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license**STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF KETAMBE NATURE
TOURISM: INTEGRATING LOCAL WISDOM AND
COMMUNITY-BASED SOCIOCULTURAL VALUES IN
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bayhaqiahmad.2022@student.uny.ac.idDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol3iss1pp117-135>**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to formulate an appropriate strategy for developing the Ketambe nature tourism area by integrating local wisdom and community-based sociocultural values in Southeast Aceh. Despite its significant ecotourism potential, Ketambe's local wisdom has not been optimally utilized as a core attraction. Employing a descriptive method with a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Data analysis follows Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive model, comprising data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. A SWOT analysis was applied to identify a strategic development path. Findings reveal that Ketambe's tourism development is supported by adequate accessibility, infrastructure, and cultural attractions rooted in local wisdom. Key dimensions include local resources (scenery, biodiversity), local culture, indigenous knowledge (Leuser Mountain legends), local skills (guiding and handicrafts), and local social processes (community interactions with nature and tourists). The SWOT matrix indicates a strategic position in quadrant III (score -0.13; 0.59), suggesting the need to minimize weaknesses to seize opportunities. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of local wisdom dimensions with strategic tourism planning—a rarely explored approach in this region. The study recommends synergy between cultural preservation and improved tourism facilities to enhance attractiveness while maintaining sociocultural identity.

Keywords: Community-Based Development, Local Wisdom, Nature Tourism, Sociocultural Values, Strategic Planning

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is renowned for its abundant natural and cultural resources. This vast potential spans various sectors, including tourism, which has shown significant growth in recent years. Apriyanti et al. (2024) reported that international tourist arrivals reached 985,123 in 2023, accompanied by nearly 6 million domestic and regional trips. This increase reflects the growing enthusiasm of both local residents and tourists to explore the beauty of Indonesia's nature and culture (Lukman et al., 2025; Wicaksono et al., 2024). In this context, tourism serves not only as a recreational activity but also as a driver of the economy, a means of strengthening cultural identity, and a tool for sustainable development, as outlined in Law No. 10 of 2009 on Tourism.

On the other hand, poorly planned tourism development can lead to serious issues, particularly concerning environmental sustainability and the degradation of local cultural values (Andriyanto et al., 2024; Hidayati & Siregar, 2024; Karyadi et al., 2024). When development is overly focused on economic aspects, local wisdom and social potential of surrounding communities are often overlooked. In fact, community- and culture-based tourism has proven to provide more inclusive social and economic impacts, especially in remote areas far from major economic centers (Afdhal, 2023; Mailoa et al., 2023; Rusli et al., 2023). Ketambe, a natural tourism area located in Southeast Aceh Regency within the Gunung Leuser National Park (TNGL), serves as a clear example of an underdeveloped destination with strong potential for integrating local wisdom dimensions (Pindi et al., 2025; Prayitno et al., 2025).

Ketambe is known for its breathtaking natural beauty: clear rivers, tropical forest trekking trails, endemic flora and fauna diversity, and a local community that continues to preserve traditional cultural values. Data from the Southeast Aceh Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office show that between 2019 and 2022, the area welcomed 70,000 domestic tourists and 7,000 international visitors (Rahmawaty et al., 2025). However, Ketambe's tourism management still faces serious challenges: lack of integrated information, limited supporting facilities, and insufficient integration between local potential and tourism development strategies. Yet, the area holds great promise for developing tourism rooted in local wisdom, aligned with sustainability principles.

Numerous studies have shown that tourism based on local culture and wisdom provides tourists with more authentic experiences while also preserving local heritage and ecosystems (Ernawati et al., 2024; Pardosi et al., 2024; Pattaray, 2024; Winanto, 2023). In countries like Thailand and Iraq, local communities have successfully made their traditions and culture integral to sustainable tourism (Ahmad & Balisany, 2024; Suriya Chinawat, 2024). Studies by Chan (2023), Schönherr & Pikkemaat (2024), and Sharma et al. (2024) also emphasize that tourism development without sustainability consideration results in long-term environmental and social impacts. In Indonesia, successful examples of local tourism development such as the Erau Festival in East Kalimantan (Diece Christy Aliesa et al., 2024; Samsir et al., 2024) and the Ogoh-ogoh cultural attraction in Bali (Prianta & Sulistyawati, 2024; Reztrianti et al., 2025) highlight the importance of blending culture and nature in tourism destinations.

However, previous studies have tended to focus more on cultural and economic aspects alone, without thoroughly exploring the integration of local community wisdom into natural tourism management strategies. In the case of Ketambe, no research has specifically addressed how local wisdom—such as lifestyle, language, cuisine, folklore, and relationship with nature—can be integrated into a community-based tourism development strategy.

This is the starting point of the current research. Ketambe is not just a picturesque tourism destination, but also a living space rich in social meaning and cultural values. Understanding this area requires more than an exploratory approach; it calls for a strategic perspective that unites nature and culture into one cohesive tourism experience. Thus, a strategy focused on developing

tourism rooted in local wisdom becomes essential—especially given the absence of any comprehensive, participatory framework addressing this in the region.

Therefore, this study aims not only to present a descriptive overview of Ketambe's potential, but more importantly to formulate a tourism development strategy that emphasizes local cultural values and community identity. The uniqueness of this research lies in its integration of the SWOT approach as a strategic tool, combined with the dimension of local wisdom as a foundation for tourism competitiveness. In other words, this study opens new avenues by positioning local communities not just as objects, but as active subjects in tourism governance. The goal is to develop a Ketambe ecotourism strategy based on local wisdom, integrated with the community's sociocultural values. This strategy is expected to enhance the destination's appeal and sustainability, preserve local identity, and provide tourists with authentic and meaningful experiences.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is designed as a descriptive study using a qualitative approach. Descriptive in the sense that it aims to systematically, factually, and accurately describe the current state of ecotourism development in Ketambe, particularly in how local wisdom and sociocultural values are strategic strengths that remain underutilized. The qualitative approach was chosen as it enables the researcher to explore in depth the meanings, experiences, and community perceptions regarding locally based tourism development. This approach is deemed most relevant since the focus of the study emphasizes understanding social, cultural, and ecological phenomena in the Ketambe community—not merely numerical data (Wutich et al., 2024).

The research location, Ketambe Ecotourism Area in Southeast Aceh Regency, was selected purposively. This area was chosen for its outstanding ecotourism potential—situated in the Gunung Leuser National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site—rich in biodiversity, natural landscapes, and authentic local culture. It is also a favorite destination for both domestic and international tourists, yet has not been fully managed with a community-based and local wisdom-oriented approach. In short, it presents both a great opportunity and a real challenge for implementing value-driven tourism strategies.

Informants were also selected purposively—those considered to have relevant information, experience, and deep understanding of the research topic. A total of 12 informants participated in this study, including local community leaders, tourism business actors (homestay owners and tour guides), destination managers (village officials and tourism department staff), and tourists who have visited Ketambe. Informants were selected to capture a diverse range of perspectives—from practitioners, managers, to users—ensuring comprehensive social, cultural, and structural insights into Ketambe's ecotourism management (Kaihlanen et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: field observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out over a three-week period (May

10–June 1, 2024) to directly experience tourism practices, social interactions, and local community lifestyles around Ketambe. These observations were important to capture social dynamics that may not surface in interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to maintain focus while allowing flexibility, particularly on the topic of local wisdom-based tourism strategies. Documentation involved gathering relevant materials such as village profiles, tourism statistics, local regulations on tourism management, and visual records during fieldwork. Together, these methods complement each other to produce a holistic and in-depth portrayal.

Data analysis in this study follows the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (2020), consisting of four main components: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Analysis was conducted cyclically to continuously refine and deepen understanding. The qualitative findings were then further examined using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis to systematically and strategically formulate a Ketambe tourism development strategy. The SWOT analysis mapped key strengths (e.g., availability of natural and cultural attractions), weaknesses (e.g., lack of promotion and facilities), opportunities (e.g., multi-stakeholder synergy), and threats (e.g., environmental pressure and cultural loss from uncontrolled mass tourism).

Data validity was ensured through triangulation techniques. The researcher employed source and method triangulation to verify data accuracy and consistency. Source triangulation involved comparing information from informants with diverse backgrounds, while method triangulation compared findings from observations, interviews, and documentation. These steps allowed for more objective verification and reduced reliance on single-source data (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019; Santos et al., 2020). Additionally, member checking was conducted by confirming preliminary findings with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretations aligned with the realities as understood by the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Ecotourism Potential of Ketambe: Between Natural Beauty and Strategic Neglect

Ketambe, a region located in Ketambe Subdistrict, Southeast Aceh Regency, is part of the Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP), known as one of the richest tropical conservation areas in the world. With its lush tropical rainforest, the clear and rocky Alas River, and a diverse range of endemic flora and fauna from Sumatra, this area holds vast potential to be developed as a conservation-based nature tourism destination. One of its main attractions is the trekking trails within the GLNP forest area, allowing visitors to explore the wilderness while observing wildlife such as orangutans, long-tailed macaques, and hornbills. On the other hand, white-water rafting in the Alas River offers an adventurous experience, particularly during the rainy season when water levels rise.

Based on field observations, basic infrastructure such as the paved road leading to Ketambe is in good condition and accessible by four-wheeled vehicles. Several guesthouses and

local eateries are also available to serve visitors. However, the tourism attractions have not been strategically managed. There is no clear tourist information center, no interpretive signage explaining the characteristics of the area, and no promotional materials that effectively frame Ketambe as a premier ecotourism destination. This indicates weak destination management and branding, resulting in low and inconsistent tourist traffic, especially among international or niche interest travelers.



Figure 1 Ketambe Village Tourism Objects

Source: Ketambe Adventure.com, 2022

A local resident who also owns a coffee stall shared that many young tourists visit just to enjoy a cup of coffee while relaxing and taking in the surrounding natural beauty. According to him, the scenic river view with naturally arranged rocks, lush trees, and cool air is the main draw for local tourists who linger in the area. This experience aligns with visual documentation (Figure 1), which captures the river landscape as a hub of social and nature-based recreational activity.



Figure 2 Animals and Plants

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

Moreover, the presence of Sumatra's unique flora and fauna enhances Ketambe's ecotourism appeal. Field observations and documentation (Figure 2) show that this area remains a natural habitat for various primates such as orangutans and monkeys, as well as endemic plants flourishing under the rainforest canopy. An official from the Southeast Aceh Tourism Office expressed that Ketambe's pristine environment and the community's adherence to local wisdom represent a highly promising foundation for development into a flagship destination. He suggested that promotion through social media and integrating local culture with ecotourism could be vital strategies for attracting travelers seeking more authentic experiences.

In the context of nature-based tourism development, Becken & Job (2020) state that the success of a destination does not only depend on abundant natural resources but also on integrated management that considers ecological, social, and cultural carrying capacities. Even with outstanding natural landscapes, unstrategic management may lead to stagnation or even exploitation. This is evident in Ketambe, where natural potential is abundant, but no management system exists to develop it as an integrated and sustainable nature tourism destination.

Aside from natural beauty, Ketambe also offers local culinary richness that could be developed into a tourism attraction. One standout example is Cimpe, a traditional food always present during customary ceremonies and major cultural events in Southeast Aceh. Cimpe is served in various forms and flavors, symbolizing togetherness and respect in local culture (Figure 3). The Head of the Marketing Division of the Southeast Aceh Tourism Office emphasized that while Gayo coffee is already well known, other local culinary items like Cimpe remain underpromoted. He believes Ketambe can serve as a gateway for introducing these culinary traditions to visitors. This would not only provide economic value to the local community but also strengthen cultural identity amid the currents of globalization.



Figure 3. Cimpe food

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

Ketambe's ecotourism potential can be categorized as a region with rich natural resources but lacking in strategic management. Its natural beauty holds high intrinsic value, but it has yet

to be framed within a strong tourism narrative or supported by professional promotional systems. Strengthening community-based tourism management, refining the destination narrative, and integrating local values with ecotourism are urgent priorities. With proper management, Ketambe has the potential to become a model for nature- and culture-based tourism that can compete globally while remaining rooted in local wisdom.

The Dimension of Local Wisdom in Ketambe Tourism: An Overlooked Treasure

Ketambe holds extraordinary local wisdom, yet it has ironically not been strategically integrated into tourism development. The local wisdom of Ketambe's community reflects a deep relationship between humans, culture, and nature. In the context of sustainable tourism, local wisdom is not merely a cultural asset but also a foundation for maintaining the social fabric in the face of globalization and mass tourism. Oliveira et al. (2024) and Sonuç (2023) stress that preserving local culture through authentic narratives is key to preventing deculturalization—the erosion of cultural identity due to the dominance of commercialized tourism.

Field observations show that Ketambe's natural resources, as part of the Leuser Ecosystem Area (LEA), are highly potential, with stunning landscapes and rich biodiversity. Clear rivers flow among rocks, tall tropical trees provide shade, and the fresh air offers a multisensory experience for tourists. Sites like "Ngurah" and several trekking routes are popular among both domestic and international tourists. However, these tourist experiences remain primarily visual, lacking distinctive cultural narratives. One local resident, AG, who runs a roadside food stall, mentioned that many young visitors come just for the coffee and cool air, without understanding or appreciating the cultural significance of the area. This finding underscores the missed opportunity to enhance the tourism experience through cultural interpretation.

Furthermore, the local knowledge of the Ketambe community holds important stories about their spiritual connection to nature. For instance, Mount Leuser is believed to be the dwelling place of nature spirits and forms the philosophical basis for forest preservation. However, the author observed no concrete efforts to present this narrative as part of tourism interpretation. There are no explanatory boards, myth-themed story trails, or cultural performances highlighting these legends. One traditional leader, MY, stated that such stories are now only shared in customary forums and are rarely known among the younger generation. This points to a narrative disconnect that risks erasing the community's intangible heritage, which should be a strength in shaping a more character-rich tourism experience.



Figure 4. Customary Hall

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

The cultural life of Ketambe residents also still reflects strong local identities, particularly of the Alas and Gayo ethnic groups. Local languages, dress codes, and social practices remain prevalent in daily life, especially during traditional ceremonies such as *kendukhi khak-khak* and *nembak deleng*. The customary hall located in the village center functions as a hub for social and cultural activities. Observations reveal that the hall is built in a raised architectural style that is not only aesthetically pleasing but also functions as a disaster mitigation structure for floods. This customary hall—with its sturdy wooden pillars and thatched roof—stands as a significant symbol in Ketambe’s social structure (Figure 4). However, it has not yet been optimally used as an educational tourism space or as a venue for regular cultural performances.



Figure 5. Bello Mesusun dance

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

During traditional celebrations or when welcoming important guests, residents often perform the Bello Mesusun dance, a traditional Alas group dance performed by village women.

This dance is simple yet symbolically rich, portraying values of respect, unity, and gratitude. On several occasions, the author witnessed this performance in the courtyard of the customary hall. The dancers wore traditional attire with Alas motifs, accompanied by live music played by locals (Figure 5). However, there is currently no effort to schedule this performance as part of a cultural tourism package.



Figure 6. Handicrafts

Source: Researcher Documentation, 2024

In terms of local skills, Ketambe residents possess expertise highly relevant to nature-based tourism, especially as trekking guides. Informants such as L explained that the role of a guide goes beyond leading the way—it includes explaining flora, fauna, and local stories related to the forest trails. However, there is no formal local certification system to recognize these skills. Additionally, handicrafts such as rattan weaving and textiles with Alas-Gayo motifs serve as expressions of material culture rich in meaning. These products, sold only in local homes or weekly markets, exhibit high aesthetic quality. According to Y, a traditional leader from the Aceh Customary Council, motifs in woven fabrics are not mere ornaments but life symbols passed down through generations. Items such as woven bags and Alas-patterned shawls are starting to gain recognition as part of the local creative economy, though they have yet to be systematically integrated into tourism promotion (Figure 6).

The community's social interactions with nature and tourists reflect meaningful cultural values. Traditions like honking at certain spots as a sign of respect to nature spirits show spiritual awareness of ecological spaces. In daily life, residents welcome tourists politely and respect their presence. However, these social practices have not been documented into tourist guidelines or codes of conduct. Observations show that many foreign tourists are unaware of local cultural boundaries and unintentionally act in ways perceived as disrespectful. The absence of cultural narratives in promotional materials and tour packages causes Ketambe to lose its differentiation—something that should set it apart from other destinations.

This field analysis supports the arguments of Dadizadeh & Doğan (2024) and Ye et al. (2024), who emphasize that the success of cultural tourism development relies heavily on the integration of environmental conservation, community participation, and strong local narratives.

Ketambe possesses all the foundational elements to become a nature-culture integrated destination, yet these have not been utilized within a formal tourism planning framework. Without strategies that position the community as key actors, local cultural values risk becoming mere decorative elements sidelined by the tide of mass tourism.

Nature-Based Tourism Development Strategy Using SWOT: Managing Strengths, Responding to Challenges

The SWOT analysis results indicate that the strategic position of Ketambe tourism destination falls into Quadrant III (Weaknesses-Opportunities), with a strategic coordinate score of (-0.13; 0.59). This finding suggests that Ketambe has significant external opportunities for development, especially due to the rising trend of nature and cultural-based tourism. However, internally, several fundamental weaknesses persist, such as limited human resource (HR) capacity, the absence of integrated management, and the lack of an information and tourism promotion system. Therefore, the most appropriate strategy for Ketambe is the Weaknesses-Opportunities (WO) strategy, which aims to minimize weaknesses by leveraging available external opportunities.

The WO strategy focuses on strengthening internal capacity, particularly through HR training, local institutional development, and enhancing the information and promotion system. This approach is crucial as Ketambe is situated amid a growing trend in eco and cultural tourism, supported by government policy and the potential for collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the environment and community empowerment sectors. To clarify the identified SWOT dimensions, the following table presents a summary in the form of a SWOT analysis matrix:

Table 1 SWOT Matrix of Ketambe Tourism Destination

Internal Factors	Internal Factors
Strengths (S):	Opportunities (O):
- Natural wealth (Leuser)	- Trend of nature & cultural tourism
- Local wisdom (customs, myths, weaving)	- Eco-tourism policy support
- Community hospitality	- NGO/alternative tourism partnerships
Weaknesses (W):	Threats (T):
- Untrained tourism HR	- Environmental pressure
- Limited public information	- Cultural globalization (custom commercialization)
- Lack of integrated management	- Social exclusion of local communities

Source: Research Analysis, 2024

Field findings reinforce the analysis results. Direct observation at the Ketambe tourist entrance area revealed the absence of a tourism information center to provide initial guidance for visitors. Some existing signage is poorly maintained and fails to convey a comprehensive narrative of the destination. A local resident, AM, who operates a coffee stall along the main Ketambe route, mentioned that tourists often get confused about finding paths to the river or

forest, eventually asking local vendors for directions. This reflects weak institutional capacity in providing systematic and professional tourism services.

In this context, the WO strategy must be implemented through a multi-stakeholder approach. The development of an integrated management system, training for local HR in guiding, hospitality, and culture, as well as partnerships with NGOs or government institutions, are concrete steps that need to be realized. This approach aligns with the findings of Basyar et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of inclusive institutional intervention in sustainable tourism development. This model prioritizes collaboration between local communities, government, private sector, and NGOs to build a resilient and competitive destination.

Additional observations also show that although basic infrastructure such as access roads and food stalls is already in place, visitor management systems remain very limited. There are no clear trekking trail markers, and foreign tourists mostly rely on informal local guides without institutional protection. Nevertheless, social interactions between residents and tourists are generally harmonious. Locals demonstrate friendliness and openness in welcoming guests, as seen in informal conversations at stalls or lodgings. However, according to NR, a homestay operator, there has never been any formal training on how to host guests or introduce local culture to tourists. This indicates that the strong social capital in the community has not yet been transformed into professional capacity within the tourism industry.

Theoretically, the WO strategy not only involves technical aspects of management but also touches on community participation and empowerment. According to Basyar et al. (2025), community-based tourism development requires a system that enables communities to act as subjects of development, not merely objects. This view aligns with the thoughts of Manaf et al. (2018) and Pasanchay & Schott (2021) on community-based tourism, which highlight the need to strengthen local capacity so communities can actively engage in planning, managing, and promoting tourism destinations. In Ketambe's context, local institutions such as tourism awareness groups (Pokdarwis), traditional councils, and tourism cooperatives are key actors that must be strengthened through regulations, training, and continuous mentoring.

Based on these observations and theoretical analysis, the WO development strategies that can be implemented in Ketambe are formulated as follows:

Table 2. WO Development Strategies for Ketambe

Weaknesses (W)	Weaknesses (W)	Weaknesses (W)
Untrained local HR	Untrained local HR	Untrained local HR
No integrated management	No integrated management	No integrated management
Limited information & promotion	Limited information & promotion	Limited information & promotion

Source: Research Analysis, 2024

Overall, the most urgent need for Ketambe's tourism development lies in strengthening local institutions and enhancing human resource capacity. Ketambe possesses all the essential

prerequisites to become a leading destination—natural beauty, cultural richness, social hospitality, and a strong local narrative. However, all of these elements have yet to be organized into a strategic design that places the community as the main actor. The WO strategy serves as a logical bridge between Ketambe’s current condition and its ideal potential as a sustainable community-based tourism destination.

Cultural and Structural Synergy: Repositioning the Community’s Role in Tourism Management

Strengthening the community’s role in local tourism development is key to creating an inclusive and sustainable governance model. In Ketambe, community involvement in tourism activities has naturally occurred, reflected in mutual cooperation, the use of local knowledge, and basic hospitality skills. However, this great potential is hindered by the absence of structured support systems, both in institutional coordination and continuous training programs. Communities are still positioned as informal actors rather than primary drivers in the tourism ecosystem.

Field observations reveal that residents have actively contributed to simple tasks such as cleaning trekking trails and welcoming guests at homestays. These roles are carried out voluntarily based on local initiatives without a clear institutional framework. For instance, some youth enthusiastically provide tourists with information about travel routes, despite lacking proper equipment and formal training. Ms. ER, a local resident who often accompanies tourists to the Alas River, revealed that she only learned from her seniors and has never attended formal guiding training. This illustrates that the transfer of knowledge is still highly informal and lacks systematic support from external parties such as the government or NGOs.

Moreover, there is no integrated information board at the tourism destination to help visitors understand trekking routes, local cultural stories, or conservation rules. This absence of information facilities indicates weak institutional support in reinforcing and protecting community roles. Without adequate structural support, community efforts in managing tourism may become fragmented, undocumented, and ultimately unsustainable.

From a theoretical perspective, the Community-Based Tourism Governance (CBTG) approach proposed by Moscardo (2023) emphasizes the importance of fully involving local communities in all stages of tourism management—from planning and implementation to evaluation. This model rejects top-down approaches and encourages communities to possess agency—that is, the capacity to control the direction of their own regional development. In Ketambe’s context, this approach is highly relevant, as the community already holds social values that support active participation, yet lacks the formal spaces to fully exercise their roles.

Tourism activities already undertaken by residents—such as providing lodging, local cuisine, and guiding services—demonstrate a spirit of independence. However, most actors are unaware of access to formal training. As stated by Mr. MS, a local traditional leader, “so far, we teach ourselves. There has never been any external training or counseling, even though many young people are capable.” This shows that local skills have evolved but are not yet integrated

into support systems that can enhance their capacity and competitiveness in the tourism industry.

Without institutional strengthening and access to training, tourism management in Ketambe will continue to rely on individual initiatives, risking role inequality, conflict, or potential exploitation. Therefore, empowering the community is crucial, encompassing three main pillars: institutions, training, and social justice.

First, it is necessary to establish or reactivate local institutions such as inclusive Pokdarwis or tourism cooperatives. These bodies will serve as coordination platforms between residents, business actors, and the government and act as bridges to access training, technical assistance, and destination promotion.

Second, training and certification should be provided to residents who already possess basic guiding skills. Training materials must include professional knowledge related to guiding, environmental conservation, and hospitality. These activities can involve NGOs, universities, and tourism agencies to ensure quality and sustainability.

Third, equal participation opportunities must be guaranteed for women, youth, and indigenous communities in every tourism planning process. Village deliberations should be the foundation of planning to ensure that programs have social legitimacy and truly represent community aspirations.

Table 3. Pillars of Community Empowerment in Participatory Tourism Governance

Empowerment Pillar	Empowerment Pillar	Empowerment Pillar
Local Institutions	Local Institutions	Local Institutions
Training & Certification	Training & Certification	Training & Certification
Participation & Equity	Participation & Equity	Participation & Equity

Source: Research Analysis, 2024

These findings indicate that Ketambe has great potential in building a community-based tourism destination. However, successful tourism management requires more than local spirit and skills—it must be supported by institutional structures and policies that facilitate inclusive participation.

Ketambe as a Model of Ecotourism Based on Local Values

The integration of local wisdom into sustainable tourism strategies forms a crucial foundation for developing destinations that are not only visually attractive but also deeply rooted in values. Ketambe, located at the heart of the Leuser Ecosystem Area, holds tremendous potential to serve as a model of community-based sustainable tourism. Its extraordinary natural wealth—ranging from the presence of orangutans to the challenging Alas River—is complemented by the cultural heritage of local communities who uphold harmony between humans and nature. This local wisdom is reflected in various practices such as customary prohibitions against indiscriminate logging, collective customs of welcoming foreign guests, and

the philosophy of respecting the “guardians of the forest,” which the community believes are spirits protecting the ecosystem.

However, field observations indicate that the integration of these values into tourism strategies has not been systematically carried out. Most of Ketambe’s tourism promotion still focuses on natural beauty and adventure—rafting on the Alas River, trekking in the tropical forest, or observing orangutans in the wild. The rich cultural values have yet to become part of the destination’s promotional narrative. In an interview with a community figure, Mr. ZR, a collective belief emerged that the forest is a sacred space inhabited by “guardians,” and therefore, large trees must not be cut down arbitrarily. This belief essentially represents a form of spiritually grounded ecological conservation that aligns with global tourism trends that increasingly value authenticity and sustainability (Phoek et al., 2021).

In response to these findings, the promotion of Ketambe tourism could be directed toward a culture-based storytelling approach. Local narratives that reflect the relationship between humans and nature could be presented through narrative tours, short documentary videos, or information boards at strategic tourist spots. During one observation at a resident’s homestay, the writer noticed that foreign tourists were more enthusiastic when invited to talk about forest legends by the homeowner than when merely offered trekking activities. This indicates that visitors are not only seeking physical adventures but also meaningful inner experiences.

Furthermore, the integration of local wisdom can also be developed into educational tourism packages. During observations, several tourists appeared enthusiastic when witnessing locals traditionally pounding rice or weaving bamboo. Some even requested to be taught how to fish using traditional tools. However, these activities have not yet been systematically packaged. Some village youths, as expressed by Mr. TR, stated that they are often asked by tourists to accompany local activities but are confused due to the lack of proper guidance or training structures. This highlights a significant potential that remains untapped due to the absence of appropriate managerial and pedagogical approaches.

Educational tourism based on local wisdom can be collaboratively designed among communities, local entrepreneurs, and supporting institutions such as NGOs or universities. Through this approach, local values such as respect for nature, organic farming methods, and harmonious living with the environment can become subjects of cross-cultural education. In line with co-creation tourism theory (Hall et al., 2021), tourists become not only consumers but also active participants in the processes of learning and cultural preservation.

In the context of community empowerment, the people of Ketambe have demonstrated initiative and a spirit of mutual cooperation in tourism activities. However, their capacity as primary actors remains suboptimal. Informants like Ms. NS expressed a desire to open a local coffee business that also presents folklore as a tourist attraction, but she lacks access to training and digital literacy to develop the idea. This shows an urgent need for localized tourism entrepreneurship training, community business management, and the use of digital technology

for marketing.

Additionally, environmental management as part of tourism strategy must also be grounded in local values passed down through generations. While walking along the trekking path, the writer found much plastic waste along the way—a sight that contrasts with the community’s conservation spirit. In interviews, residents cited a lack of proper equipment and coordination systems involving them in maintaining the trails. Yet, they possess customary norms prohibiting environmental damage, such as bans on dumping waste into rivers or hunting wildlife.

As a form of integrating ecological values into destination management, a customary-based tourism code of ethics can be developed. Programs such as “Customary Eco-Rangers,” which involve customary leaders in destination supervision, or campaigns like “Clean Tourism Based on Customary Values,” can be solutions that simultaneously strengthen local participation and environmental preservation. This approach not only impacts environmental sustainability but also reinforces the community’s role as guardians of values and stewards of their living space.

Table 4. strategies for Integrating Local Wisdom into Ketambe Tourism Development

Strategy	Strategy	Strategy
Cultural narrative promotion	Cultural narrative promotion	Cultural narrative promotion
Educational tourism	Educational tourism	Educational tourism
Community empowerment	Community empowerment	Community empowerment
Custom-based conservation	Custom-based conservation	Custom-based conservation

Source: Research Analysis, 2024

By integrating local wisdom into all aspects of tourism development strategies, Ketambe has great potential to become a best practice model for sustainable tourism in Indonesia. This requires a shift in approach from merely selling “natural attractions” to offering meaningful life experiences. As emphasized by Depari (2023), the power of future destinations does not lie solely in visual beauty but in how local identities are managed wisely and sustainably.

The policy implication of these findings is the need to reposition the community’s role as the owner of the narrative and a strategic partner in destination development. Governments, NGOs, and academics must position themselves as facilitating companions who work from within the community, not as sole directors. In this way, Ketambe will not only become a tourist destination but also a shared learning space on how local wisdom can become a fundamental foundation toward just, sustainable, and meaningful development.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study affirms that the strategic development of Ketambe nature tourism area in Southeast Aceh cannot be separated from the integration of local wisdom and

community-based sociocultural values. Although Ketambe's ecotourism potential is vast—from natural, cultural, and social interaction aspects—the use of local values as the core of tourism appeal has not been fully optimized. The analysis results show that Ketambe's strengths lie in its unique natural resources, traditional knowledge passed down through generations, and social structures that support community participation in environmentally friendly tourism practices. Through SWOT analysis, Ketambe's strategic position falls within Quadrant III, indicating the need for a survival strategy that minimizes internal weaknesses to seize external opportunities. In this context, sustainable development strategies should prioritize the synergy between cultural preservation and participatory improvement of tourism facilities. This finding supports the research objective that an approach based on the integration of local wisdom not only strengthens destination identity but also opens innovative spaces in inclusive nature tourism strategic planning. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of a development strategy that explicitly integrates cultural-communal dimensions within the tourism planning framework—an approach that is still rarely applied in conservation areas like Ketambe.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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