012	accepted
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism -> Awareness of Ethical Issues	0.416	0.098	4.245	0.000	accepted
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism -> Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.226	0.097	2.322	0.021	accepted
Awareness of Ethical Issues -> Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.303	0.084	3.614	0.000	accepted
Awareness of Ethical Issues -> Animal Cocreation Behavior	0.290	0.076	3.792	0.000	accepted
Awareness of Ethical Issues -> Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0.371	0.091	4.065	0.000	accepted
Awareness of Ethical Issues -> Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.266	0.098	2.714	0.007	accepted
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism -> Animal Cocreation Behavior	0.310	0.084	3.698	0.000	accepted
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism -> Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0.322	0.086	3.724	0.000	accepted
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism -> Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.461	0.095	4.862	0.000	accepted

Table 7 presents the results of the path analysis, including the standardized path coefficients, standard errors, t-statistics, and significance levels for the direct relationships between the model variables. The path coefficients indicate the magnitude of the effect of one variable on another.

In this table, the effect of Islamic approach on Awareness of Ethical Issues is reported with a coefficient of 0.474, and the direct effect of Islamic approach on Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.235. In addition, the effect of Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism on Awareness of Ethical Issues is reported with a coefficient of 0.416, and the effect of Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism on Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.226.

The effect of Awareness of Ethical Issues on Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.303, the effect of Awareness of Ethical Issues on Animal Cocreation Behavior is reported with a coefficient of 0.290, the effect of Awareness of Ethical Issues on Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.371, and the effect of Awareness of Ethical Issues on Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.266. Moreover, the effect of Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism on Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.310, the effect of Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism on Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.322, and the effect of Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism on Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism is reported with a coefficient of 0.461. All of these relationships are statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Evaluation of the structural model

This study evaluates the inner structural model using key indices, including R^2 and Q^2 . R^2 reflects the explanatory power of the model, and Q^2 assesses its predictive relevance. The results indicate that both R^2 and Q^2 take on desirable values in this model, suggesting that the model demonstrates good explanatory power as well as acceptable predictive capability.

Table 8. Values of the coefficient of determination and the criterion Q^2

Endogenous variable	R²	Q²
Animal Cocreation Behavior	0.291	0,168
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.444	0,308
Awareness of Ethical Issues	0.605	0,317
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0.434	0,322
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0.389	0,298

The predictive power of the model for the indicators was examined using the cross-validated communality index. Table 9 shows that the values for all factors were positive; therefore, the predictive power of the structural model is confirmed.

Table 9. Common value

Model variables	Common value
Animal Cocreation Behavior	0,393
Attitude toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0,570
Awareness of Ethical Issues	0,309
Ethical Beliefs in Animal Tourism	0,330
Behavioral Intentions toward Ethical Animal Tourism	0,548
Involvement in Ethical Animal Tourism	0,575
Islamic approach	0,461

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings indicate a positive and significant relationship between Islamic teachings and both awareness of ethical issues and attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. Individuals who have a deeper understanding of Islamic moral principles and hold stronger religious beliefs tend to assign greater value to the rights and welfare of animals. As emphasized in Islamic sources — including verse 60 of Surah al-‘Ankabūt, verse 119 of Surah al-Nisā’, and narrations cited by Majlisi (1403 AH) — Islam stresses respect for animals, the provision of their needs, avoidance of harm, and the preservation of their well-being. In line with Fakfare (2024), values and attitudes rooted in religious teachings promote responsible and protective behaviors. Therefore, it is recommended that policymakers and religious institutions incorporate Islamic concepts related to animal rights into educational and cultural programs connected to tourism.

The findings also show that ethical beliefs in animal tourism have a positive and significant effect on awareness of ethical issues and on attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. Ethical beliefs, as part of individuals’ internal value systems, provide a framework for interpreting and judging human behaviors. As Blaer (2022) and Flower et al. (2021) have shown, belief in the moral relevance of animal issues and animal welfare leads to supportive and proactive attitudes toward the protection of animal rights and can, to some extent, improve their welfare. To strengthen such beliefs and attitudes, it is suggested that tourism centers and natural destinations use educational and awareness-raising campaigns grounded in ethical and religious values. These campaigns may include educational exhibits, interactive workshops, and impactful media content that communicate both the importance of animal welfare and the relevant moral principles to tourists. By integrating ethical beliefs and spiritual principles into tourism policies and practices, it is possible to enhance animal welfare and promote the sustainable development of tourism.

The results also showed that awareness of ethical issues has a positive and significant relationship with tourists' attitudes toward ethical animal tourism. This finding suggests that a deeper understanding of topics related to animal welfare and animal rights helps strengthen individuals' ethical attitudes. This is consistent with the study by Flower et al. (2021), which showed that increased awareness of the conditions of animals in tourism settings encourages tourists to act more responsibly in their decision-making. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism authorities and stakeholders collaborate with media outlets to design educational campaigns that raise awareness about animal protection and promote ethical behavior in tourism. Such campaigns can employ emotional narratives and impactful imagery to evoke a sense of moral responsibility in tourists and increase their awareness of animal welfare.

In addition, the findings revealed that awareness of ethical issues has a positive and significant effect on tourists' behavioral engagement. In other words, individuals who possess greater knowledge of and sensitivity to animal welfare are more likely to participate in activities that align with ethical principles — such as volunteering at shelters, supporting animal rescue organizations, or choosing sustainable tourism destinations. This highlights the importance of active tourist involvement in protective and supportive practices. Therefore, it is suggested that tourism destinations incorporate opportunities for voluntary, education-oriented participation (for example, joining rescue teams or taking part in wildlife conservation programs) into their tourism packages.

The results showed that a positive attitude toward ethical animal tourism has a significant relationship with behavioral engagement. In other words, individuals who hold a positive attitude toward animal welfare are more likely to choose activities that align with the well-being of animals. Blaer (2022) found that ethical attitudes are a key factor in shaping the way tourists interact with animals. Therefore, it is recommended that interactive, non-exploitative activities be designed so that tourists' positive attitudes can be transformed into actual ethical behavior. In this regard, awareness campaigns and tourism advertising content should focus on fostering positive attitudes and ethical beliefs in the audience.

Overall, the present study suggests that the sustainable development of animal tourism requires ongoing dialogue, education, and collective learning. Collaboration between environmental protection organizations, wildlife tour operators, and animal care facilities can play a key role in improving animal welfare and preserving ecosystems. Accordingly, it is recommended that tourism policy-makers develop frameworks for ethical animal tourism and promote ethical behavior in this area through practical measures such as awareness-raising campaigns and the establishment of protective regulations.

Recommendations for future studies

This study examined the effect of Islamic teachings on tourists' ethical attitudes and behaviors in relation to the Iranian cheetah. It is recommended that future research investigate the impact of these teachings with respect to other species, such as dolphins or birds kept in aviaries. Furthermore, conducting similar studies in other Islamic countries neighboring Iran could help improve the external validity of the model.

Future studies could also extend the analysis of ethical and caring principles beyond the level of tourists, by examining operational settings and the behavior of staff working in wildlife tourism centers. This would make it possible to assess the role of organizational culture and staff training in promoting animal welfare and supporting ethical tourism practices.

In addition, the present research relied exclusively on online data collection. Future studies could be conducted on-site in order to capture tourists' immediate reactions. The use of mixed methods — including observation, interviews, and questionnaires — could provide a more comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior. Finally, in a comparative approach, differences in the attitudes and behaviors of domestic versus international tourists toward animals could serve as a promising direction for future research.

Author Contribution

N. Pourdelan contributed to the acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation of the results, and drafting of the manuscript. O. Behboodi contributed to the conception and design of the study and critically revised the manuscript for important intellectual content. A. Aghehro Chaboki contributed to the analysis and interpretation of the data.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest regarding the publication of this work. In addition, the ethical issues including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and, or falsification, double publication and, or submission, and redundancy have been completely witnessed by the authors.

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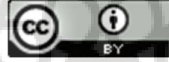
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