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READINESS OF CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL TOURISM DESTINATIONS ON MOROTAI ISLAND FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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Abstract

This study analyzes the readiness of cultural tourism destinations on Morotai Island, specifically Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, in implementing the principles of sustainable tourism. These two destinations were selected due to their high historical value, although their management and supporting facilities have not been optimally developed. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that both destinations are not fully prepared to apply sustainable tourism principles. Museum Trikora faces issues related to damaged facilities, limited maintenance, and restrictions on activities due to land ownership, while Army Dock Beach lacks official management, adequate infrastructure, and proper environmental maintenance. In addition, community involvement and coordination among relevant agencies remain limited. Based on analysis of five main aspects, including management, infrastructure and facilities, community involvement, environmental and cultural preservation, as well as promotion and accessibility, the level of understanding and participation of local communities and managers in sustainable tourism practices remains relatively low. Therefore, strengthening destination management, enhancing active community participation, and improving supporting facilities are essential steps toward achieving sustainable cultural tourism development on Morotai Island.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the important sectors in the global economy. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable tourism is tourism that considers the economic, social, and environmental impacts of a tourist destination, both in the present and in the future. The development of tourism in a country can produce both positive and negative impacts, with economic, social, and cultural aspects being the most significant (Pjanić, 2019). As one of the world's largest industries with the potential to boost a country's economy and generate substantial employment, tourism needs to be continuously developed in order to improve the economy and welfare of local communities in tourist areas (Sugiarto & Nuruddin, 2024)

From a cultural perspective, tourism plays an important role in the development and preservation of cultural tourism in Indonesia (Sugiyarto & Amaruli, 2018). As the largest archipelagic country in the world, Indonesia has many inhabited islands, including Morotai Island in North Maluku Province. This island is part of the "10 New Balis" initiative launched by the government in 2015 (Fadli et al., 2022). Morotai holds significant potential for the development of cultural tourism through its history, local traditions such as dances and traditional ceremonies, and natural beauty. This island also has marked global history as it once served as a military base during World War II due to its strategic location in the Pacific Ocean (Mouw et al., 2022).

Several tourist attractions in Morotai, such as the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, have the potential to be developed while still adhering to the principles of sustainable tourism. These principles not only focus on financial benefits but also emphasize environmental sustainability and the social welfare of local communities. However, a major challenge is the low number of tourists visiting. According to data from the Morotai Tourism Office, the number of visitors in 2023 was recorded at 10,510 people, while in 2024 it decreased to 6,629 people. The details are, Museum Trikora received 1,604 visits in 2023 and 1,456 visits in 2024, while Army Dock Beach only recorded 2,589 visits in 2023. This decline can be attributed to several factors identified through field observations and interviews, including the limited availability and poor condition of supporting facilities and infrastructure, the absence of official management at Army Dock Beach, and restrictions on activities at Museum Trikora due to land ownership issues. In addition, inadequate promotion and weak coordination among relevant stakeholders have reduced destination visibility and limited tourism development, which in turn has affected tourist interest and revisit intentions (Lestari et al., 2025; Masrurun & Nastiti, 2023; Saragih, 2024; Zebua et al., 2025).

The readiness of cultural attractions in Morotai, including the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, is highly dependent on the participation of the local community. The development of tourism is closely linked to the availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure, while maintaining environmental sustainability and cultural management based on local values. Community participation is crucial so that they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the sustainability of tourism (Sulistyadi et al., 2019). Data from the Tourism Office show that there are 14 Tourism Awareness Groups (Pokdarwis) spread across Morotai, indicating great potential for community involvement. Additionally, the role of local

government is also a crucial factor in promoting sustainable tourism management (Tedyansyah et al., 2025).

These efforts align with Regulation of the Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy of the Republic of Indonesia No. 9 of 2021 concerning Guidelines for Sustainable Tourism Destinations, which has been recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and emphasize the diversity, uniqueness, and distinctiveness of culture and nature in tourism development (Nugroho et al., 2024). These guidelines aim to establish global standards for sustainable tourism while enhancing local practices through collaboration between government and the private sector. By following these guidelines, it is expected that the management of cultural and historical tourism at the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach can be carried out by combining local wisdom, cultural preservation, and environmental protection.

There are two fundamental reasons why this research was conducted. First, Morotai Island possesses significant potential as a cultural and historical tourism destination, as it preserves the legacy of World War II, including the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, which serve as important historical landmarks (Karim et al., 2024). In addition, Morotai was the venue for the Sail Morotai event in 2012, an international event that further reinforced its attractiveness on the global stage (Arsul et al., 2016). However, tourism development that is not managed based on sustainable principles may generate negative impacts on the local environment and culture (Situmorang et al., 2025). Therefore, it is essential to analyze the extent to which cultural tourism destinations in Morotai are prepared to implement sustainable tourism, particularly in terms of cultural preservation, environmental protection, and community empowerment. Second, the issue of sustainable tourism has become increasingly relevant in many destinations, including in Eastern Indonesia. Nevertheless, research specifically addressing the readiness of the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach in applying sustainable tourism principles remains limited.

Despite the growing body of literature on sustainable tourism development, most existing studies focus on well-established destinations or urban tourism areas, while research on the readiness of cultural and historical tourism destinations in remote island regions remains limited (Butler, 2025; UNWTO, 2018). In particular, there is a lack of empirical studies that specifically examine the preparedness of cultural tourism destinations in Morotai Island, such as Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, in implementing sustainable tourism principles. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the level of readiness of Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach as cultural and historical tourism destinations on Morotai Island in applying sustainable tourism principles, based on five main aspects: management, infrastructure and facilities, community involvement, environmental and cultural preservation, as well as promotion and accessibility.

METHODS

This study uses qualitative descriptive method with the aim of systematically describing the phenomena that occur in the field without intending to generalize the findings broadly (Adiputra et al., 2021 in Nadila & Jamia, 2023). This method was chosen because it is suitable for understanding the social and cultural phenomena experienced by the community and tourism managers, which are then presented descriptively through written and oral forms (Moleong, 2013 in Fiantika et al., 2022). The unit of analysis in this study is cultural attractions that represent tourist destinations on Morotai Island, namely the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, which include cultural activities, history, and the involvement of local communities in cultural preservation and sustainable tourism management. The research data consisted of primary data obtained through interviews with informants such as managers, local community members, and tourists, as well as secondary data in the form of relevant documents, journals, articles, and regulations. The sampling technique used is purposive sampling with informant criteria that are directly related to the management and activities of cultural tourism in Morotai.

Data collection was conducted through field observation, in-depth interview, and documentation in the form of notes and photographs to support the findings. The data obtained was then analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model by Miles and Huberman in (Sugiyono, 2018), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification. To maintain data credibility, the researcher applied extended observation, triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, and conducted member checks with informants to ensure the validity of the data obtained. This research was conducted on Morotai Island, specifically at the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, with a time frame starting from the preparation of the proposal, observation, data collection, to analysis and writing of the research report, which began in January.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Museum Trikora (World War II)

Museum Trikora is one of the cultural attractions on Morotai Island, North Maluku. Museum Trikora was built on Morotai Island because this island was one of the bases for the Indonesian Army in its efforts to liberate West Irian from Dutch colonial rule, and also to commemorate their services. The name Trikora is abbreviation from "Tri Komando Rakyat" or Three Commands of the people, which was initiated by President Soekarno in 1961. The museum was inaugurated in 2012 by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.



Figure 1. Museum World War II & Trikora
(Source: Researcher Data 2025)

Physically, the museum consists of two glass buildings; however, only one building is currently in use, as the other has been severely damaged. The museum is located on land owned by the Indonesian Air Force (TNI AU), which is relatively accessible due to its proximity to Daruba city center. Inside the museum, various World War II artifacts and items related to the Trikora incident are displayed, including photo documentation and historical relics from that period.

Although Museum Trikora holds high historical value based on its collections and historical background, it is not yet widely known to the public or tourists from outside the region. However, as part of a destination's tourism offer, museums have significant potential to enhance visitor experiences and enrich public understanding of history through educational and interpretive functions (Badurina et al., 2025). In this context, the existence of Museum Trikora demonstrates strong potential to increase public awareness of national history, particularly related to the Trikora incident and the Eastern region of Indonesia.

Army Dock Beach

Army Dock Beach, a beach crowded with tourists, is located between Darame Village and Juanga Village in South Morotai District, Morotai Island. This beach was one of the locations used for the landing of thousands of allied troops and also the military vehicles during World War II.

The name "Army Dock" has the following meaning: dock military, which at that time was known with the term "white beach". Army Dock was built when the allies had difficulty landing due to its muddy location and many reefs. Therefore, the allies build as many as 5 bridges or dock for landing. This is where they also built emergency hospitals and military camps (Handoko et al., 2018). Although now the docks are no longer intact, their historical significance can still be felt through the stories told by the local community.



Figure 2. Documentation of 5 Army Dock drones
(Source: Documentation) Maluku Balar, 2017)

In terms of location, Army Dock Beach is situated relatively close to the city center and features an extended coastline with scenic sea view. The beach is located on land owned by the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), similar to Museum Trikora; therefore, it is not officially designated as a tourist area managed by the local government. Consequently, beach management related to cleanliness and utilization of the area for small-scale economic activities is primarily carried out by the local community.

Army Dock Beach is a well-known local beach that is often a place to relax or enjoy the sunset. With more serious sustainable management and approaches, this beach has the potential to become one of Morotai's tourist icons, which represents its historical value and natural charm.

Field Findings *at the Museum Trikora*

The findings in the Museum Trikora field are described below using a five-aspect approach, namely management, infrastructure and facilities, community involvement, cultural and environmental preservation, and promotion and accessibility.

Management

Based on interviews with The Museum Trikora Manager, it is known that this museum is under the responsibility of the Morotai Regional Government. However, the government itself has not paid much attention to the condition of the museum. The museum itself does not yet have a security system on site. There are two buildings that are used as a museum, and one of them is totally damaged and can no longer be used. Meanwhile, many facilities inside the main building are also damaged.

This museum does not have an official admission fee, so visitors only need to pay voluntarily or as much as they can afford. Even with this policy, the number of tourists visiting is very low. Meanwhile, the museum managers only receive a payment from the government around Rp. 1,000,000/month, which is not enough to cover their living expenses, especially when they have to pay for their own transportation from home to the museum. Despite facing budget constraints and policy limitations, the managers still continue to carry out their duties,

which include being present regularly, cleaning the museum rooms, and serving guests from visiting agencies as well as foreign tourists and locals.

Museum Trikora is managed by the local government, but the land belongs to the Indonesian Air Force, so all activities that will be held at the museum location must first obtain permission from the military. Programs that were previously running, such as historical films screenings and art performances, have been discontinued because they did not obtain further permission.

Infrastructure and Facilities

The damage to the buildings attracts the attention of visitors, so the manager often receives complaints from visitors about the condition of the museum. Broken windows, the air conditioning was not working, and the roof or ceiling were starting to collapse. Outside the building also has no facilities supporters, such as public information boards, directional signs, and proper toilets.

Community Involvement

From the interviews, the management said that the local community participates in efforts to maintain the museum, but when the author saw it firsthand in the field, this was not entirely true. Based on the data that the author obtained from the Tourism Office, it is known that a Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) has been formed in the Morotai Island region, but during the data collection process in the field, the author did not find any activities related to the management or preservation of objects by this group. The impact of this lack of involvement is clearly seen in the condition of the museum, which has suffered various physical damages, as well as the absence of programs that can involve the community.

Cultural and Environmental Preservation

This museum is an important historical site, where during the liberation of West Irian or Trikora, this place was used as an emergency military landing site. This place is also the location of the Japanese surrender and signing ceremony to the allies.

Based on interviews with the manager, it is known that although the facilities and buildings belong to the local government, the collection of World War II artifacts in the museum is privately owned or belongs to the World War II Observers Group, of which one of the members is the manager of the Museum. The collection of World War II and Operation Trikora artifacts includes allied military uniforms, one is a uniform owned by General Douglas Mac Arthur, Japanese military uniforms, military badges, half body statues of Allied and Japanese leaders, although the names on some of the statues are missing and illegible. In addition, there is also combat equipment and vehicles such as large radios or military communication devices, several replica tanks, cannons used in Operation Trikora, various types of ammunition like bullets, torpedoes, grenades, and other heavy weapons. There are also soldiers eating and drinking utensils, as well as several glass artifacts, such as medicine bottles, perfume bottles, and drink bottles carried by Allied soldiers.

Inside the museum, there is a room that has been turned into a mini theater that has an available place to sit, there are also historical narrative boards, and miniature of Japan's surrender to the Allies. Meanwhile, outside the museum, there is a Trikora monument and several Indonesian National Army tanks on display in the park in front of the museum.

Although several important events took place at the museum's location, this is still not a strong enough reason to hold activities that support cultural preservation, such as historical film screenings, and other art performances. Efforts to prevent damage and pollution of the museum environment have also not been carried out optimally.

Promotion and Accessibility

Museum Trikora also lacks in promotion. There are no effective promotional media, such as active social media accounts that can be held by the managers, brochures, websites. Through an interview with the manager, it is known that social media accounts are managed by the government, more precisely the Morotai Island Regency Tourism Office. The government itself does not promote the Museum enough, making it difficult for the museum to be known by the people outside the region, which causes a low number of tourist visits. Access to the museum is quite easy, because the museum is located directly on the main road, but there are no directions and no public transportation serving the area around the museum.

Field Findings at Army Dock Beach

The following are the results of field findings at Army Dock Beach, which also used a five-aspect approach.

Management

Through an interview with the community, who are also traders at Army Dock Beach, it was found that this tourist attraction is not managed by the local government, nor does it have an official manager or anyone actively managing Army Dock Beach. Because the land on which this tourist attraction stands is owned by the Indonesian Air Force, so that the local community can only rent the land to use as a place to trade.

Although a park and other facilities have been built at the site of Army Dock Beach, the absence of a manager has caused both to become neglected and damaged. There is no clear management system and also programs that can support sustainable tourism management.

Infrastructure and Facilities

For infrastructure and facilities, as the author has explained in the management aspect, there is a fairly large park at Army Dock Beach, but it is poorly maintained and also the facilities. The only facilities available are public toilets, a tourist sign that is almost falling apart, gazebos and stalls. There are no information boards, directional signs and other facilities or amenities that should be there at a tourist site.

Community Involvement

The community surrounding Army Dock Beach is yet fully involved, particularly in environmental management and conservation, as community participation tends to focus more on economic-related activities. Similar to the conditions observed at Museum Trikora, field observations at Army Dock Beach found no evidence of an established Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) or a community organization responsible for site management, including safety and beach cleanliness. However, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) are known to conduct occasional inspections, particularly at night, due to frequent visits by groups of young people that may cause disturbances, such as the consumption of alcoholic beverages.

Cultural and Environmental Preservation

The environment around Army Dock Beach is not well maintained. There is no waste management system, so there is a lot of litter on the beach. This tourist attraction, which is a military landing site, has historical value, but there are no educational programs and information about history provided here. This shows a lack of attention from government and land owners to preserve the environment and culture of this beach.

Promotion and Accessibility

Need to remember that there is no official manager for this tourist attraction. Therefore, there are no formal promotional activities yet, only informally from mouth to mouth. Even no board information general and history on site, no brochure or posters distributed, and no activities to attract tourists to visit. Access to Army Dock Beach itself is fairly easy, although there are no clear directional signs around the location.

Discussion

Based on field observations and interviews, Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach on Morotai Island demonstrate low readiness in implementing sustainable tourism when assessed using the UNWTO's three main indicators: economic, social, and environmental. Economically, both sites remain underdeveloped. Museum Trikora lacks a structured ticketing and revenue management system, resulting in limited financial capacity to support maintenance and site development. Similarly, Army Dock Beach operates without formal management and relies on informal community initiatives, which constrains reinvestment and long-term financial sustainability. This condition reflects weak institutional and strategic management, which Kotler et al. (2008) identify as a major barrier to sustainable revenue generation in cultural institutions.

From a social perspective, community involvement through the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) is still minimal and largely passive. Local participation is mostly limited to small-scale economic activities rather than active engagement in planning, management, or decision-making processes. According to Kotler et al. (2008), effective cultural tourism development requires strong community integration and stakeholder engagement. The limited role of local communities at both sites indicates that social sustainability has not yet become a development priority.

Environmental conditions at both attractions also remain suboptimal. Museum Trikora faces facility deterioration due to inadequate maintenance, which not only reduces the quality of the visitor experience but also threatens the long-term sustainability of the site. Meanwhile, Army Dock Beach experiences unmanaged waste disposal issues, causing damage to the coastal area and threatening its ecological integrity. Neither site has implemented systematic conservation programs or environmental education initiatives for the community and tourists. This situation contradicts recent perspectives on sustainable heritage management that emphasize long-term conservation and integrated governance (Pisolkar, 2024).

These findings are consistent with previous studies on sustainable cultural tourism in developing and remote destinations. Janprachom et al. (2021) highlighted that inadequate infrastructure, weak institutional coordination, and limited community participation are major

barriers to sustainable tourism development. Similar conditions are evident at Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, indicating that strengthening management capacity, institutional coordination, and community engagement is essential for improving the sustainability of cultural tourism on Morotai Island.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach on Morotai Island are not yet fully prepared to implement the principles of sustainable tourism as formulated in the three pillars of UNWTO, namely economic, social, and environmental. The current level of readiness is still limited, so further efforts are needed to integrate community participation, strengthen the local economy, and preserve the environment in destination management. This conclusion was drawn cautiously based on observation data and interviews, so that generalization outside the context of this study needs to be made with careful consideration.

The limitations of this study lie in its scope, which focused only on two destinations, namely the Museum Trikora and Army Dock Beach, as well as the relatively limited number of informants, which may not fully represent the overall condition of sustainable tourism in Morotai Island. In addition, the study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, making the findings exploratory rather than widely generalizable. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the scope to other tourist destinations in Morotai and its surrounding areas, involve a greater number and variety of informants from multiple stakeholders, and consider quantitative or mixed-method approaches. By addressing these shortcomings, subsequent studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the readiness of cultural tourism destinations to implement sustainable tourism principles and offer practical guidance for local authorities, communities, and tourism managers.

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