

Research Article

Cultural Heritage as a Potential for Tourism Development Based on Local Potential and Oriented towards Sustainable Development

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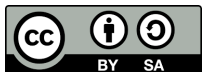
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Abstract. The city of Malang holds heritage-city status with dozens of cultural-heritage buildings, yet this historical capital has not yet translated into commensurate tourism benefits; visits are brief, economic benefits are uneven, and a number of buildings are at risk of change of function. This study aims to map the cultural-heritage potential of Malang City, assess how far its use is aligned with the principles of sustainable development and local potential, and formulate a tourism-development strategy that unites conservation, community empowerment, and sustainability. The study population consisted of heritage-tourism stakeholders in Malang City, with a purposively selected sample of ten informants covering government officials, experts, conservation communities, business operators, residents, guides, and tourists. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation, then analysed using an interactive model—data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing—followed by a SWOT analysis to formulate strategy. The results show that Malang's cultural heritage has strong appeal, particularly because it combines buildings, kampongs, culinary traditions, and residents' stories, but its use is not yet sustainable: the tourism experience remains shallow, economic benefits are uneven, community participation is limited to implementation, environmental pressure is rising, and governance and data remain fragmented. The recommended strategy is to build a coordinated, community-based cultural-heritage tourism ecosystem, comprising an integrated heritage route, a visitor-data platform, multilingual interpretation, adaptive-reuse guidelines, carrying-capacity control, and a cross-stakeholder forum. The study concludes that conservation and utilisation can proceed together when managed in an integrated way that places the community as the principal actor.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism; Cultural Heritage; Local Potential; Malang City; Sustainable Tourism.

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1. Introduction

Malang calls itself a heritage city, and the claim has a basis. At least 32 buildings in the city hold cultural-heritage status under Law No. 11 of 2010, most of them colonial-era remains from the 1860s to the 1940s. These buildings are clustered around Tugu, Jalan Ijen, and Jalan Semeru, an area originally designed by Thomas Karsten as a garden city (Wijaya et al., 2023). Capital of this kind should be highly valuable; in many places, cultural heritage becomes an engine of development once properly managed (Geçikli et al., 2024). The problem is that in Malang, this capital has not yet produced commensurate results. The hotel-room occupancy rate was only 57.02 percent, with guests staying an average of 1.38 days in December 2024 (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Malang, 2025). People come, but briefly, and the money that circulates is thin. Guests are also almost entirely domestic, 98.21 percent, while foreign tourists account for only 1.79 percent. At the same time, a number of old buildings are at risk of demolition or conversion into shophouses and commercial businesses. Also notable is that, in tourists' minds, Malang's name is more closely associated with new man-made attractions than

with its row of historic buildings. Kayutangan, for instance, has already been arranged as a heritage area, but its economic pulse does not yet match the historical value it holds (Maulida et al., 2025). So the problem is not that Malang lacks assets, but that it does not yet know how to use them.

Existing research has not fully answered this question. Studies of Malang tourism generally stop at cataloguing and describing its historical attractions (Wijaya et al., 2023), or discuss destination development and the creative economy in a piecemeal way (Armanu et al., 2023). Even a study that specifically examines Kayutangan focuses more on the pattern of communication among stakeholders (Maulida et al., 2025) than on designing a strategy that links conservation with sustainability. No study has yet united cultural-heritage conservation, the harnessing of local potential, and sustainable-development principles into a single strategy. At the national level, a review by Muda (2025) found that community involvement in Indonesian sustainable tourism is often merely formal, its benefits uneven, and it rarely touches on questions of justice. Global research on cultural-heritage tourism itself is growing rapidly (Geçikli et al., 2024), but little of it has been applied to medium-sized cities built on colonial heritage such as Malang. Most studies also treat conservation and utilisation as two opposing concerns: one side wanting to freeze buildings to keep them intact, the other wanting to exploit them for visits. Yet the two can reinforce one another if the strategy is right. This is precisely the gap this study seeks to fill, and also the reason Malang is a fitting example.

The novelty is simple, though not yet widely undertaken: combining three matters that have so far been discussed separately—conserving cultural heritage, harnessing local uniqueness, and maintaining sustainability—into a single tourism strategy for Malang. Where previous research stops at mapping attractions or evaluating policy, this study views cultural heritage not merely as an object to be protected, but as a source of livelihood that is actually more sustainable when used responsibly and with residents as the principal actors. Linking Malang's colonial heritage with measures of economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability all at once is what previous studies have not done. In this way, cultural heritage is no longer seen as a maintenance burden, but as an asset that works for its own city.

This study rests on three theories. First, community-based tourism: a destination succeeds when its residents take part in managing it and enjoying its results, not merely watching from the sidelines (Mersa et al., 2026; Risfandini, 2024). Second, sustainable tourism, which demands a balance between economic gain, social justice, preserved culture, and an undamaged environment, precisely the spirit of the Sustainable Development Goals (Nurjaya, 2022; Risfandini, 2024). Third, heritage tourism: heritage can drive the local economy provided it is managed through interpretation and governance that do not erase its authenticity (Geçikli et al., 2024). These three are then linked to Malang's local potential—its history, architecture, and traditions—as a distinguishing feature difficult for other regions to replicate. This framework is also used to gauge whether the tourism currently taking place is already sustainable or merely extracting short-term profit (Nurjaya, 2022).

From here, this study pursues three objectives. First, to map Malang's cultural heritage that is worthy of becoming a tourist attraction. Second, to assess how far its utilisation is already in line with the principles of sustainability and local potential. Third, to formulate a strategy for developing cultural-heritage tourism that unites conservation, community empowerment, and sustainability, complete with clear roles for government, business operators, and the local community. All three are directed at one thing: closing the gap between the size of the asset and the smallness of the benefit that has so far occurred, while also ensuring that historic buildings are not consumed by hasty development.

The benefits are twofold. Academically, this study offers a model that unites conservation, local potential, and sustainability in a medium-sized city built on colonial heritage, a context still rarely discussed (Muda, 2025; Geçikli et al., 2024). Practically, the results can serve as a guide for the Malang City Government, business operators, and conservation communities in formulating tourism policies and programmes: not merely pursuing revenue, but also ensuring that cultural heritage remains protected and that residents share in prosperity. A model of this kind can also serve as a reference for other cities carrying a similar burden—having many historic old buildings but uncertain how to turn them into a sustainable source of livelihood. In short, this study seeks a way for tourism to sustain heritage rather than consume it, even though that heritage is precisely what gives it market appeal.

2. Methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case-study design. This choice was made because the problem under study—how cultural heritage can be developed into sustainable tourism—demands an understanding of context, meaning, and field dynamics, not merely numbers (Sugiyono, 2022). A case study was chosen so that Malang City could be examined as a complete whole, including its history, policies, and distinctive problems, so that the results would not be generalised indiscriminately to other regions. The research location was Malang City, focusing on the areas with the highest concentration of cultural-heritage buildings: Tugu, Jalan Ijen, Jalan Semeru, and the Kayutangan corridor.

Data were collected from two sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observation, and documentation. Interviews were directed at parties most familiar with the issue: the Malang City Culture and Tourism Office, the cultural-heritage expert team, tourism business operators, conservation communities, and some tourists. Informants were selected purposively, that is, based on their relevance to and knowledge of the research object, not merely their number (Sugiyono, 2022). Observation was used to directly examine the physical condition of buildings, how they are used, and tourism activity around them. Interviews were guided by a semi-open protocol, so the direction of questioning was clear while informants remained free to explain unexpected matters. Secondary data, meanwhile, were drawn from cultural-heritage designation documents, tourism statistics from the Malang City Statistics Agency, relevant local regulations, and relevant prior research. This combination of sources was used so that a single issue could be viewed from several angles and would not depend on a single account.

Analysis proceeded in two interconnected stages. The first stage used an interactive analysis model: the data collected were reduced, presented in a more condensed form, and conclusions drawn progressively (Sugiyono, 2022). At this stage, the condition of Malang's cultural heritage was read through four sustainability dimensions at once—economic, social, cultural, and environmental—so that the assessment would not be one-sided. The economic dimension examined income and employment generated by tourism, the social dimension weighed community involvement and acceptance, the cultural dimension safeguarded the authenticity and meaning of buildings, while the environmental dimension gauged the carrying capacity of the area so it would not become overcrowded. The result was a complete picture of the existing potential, condition, and problems. The second stage translated this picture into strategy through a SWOT analysis. Internal factors in the form of strengths and weaknesses, and external factors in the form of opportunities and threats, were mapped, weighted, and scored using IFAS and EFAS matrices, then positioned in a quadrant to determine the most sensible strategic direction (Mutiarasari et al., 2024). From the intersection of these four factors, four possible strategies were formulated: using strengths to seize opportunities, using strengths to face threats, addressing weaknesses by exploiting opportunities, and minimising weaknesses so they are not aggravated by threats. This method is widely used in tourism-development studies because it links real field conditions with genuinely actionable strategic choices.

To ensure the findings were trustworthy, data validity was maintained through triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from different informants, while technique triangulation was carried out by cross-checking interview results, observation, and documents (Sugiyono, 2022). When all three pointed in the same direction, the finding was considered robust; when they diverged, further tracing was done until the matter was clear. Through these steps, the resulting strategy is expected to be grounded in actual conditions rather than a fleeting impression.

3. Results And Discussion

Interviews with ten informants representing government, experts, conservation communities, business operators, residents, guides, and tourists confirmed one thing suspected from the outset: Malang City's cultural-heritage capital is substantial, but has not yet been turned into a complete tourism experience. All informants agreed that the city's strength lies in the concentration of old buildings, the pattern of the old-town area, and colonial architecture interconnected with the city's history. This finding is consistent with the view that cultural heritage can drive development when managed through appropriate governance and interpretation (Geçikli et al., 2024), and reinforces the results of Wijaya et al. (2023), who mapped Malang as an area layered with history from the Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and colonial periods through to the Japanese occupation.

Notably, informants did not view cultural heritage as limited to buildings. Area managers and conservation communities emphasised that Kayutangan's strength actually lies in the

combination of buildings, kampongs, culinary traditions, family stories, and residents' activities. This means the tourism product worth building is not merely a row of facades, but a combination of tangible and intangible assets. This is the concrete embodiment of the local potential mentioned at the outset: a uniqueness difficult for other regions to replicate because it is embedded in local memory and community life.

Yet this potential is not yet matched by the experience on offer. Eight of the ten informants noted that tourism activity still stops at walking, taking photos, and enjoying culinary offerings. Historical narratives, thematic routes, interpretive signage, and guiding materials are not yet evenly available. Tourists enjoy the physical form of the buildings but do not always understand why they matter. Within the heritage-tourism framework, this is precisely the weak point: heritage value is only conveyed when there is interpretation that bridges visitors to the meaning behind the buildings (Geçikli et al., 2024). Without it, visits remain brief, consistent with the length-of-stay data of only 1.38 days (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Malang, 2025).

Economically, activating the area has already opened up business opportunities, culinary sales, guiding services, and informal work. But the benefits are not yet evenly distributed or measured. Residents with strategically located property find it easier to enjoy the results, while others bear more of the crowds, parking, and waste. Business operators' turnover also depends on weekends and event schedules. This finding reinforces Muda's (2025) warning that participation and benefits in Indonesian sustainable tourism are often uneven and rarely touch on questions of justice. The principle of sustainable tourism demands balance, not mere growth (Nurjaya, 2022), so economic benefit needs to be measured—for example, through the share of businesses owned by local residents, local employment absorption, and tourism's contribution to a conservation fund.

The most fundamental problem actually appears in participation. Residents are active once activities are about to run, but are rarely involved in setting direction, drafting rules, or dividing benefits. In the language of community-based tourism, this kind of participation has only reached the consultative or operational stage, not yet a partnership in decision-making. Yet this is precisely where CBT theory places its key point: a sustainable destination requires residents to become managers and beneficiaries, not merely implementers or spectators (Mersa et al., 2026; Risfandini, 2024), as shown by CBT models tested in a number of other regions (Alhadi et al., 2023). The Nglanggeran experience even underscores the risk: tourism managed by residents once succeeded in reducing poverty, but excessive government intervention instead created power imbalances and narrowed the pool of beneficiaries (Suyatna et al., 2024). Strengthening community institutions and opening up transparency of benefits are therefore a prerequisite, not an add-on.

On the cultural dimension, government informants, experts, and communities agreed that buildings need to be used so they remain alive and maintained, but that use must be fenced in. Facade alteration, excessive signage, unsuitable materials, and undocumented renovation threaten authenticity. Interestingly, informants stressed that prohibition alone is not enough: building owners are often burdened by maintenance costs, so without incentives and mentoring, compliance is hard to sustain. This reinforces the idea that conservation and utilisation are not two opposing poles, but can reinforce one another given clear adaptive-reuse guidelines.

The last two themes concern environment and governance. Traffic congestion, illegal parking, waste, and noise increase on weekends and during events, and residents demand firm rules. The area's carrying capacity therefore needs to be treated as an indicator of success, not a side effect. Behind all this lies a strategic weakness: fragmented governance and data. Matters of culture, tourism, spatial planning, traffic, and business sit in different units without shared indicators, while daily visitor data, movement patterns, and spending are not yet routinely recorded. Consistent with Armanu et al. (2023) and the findings of Maulida et al. (2025) in Kayutangan, piecemeal development without established communication among stakeholders is indeed difficult to translate into measurable impact. A summary of findings by the four sustainability dimensions is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Matrix of Findings by Sustainability Dimension.

Dimension	Main Finding	Strategic Implication
Economic	Benefits are increasing but not evenly distributed; turnover depends on weekends and events.	Measure local businesses and employment; tour packages; event calendar; conservation fund.
Social	Residents are active in implementation but limited in decision-making and evaluation.	Community forum; benefit transparency; complaint channel; activity rules.
Cultural	Adaptive use is needed, but physical change and commercialisation need to be controlled.	Adaptive-reuse guidelines; incentives; technical consultation; validated interpretation.
Environmental	Impacts increase during busy periods, reducing comfort for residents and tourists.	Visitor management; integrated parking; gradual pedestrianisation; waste management.
Governance	Data and programmes remain fragmented, making overall impact hard to measure.	Cross-party forum; data dashboard; shared indicators; periodic evaluation.

Source: field data and researchers' analysis, 2026.

One thread connecting almost all the themes is that promotion is not yet supported by an interpretation system and digital services. Social media has successfully boosted the area's popularity, but what spreads is more about aesthetics and culinary appeal than historical value. Domestic tourists find it hard to locate routes, tour schedules, and key building points in a single channel, while foreign tourists are hampered by minimal English-language information and ease of booking tours. This gap is not merely a marketing-technicality issue, but part of the tourism experience itself: without an interactive map, validated narrative, activity calendar, and connected guide-reservation system, visitation potential that has already grown is difficult to convert into longer stays and greater spending. The need for this integrated platform reinforces the argument that partial development needs to be replaced with an approach that links destination, community, local business, and data into a single ecosystem (Armanu et al., 2023).

When these findings are summarised into a SWOT analysis, Malang's strengths lie in the concentration of historic buildings, city identity, and active conservation communities; its weaknesses lie in interpretation, data, participation, and coordination that are not yet integrated. Opportunities come from rising interest in heritage tourism, walking tours, and educational tourism, as well as opening digital and academic collaboration. Threats take the form of excessive commercialisation, rent increases displacing residents, physical damage to buildings, and competition from other, more structured destinations. Weighting through the IFAS and EFAS matrices places the strategy on a combination of maximising strengths while addressing weaknesses (Mutiarasari et al., 2024). The resulting strategy formulation is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. SWOT Matrix and Alternative Strategies.

Strategy	Strategy Formulation
S–O	Developing an integrated heritage route based on Malang City's story, weaving together historic buildings, kampongs, culinary traditions, arts, and MSME products; holding an annual event calendar; and marketing two- to three-day tour packages.
W–O	Building an information platform and visitor dashboard; strengthening the capacity of guides and business operators; providing multilingual signage; and forming a management forum that involves residents from the planning stage.
S–T	Developing adaptive-reuse guidelines, signage and facade standards, heritage-friendly business certification, and visitor education so that the strength of historical assets is not eroded by commercialisation.
W–T	Implementing activity and parking zoning, carrying-capacity control, building-change audits, a resident complaint mechanism, maintenance assistance, and socio-economic monitoring to prevent gentrification and spatial conflict.

Source: field data and researchers' analysis, 2026.

From these four strategy quadrants, the same common thread emerges: conservation, tourism experience, community empowerment, environmental control, and governance cannot be handled separately. The most sensible priority is to build a coordinated, community-based heritage-tourism ecosystem—namely, an integrated heritage route linking Tugu, Kayutangan, Ijen, and Semeru; an information and visitor-data platform; multilingual interpretation; adaptive-reuse guidelines along with incentives; carrying-capacity control; and a cross-stakeholder forum. In this way, Malang's cultural heritage can genuinely function as local potential oriented towards sustainable development, precisely the aim of this study.

4. Conclusion

This study starts from a simple gap: Malang City possesses substantial cultural-heritage capital, but that capital has not yet translated into commensurate tourism benefits. From the three objectives set out, the findings can be summarised as follows. First, Malang's cultural heritage, particularly in the Tugu, Kayutangan, Jalan Ijen, and Jalan Semeru areas, is indeed worthy of being a primary attraction, and its strength does not stop at the buildings, but lies in the combination of buildings, kampongs, culinary traditions, and residents' stories that are difficult for other regions to replicate. Second, its utilisation is not yet aligned with sustainability principles: the tourism experience remains shallow, economic benefits are uneven and unmeasured, community participation remains limited to implementation, environmental pressure rises when the area is busy, while governance and data remain fragmented. Third, the most sensible strategy is not to add new attractions, but to link and organise what already exists.

The SWOT analysis points to a single strategic conclusion: building a coordinated, community-based cultural-heritage tourism ecosystem. Its concrete form includes an integrated heritage route weaving together the four areas, an information and visitor-data platform, multilingual interpretation, adaptive-use guidelines along with incentives, carrying-capacity control of the area, and a cross-stakeholder forum. In this way, conservation and utilisation stop being viewed as two opposing matters and begin to work in mutual support, so that cultural heritage genuinely functions as local potential oriented towards sustainable development.

This study's contribution lies in uniting three matters previously discussed separately—conservation, local potential, and sustainability—into a single strategic framework for a medium-sized city built on colonial heritage. Even so, these findings should be read with caution. The analysis rests on interviews with ten informants, so it has not quantitatively measured the scale of economic benefit, the area's real carrying capacity, or the actual IFAS-EFAS weighting. Further research is recommended to add quantitative data, such as visitor-satisfaction surveys, carrying-capacity calculations, and measurable SWOT weighting, and to test the application of this strategy in the field. For the Malang City Government and stakeholders, the most urgent step is to establish a coordination forum and a shared data system, since it is from there that other strategies can be built.

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