



Vol. 14, No. 1, January 2026	Copyright © 2026, is licensed under a CC-BY-SA
Pages: 171-194	Publisher: SCAD Independent
DOI: https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v14i1.1357	P-ISSN: 2338-8617 / E-ISSN: 2443-2067

The Challenges and Strategies of Coastal Tourism Development: The Insight from Kampai Island, Indonesia

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Received: February 22, 2024	Accepted: January 23, 2026	Published: January 30, 2026
Article Url: https://journal.scadindependent.org/index.php/jipeuradeun/article/view/1357		

Abstract

While leveraging local potential is an established paradigm for sustainable tourism, its application in geographically isolated contexts remains complex and underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining the unique case of Kampai Island, Indonesia, a remote destination possessing underutilized natural and cultural assets. The objectives of this research are: 1) to identify the island's tourism potential and development challenges; and 2) to formulate comprehensive strategies for sustainable growth. Utilizing a phenomenological qualitative design, data were gathered through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The findings highlight significant potential in natural features such as Berawe Beach, as well as cultural-historical sites including the Keramat Panjang and Mas Merah cemeteries. However, development efforts are hindered by multidimensional barriers, encompassing inadequate infrastructure, limited institutional capacity, a lack of strategic partnerships, and human resource limitations. Synthesizing these insights, the discussion proposes an integrated strategic framework. Key recommendations involve strengthening local institutions and human resources through context-specific training, fostering multi-stakeholder collaborations to leverage external resources, prioritizing participatory infrastructure development, and designing integrated tourism products based on local narratives. In conclusion, sustainable tourism on remote islands requires a holistic approach that strategically leverages local assets and addresses systemic constraints via inclusive and collaborative planning.

Keywords: Coastal Community; Local Potential; Tourism; Indonesia.

A. Introduction

Local potential is widely recognized as a strategic asset for attracting tourists and significantly contributing to tourism sector development (Kurniawaty et al., 2021). The strategic utilization of culture and local assets has proven effective in driving sustainable regional tourism. This phenomenon is evident across diverse geographical contexts, from Wen County in China, where local martial arts traditions have spurred economic and urban advancement (Raimondo et al., 2022), to ecotourism practices grounded in local wisdom in Central Aceh (Zainal et al., 2024), and studies on mangrove ecotourism in Langsa City (Zainal et al., 2023). These cases reinforce the paradigm that cultural capital and local knowledge constitute vital resources for sustainable tourism.

Despite the implementation of local, potential-based development paradigms across regions, their application in unique geographical contexts often poses complex challenges. This study focuses on Kampai Island in Langkat Regency, Indonesia, which features primary tourist attractions such as Berawe Beach, noted for its pristine white sand and exotic ambiance along the Strait of Malacca, as well as the Keramat Panjang Tomb and the Salam (*Mas Merah*) Tomb. The strategic development of these assets holds promise for enhancing community welfare. However, as a small island geographically isolated from the mainland, tourism development on Kampai Island faces multidimensional challenges requiring specific consideration and approaches distinct from those in mainstream tourism areas.

In geographically isolated and socially distinctive areas such as Kampai Island, tourism development cannot be approached solely as an economic or infrastructural agenda, but must be understood as a multidimensional governance process involving legal, cultural, religious, and community-based considerations. Studies on tourism governance in Aceh demonstrate that local tourism initiatives are closely intertwined with regulatory frameworks, particularly in contexts where religious norms and community rights play a central role, requiring synergistic collaboration among state actors, communities, religious authorities, academics, and business sectors (Rahayu & Abbas, 2024; Trishananto et al., 2024). At the community level, residents' perceptions toward tourism activities significantly influence acceptance, participation, and long-



term sustainability, especially in developing regions with limited market access and high socio-economic vulnerability, as shown in comparable small-market contexts (Munkhuu et al., 2023).

Furthermore, tourism development in peripheral and island regions often intersects with issues of land ownership and customary rights, making the protection of local and indigenous land tenure a critical policy concern to prevent marginalization and social conflict (Simamora, 2025). Beyond formal governance structures, locally embedded institutions – particularly religious institutions – also hold strategic potential in shaping inclusive economic activities that align tourism development with social welfare, moral values, and community resilience (Md Radzi et al., 2024). These dynamics suggest that tourism development on Kampai Island requires a context-sensitive and integrated approach that moves beyond generic local-based development models, acknowledging the island's geographical isolation, socio-cultural complexity, and governance challenges as defining factors in shaping sustainable and community-oriented tourism strategies.

Previous research has extensively examined locally based tourism development models, providing valuable theoretical and practical foundations. These include studies on ecotourism based on local wisdom and conservation ethics in Central Aceh (Zainal et al., 2024), mangrove ecotourism management through multi-stakeholder collaboration in Langsa City promoting environmental and social sustainability (Zainal et al., 2023), and the utilization of cultural traditions for tourism and economic development in China (Raimondo et al., 2022). This body of literature consistently underscores the importance of effective governance, community engagement, and the utilization of local resources.

While these studies offer significant insights, a knowledge gap persists concerning isolated small island contexts like Kampai Island. The complexity of tourism development on the island, with its distinctive geographical, social, and economic characteristics, extends beyond the contexts examined in prior research. Furthermore, existing studies have often focused on the impacts of specific resource utilization or collaboration models, whereas comprehensive strategies for holistically optimizing local potential in remote island settings remain underexplored.



While these studies offer significant insights, a knowledge gap persists concerning isolated small island contexts like Kampai Island, particularly in relation to how complex socio-legal, economic, and cultural dynamics intersect in shaping development outcomes. The complexity of tourism development on the island, with its distinctive geographical, social, and economic characteristics, extends beyond the contexts examined in prior research, which often emphasize sectoral interventions or single-issue governance frameworks. Existing studies in related fields demonstrate that community participation, social inclusion, and local empowerment are deeply influenced by institutional arrangements, legal clarity, and partnership-based development strategies, as shown in community-centered political education and participatory empowerment initiatives in peripheral regions (Kadir et al., 2024), as well as in community-based economic development models grounded in partnership cooperation and collective welfare principles (Ali, 2024).

Moreover, unresolved legal ambiguities—particularly those related to ownership, compensation, and the interaction between Islamic law and customary norms—have been shown to generate social vulnerability and conflict in local economic practices, underscoring the importance of legal coherence in development planning (Arianti et al., 2025; Al Idrus et al., 2024). In remote and marginalized settings, such governance gaps may further exacerbate risks of exploitation, inequality, and weak institutional protection, as reflected in broader challenges of law enforcement and public awareness in safeguarding community rights (Saffanah et al., 2024). Taken together, these perspectives indicate that tourism development in isolated island contexts cannot rely solely on optimizing physical or cultural resources, but must be embedded within a holistic framework that integrates community empowerment, legal certainty, institutional partnership, and social protection—dimensions that remain insufficiently addressed in existing tourism-focused scholarship on small islands such as Kampai Island.

Departing from previous research, this study specifically addresses the unique context of Kampai Island, a small island with distinct socio-ecological characteristics. Its novelty lies in formulating a comprehensive and inclusive approach that integrates social, economic, and environmental dimensions to address sustainable tourism



development challenges on remote islands. This study explicitly focuses on strategies to optimize local potential, beyond impact identification, to foster inclusive growth and enhance community resilience.

To address this gap, the study objectives are: 1) to explore the tourism potential of Kampai Island as a prospective destination along with its inherent development challenges; and 2) to formulate comprehensive strategic interventions to promote sustainable tourism growth. Academically, this study contributes to the literature on tourism development in remote island regions. Practically, it aims to offer effective strategies that optimize local assets, such as local wisdom, history, and culture, to address developmental barriers while mitigating the risks of environmental degradation and social inequality from uncontrolled tourism expansion (Navío-Marco et al., 2018; Tong et al., 2024).

Ultimately, optimizing Kampai Island's intrinsic local assets is essential for developing sustainable tourism that benefits the local community. Therefore, exploring and optimizing local wisdom in managing tourism resources is crucial for fostering a prosperous, independent, and adaptable community (Audefroy & Sánchez, 2017). This study aims to promote socially inclusive growth and improved quality of life while facilitating the preservation and intergenerational transmission of local knowledge.

B. Method

This study used a qualitative, phenomenological design to examine how tourism development is experienced and understood by actors living and working in a coastal island community. The phenomenological design was employed to capture the meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of individuals directly involved in tourism activities and local development processes, allowing the research to explore tourism dynamics as they are subjectively perceived within a specific socio-cultural and environmental context (Flood, 2010). Through this approach, the study sought to understand the complexity of social realities surrounding tourism development on a small island, particularly from the perspectives of community members who are often marginalized in formal development planning.

The research took place in Kampai Island Village, located in Pangkalan Susu District, Langkat Regency, North Sumatra. Kampai Island lies along the Malacca Strait



and is characterized by a coastal ecosystem in Aru Bay, which functions as the estuary of several rivers originating from the Sumatran mainland, including the Besitang, Salahaji, and Serangjaya Rivers (Soedewo, 2013). This location was selected due to its significant yet underutilized tourism potential, combined with persistent socio-economic challenges faced by the local community, including disparities between natural resource wealth and residents' welfare levels, as previously highlighted in regional development discourse (Muhammad, 2018).

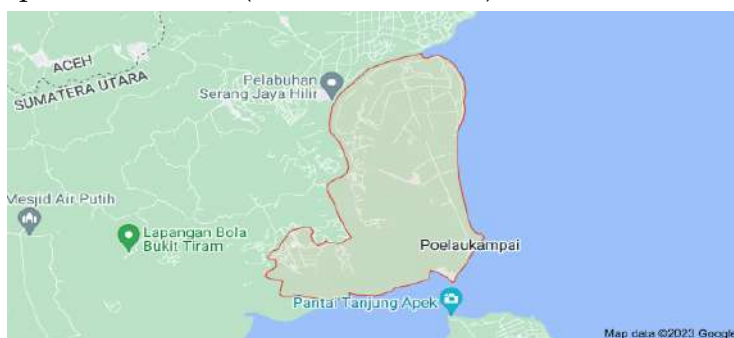


Figure 1. Map of Kampai Island

Informants were selected purposively to ensure that the data reflected direct involvement and contextual knowledge. They included tourism actors engaged in managing or operating tourism sites, local government representatives involved in tourism planning and policymaking, and members of the coastal community who possess in-depth knowledge of local social, economic, and environmental conditions.

Data collection was carried out through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation involved the researcher residing within the community for approximately one month, enabling immersion in everyday social and cultural life while directly observing tourism-related practices and interactions among local actors (Benson & O'Reilly, 2022). In-depth interviews were conducted using both structured and semi-structured formats, guided by key questions focusing on tourism potential, development constraints, and strategies perceived as appropriate by informants (Spradley, 2016). To strengthen contextual understanding, document analysis was undertaken on village regulations, official statistical data, development planning documents, previous reports, and relevant media coverage, which served as complementary primary and secondary data sources (Cardno, 2019).

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative analysis process following the stages proposed by Patton (2015). Analysis began with a comprehensive examination of the entire dataset to identify recurring patterns, such as repeated attitudes, behaviors, opinions, and events emerging from interviews, observations, and documents. These patterns were then organized into thematic categories to capture the core characteristics of the phenomena under study. Subsequently, relationships among themes were examined to develop an integrated understanding of tourism development challenges and strategic responses within the local context. Data validity and reliability were ensured through triangulation by systematically comparing findings across multiple data sources and collection methods to confirm consistency and reduce the risk of single-source bias.

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to data collection, after the research objectives, procedures, benefits, and data use were clearly explained. All participants agreed to the use of their information for academic purposes. Throughout the research process, the researcher respected local norms and customs during field engagement, and all data collected were used solely for scholarly purposes.

C. Results and Discussion

This section presents an integrated analysis of the potential and challenges in developing sustainable tourism on Kampai Island. The processed data is derived from field observations, in-depth interviews, and document studies, which were analyzed qualitatively to understand local tourism dynamics holistically. Overall, this section is organized into two interconnected main strands. First, a structured presentation of findings based on three tourism assets (Berawe Beach, Keramat Panjang Cemetery, and the Mas Merah Cemetery) along with an identification of their development challenges. Second, an in-depth discussion linking these empirical findings to theoretical frameworks of sustainable tourism development, collaborative governance, and asset-based approaches. The results and discussion are presented as a coherent, unified argument to strengthen understanding of the complexities of tourism development management in a remote coastal community.



1. Results

a. Potential of local resource-based tourism destinations

Based on field observations and interviews, three main tourist attractions with specific appeal and potential for further development were identified: Berawe Beach, Keramat Panjang Cemetery, and Mas Merah Cemetery. The two cemeteries hold significant historical value, offering opportunities for the development of historical and religious tourism.

1) Berawe Beach as a marine destination

Berawe Beach is a notable marine tourism destination, distinguished by its scenic sea views and shaded trees, which create a tranquil environment for visitors. Stretching approximately 7 kilometers along the coastline facing the Malacca Strait, it offers significant natural appeal (Field Documentation, 2023).

The site officially commenced as a local tourist attraction in 2004, initiated by the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*) comprising 25 members. The manager and pioneer of beach tourism stated.

"... this tour began to open in 2004, precisely in December, coinciding with the tsunami disaster in Aceh. At that time, people clearing land and cleaning the beach were surprised by the unusual phenomenon of seawater. The seawater suddenly experienced tides but did not emit large waves until at night, when we found out that there had been a large tsunami in Aceh." (Interview with Amir Husein, September, 2023)



Figure 2. The Beauty of Berawe Beach (Source: Field Documentation, 2023)

Prior to its designation as a formal tourist spot, the local community used Berawe Beach for leisure activities and family gatherings, and some residents

harvested mussels there. According to Usman, a resident of Kampai Island, Berawe Beach was initially called Pematang Sentang by the Malay community. Its name evolved to Berawe, derived from “Merawe-Merawai,” referring to a traditional fishing technique using a rope and a fishing rod.

Presently, Berawe Beach is registered with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights as an official tourist destination, attracting visitors primarily from Aceh Tamiang and Langsa City. This beach constitutes a primary natural asset with beautiful scenery. However, its management faces constraints. Qualitative data from interviews and observations link the recent decline in visitor numbers to inadequate infrastructure, including poor road access and limited supporting facilities such as playgrounds and photo spots. Moreover, competition from other more accessible tourist destinations has impacted visitation rates. Despite these challenges, the beach retains substantial potential for community economic development if effectively managed.

2) Keramat Panjang Cemetery as a historical and religious site

Keramat Panjang Cemetery is located in Kampai Island Village, within a residential area. Originally, the structure consisted solely of a tomb; however, it was renovated in 2011 with external assistance. The tomb’s origin is subject to multiple narratives. Residents report that it belongs to a couple descended from *Wali Allah* (saints), missionaries sent to Kampai Island to propagate Islam from a Middle Eastern country named Sultan Murad Zabar. Another account attributes the tomb to a descendant of the Aceh Sultanate, specifically Sultan Malikussaleh. Ibrahim, a community leader of Kampai Island, supports the latter version, citing similarities between the tombstone here and that at the Tomb of Sultan Malikussaleh. Within the tomb structure, two graves differ in size: one approximately 7 meters in length and the other about 4 meters.

Researchers documented numerous mystical tales associated with the tomb. For instance, a resident recounted witnessing a golden chariot drawn by horses emerging from the tomb and moving towards the sea at night. Other residents claim sightings of a three-legged white tiger at the site (Interview with Ibrahim, Community Leader, September, 2023).



These narratives contribute to the local belief that the tomb is sacred and spiritually potent. Consequently, it has become a pilgrimage site where people perform vows and prayers, trusting in the tomb's perceived efficacy. Empirical evidence shows this site has been a multicultural pilgrimage destination. From the 1990s until 2011, the tomb also served as a site of worship for the Chinese community on Kampai Island, who regarded it as linked to a deity. Chinese residents and visitors from neighboring cities and countries such as Singapore and Malaysia would visit daily, demonstrating a spiritual appeal that transcends a single religious group.



Figure 3. Keramat Panjang Cemetery
Source: Field Documentation, 2023

3) Mas Merah Cemetery as a cultural heritage tourism site

Mas Merah Cemetery is steeped in a poignant love story that has been transmitted across generations on Kampai Island. The account was obtained from Mr. Khairul Azmi, grandson of the late Mr. Adam Bin Awang Bin Muhammad Din, who personally witnessed the marriage of Salam and Salmah. Mr. Adam later documented this narrative in written form, preserving it for posterity.

The narrative commences with the romantic struggle of Salam and Salmah on Kampai Island. Salam, originally from Sarawak, left his homeland following heartbreak. He later traveled, earned renown as a violinist, and in Labuhan Deli, met and fell in love with Salmah, also known as Mas Merah. However, Salmah was compelled to marry a wealthy merchant due to her mother's debt. Salam vowed to wait and eventually rescued Salmah from a pirate attack. They resettled on Kampai

Island, married, but remained childless. Tragically, both contracted smallpox and died in 1920. Prior to his death, Salam instructed that a cape flower be planted on their graves, symbolizing their love and the connection between Peninsular Malaysia, Medan Labuhan, and Kampai Island.

The site's potential is rooted in this well-documented cultural-historical narrative of the love story between Salam and Salmah (Mas Merah), which has been passed down orally. This story links Kampai Island to Peninsular Malaysia and Medan, offering opportunities for narrative tourism development. Physical evidence indicates academic institutional interest, as the tomb was renovated on the initiative of the Faculty of Law at North Sumatra Islamic University (UINSU) in 1991. However, its location, surrounded by residential houses without clear boundaries, indicates a lack of structured destination management.



Figure 4. Mas Merah Cemetery
Source: Field Documentation, 2023

b. Tourism development challenges

This study identifies four main interrelated challenges that hinder the realization of the aforementioned tourism potential – first, inadequate infrastructure. Access to and within the island is a primary constraint. Currently, Kampai Island is accessible via two modes of transport: a 45-minute boat journey from the Pangkalan Susu ferry port, and a shorter, approximately 5-minute crossing on a *getek* (local ferry) from Sarangjaya Village. The *getek* is a larger vessel used by locals to transport private vehicles and palm oil trucks.

The community strongly desires the construction of a bridge connecting Kampai Island to the Sumatran mainland, a project planned since 2010 but unrealized



as of 2023. Road conditions on the island are also largely unpaved and difficult to navigate during rain, which, according to residents, affects the transportation of agricultural products and emergency response. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by the customary leader as follows.

“...existing infrastructure is very limited, not only the transportation connecting Kampai Island to the mainland, but also the problematic village road infrastructure. This condition affects the transport of agricultural products to the mainland and access in emergencies, such as illness” (Interview with Mahyar, August, 2023).



Figure 5. Getek, the Transport Mode Connecting Kampai Island with Sarangjaya Village
Source: Field Documentation, 2023

Second, limited institutional capacity and government engagement. The community has limited bargaining power to influence development priorities. Limited access to higher-level government support and political dynamics (such as political party affiliation) negatively affect development priorities. A home industry owner explained this perspective by stating: *“The authorities have not made Kampai Island a priority development area. The existence of political party affiliation greatly influences the implementation of development on Kampai Island”*. (Interview with Edi, August, 2023)

Third, minimal strategic partnerships and networks. The current management of tourism potential relies on limited-resource local initiatives, such as the Tourism Awareness Group (*Pokdarwis*) for Berawe Beach, or informal guardianship by residents for the two cemeteries. The absence of formal collaboration with external parties such as local government, academia, or the private sector hinders access to funding, innovation, and technical support.

Fourth, limitations in human resources. While educational attainment is not necessarily low, the community lacks formal competence and training in tourism management. A teacher presented the findings of his observation as follows:

“One of the biggest challenges in developing Kampai Island is human resources. We are very aware of the limited human resource capacity here. If the government also neglects this condition, how can we possibly rise? As a teacher, I observed that there are intellectually intelligent children here. However, they are forced to drop out of school due to financial constraints”. (Interview with Nazian, August, 2023)



Figure 6. Word Cloud of Kampai Island Tourism
Source: Researcher’s analysis, 2024

In summary, the challenges affecting tourism development on Kampai Island are multifaceted, primarily encompassing inadequate infrastructure, limited community bargaining power, a lack of strategic partnerships, and human resource deficiencies. These barriers hinder the full utilization of tourism potential despite the existence of appealing attractions.

2. Discussion

This study provides an integrated analytical understanding of sustainable tourism development in a remote coastal island context by mapping both the opportunities and the structural constraints that shape tourism trajectories on Kampai Island. The findings demonstrate that Kampai Island possesses substantial tourism potential rooted in its natural landscape, represented by Berawe Beach, and its historical-cultural assets, embodied in Keramat Panjang and Mas Merah Cemeteries. These assets function not merely as physical attractions but as repositories of living local narratives that continue to shape collective identity, spiritual meaning, and social memory. However, the study also reveals that this potential remains largely underutilized due to multidimensional systemic challenges, including inadequate



infrastructure, weak local institutions, limited multi-stakeholder collaboration, and uneven human resource capacity. This configuration underscores a central argument of this study: in remote island contexts, tourism potential alone is insufficient to drive sustainable development unless it is accompanied by institutional strengthening and collaborative governance mechanisms.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce and extend asset-based development approaches in tourism studies, which emphasize the strategic mobilization of local resources as the foundation of sustainability. Previous studies have highlighted the role of local wisdom, cultural heritage, and community-based assets in driving tourism development (Audefroy & Sánchez, 2017; Raimondo et al., 2022; Zainal et al., 2024). However, this study advances the discussion by demonstrating that, in geographically isolated settings such as Kampai Island, asset-based strategies must be critically aligned with an analysis of structural constraints. The Kampai case illustrates that natural beauty and rich cultural narratives can coexist with stagnation when institutional capacity, infrastructure, and external networks are weak, particularly in the absence of coherent regulatory frameworks and inclusive governance mechanisms (Rahayu & Abbas, 2024; Trishananto et al., 2024).

In addition, residents' perceptions and levels of participation—shaped by unequal access to information, limited institutional trust, and constrained economic opportunities—further condition whether local assets can be effectively transformed into sustainable tourism outcomes (Munkhuu et al., 2023). From a legal-institutional standpoint, unresolved issues related to land rights, customary authority, and the interaction between formal and informal norms may also limit the transformative potential of local assets, reinforcing existing power asymmetries rather than alleviating them (Simamora, 2025). These findings therefore challenge overly optimistic assumptions in some sustainable tourism frameworks that treat local assets as inherently transformative, showing instead that asset-based development in small island contexts requires strong institutional mediation, legal certainty, and participatory governance to avoid reproducing structural marginalization.

One of the most tangible manifestations of these structural constraints is infrastructure as a primary constraint aligns with broader empirical evidence demonstrating the critical role of transportation and supporting facilities in shaping



tourism accessibility and competitiveness (Gúčik et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2023; Nguyen, 2021). In Kampai Island, limited land and sea transport access not only restricts tourist mobility but also reinforces social and economic isolation, thereby amplifying development inequalities. This study contributes to the literature by situating infrastructure not merely as a technical variable but as a socio-political factor that influences community bargaining power, emergency access, and participation in regional development networks. In this sense, infrastructure deficits are both a cause and a consequence of marginalization, particularly in peripheral island regions.

Beyond physical infrastructure, the study reveals that institutional capacity plays a decisive role in mediating how tourism potential is managed and distributed. The limited effectiveness of the Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis) reflects broader challenges faced by community-based tourism institutions in many developing contexts, where formal recognition is not matched by managerial competence or regulatory support (Lasibey & Milyardo, 2021). This finding resonates with studies emphasizing that institutional weakness often undermines community empowerment despite the presence of participatory rhetoric in tourism policy (Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Gohori & van der Merwe, 2022). By highlighting the institutional dimension, this study contributes theoretically by positioning local institutions as the critical interface between assets and outcomes, rather than treating them as peripheral actors.

Human resource limitations further complicate tourism development on Kampai Island. Although the community possesses latent intellectual and cultural capital, the lack of targeted training in tourism management, service quality, and foreign language skills constrains the professionalization of tourism activities. Empirical evidence from international contexts consistently shows that service quality and managerial competence are key determinants of tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty (Almasoodi & Rahman, 2023; Hussain et al., 2023; Ramos et al., 2022). The Kampai case demonstrates that without systematic capacity-building interventions, local communities' risk being confined to low-value segments of the tourism economy. This finding underscores the importance of aligning human resource development with institutional strengthening, rather than treating training as an isolated intervention.



One of the central contributions of this study lies in its analysis of multi-stakeholder collaboration as a strategic lever for overcoming resource constraints in remote island tourism. The absence of formal partnerships with government agencies, universities, and the private sector has limited access to funding, innovation, and technical expertise on Kampai Island. This finding is consistent with the growing body of literature emphasizing collaborative governance as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism development (Eckert & Pechlaner, 2019; Garanti & Berjzokina, 2021; Seraphin, 2020). However, this study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how collaboration functions as a compensatory mechanism in contexts characterized by geographical isolation and fiscal limitations. Strategic partnerships, particularly those involving Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives and university engagement, offer practical pathways to bridge gaps in infrastructure, training, and destination management.

Importantly, the Kampai Island case illustrates that collaboration is not merely a technical arrangement but a political process that requires clarity of roles, trust-building, and institutional coordination. Cross-sectoral collaboration has been shown to enhance environmental conservation practices and knowledge integration (Crowley et al., 2020; Sentanu et al., 2023), and this study confirms its relevance in small island tourism governance. By embedding Kampai Island within regional and provincial tourism planning frameworks, collaborative governance can reduce peripheral isolation and enhance policy coherence. This insight has broader implications for other small island and coastal destinations facing similar structural disadvantages, both in Indonesia and globally.

The emphasis on participatory and sustainable infrastructure development further strengthens the analytical contribution of this study. Rather than advocating large-scale, externally driven projects, the findings support incremental infrastructure development that actively involves local communities in planning and oversight. Such participatory approaches have been shown to enhance community ownership, protect cultural assets, and mitigate social conflict (Coronado Martínez et al., 2018; Havadi Nagy & Espinosa Segui, 2020). In the fragile coastal ecosystem of Kampai Island, this approach is particularly critical, as unregulated development could exacerbate environmental degradation and undermine long-term sustainability. By integrating



environmental considerations with social participation, this study aligns with and enriches sustainable tourism principles that emphasize balance between development and conservation (Nigatu & Tegegne, 2021).

A distinctive contribution of this study lies in its articulation of integrated tourism product packaging based on local narratives. The study demonstrates that the natural, historical, and cultural attractions of Kampai Island are interconnected through stories that link the island to broader regional and transnational contexts, including Aceh, Peninsular Malaysia, and historical Islamic networks. These narratives are not merely symbolic, but are embedded in living cultural practices, customary norms, and ethical frameworks that continue to shape community identity and social relations, particularly in contexts where local traditions, family structures, and moral responsibilities toward nature and heritage remain salient (Syaikhu et al., 2024; Abubakar et al., 2023).

By proposing integrated tourism packaging grounded in these narratives, the study moves beyond conventional destination marketing that prioritizes physical attributes alone, and instead situates tourism development within broader concerns of cultural heritage protection, legal recognition, and social meaning-making (Sugirman et al., 2024). This narrative-based approach contributes to the growing discourse on experiential and cultural tourism, where authenticity, heritage, and intangible cultural assets are central to visitor engagement and long-term sustainability (Raimondo et al., 2022). In global terms, this approach resonates with contemporary tourism trends that increasingly value storytelling and cultural depth as competitive advantages, particularly amid rising awareness of ecological vulnerability and the need to balance tourism development with human security and environmental stewardship (Eddy et al., 2025).

From a global perspective, the findings of this study contribute to sustainable tourism theory by offering empirical insights from a remote island context in the Global South, a setting that remains underrepresented in mainstream tourism scholarship. Many existing models of sustainable tourism are derived from well-connected destinations with relatively strong institutional frameworks. The Kampai Island case highlights the need for adaptive, context-sensitive frameworks that can accommodate infrastructural scarcity, governance fragmentation, and socio-cultural complexity. By integrating asset-based development with collaborative governance



and institutional analysis, this study offers a more nuanced theoretical lens for understanding sustainability in peripheral regions.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The qualitative and phenomenological design, while providing rich contextual insights, limits the generalizability of findings beyond Kampai Island and similar settings. The study also relies on cross-sectional data collected within a specific time frame, which constrains the ability to capture long-term dynamics and changes in tourism development processes. Additionally, the analysis focuses primarily on social, institutional, and infrastructural dimensions, without conducting detailed environmental carrying capacity assessments or quantifying economic impacts, which could further enrich the understanding of sustainability outcomes.

D. Conclusion

Based on a synthesized reading of the empirical findings and analytical discussions, this study concludes that sustainable tourism development in remote small island contexts requires an integrated and context-sensitive approach that simultaneously addresses local assets and structural constraints. The case of Kampai Island demonstrates that natural attractions, historical-spiritual heritage, and cultural narratives constitute valuable tourism capital; however, their transformative potential remains limited when not accompanied by adequate infrastructure, institutional capacity, skilled human resources, and effective multi-stakeholder collaboration. Sustainable tourism in peripheral island regions, therefore, cannot be reduced to asset promotion alone, but must be understood as a governance-driven process that aligns local potential with structural readiness.

The primary academic contribution of this study lies in advancing sustainable tourism discourse by critically integrating asset-based development with an explicit analysis of systemic limitations in isolated island settings. Existing frameworks often emphasize local resources while underestimating the effects of geographical isolation, institutional fragility, and uneven connectivity. By foregrounding these dimensions, this study offers a more nuanced conceptualization of sustainability that highlights inclusive governance and community adaptive capacity as central determinants of long-term outcomes.



From a practical perspective, the findings underline the importance of collaborative policy strategies that bridge local communities, government institutions, the private sector, and academic actors. Such collaboration is essential to overcome infrastructure gaps, enhance human resource capacity, and integrate remote destinations into broader regional tourism systems. These implications extend beyond Kampai Island and are applicable to other small islands and coastal regions facing similar development constraints at both national and global levels.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to several limitations that shape directions for future research. Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt comparative multi-island studies, integrate technical assessments of environmental and infrastructural feasibility, and employ longitudinal designs to better capture the socio-ecological sustainability of tourism development in remote island communities.

Finally, sustainable tourism on remote small islands is not determined by the abundance of local attractions, but by the capacity to govern, connect, and collaboratively transform those assets into inclusive and resilient development pathways.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the research funding provided by Universitas Malikussaleh. We are also indebted to the informants in Kampai Island, as well as all other contributors who shared their valuable insights, which were instrumental in completing this work.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial or non-financial interests that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Deepseek and Grammarly for language editing and readability improvement. All outputs generated by the tool were carefully reviewed and edited by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content of this article.



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