

KAWA TRADITIONAL VILLAGE AS A CULTURAL TOURISM DESTINATION: CULTURAL HERITAGE POTENTIAL, LANDSCAPE BEAUTY, AND ACCESSIBILITY CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism can support the preservation of living cultural heritage when tourism development is grounded in local identity, community involvement, and environmental sustainability. This study aims to identify and analyze the potential of Kawa Traditional Village in Nagekeo Regency as a cultural tourism destination by focusing on cultural heritage, landscape beauty, and accessibility conditions. A qualitative descriptive approach was used. Data were collected through direct observation, a semi-structured interview with the customary leader of Kawa Village as the key informant, supplementary informal information from community members encountered during fieldwork, and documentation. The findings show that Kawa Traditional Village has substantial cultural tourism potential through 13 remaining traditional houses, a Kawa clan-based kinship system comprising five sub-clans, and seven customary rituals and traditions that remain connected to community life. The village also possesses an integrated cultural landscape consisting of traditional settlement, agricultural areas, savanna, hills, and mountain scenery between Mount Amagelu and Mount Ebulobo. Nevertheless, accessibility remains a major development constraint because sections of the concrete road have deteriorated through water erosion, access differs considerably by vehicle type, and directional information is limited. The study concludes that Kawa has strong potential as a living cultural tourism destination, but its development should prioritize cultural authenticity, environmental protection, community participation, and gradual improvement of safe and resilient access infrastructure.

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INTRODUCTION

Cultural tourism is increasingly understood not simply as the consumption of cultural attractions but as an interaction between visitors, local communities, heritage, and place. Traditional villages are particularly important in this context because culture is embedded in everyday life through architecture, customary institutions, rituals, local knowledge, livelihoods, and relationships with the surrounding environment. Recent studies emphasize that traditional villages can function as living cultural landscapes in which heritage continues to be practiced and transmitted rather than preserved only as a static object (Benowo et al., 2026). Cultural tourism can therefore contribute to preservation when development strengthens community identity and participation rather than reducing culture to a commodity.

The relationship between tourism and cultural preservation, however, requires a context-sensitive approach. Tresiana and Kartika (2024) show that sustainable traditional tourism villages cannot be developed effectively through uniform policy models because political, social, economic, and cultural conditions differ among destinations. Similarly, Pratiwi and Wikantiyoso (2022) demonstrate that customary institutions, local values, environmental conservation, and appropriate infrastructure are important for maintaining cultural resilience in Penglipuran. Astara and Wesna (2023) further highlight the role of local wisdom, social capital, culture, and community participation in the management of traditional tourism villages. These findings suggest that the identification of local cultural resources should precede tourism development and that infrastructure should support, rather than displace, cultural authenticity.

The same principle applies to the relationship between cultural heritage and the natural environment. Cultural landscapes are produced through long-term interaction between communities and their physical surroundings. Traditional houses, agricultural practices, vegetation, paths, hills, and other environmental features can collectively create a distinctive sense of place. In sustainable tourism, such resources need to be considered together because the attractiveness of a traditional village may derive from the combination of cultural and natural elements rather than from a single attraction. Research on local wisdom-based tourism likewise emphasizes that cultural values can provide a foundation for sustainable differentiation while strengthening the connection between visitors and local communities (Andari et al., 2020; Mentansan et al., 2023).

Kawa Traditional Village in Labolewa Village, Aesesa District, Nagekeo Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, provides an important case for examining this relationship. The destination is publicly promoted as a traditional village in which indigenous community life, natural scenery, and ancestral traditions remain closely connected. Official tourism information identifies Kawa as a destination where traditional community life is maintained in harmony with the natural environment, while national tourism data also record Kawa as a tourism attraction in Labolewa Village. The destination is located in a hilly environment and is associated with the landscape around Mount Amagelu and Mount Ebulobo. These characteristics provide a basis for considering Kawa as a cultural landscape as well as a cultural tourism destination.

Field observations for this study indicate that Kawa has distinctive cultural and landscape resources. Thirteen traditional houses remain, while the Kawa kinship system, customary rituals, agricultural practices, and community traditions continue to shape everyday life. The surrounding landscape includes traditional settlement areas, agricultural land, savanna, hills, and mountain scenery. These resources are consistent with the concept of a living cultural landscape because cultural practices and the physical environment remain interconnected. Nevertheless, the destination faces a significant accessibility challenge. Several sections of the concrete road have deteriorated because of water erosion during the rainy season, and access is more difficult for automatic scooters and four-wheeled vehicles. The absence of adequate directional signs and information boards further limits information accessibility.

Accessibility is not a secondary issue in destination development. It influences the ability of visitors to reach, enter, and experience a destination and can shape destination competitiveness and visitor comfort. In Kawa, accessibility also has a direct relationship with sustainability because road repairs that ignore drainage and water-flow patterns may quickly deteriorate. The Nagekeo tourism guide similarly describes the route to Kawa as rough and rocky and notes that rainy-season conditions can make the journey substantially more difficult. Thus, the access problem is not simply the absence of a road; it involves road quality, terrain, vehicle suitability, pedestrian movement, information, and infrastructure maintenance.

Previous studies have examined cultural tourism potential in several traditional villages, including Penglipuran in Bali (Pratiwi & Wikantiyoso, 2022), Duarato in Belu (Sanam et al., 2024), Prai Ijing in Sumba (Zidane & Maranisy, 2024), and Cireundeu in West Java (Nurdin et al., 2025). Kurniawan et al. (2024) also demonstrate the value of systematically identifying cultural and natural resources in Gebong Memarong Mapur Traditional Village before formulating development strategies. However, research that specifically integrates the cultural heritage, cultural landscape, and accessibility conditions of Kawa Traditional Village remains limited. The research gap is therefore located at the local level: there is a need to understand how Kawa's existing cultural and environmental resources can be positioned as tourism assets while its access limitations are recognized as part of destination readiness.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyze Kawa Traditional Village as a cultural tourism destination by examining three interrelated aspects: (1) cultural heritage potential, (2) landscape beauty as an integrated cultural landscape, and (3) accessibility conditions as a development challenge. The study contributes a site-specific description and interpretation of Kawa as a living cultural destination and provides a basis for tourism development that prioritizes cultural authenticity, environmental quality, community involvement, and appropriate accessibility improvements.

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to identify and interpret the potential of Kawa Traditional Village as a cultural tourism destination. The approach was selected because the research focuses on describing and understanding existing cultural, social, environmental, and accessibility conditions from field-based information rather than measuring predetermined variables. The study was conducted in Kawa Traditional Village, Labolewa Village, Aesesa District, Nagekeo Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Field data collection was conducted on June 5, 2026.

Data were collected through direct observation, a semi-structured interview, supplementary informal interactions, and documentation. Observation focused on the traditional settlement, traditional houses, community activities, customary practices, savanna, hills, mountain scenery, routes to the village, road conditions, and directional information. The semi-structured interview was conducted with Mr. Don Bosco Doko, the customary leader of Kawa Village, who was purposively selected as the key informant because of his knowledge of the village's history, customary practices, kinship structure, rituals, traditional houses, and community life. The use of one key informant was appropriate for the study's focused descriptive purpose because the informant occupied a customary leadership position and possessed direct knowledge of the cultural resources examined. Nevertheless, the study recognizes that reliance on one principal informant limits the range of perspectives represented in the interview data. Additional information was obtained informally from the key informant's wife and two community members encountered during fieldwork.

These interactions were used only as supporting information and were not treated as equivalent to the principal semi-structured interview. The supplementary information was compared with observation findings and the key informant's statements, particularly concerning customary practices, traditions, and everyday community life.

Individual identities are not reported because these interactions were informal and were not designed as separate formal interviews.

Documentation consisted primarily of photographs recording traditional houses, the settlement environment, landscape features, community activities, and road conditions. Data analysis proceeded through four stages: organizing the field notes and documentation; coding information according to the research focus; grouping recurring information into three thematic categories—cultural heritage, landscape, and accessibility; and interpreting the relationships among these themes in light of relevant cultural tourism literature. Findings from different data collection techniques were compared to identify convergence and to reduce reliance on a single form of evidence.

Trustworthiness was addressed through methodological triangulation by comparing observation, interview information, supplementary community information, and documentation. Credibility was strengthened by checking whether statements from the key informant were consistent with observed conditions and supplementary information. Dependability was supported by documenting the data-collection procedures and analytical categories, while confirmability was addressed by grounding interpretations in field evidence rather than personal preference. Transferability is supported through detailed contextual description of the site and its cultural and environmental characteristics. These procedures are consistent with established qualitative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stenfors et al., 2020).

Ethical considerations were applied by explaining the purpose of the study to the key informant and community members involved in the fieldwork, obtaining permission to conduct observations, interviews, and documentation, and avoiding disclosure of personal identities of informal community contributors.

METHOD

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kawa Traditional Village is a traditional settlement in Labolewa Village, Aesesa District, Nagekeo Regency. Field observations show that its tourism potential is produced by the interaction of tangible heritage, intangible heritage, natural scenery, agricultural activity, and the physical conditions of access. The destination was opened to tourist visits on December 11, 2019, and the manuscript's field information records its official designation as a tourism village on December 13, 2025. Rather than treating these resources as separate attractions, the findings indicate that Kawa is better understood as a living cultural landscape in which community identity and the surrounding environment remain connected. This interpretation is consistent with recent work on Indonesian traditional villages as living cultural landscapes (Benowo et al., 2026).

Cultural Heritage Potential

The strongest tourism potential of Kawa Traditional Village is its living cultural heritage. Tangible heritage is represented by 13 remaining traditional houses, while intangible heritage includes the Kawa clan-based kinship system, five sub-clans, customary rituals, agricultural traditions, and social values. The continued use and maintenance of these elements distinguish Kawa from a destination in which heritage is preserved only as a historical display.



Figure 1: Views of the Kawa traditional village

Source : Author's documentation, June 5, 2026.

The traditional houses are raised structures with open space beneath them and supporting posts embedded in the ground. Floors are made from wooden planks and chopped bamboo, while walls use wood and bamboo and roofs are covered with thatch. These materials reflect the use of locally available resources and inherited construction knowledge. The houses therefore possess both architectural value and interpretive value: they demonstrate how local knowledge has adapted dwelling forms to the environmental context. Similar relationships between traditional architecture, local knowledge, and tourism potential have been observed in Duarato and Penglipuran (Sanam et al., 2024; Pratiwi & Wikantiyoso, 2022).

The intangible dimension is equally important. Kawa's social structure is centered on the Kawa clan, which comprises five sub-clans: Naka Zale, Walla, Ghea Neja, Nakabhega, and Riburato. The kinship system supports solidarity, mutual cooperation, customary decision-making, and ritual activities. This finding supports the argument that traditional villages derive tourism value not only from physical heritage but also from social institutions that maintain cultural continuity. Nurdin et al. (2025), for example, show that cultural wisdom in Cireundeu continues to shape community life and environmental relationships, while Astara and Wesna (2023) emphasize the importance of local institutions and participation in traditional-village tourism management.

Seven customary ritual stages identified in the field are Sewe Li'e Uta, Bhago Jawa, Gua Ru, Gua Pare, Dhodho Kako, Gua Etu, and Dai Nara. Their meanings are associated with agriculture, harvest, crop protection, social relations, respect for ancestors, traditional boxing, cooperation, and relationships with nature. Gua Etu is connected with the traditional boxing event held in August, while activities such as Kose and Teke Dhega accompany the event. Dai Nara represents a traditional hunting practice associated with togetherness, cooperation, and respect for nature. These practices strengthen the argument that Kawa's cultural attraction is experiential and relational rather than merely visual.

At the same time, the presence of rituals does not mean that every customary practice should automatically become a tourist performance. Cultural tourism can support preservation, but commercialization may also create pressure on authenticity and community meaning. Recent research on traditional villages in Indonesia similarly emphasizes the need to balance tourism development with cultural continuity and community ownership (Benowo et al., 2026; Djunaid et al., 2025). For Kawa, a practical implication is that the community should determine which cultural elements can be interpreted for visitors, which may be observed only under customary conditions, and which should remain outside tourism activities.

Landscape Beauty

Kawa's landscape is another major component of its tourism potential. The settlement is located in a hilly environment associated with Mount Amagelu and Mount Ebulobo and includes savanna, agricultural land, and

traditional houses. The landscape therefore provides more than scenic value: it represents the physical setting in which cultural practices and livelihoods take place.



Figure 2: Views of Mount Amagelu, Mount Ebulobo and the savanna which are the backdrop for Kawa village

Source : Author's documentation, June 5, 2026.

Most community members work as farmers and livestock breeders, with agricultural commodities including rice, maize, root crops, candlenuts, and cashew nuts. These activities contribute to the visual and functional character of the landscape. The combination of settlement, agriculture, savanna, hills, and mountain scenery can be interpreted as a cultural landscape because it has been shaped by continuous interaction between community practices and the natural environment. This interpretation extends the tourism value of Kawa beyond conventional scenic tourism and creates opportunities for integrated cultural and nature-based experiences.

The interpretation is also supported by research showing that cultural landscapes and local wisdom can strengthen sustainable tourism when community practices remain central to destination identity. Kurniawan et al. (2024) found that cultural and natural resources should be identified together when developing traditional-village tourism, while Andari et al. (2020) emphasize that local wisdom can provide a basis for sustainable tourism attractions. Kawa therefore has the potential to develop a destination identity based on the relationship between people, traditional settlement, agriculture, and mountain-savanna scenery rather than on scenery alone.

Landscape development should nevertheless avoid excessive physical intervention. Facilities, viewing points, pathways, and visitor services should be compatible with the traditional character and ecological conditions of the site. This is particularly important because the same landscape that creates tourism appeal also influences road erosion and accessibility. Sustainable development therefore requires the landscape to be treated simultaneously as an attraction, a living environment, and an ecological system.

Accessibility Challenges

Accessibility is the principal gap between Kawa's tourism potential and its current destination readiness. The concrete road provided to support access has deteriorated in several sections, primarily because of water erosion during the rainy season. The resulting potholes and uneven surfaces reduce the reliability of vehicle access. The resulting potholes and uneven surfaces compromise the reliability of vehicle access, while the rough, rocky terrain can make the journey significantly more difficult, especially during the rainy season.

Access difficulty varies by vehicle. Off-road-capable motorcycles can navigate the terrain more readily, whereas automatic scooters face greater limitations. Four-wheeled vehicles encounter even greater difficulty in some sections, and the field observations indicate that visitors may need to leave vehicles at an accessible point and walk

approximately four kilometers to the village. Accessibility therefore involves not only distance but also road surface, terrain, vehicle suitability, pedestrian safety, and information about the route.



Figure 3: The condition of the road to Kawa Village and visitors walking toward the destination.

Source : Author's documentation, June 5, 2026.

This finding can be compared with Prai Ijing Traditional Village, where tourism impacts have been examined through multiple stakeholder perspectives and triangulated data (Zidane & Maranisya, 2024). In Kawa, the present study's narrower evidence base means that accessibility is interpreted primarily through direct observation and the customary leader's information rather than through systematic visitor surveys. Future research should therefore measure visitor perceptions, travel time, vehicle types, seasonal accessibility, and willingness to walk in order to quantify the effect of access conditions on visitation.

Information accessibility is another weakness. Field observations identified inadequate directional signs and information boards. This problem can be especially important in a destination with a difficult route because visitors require reliable information to navigate safely. Improving information accessibility could be achieved relatively quickly through directional signage, route maps, digital location information, and clearly identified walking points. Such measures can complement, rather than replace, gradual physical road improvement.

Road improvement should also address the cause of deterioration rather than only repairing damaged surfaces. Because water erosion is a recurring problem, drainage, runoff control, and road-edge protection should be integrated into infrastructure planning. Sustainable tourism literature emphasizes the importance of long-term and holistic planning and meaningful stakeholder participation in heritage destinations (Landorf, 2009). In Kawa, infrastructure planning should therefore involve the local community and consider environmental conditions, traditional settlement character, visitor safety, and maintenance capacity.

Accessibility should not, however, be interpreted solely as a deficiency. The journey itself may become part of the destination experience for visitors interested in nature- and culture-based tourism, particularly when walking routes are safe and accompanied by clear interpretation. The key issue is therefore to transform difficult access into a manageable and meaningful journey without romanticizing unsafe conditions. The objective should be improved safety, predictability, and inclusiveness while retaining the distinctive environmental character of the route.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

Table 1 : Summary of Findings

Aspect	Main field findings	Tourism potential	Main challenge
Cultural heritage	13 traditional houses; Kawa clan and five sub-clans; seven customary ritual stages; continuing traditions	Living cultural heritage, interpretation, cultural learning, community-based experiences	Risk of reducing sacred/customary practices to tourist performances
Landscape	Traditional settlement, agriculture, savanna, hills, and mountain scenery between Mount Amagelu and Mount Ebulobo	Integrated cultural landscape and combined cultural–nature experience	Need to protect landscape character and ecological quality
Accessibility	Damaged concrete road; water erosion; vehicle limitations; approximately 4 km walking section; limited signage	Potential for managed walking/adventure experience	Safety, inclusiveness, seasonal road deterioration, and information access

Source: summary of Findings (author, 2026)

CONCLUSION

Kawa Traditional Village has substantial potential to function as a cultural tourism destination because its cultural heritage and landscape remain connected to the everyday life of the community. The first major strength is living cultural heritage, represented by 13 traditional houses, the Kawa clan-based kinship system and five sub-clans, and seven customary rituals and traditions. The second strength is the cultural landscape formed by traditional settlement, agricultural activities, savanna, hills, and mountain scenery associated with Mount Amagelu and Mount Ebulobo. The third finding is that accessibility remains the main constraint on destination readiness. Road deterioration caused by water erosion, limitations for automatic scooters and four-wheeled vehicles, sections requiring walking, and inadequate directional information reduce the ease and inclusiveness of access.

The central implication is that Kawa should not be developed through promotion alone. Tourism development should be based on the protection of living cultural practices, community authority over cultural interpretation, landscape conservation, and infrastructure that responds to local environmental conditions. In particular, road improvement should incorporate drainage and runoff management; directional signs should be installed at strategic access points; and safe walking sections should be identified and managed where vehicles cannot reach the village. These measures should be planned with the customary community and relevant government stakeholders so that infrastructure supports rather than transforms the cultural landscape.

This study has limitations. First, the principal interview involved one customary leader, so the findings do not represent the full range of views among residents, tourism managers, government officials, or visitors. Second, fieldwork was conducted within a limited period in June 2026 and therefore does not provide a systematic comparison between dry- and rainy-season accessibility. Third, the study is descriptive and does not quantify visitor numbers, economic impacts, carrying capacity, or tourists' perceptions. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Future research should involve a broader range of stakeholders, including customary leaders, households, younger residents, tourism managers, government officials, and visitors. Subsequent studies could also compare dry- and rainy-season road conditions, assess visitor accessibility and satisfaction, map cultural and landscape assets, and evaluate carrying capacity and community-based tourism governance. Such research would strengthen the empirical

basis for developing Kawa as a sustainable cultural tourism destination while ensuring that tourism remains compatible with cultural continuity and environmental protection.

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