

THE KINGDOM OF PEPPER AND COLONIAL RESISTANCE: TRANSFORMING HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE INTO A SOURCE OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN ACEH, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study examines the potential for developing sustainable tourism based on cultural heritage preservation through a heritage trail on the eastern coast of Aceh, Indonesia, highlighting the local narrative of the Kingdom of Pepper. The primary aim of this research is to explore how the development of the heritage trail concept can contribute to strengthening historical and cultural identity, supporting the revitalization of relevant historical sites, providing economic benefits to local communities, and promoting environmental and cultural sustainability. This study employs a tourism approach that integrates cultural preservation with sustainable development, analyzed as a solution to the existing challenges. The findings indicate that the heritage trail concept can reinforce local cultural identity, encourage active community participation, and enhance economic well-being through empowering local communities as key stakeholders in the tourism sector. The study also emphasizes the importance of collaboration between the government, local communities, and the private sector to create a sustainable tourism model. The findings suggest that policymakers should prioritize the development of culture-based tourism in tourism planning in Aceh, ensuring the preservation of historical and cultural values while increasing economic benefits for local communities.

Keywords: Historical Tourism; Heritage Trail; Cultural Heritage Preservation; Kingdom of Pepper; Sustainable Tourism

Introduction

Aceh possesses a wealth of historical and cultural heritage, shaped by the long-standing interaction between its people and their environment. These heritage resources have become integral to the cultural identity of the Acehnese people. However, in the last 20 years, the preservation of historical and cultural heritage in Aceh has faced many challenges. One of the most significant challenges was the tsunami disaster in 2004, which caused severe damage to historical and cultural heritage [1, 2]. In addition, local historical narratives that are important in building identity and civilization also are neglected. If a scheme is designed to repair, preserve, and reuse these heritages sustainably, many historical and cultural heritages that are substantially important and of quality in Aceh will be permanently recovered and remembered.

One of the important historical and cultural heritages in Aceh in the 17th to 19th centuries is related to the historical narrative of pepper civilization, which is supported by the existence of pepper countries [3-6]. The horror of pepper refers to the kingdom system, local government, or traditional government that emerged in the Aceh region, which was specifically established and

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developed because pepper was the main economic resource. As one of the most valuable commodities in the past, pepper played a very big role in the formation and management of these countries. During its heyday, pepper became a major commodity that played a role in the economy, trade, and even politics, making the Pepper History a very vital entity in the history of Aceh [7, 8]. Apart from that, during the colonial period, the kingdom of Papper became one of the bases of the people's resistance struggle led by local leaders known as uleebalang against the Dutch.

Today, many historical sites and cultural heritages from the Kingdom of Pepper are forgotten and tend to be neglected. In fact, the location of the Kingdom of Pepper that once existed is now not widely known. This has resulted in the loss of narratives and traces that have historical value for the people of Aceh and Indonesia. Various efforts have been made to preserve the history and culture of Aceh, but revitalizing the historical heritage of the Pepper Kingdom through sustainable tourism has not been the main focus. Although the Pepper Kingdom has an important history in the struggle against Dutch colonialism, the potential of its historical narrative and historical heritage has yet to be optimally utilized in the context of the Aceh tourism [9]. The Pepper Kingdom, with its heroic story of resistance against the colonizers, is an integral part of Aceh's history that should be the main attraction in the tourism sector [3, 10-12]. However, in reality, this historical destination is still neglected, both in local and national promotions. In fact, even though tourism in Aceh is growing rapidly, the existence of the Pepper Kingdom as a center of historical resistance is still minimally used as an educational tourist attraction. A new fact that can be explored is how this narrative of resistance has yet to be fully utilized to attract domestic and international tourists. The potential to link the history of Aceh's struggle with the concept of heritage-based tourism, especially in the form of educational narratives about Dutch colonialism, is still very limited and needs to be explored further. There is a significant gap regarding the connection between the narrative of colonial resistance history and sustainable tourism development in the study of heritage-based tourism. Most tourism theories focus on physical conservation and cultural diversity [13, 14] without considering how the history of struggle, such as that which occurred in the Pepper Kingdom, can strengthen local identity and nationalism. This creates a gap in the development of heritage-based tourism theories that attract tourists and have a positive social impact on local communities. One approach that can fill this gap is the development of a Heritage Trail in the Pepper Kingdom, which connects historical and cultural sites with the active participation of local communities. Heritage Trail has the potential to create sustainable tourism that supports local economies, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability, while highlighting the values of struggle in the tourism narrative.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the potential of the historical and cultural heritage of the Pepper Kingdom and its resistance to colonialism as the main resource for developing sustainable tourism in Aceh. This research aims to explore how the narrative of historical struggles can be integrated into heritage-based tourism management, with the dual objective of attracting tourists while strengthening the cultural identity and nationalism of the local community. Additionally, this study seeks to develop a management model that involves local communities, supports economic sustainability, and ensures environmental preservation, with a specific focus on creating a Heritage Trail—an interconnected tourist route linking various historical sites within the Pepper Kingdom.

This study aims to contribute to the development of sustainable tourism that balances cultural preservation with the welfare of local communities. The research begins with the argument that integrating historical heritage with economic development and cultural conservation is essential. Aceh, with its rich history—especially its resistance to Dutch colonialism—holds significant historical value. However, many of its historical sites remain underutilized in the tourism sector. This study is important because it seeks to unlock the potential of cultural heritage, not only as a means to attract tourists but also to strengthen the cultural identity and nationalism of the Acehnese people.

Moreover, the development of history-based tourism can positively impact the local economy by involving the community in managing and preserving historical sites. A sustainable tourism approach that ensures a balance between cultural preservation and economic growth is urgently needed to protect Aceh's historical heritage and improve the local quality of life. Therefore, this study is vital in designing strategies that foster the sustainability of heritage-based tourism in Aceh, ensuring long-term benefits for both the community and the environment.

Methods

This research was conducted in the Aceh Tamiang and East Aceh regencies. The area was chosen because it has historical heritage related to the Pepper Kingdom resistance against the Dutch during the 2nd expedition in the 19th century [15]. This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the potential of the Pepper Kingdom historical heritage on the East Coast of Aceh as a sustainable tourism destination and preserve the historical heritage of resistance against Dutch colonialism. This approach was chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of the views, experiences, and expectations of local communities and other stakeholders related to tourism development and cultural preservation.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, namely community leaders, local historians, government officials, and tourism actors. This interview was designed to explore the views, experiences, and expectations of informants related to the preservation of cultural heritage and the potential for tourism development in the area. Participatory observation was carried out by researchers directly observing historical sites on the East Coast of Aceh. This observation aims to observe the physical condition of historical sites, ongoing tourism activities, and interactions between local communities and tourists. The final technique is documentation.

Data collected through various information-gathering techniques were analyzed using thematic analysis methods to identify key patterns and themes relevant to the revitalization of Pepper Kingdom and the potential for sustainable tourism development. This thematic analysis process aims to explore the meaning contained in the data and understand the relationship between cultural, historical, and tourism elements. The final results of this analysis will be presented in the form of a qualitative narrative that describes the main findings, including strategies that can be applied to integrate the historical heritage of the Kingdom of Pepper into sustainable tourism management. The narrative is expected to provide comprehensive insight into how the revitalization of the culture and history of the pepper kingdom can be used as a means to strengthen local identity, encourage community economic welfare, and preserve historical sites, thus making a positive contribution to the development of sustainable tourism in Aceh.

Results and discussion

History of Pepper Kingdoms on the East Coast of Aceh

Until the early 19th century, the east coast of Aceh consisted of four kingdoms: Peureulak, Langsa, Karang, and Kejuruan Muda [10]. Although the role of this region was still minimal in the early 18th century, the situation changed drastically with the introduction of pepper cultivation by immigrants from Pasai, Pidie, and Aceh Besar [10, 16, 17]. This region later became an important center for pepper cultivation in Aceh, which contributed to the formation of uleebalang, namely regional leaders who politically controlled certain areas. The wealth accumulated from the pepper trade and the expanding planting area made local leaders gain many followers and approval from the Sultan of Aceh, which made them officially uleebalang recognized by the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam.

The ratification of the new kingdom and uleebalang was the policy of the Sultan of Aceh Darussalam to expand his influence in the pepper-growing areas [10]. Pepper planting also had

an impact on the formation of the pepper kingdom on the east coast of Aceh since 1840. However, the conquest of Aceh by the Dutch colonialists in 1873 brought major changes. The Dutch military expedition was launched as part of an effort to control the Aceh region, which began in 1873. The main objective of this expedition was to subdue the resistance of the Acehnese people and secure Dutch control over strategic areas in the northern part of Sumatra. The expedition involved a series of battles and political strategies to overcome fierce resistance from various kingdoms in Aceh. The first Dutch expedition to Aceh in 1873 ended in failure. The expedition, led by Major General J.H.R. Kohler, brought around 3,000 soldiers and several warships to attack Aceh. However, poor planning and lack of preparation led to the defeat of the Dutch. Major General Kohler was killed in the battle around the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque [18, 19]. After the failure, the Dutch launched a second expedition in 1874 with better preparation. Led by Jan van Swieten, the Dutch deployed a larger force, consisting of 8,500 soldiers, 4,300 coolies, and 1,500 reserve troops recruited from Dutch mercenaries and vagrants. Despite facing fierce resistance, especially around the Grand Mosque and the Sultan of Aceh's Palace, the Dutch finally succeeded in capturing the Sultan's Palace on January 24, 1874, which was considered a great achievement by the Dutch.

The second military expedition (1874), led by J. van Swieten, was specifically projected to subdue countries outside Greater Aceh through three channels, namely diplomacy, blockade, and military aggression. The diplomatic route was taken by sending envoys who brought a declaration of recognition of the sovereignty of the Dutch East Indies to the heads of the Bumiputra countries, namely the ulëëbalang. The information was known as the "Van Swieten Information," which began to be distributed in 1874. Meanwhile, the blockade was carried out by alerting a number of warship fleets by the colonial side at important points in the Malacca Strait. The aim was to block the Acehnese warship fleet and sabotage the economy of the Acehnese people, especially on the east coast, which was highly dependent on export-import traffic in the strait area. Military aggression as a last resort was carried out to complete diplomatic efforts [20].

Resistance of The Pepper Kingdom against Dutch Colonialism on the East Coast of Aceh

After the conquest of the Aceh Sultanate, the Dutch military continued its expansion into various kingdoms in the Aceh region. In this process, many kingdoms were forced to recognize Dutch rule and sign the Korte Verklating, which signified the transfer of power from the Aceh Sultanate to the colonial government. This conquest not only had political goals but also aimed to control strategic trade routes. Kingdoms with insufficient military strength to resist Dutch pressure were forced to sign a surrender agreement, consisting of three main articles. First, they pledged allegiance to the Queen of the Netherlands; second, they committed to making the enemies of the Netherlands their enemies; and third, they were required to carry out the orders of the Queen of the Netherlands and her representatives. This agreement reflects the Dutch colonial strategy of strengthening their power and control in the newly conquered territories [18, 21]. After signing the Korte Verklaring, Aceh was then positioned as a colonial territory [22].

Between 1874 and 1876, 31 ulëëbalang were recorded as signing a short agreement. In the early 20th century, precisely in 1900, 82 out of 100 ulëëbalang in Aceh were recorded as signing the Korte Verklaring [23]. Several kingdoms that put up fierce resistance against the Dutch included the Simpang Ulim Kingdom, the Langsa Kingdom, and the kingdoms in the Aceh Tamiang region [24]. The Simpang Ulim Kingdom, led by Teuku Nyak Malim, firmly refused to recognize Dutch sovereignty. One important factor that drove this resistance was the prosperity of the region. As a local ruler, Teuku Muda Nyak Malim was able to finance most of the early armed resistance against the Dutch [25]. Teuku Nyak Malim, an Acehnese from the XXVI Moekims, came to the east coast of Aceh to plant pepper in 1860. After succeeding in his business and marrying the village head's daughter in Lho Nibong, he quickly took over the area's government. As a result of the war in Groot-Atjèh, the population of Simpang Ulim increased rapidly because many XXVI Moekims settled there. Teuku Nyak Malim's refusal to submit to the

Dutch sparked a Dutch military attack on the area in 1876. Eventually, he was replaced by Teuku Muda Lamkuta, one of the Petuha-Ampat, although he was considered to be less influential [26]. In the process, Teuku Nyak Malim launched a counterattack on the Dutch fort in the Blang-Ni area. In addition, Nyak Malim also managed to gather significant followers. This resistance made the Dutch feel the need to immediately expel him. Since the Dutch military power on the East Coast was considered inadequate, troop assistance was requested from Kotta Radja [27]. The Aceh Sultanate supported Nja Malim's resistance through Teuku Nyak Makam. In June 1892, Nyak Makam, the imam from Lamnga (Groot-Atjeh), appeared in Simpang Ulim with about 300 of his followers, who were well-received by the local population. However, his efforts to gain the support of other regional leaders were not entirely successful. Several leaders, such as Toekoe Bintara Pekan from Julok-Besar and Radja Nagoer from Idi Cut Kingdom, refused to provide assistance or a route to Nja Makam, and because he also felt unsafe in the lower Edi and Pedawa, he was forced to take a difficult route through the forest towards Semali, then via Perlak, Sungai Raya, and Langsar to Manyak Payed [28].

After holding out for some time, on November 18, 1876, Nyak Malim finally offered to surrender after being forced by Dutch military power. However, he failed to fulfill the stipulated requirements and fled inland. In January 1877, he was declared to have lost his power and was replaced by Teuku Nyak Lamkuta, who stated surrender in 17 articles.

In the Dutch intervention against power in Simpang Ulim State, the Dutch military was also involved in internal politics by supporting states with similar interests. In the conflict between the Simpang Ulim Kingdom and the Kerti Kingdom, the Dutch helped Kerti by sending armed troops and ammunition, as well as providing financial support of 3,000 dollars to Teuku Muda Angkasa, who wanted to help Kerti with 500 people to fight against the Simpang Ulim Kingdom and Tanjung Semantoh.

In November 1876, after a series of military expeditions, the Dutch finally succeeded in forcing the Simpang Ulim Kingdom and Tanjung Semantoh to recognize their sovereignty and placed a supervisor to administer the government, supported by a Dutch military garrison [24]. Since the departure of General van Swieten, the power of the Dutch military in Aceh had increased significantly. In 1876, according to Kielstra, the military force in Aceh consisted of 3,000 Europeans, 180 Africans, and 5,000 natives, excluding officers.

Another Pepper Kingdom that resisted the Dutch colonial expedition was the state of the kingdom in the Tamiang region [15]. Like the Kingdom of Pepper Simpang Ulim, the Kingdom of Pepper Tamiang also fought the Dutch with the help of Teuku Nyak Makam [29]. In January 1878, it was decided that four areas in Tamiang would be placed under the supervision of a Binnenlandsch Bestuur controller with a duty station in Seruwai. Along with the expansion of European companies from Langkat to Tamiang, military protection against attacks from Acehnese groups was moved to Kualasimpang in 1879. Attacks from Acehnese groups consistently occurred in 1885, 1886, and 1893, led by Teuku Nyak Makam from Aceh Besar.

On February 13, 1893, additional Dutch troops from Medan arrived at the mouth of the Tamiang River and cleared the area of Acehnese resistance groups. The troops then moved upstream to destroy a fortress belonging to Nyak Makam in Lubuk Batil. Although the expedition returned to Belawan, this allowed Nyak Makam to become active again and continue the resistance with the same courage as before. In response to this resistance, the Dutch sent a new military force consisting of 8 officers, 400 soldiers, and 4 mountain cannons under the command of Colonel A. H. van Pel. On March 29, 1893, these troops Lubuk Batil and managed to capture no less than 10 Aceh forts, although Nyak Makam retreated to the Upah area and continued to resist [30].

To face Nyak Makam's troops in Tamiang, the Dutch deployed land troops and sea. The peak of the battle occurred at Lubuk Batil Fort, where the Dutch ground forces numbered about 280 men, while the naval landing division numbered about 90 men. After fierce fighting, the Dutch suffered losses to the Acehnese resistance forces, with 4 soldiers killed and 37 others wounded,

including 3 officers. Four strong forts were successfully conquered by getting tough resistance from the Acehese resistance forces, as proven by the discovery of 63 bodies inside the fort. The losses on the enemy side outside the fort were also quite large. From the Dutch military, of the 37 people who were injured, Lieutenant First Infantry C. van der Schroeff, the military commander in Seroewaij, and a navy soldier died. Of the other 35, 6 were seriously injured, including Lieutenant First Class D. A. Mensert, who was shot in the right eye. Among the 63 bodies found at the fort, none were identified as Tamiang. However, from the letters found, it is clear that the Tamiang chiefs, whether willingly or not, supported Nyak Makam and his troops [31].

On the Tamiang side, the war commander and 63 Acehese troops died in the battle, including War Commander Raja Banta Achmad, who died in the battle and was buried on high ground in Kampung Hilir Sungai Iyu (interview with d). After facing various attacks from the Dutch, at the end of 1893, the resistance of the Bendahara and Vocational Youth began to weaken. Raja Maan from Vocational Youth then met Controleur Sieberg in Seruway via T. Sulung Laut Sultan Muda Indera Kesuma. After the Dutch destroyed the last forts in Lubuk Batil and Tumpuk Tengoh, the Bendahara state in Tamiang finally surrendered on April 2, 1893, coinciding with 16 Ramadhan 1315 H. King Maan of the Muda Vocational School also surrendered to the Dutch, marking the end of resistance in the Tamiang region [15].

Heritage Trail Scheme of the Pepper Kingdom on the East Coast of Aceh

The Pepper Kingdom in Aceh, especially in the east coast area, has an important role in the region's history and social, economic, and political development. In the 17th to 19th centuries, the pepper kingdoms in the coastal area of eastern Aceh developed into a pepper planting center, which not only contributed to the local economy but also created complex political dynamics with the formation of a state entity as part of the existing social structure [32]. In addition, the Kingdom of Pepper also played an important role in the resistance against Dutch colonialism, making it an important part of the history of Aceh's struggle [33].

Although largely unknown to the general public, the cultural heritage left by the Pepper Kingdom has high historical value. The heritage includes various historical sites, history, traditional structures, and cultural traces that reflect the political and social life of the past. These sites include defensive forts, pepper trading locations, and the residences and governments of the uleebalang who once led the pepper kingdom. However, many of these sites are currently degraded or forgotten due to a lack of attention to conservation and management.

One solution to maintaining the cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Pepper is the development of the Heritage Trail Scheme. This scheme aims to identify, preserve, and promote the Kingdom of Pepper cultural heritage site as a sustainable tourism destination. The Heritage Trail is a historical-cultural tourism route that connects various important sites related to the history and culture of pepper so that visitors can gain a deeper understanding of Aceh's cultural heritage, especially pepper culture.

Heritage trail development This can involve various elements, such as tour guides who understand local history, adequate supporting infrastructure, and information boards at each site explaining the important role of the place in Aceh's history. This scheme can also be linked to conservation initiatives involving local communities that directly relate to the historical sites.

With the implementation of this scheme, cultural heritage sites in the pepper kingdom of the Simpang Ulim region can get more attention, not only as part of history but also as economic potential through sustainable tourism development. Good management will ensure that future generations can understand and appreciate the contribution of the Pepper Kingdom to the history of Aceh's struggle and culture. The heritage trail scheme, developed based on the historical heritage of the Pepper Kingdom on the east coast of Aceh, is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Heritage Trail The Pepper Kingdom of Simpang Ulim

No	Site Name	Description	Activity
1	Historical Port of Pepper, Simpang Ulim Kingdom 	A small port that once served as a major entry and exit point for trade and military activities in the past.	Learn about Aceh's maritime history, landscape photography, and pepper monuments.
2	Old Mosque Simpang Ulim (Al-Hikmah)  	Old Mosque Simpang Ulim is one of the oldest mosques in East Aceh, featuring traditional Acehese architecture and holding significant historical and religious value. This mosque has served as a spiritual and social center for the local community for centuries.	Visitors can explore the mosque with a guide who explains the traditional Acehese architecture and the history of its construction.
3	Grave of Teuku Muda Yusuf (son of Teuku Nyak Malim) 	This grave is the final resting place of Teuku Muda Yusuf, an important figure in the resistance against Dutch colonialism in East Aceh.	Visitors can pay their respects at Teuku Muda Yusuf's grave, hear stories about his struggle against colonialism, and learn about the significance of local resistance in Aceh's history.

The Heritage Trail of the Kingdom of Pepper at Simpang Ulim and Sungai Iyu was designed as an effort to connect various historical sites that have important values in the history and local culture of Aceh, especially those related to the pepper civilization in the Kingdom of Pepper. The main objective of this trail is to revive the historical traces of the Kingdom of Pepper, which was once one of the important economic and political centers in East Aceh from the 17th to 19th centuries. The Heritage Trail is expected to be a means to present historical stories that have been neglected and provide an opportunity for visitors to explore places that have important meanings in building Aceh's civilization in the past and the history of Aceh's struggle against Dutch colonialism carried out by the Kingdom of Pepper.

In addition, the Kingdom of Pepper Heritage Trail has a long-term vision to develop sustainable tourism in Aceh. By utilizing the potential of historical sites as tourist attractions, this trail is expected to provide a positive economic impact on the local community while maintaining cultural and environmental sustainability. Each site that is part of this heritage trail will be

developed in an integrated manner, with the support of environmentally friendly infrastructure, detailed historical guides, and management that involves the local community.

Table 2. Heritage Trail The Pepper Kingdom of Sungai Iyu

No	Site Name	Description	Activity
1	Grave of Panglima Perang Banta Ahmad 	This grave is the final resting place of Panglima Perang Banta Ahmad, a well-known Acehnese military leader recognized for his bravery in leading the resistance against Dutch colonizers. This site is honored as a historical and pilgrimage site for the local community.	Local residents will share folk stories and oral traditions related to Panglima Banta Ahmad and the history of resistance in Aceh.
2	Baiturrasyidin Attahasyi Mosque, Bendahara District, Aceh Tamiang Regency  	Baiturrasyidin Attahasyi Mosque is a historical mosque in Sungai Iyu with traditional Acehnese architecture, playing a crucial role as a center for religious and social activities in the local community. This mosque was also used as a strategic meeting place during the resistance against colonizers.	Visitors can explore the mosque with a guide explaining its history, social role in the past, and unique Acehnese architecture.
3	Lubuk Batil, Bendahara District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province	The village of Lubuk Batil is a significant location that became a battleground between Acehnese warriors and Dutch colonial forces. This village symbolizes the courage and fighting spirit of the Acehnese people in defending their independence and sovereignty.	Visitors can join a battlefield tour led by a local historian to learn about the tactics and strategies used by Acehnese fighters against the colonizers.

Through the Heritage Trail, visitors will get an in-depth and educational tourism experience and help support the preservation of Aceh's cultural heritage. This Heritage Trail is also expected to revive the identity and pride of the local community towards the history and culture of the Kingdom of Pepper and become a model for the development of cultural heritage trails in other regions in Indonesia.

Challenges and Solutions in Developing a Heritage Trail on the East Coast of Aceh

The development of the Heritage Trail on the east coast of Aceh faces several diverse challenges, both in terms of technical and socio-cultural aspects. Currently, the local government in Aceh has taken the initial steps in maintaining and identifying cultural heritage in its region, especially those related to the history of the Kingdom of Pepper and other historical sites (interview with Mr. A). This step is realized through a series of studies aimed at documenting, evaluating, and determining sites that have important historical and cultural value as cultural heritage. This study involves searching historical archives, conducting field studies, and holding discussions with local figures to gather accurate information about the area's condition and potential of cultural heritage.

However, until now, the process is still ongoing. This is due to a variety of factors, including limited human resources, funding, and lack of technical support and infrastructure. In some cases, identified historical sites have yet to receive the attention they deserve in terms of preservation and restoration and are still at risk of being damaged or even lost. In addition, the lack of training programs for cultural heritage caretakers means that local communities carry out most maintenance efforts independently, and they often need more technical knowledge to care for these historical sites.

Although these challenges are quite significant, the initial steps taken by the local government are an important effort in maintaining the sustainability of local cultural heritage. Improved coordination between local governments, academics, and local communities is needed to accelerate the identification and preservation process. With better support in terms of resources, training, and integrated policy development, the local government can optimize these efforts and ensure that cultural heritage in Aceh Tamiang is well preserved for future generations.

A major challenge in the development of sustainable tourism in the region is the absence of a comprehensive tourism management plan. Although the local government has conducted preliminary studies of historical sites, the identification and preservation processes remain incomplete. Additionally, the custodians of cultural heritage often lack formal training, which results in them managing conservation efforts independently, without adequate technical support or official guidance (interview with Mr. F). Furthermore, the protection of natural and cultural heritage in the heritage trail areas is insufficient, and this is compounded by a lack of awareness among local communities regarding the importance of sustainability. This lack of coordination, coupled with daily activities and infrastructure development, poses a significant risk to the preservation of historical sites, potentially leading to environmental degradation and the erosion of cultural integrity.

To address these challenges, the development of a comprehensive sustainable tourism management plan is essential. This plan should incorporate strategies focused on preserving cultural heritage, protecting the environment, and improving tourism infrastructure in a way that supports long-term sustainability. An integral component of this plan is the provision of formal training for heritage custodians to ensure they have the requisite skills and knowledge to effectively maintain historical sites. Such training is crucial not only for the proper conservation of cultural and natural resources but also for empowering custodians to take on the role of educational tour guides. This dual approach would not only contribute to the physical preservation of sites but also enhance the visitor experience, fostering a deeper understanding of the region's cultural and historical significance.

Empowering local communities is also an important solution in developing heritage trails. Active community participation in tourism planning and management will increase their sense of

ownership and responsibility for preserving cultural heritage. In addition, by involving local communities, the economic potential of heritage-based tourism can be more evenly distributed, encouraging more inclusive economic development.

Finally, socialization of sustainability awareness needs to be carried out among local residents and visitors. This awareness will build a shared understanding of the importance of maintaining a balance between cultural preservation, environmental protection, and economic development, so heritage-based tourism on Aceh's east coast can run sustainably for future generations.

Conclusions

This study emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural heritage preservation with sustainable tourism, particularly through developing the Heritage Trail in the kingdom of pepper, Aceh. This study addressed the gap in tourism literature, where many previous policies and studies have focused more on the physical conservation of historical sites without considering the broader economic and social impacts. In this regard, the development of the Heritage Trail offers an effective solution to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability and strengthen local communities' cultural identity.

The main findings of this study indicate that Heritage Trail has the potential not only as a tool to preserve historical heritage but also as a means of empowering the local community's economy through active participation in tourism. Therefore, a tourism model that combines cultural preservation and sustainable development is needed to ensure equitable long-term benefits for all parties involved. This study also challenges policymakers to pay more attention to the relationship between tourism and community empowerment in tourism policy planning, particularly in areas with great historical potential, such as Aceh.

From a theoretical and practical perspective, this study provides a new contribution to the development of sustainable tourism theory by focusing on integrating cultural, economic, and social aspects in the management of historical and cultural heritage-based tourism. The results of this study offer guidance for policymakers and tourism managers to develop more holistic and integrated strategies that pay attention to historical and cultural preservation and promote local communities' economic well-being. Furthermore, it is important to conduct further research on the long-term impacts of Heritage Trail development on cultural heritage preservation and its impact on the local economy. Further research can also help develop a more comprehensive model for sustainable tourism management that prioritizes a balance between cultural preservation and economic development. Globally, this study shows that heritage-based tourism can be an important pillar in sustainable development. On the other hand, specifically, this study highlights the great potential of the Kingdom of Pepper as a sustainable tourism destination, which not only preserves history and culture but also contributes to strengthening the identity and well-being of local communities.

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