

Community readiness to host a world-class tourism destination: Insights from lake Toba

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Abstract: The research focuses on the potential of the Lake Toba area for internationally recognized tourism and explores whether its local people are prepared to welcome foreign travellers. It also discusses whether traditional customs and behaviour of people around Lake Toba have limited tourism. A web survey was conducted with the aim of gathering information from visitors and locals in Lake Toba and North Sumatra to verify if they knew that the lake has been identified as a Super Priority Destination. The results were analysed based on a six-step content analysis. It is from these results that there will be the potentiality of Lake Toba to be a top-class tourist destination for all, something that should really get and inspire everybody: natural beauty, a variety of fauna and flora, nature preservation, improving infrastructure, and cultural diversity. Community welcoming and support of local culture and ways of living enhance the experience of the visitor in this tourism sector. A good number of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) concur with the research. SDGs 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 15 (Life on Land) all give priority to conservation and nature's beauty. These two SDGs encourage sustainable operations. SDG 11, which is Sustainable Cities and Communities, stipulates that local culture integrated into tourism supports sustainable cities and communities' development actions.

Keywords: *Lake tourism, Life on land, Responsible consumption and production, Sustainable cities and communities, Sustainable tourism.*

1. Introduction

Declaration of Super Priority Destinations (SPD) in Indonesia was an effort to boost the tourism in several leading locations in Indonesia. This is an attempt to shape potentiality that extraordinary tourism has in the various regions in Indonesia into magnets for domestic and international tourists. It is based on identifying locations with unique cultural, natural, historical, or significant economic potential. The determination of these Super Priority Destinations was done by looking at the existence of actual and potential tourist attractions, adequate infrastructure, and local government support. This Destination Super Priority was launched as part of the government's efforts in encouraging regional economic growth through tourism. Meanwhile, the government through the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy has concerned some potential destination which is soon developed intensively with the expectation of high tourist interest visit as well as high investment interest in the tourism sector. The first thing to do is to select destinations which are categorized as Super Priority using this criteria. After the identification, the government collaborates with all relevant stakeholders to prepare a detailed master plan for Indonesia's tourism industry. The launch is part of the bigger strategy of building a

sustainable and inclusive Indonesia tourism industry to increase the contribution of the tourism sector in the country's economic growth and, at the same time, provide direct benefits to the tourists.

Current literature concentrates on the success of created highly prioritised tourism sites and presents different techniques and strategies applied by various countries. Papers highlight specific destinations that are given priority for the application of sustainable tourism development, for instance, Mandalika in Indonesia by Desembrianita et al., (2024) and Sunandar et al. (2022), Likupang, and Labuan Bajo. The three sites were therefore chosen since each one has a unique high value of natural resources that can best be developed through eco-tourism for the purposes of environmental conservation and promotion of tourism attraction.

Medical tourism to Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates are some of the top choices; local governments are initiating plans for the further development of the region's medical tourism industry (Bulatovic & Iankova, 2021). On the other hand, articles within Iran focus on strategies by which the country can become one of the leading choices for the residents of neighbouring countries, thus expanding the scope of the global network. The focus is on gaining respect for the country through public diplomacy and international cooperation (Chianeh et al., 2018).

In the case of Canavese Area, Italy, for example, stakeholders are pooling their knowledge in a participatory process to prioritize actions that will allow the territory to be greatly valued as an attractive destination for tourists, factoring in the use of technology and the effectiveness of coordination on the development of touristic infrastructures in the area (Beltramo et al., 2021). Both articles show examples of how to define, design, and publicize relevant tourist destinations in new ways, as integral and sustainable strategies for the development of this sector, providing a shared responsibility approach.

Several studies have now been conducted on various aspects of popular tourists' destinations. However, their preparedness to host international tourists in such places remains a widely under-investigated area. The focus in the current study, therefore, is justified by the ability of the region around Lake Toba in Indonesia to go global as a recognized destination for tourism. The present study is intended to cover this research gap. This study will evaluate the readiness of the local community for the arrival of international tourists, taking into consideration issues related to infrastructure and hospitality services, as well as cultural compatibility. It also seeks to determine the kind of cultural practices and customs present among the people of Lake Toba that might become barriers to, or inhibitions of, the growth of international tourism. This study aims to provide an insight into ways by which the region may be improved, making it appealing and competitive enough for tourism in the global market.

Lake Toba has therefore changed and be developed into first-class tourist destinations with several strategic programs along with its appointment as one of the five Super Priority Destinations in Indonesia. One of them is the 'New Bali' program initiated by the government to further diversify the myriad tourist offers in Indonesia and reduce over-reliance on Bali. In relation to that, Lake Toba will actually play an important part with the beautiful natural scenery it has, the amount of cultural heritage available, as well as the potential it would have to boost the local creative economy. Mahmudin et al. (2024), report that the potential of Lake Toba lies in the picturesque natural landscape, tremendous cultural heritage, and commitment toward joining the 'New Bali' program. In as much as it is ailing from the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak, Saragih et al. (2022) observe that Lake Toba is a destination for domestic tourists. Local tourists are interested in the natural and historical value present at the scene. The Indonesian government recovery strategies aim at increasing functional and epistemic value among the locals to enhance visitors' satisfaction.

Tourist development of Lake Toba these days is a deeply innovative and sustainable process. Damanik et al. (2022) study technological features enriched with the 'Visit Samosir' mobile application and green marketing for an enriched experience of tourists and fostering ecologic sustainability. The idea of sustainability at Lake Toba translates to something more than just cultural. Local traditions and landscapes have a big stake in maintaining the uniqueness of the region. Hulu (2022) puts more

emphasis on the local problems of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly the suggestion to increase quality, production capacity, and better management of products. Collaboration is vital for enhancing competitiveness among SMEs and, therefore, further important in economizing downturns that have been caused by the pandemic. Such collaboration will integrate SMEs into the tourism ecosystem and, in the process, further increase the preference for Lake Toba as a highly prioritised destination.

Surya et al. (2021) added that the provision for visitors of Muslim faith to a destination with a non-Muslim majority is challenging; there are little to no facilities catering to their needs. Halal tourism facilities can overcome these and enhance Lake Toba's general appeal to the visitors. Yuliaty and Hutagalung (2024) also stress the excellent natural beauty of the area, illustrating the rich number of activities that guests visiting can engage in, including kayaking and walking the many picturesque trails along the lake. A holistic approach needs to be developed that capitalizes on the intrinsic, cultural, and physical resources of Lake Toba while at the same time addressing any lack or inadequacies to make this a world-class destination.

2. Literature Review

2.1. World-Class Tourism Destination

A world-class tourism destination can be represented by aspects of cultural richness, community involvement, strategic planning, and sustainability. Studies have looked at these aspects to gain an understanding of what makes a place more attractive to international visitors. This review presents the findings from seven studies published in the last five years in journals indexed in Scopus. The research looks at determining the essential attributes that contribute to creating and maintaining top-ranked tourist destination. Cultural riches and authenticity are imperative for a top-ranked tourist destination. According to Richards (2018), cultural tourism is central to new tourists craving unique and experiential offering. Destinations that will be able to deliver a more engaging expression of their cultural past managed to lure more tourists to them if the travellers are culturally motivated. In terms of improving the experience of tourists, Kim and Jamal (2007) state that it is through cultural authenticity that such sites shall be more memorable and preferable. It shall be the active participation of the community in the creation of such sites that will cause a change in destination. For example, Li (2004) states that the community participation within the Nanshan Cultural Tourism Zone has not only ensured the safeguarding of the cultural assets but advanced tourism, showing how community engagement can transform tourism. In a comparable case, Nyaupane and Timothy (2009) stress the role of local communities in driving tourism policies that would reflect local cultural values and meet the expectations of overseas visitors, hence the centrality of community engagement in the creation of a vision for tourism. Developing a destination that stands out is a complex process that requires thoughtful strategic planning coupled with infrastructural development. Planning comprehensively by integrating cultural and environmental elements for the achievement of sustainable growth within the tourism industry has been emphasized by Gai (2024). Additionally, Bramwell and Lane (2011) have also noted that partnership between the local government and the stakeholders is very important in building the infrastructure that will ease tourism while protecting the cultural and natural assets. This strategic implementation ensures long-term success and sustainability in a tourism destination. In his study, Cohen (Cohen, 2012) dapples into the issues and problems attendant upon creating an appropriate balance in development between tourism and the conservation of the environment, and he stresses that sustainability is essentially needed to preserve tourist sites' ecological-cultural authenticity for them to remain attractive and viable through time and further heightening the importance of strategic planning to reach such end. Furthermore, the impact of tourism on the local economy can be so immense. Huang and Hsu (L.-L. Huang & Hsu, 2011) have pointed out that as tourism in Hangzhou, China, advances, it brings along economic improvement and upgrade in quality of life for local people. Economic perks, therefore, serve as inducement for a more profound local community support of tourism projects, hence improving the place even more. For that reason, understanding and meeting global visitors' needs are

some of the basics for running a successful tourism destination. Cohen (1989) shows that in his study there are tourism industry service providers that have a high level of cultural competence and in most instances their visitation satisfaction rating is always above average. Additionally, Bramwell and Lane (2011) go on to argue that the very nature of establishing partnerships between municipal governments, businesses, and residents allows local cultural nuances to be integrated into the overall experience of tourism, a key underpinning of being able to formulate strategies that are supportive of sustainable and equitable tourism.

2.2. Community Readiness to Host a World-Class Tourism Destination

Further research is needed to assess the readiness of a community in having good tourist attraction. Nonetheless, the current studies are much informative in this prime area as they assure you of the possibility of community readiness. This has been proved by Azizurrohman et al. (2023) who, while using the Sapta Pesona criteria, managed to conduct research on the readiness of the population in the Mandalika Special Economic Zone, further indicating that there was good value of ratings on order, cleanliness, beauty, hospitality, and memorability, although there were also points where improvement should be made in terms of security and tranquillity.

According to Rosadi et al. (2022), community attitude was very important and affects the recovery of tourism and readiness of hosts in the pandemic, with strong emphasis on adaptation in this quest for global excellence. Sayuti (2023) found that the community preparedness in Lombok, Indonesia, in its economic, social, cultural, environmental, and symbolic dimensions was high. They had detected large-scale involvement from the public as well as private sectors in promoting the sustainable growth of tourism. Saragih and Sukristiningsih (2024) conducted a research to find the cognitive, emotional, and conative elements of the community readiness about the society's transition into the touristic society in Kuta Mandalika Village, they said that even though the community shifts into society with their focus on tourism but for that purpose more preparation is required. Phon-ngam (2014) conducted a research to explore the preparedness level of the community of the Chiang Khan nearby the Mekong River. The research pointed out that landscapes, infrastructures as well as the tourism activities must be adequately prepared to receive the increased number of tourists.

A study by Huzain et al. (2022) conducted to determine the level of community preparedness in Bondowoso, Indonesia, indicated that the lack of understanding of the Sapta Pesona's principles had restricted the area's capacity for tourism development. Orbawati et al. (2020) explored in their study various community readiness drivers, including technological readiness, the development of cultural resources, and awareness of ecotourism concepts. These results indicate a diversification of readiness in communities and that it is basically multidimensional, calling for integrated policies involving socio-cultural, economic, and environmental factors that will be applied in supporting the sites and providing high-quality tourism services. The preparedness of a place to host an exemplary tourist facility encompasses many factors, such as those related to culture, society, economy, and the environment. Understanding these factors is important and researchers, policymakers, tourism professionals, community developers, and experts in the field of sustainable development have shared responsibilities with respect to understanding overall processes. This literature review abstracts the recent findings from several studies on the core components of community preparedness to host tourist attractions of international repute with a focus on participation and significance involvement of the community.

The cultural heritage has played and is known to play a vital role in tourism development while Li (2004) is of the view that greater participation from the community also helps to make place more attractive, where tourists want to spend their money. In this regard, the observation of this study about the Nanshan Cultural Tourism Zone in China is that when the local people participate in the planning and management of activities, there is a sense of ownership and pride, and this ensures long-term environmentally responsible growth for tourism. Cultural competence, as delineated by Cohen (2012), is also important in the provision of tourism services. Community that can understand various cultures to depth and manage to alter their goods and services in a manner that can meet the needs of the

international tourists have more capabilities of having super class tourist attraction. Cultural competency improves the experience of the visitors and reduces potential confrontation between hosts and visitors. Economic impacts and benefits to society are also key in preparedness of the community. Nyaupane and Timothy (2010) further discussed the benefits of tourism in economic terms to communities. In their study of tourism policies in Bhutan, they find that clear economic motivation and benefits, such as employment and cash generation, are linked to whether there is community acceptance for any type of tourism venture.

Richards' review in 2018 centres on trends within cultural tourism and sustainable economic development. "Communities must walk a fine balance between the economic benefits of tourism with protecting their cultural and ecological resources. Sustainable tourism methods guarantee that there is a long-term economic benefit without undermining the cultural heritage of the town. And clearly, it shall be obvious that one of the top priorities to be considered is environmental sustainability. For this reason, Gai (2024) shall emphasize the role of environmental sustainability in creating world-class tourism destinations in the Third World.". Communal sustainable practices should be embraced to protect natural resources that often form a significant attraction for tourists. The management of waste, conservation, and policies on sustainable land use are steps towards the prevention of degradation in the environment because of tourism development. Good governance and participatory planning make a difference in successful tourism development. As Bramwell and Lane (2011) show, governance and collaborative planning are the main stimulators of tourism promotion. They further argue that there are effective governance mechanisms and partnerships among local authorities, tourism partners, and the community to ensure that the interests of each entity are considered, and that development rests on long-term community aspirations.

Moreover, Huang and Hsu (2008) examine the influence of the policy and regulatory framework in its contribution to the progress in tourism. The positive laws and regulation mainly enable the development of tourism hence are achieved by encouraging investment in infrastructure on tourism; cultural and natural resources are protected and ensure that the direction of tourism development benefits and is comprehensive for the natives. The readiness of a community to host high-quality tourism should be included as part of an all-encompassing strategy covering cultural, economic, environmental, and governance elements. Effective community engagement, cultural competence, sustainable development, and efficient government are now among the new dimensions of essential elements that can contribute to the preparedness of communities to receive international tourism. By addressing these elements, we can ensure that tourism growth yields favourable and enduring advantages for both guests and the local population, fostering a sense of optimism and motivation for the audience.

2.3. Culture and Customs of a World-Class Tourism Destination: Supports and Barriers

In the world-renowned tourist locale, there are few studies conducted on how culture and customs act as facilitators and barriers to aid or hinder students. However, Bello and Kamanga (2020) argue that the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities in Malawi's tourist business can be highly culture specific, while understanding and appreciating local cultural sensitivities is apt to strengthen community support for CSR initiatives; as disregard of these factors may jeopardise any genuine long-term sustainability of CSR endeavours. Esparon et al. Argyle (2015) states that unique cultural practices may entice tourists who seek authentic experiences. But these same traditions can turn sour if they are misunderstood or disrespected by visitors.

On the other hand, Momeni et al. [2] argue that the development of medical tourism in East Azerbaijan Province is mostly due to cultural factors. They propose that comprehensive cultural planning and education should be carried out to handle and overcome cultural problems. In addition, they focus on the proper interaction of tourists by the local media. Siow et al. [3] evaluate the role of culture and traditions in rural tourism participation, identifying that cultural and religious activities alienate community participation in tourism when adopted or integrated; Zielinski et al. (2020) posit

that CBT programs would utilize local culture and traditions by engaging community pride in promoting local culture and traditions as an offer for unique tourism products based purely on heritage. While these authors, Raad (2019) and Bulatovic and Iankova (2021), do not focus explicitly on culture and customs, their discussion of the broader challenges to tourist growth in Iran and the UAE indicates that cultural factors are a key element in the successful implementation of tourist policies.

It is among the most influential factors: integration of culture and tradition in the process of tourism development, which can either ease or prevent transformation of a region into a very attractive tourist destination. Although recent studies underline the real impact of local culture and habits on the experience of visitors, this literature review will try to shed light on the paradoxical role of culture in tourism development, acting both as an enabler and as an obstacle. It uses recent research done within the past five years.

Cultural enrichment has a positive effect on tourism's attractiveness, as multiple studies underscore. According to Richards, there is a growing concern about cultural tourism in that tourists now strive to actively participate in the culture and traditions of local communities for a real experience. High values regarding the cultural heritage, such as at Lake Toba, could utilize available resources to entice more foreign tourists. Li (2004) has performed a case study on the Nanshan Cultural Tourism Zone of China, which revealed that the main reasons behind the prosperity of these tourist places are the involvement of the local population and a seamless merge of cultures. Participation of residents will help such places to rest on their heritage and attract more tourists by promoting their culture.

Despite all the thrills, cultural differences and misunderstandings are always one major thorn in the flesh to the tourism industry. Nyaupane and Timothy, [8], bring out the need for proper handling of cultural differences to avert some negative experiences between tourists and residents. Effective and clear communication along with cultural competence will go a long way in solving such issues and giving the visiting tourist a good gesture of being welcome and appreciated. Cohen [9] supports this idea of cultural awareness in tourism, stating that training local hosts to understand and appreciate the cultural norms and expectations of foreign visitors is a potential key factor in enriching the visitor experience. This again supports the careful management and consequent training for change required in transposing potential cultural barriers into advantages—the objective of this literature review.

Community participation is one of the very key issues in the development process of tourism. Huang and Hsu (L.-L. Huang & Hsu, 2011) investigate how local community involvement might have positive impacts on creating a friendly environment that helps in drawing tourists. Their research, conducted in Hangzhou of China, proved that active participation by citizens in tourism activities can enhance deeper understanding and adaptation to the needs and preferences of their tourists. Bramwell and Lane (2005) suggest a need to embed local culture within wider tourism developments and recommend that partnerships between local authorities and tourism partners are essential. These accords collectively work towards the preservation and development of cultural assets for improving the tourist experience, hence giving a model of sustainable tourism for the benefit of both the community and tourists.

3. Methods

In this study, the data collected have been analysed by using content analysis. Content analysis is the systematic research method applied to analyse text or any other data related to communication to make inferences about its meaning, themes, or patterns. Krippendorff (2018) argued that formulation of clear and specific questions concerning the study has to be one of the first steps to guide the analysis. Next will be the extensive plan of what units of analysis to choose, determine the categories to be used, and how data gathering will strategically take place. Afterwards, data is collected according to this framework; information is categorized and encoded in a way that permits the identification of recurrent patterns and themes. The analysed data is checked for significant patterns and meanings, and the findings are assessed and presented in publications to provide insights into, and solutions to, the original research questions. Neuendorf [17] also provides a quantitative content analysis methodology that begins with the setting of research objectives and determining what will be measured, such as

words, sentences, or images. Data classification categories are established, and data is systematically collected and analysed through qualitative and quantitative methods. After this, the findings are analysed and transformed into meaningful deductions and general principles. Both models place an emphasis on systematism - starting from clearly set parameters based on research questions and objectives, succession through organized stages to ensure reliable and valid results. This again can be combined with the other methodologies to come up with a comprehensive and reliable guide in executing accurate, rigorous content analysis that may be differently applied on different research settings.

4. Results

4.1. Participants

This involved participant aged 17 years and above, living either near Lake Toba or in the broader region of North Sumatra. Participants had visited Lake Toba previously for recreational purposes and were aware that it was chosen as one of the Super Priority Destinations. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling, and those expressing their willingness to participate were sent an online survey link. Domicile distribution indicated that 63.3% of the respondents were from North Sumatra Province, while 36.7% were from the setting around Lake Toba, which gave a good representation of both the provincial area at large and the setting around the lake. The findings indicate that most of the respondents, 66.1%, last visited Lake Toba one year ago, while 31.7% visited three months ago. Those who have visited three years ago are 1.8%, while those that have just visited more than three years ago are only 0.5%. This shows that most people visited the lake quite recently. The gender breakdown results show that 61.5% of the population is male while 38.5% is female, which means there is greater participation of the male gender.

Of the respondents, 74.7% were working, while 19.5% of them self-employed; this is shown to be 5.9% unemployed, proving that the sample includes mostly people who are actively involved in the economy. Data on marital status are available for 76.5% of the participants: married, while 19.9% are single, 2.3% separated or divorced, and lastly, 1.4% widowed. This shows that most of the respondents are living in long-term committed unions. The age distribution indicates that the largest age cohorts were those 30–34 years old, accounting for about 35.7% of the participants, and the ones aged 25–29 years, which accounted for 35.3%. Other groups included participants aged 21–24 years with a share of 13.6%, those aged 35–39 years at 10.0%, 17–20 years at 4.1%, and lastly, those over 39 years at 1.4%. This information implies that most of the respondents are young and middle-aged, largely within their late 20s to early 30s. Generally, most of the respondents' characteristics show the varied demography where a significant number of respondents have lately visited Lake Toba. This shows that interest is high and some form of engagement with the destination exists. Understanding the broad demographic dispersion becomes important to learn about the different views concerning Lake Toba's development as a Super Priority Destination.

Table 1.
Profile of participants.

Profile		Frequency	Percent
Domicile	Province of North Sumatera	140	63.3
	About Danau Toba	81	36.7
	Total	221	100.0
Experience visiting Toba Lake	Last three years	4	1.8
	Last year	146	66.1
	Last three months	70	31.7
	More than three years ago	1	0.5
Sex	Male	136	61.5
	Female	85	38.5

Occupational status	Employed	165	74.7
	Self-employed	43	19.5
	Unemployed	13	5.9
Marital status	Separated/Divorced	5	2.3
	Married	169	76.5
	Widowed	3	1.4
	Unmarried	44	19.9
Group of age	>39	3	1.4
	17-20	9	4.1
	21-24	30	13.6
	25-29	78	35.3
	30-34	79	35.7
	35-39	22	10.0

4.2. The Feasibility of the Lake Toba Area to Become a World-Class Tourism Destination

Three factors will determine Lake Toba's potential to be one of the leading tourist destinations: the natural state of beauty and environment, infrastructure and connectivity, and richness in culture and local community. In essence, it depends on Lake Toba's innate beauty and its ecological preservation. The captivating vistas, immaculate lakes, and abundant vegetation are big draws, attracting business from people in search of natural beauty. Effective conservation efforts are therefore essential in conserving these resources and making sure that tourism development does not damage the environment. Second, creating connectivity through infrastructure development is very important to make Lake Toba accessible and convenient for international tourists. Infrastructure improvements include the development of roads, transit links, tourist facilities to enhance visitor experience and foster sustainable growth in the tourism industry. The richness of culture of the local community itself plays a vital part in their active consideration to establish a real tourist encounter that is doubly captivating. Unique cultural history, comprising elements of traditional Batak music, dance, and crafts, further enriches this destination of Lake Toba. Local community involvement in the design and delivery of tourism-related initiatives ensures that artistic traditions are preserved, as well as the fair distribution of profits gained from tourism. This tends to create community support and makes growth sustainable.

4.3. Natural Beauty and Environment Preservation

It is the intrinsic aesthetic appeal and steadfast commitment to the preservation of Lake Toba's ecological system that makes this place an international tourist destination. Some respondents mentioned that the breathtaking views, pristine seas, and lush vegetation are among the reasons for which visitors come there to have a scenic, hassle-free holiday. One of the participants pointed out that the continuous efforts towards conservation will yield results in the intrinsic beauty of their region, thus tourism development does not have to mean a detriment to ecological sustainability. Another participant added that readiness of the community to conserve the environment is an indication of understanding long-term benefits that accrue with sustainable tourism. At the same time, mechanisms ensuring the lake and its catchment are free from pollution and degradation must be in place for the sustainability of attractiveness of the attraction. It was also noted by the respondents that the natural beauty of Lake Toba provides a perfect setting for a wide range of outdoor activities, adding to its attraction.

Below are excerpts from the response of the participants.

"I was inspired by the natural beauty of Lake Toba to be more environmentally conscious."

"I felt the freshness and the extraordinary clarity of the water of Lake Toba."

"I believe that the Lake Toba region can serve as a model to other places in how one could reconcile economic development with environmental protection."

"The development of Lake Toba should put more investment into green and sustainable infrastructure."

"Various Lake Toba recreation sports, including aquatic sports, hiking, and cycling, further make it feasible and more attractive as a world-class destination."

Levelling off community-based approaches with sustainable development practices in ceremonies for the conservation and sustainability of Lake Toba's ecological setting, all the while maintaining attractiveness. Literature available shows that the involvement of local communities provides a dual benefit of increasing environmental awareness while at the same time gaining local support for any sustainable tourism projects targeted at these locals through (Tanjung & Hutagaol, 2019). It is proposed that the application of green technology and environmentally friendly infrastructure will be able to reduce the negative impact on the local ecosystem in line with the ecotourism-based study by Anele and Sam-Otuonye et al. (2021). When mitigating pollution and managing water quality, there is a pivotal need illustrated to protect the short- and long-term condition and tourist attractiveness of natural beauty within the Danau Toba area (Hutagaol et al., 2024). Added to this, Tampubolon et al. (2023) write that the development of tourism that makes good consideration of social and economic features can give the local community long-term gain. A model of sustainable development encompassing environment conservation and well-being of communities has to be the number one agenda in strategies for Lake Toba's tourism development (Nainggolan et al., 2020).

4.4. Infrastructure Development and Connectivity

This is where infrastructure development and connectivity are important to make Lake Toba a world-class tourist destination. In this regard, the respondents pointed out that the improvements in transportation and accessibility so far showed the area in better shape to attract foreign tourists. According to one of the participants, an improved road infrastructure was under construction, coupled with an expansion in public transport options to enable easier travel to and around Lake Toba. While another respondent was concerned with the renovation of the airport infrastructure and increasing routes of aircrafts to main urban cities, hence making the place more accessible to foreign tourists. Furthermore, construction of reliable internet and communication had been a major improvement; this would suit the tourists who required continuous access. Some more responses on this were that the development of high-quality accommodation and tourism facilities had improved tourist experience/satisfaction altogether. These infrastructural improvements increase the convenience and comfort of travellers and hence are for the sustainable development of tourism in this region. Combined infrastructure development and connectivity efforts are premier steps viewed as key measures in positioning Lake Toba at the forefront of international tourist destinations.

Participants provided responses, and the following are a few examples of them.

"Much improved infrastructure and connectivity would, therefore, present vast opportunities for Lake Toba to attract tourists from all over the emerging markets, such as China and India."

"After all, the viability of Lake Toba as a world class destination is supported by the existence of huge potential as a romantic travel destination for couples celebrating special moments amidst the enchanting scenery."

"The development of Lake Toba needs to consider the aspects of safety and comfort for both visitors and the local community."

"The infrastructure is commencing to grow, and it has a potential that is vast, yet needs to be properly managed."

"The area around Lake Toba has modernized itself, but it should have better infrastructure."

Some of the key drivers in developing Lake Toba into a world-class tourist destination are the establishment of sufficient infrastructures and enhancement of connectivity. The authors have observed that the enhancement of accessibility, transport infrastructure, would improve significantly the number of tourists and satisfaction rating in any place/ranking under study. Improvement in infrastructure of the road system and development of public transport modes are beneficial for travel to and inside Lake

Toba; this is very relevant when attracting foreign tourists (Tanjung & Hutagaol, 2019). Besides, renovation of the airport infrastructure and opening of flight routes to major cities will further increase the appeal among international tourists (Marbun & Simarmata, 2024). Further, it is in developing reliable internet and communication infrastructure to suit the modern tourist needs of being online at all times (Kennedy, 2022). The development of high-quality accommodation and tourist facilities has, according to prove studies, been able to ensure a better experience and satisfaction among tourists; these are elements important in developmental sustainable tourism (Rini et al., 2021). To make Lake Toba one of the frontliners of the world's tourist destinations, it will first need to undergo integrated development in infrastructure and connectivity.

4.5. Cultural Richness and Local Community

The locals are integral to the cultural richness and warm participation that Lake Toba needs to make it one of the premium spots for tourism. This is reflected in unique points mentioned by most respondents about traditional Batak culture in terms of music, dance, and handicrafts, providing an experience in authenticity and rewarding cultural experience. According to a respondent to a questionnaire, the earnest efforts of the community toward preserving and showcasing its rich cultural heritage have much aided in the area's attractiveness. Another respondent commented that the communities' involvement in activities such as organizing cultural performances and giving traditional culinary experiences is very important in setting a lively, interactive atmosphere for visitors. Other respondents mentioned the friendliness of the community members and their eagerness to share their way of life with the visitors, which created an ambiance of hospitality. Adding cultural features in tourism does not only facilitate the experience of visitors but also helps in preserving local culture and strengthening the community. Cultural richness and enthusiastic participation from the community are the two very important steps to improve Lake Toba's potentials as a key tourist destination.

The following are selected excerpts from the responses of the study cohort.

"The locals are very friendly, and local food is nice. Some areas have become well developed, especially for the tourists."

"[T]he rich cultural heritages together with the diversity of tourist attractions support the feasibility of Lake Toba as a world-class destination."

"It's the local culture, which represents the tradition and customs of Lake Toba, that can be quite a challenge to any tourist who comes from different parts of the nation or worldwide."

"The friendly nature and hospitality of the people around Lake Toba increase its potential to be a world-class destination."

"This place has so much potential but needs good management to be rated a world class."

Community involvement, on the other hand, highly enriches the cultural experience and authenticity of whatever it is that Lake Toba is offering to tourists. It has actually been noted that community participation in activities related to cultural tourism makes a destination more attractive by preserving and promoting local heritage. However, efforts would be made to display and uphold the rich Batak culture through music, dance, and handicrafts that significantly add value to the experience of the visitors (Anele & Sam-Otuonye, 2021). This helps present such cultural performances with the provision of traditional culinary experiences to foster an ambiance that is interactive and lively—a good market of engaging tourists (Rambe et al., 2022). This, together with the warm hospitality of the local people, makes Lake Toba a very appealing destination in its entirety, such that the tourists end up becoming interested in the area. Integrating culture into tourism does not only enhance the experience of the visitors but also helps in the retainment of local traditions and increases the affections of the people toward each other. All of these highlight the importance of cultural richness and community enthusiasm in elevating Lake Toba's potential to a top-class tourist spot.

4.6. Readiness of Community of Lake Toba to Host International Tourists

Readiness of the people of Lake Toba in hosting international tourists is understandable through three main aspects: hospitality and cultural promotion; community engagement and consultation; and preparation and service quality.

4.7. Hospitality and Cultural Promotion

The hospitality of the residents of Lake Toba has been tremendous, accompanied by such powerful enthusiasm in endeavours to introduce the world to their indigenous culture, thereby leaving no doubt that they are quite prepared for visitors from all over the globe. One of the participants noted that the community is very friendly and willing to embrace visitors, hence out to engage the guests. Another participant commented that the various initiatives the Lake Toba community is implementing in promoting their unique cultural heritage are very important in making this more conducive and intellectually rewarding to tourists. Local cultures and traditions, another response commented, do not represent a barrier but an opportunity for offering visitors more complete and authentic tourism experiences. On top of that, comprehensive service and accommodation arrangements have been assured to make international tourists feel warmly welcomed and at ease throughout their stay. Besides, the several unique cultural practices and traditions which characterize the population living around Lake Toba represent something that will attract more domestic tourists in search of typical and different cultural experiences, increasing its attractiveness. These considerations jointly underline the commitment of quality service and the community's culture, two areas held dear in this community's preparedness to receive international tourists.

Below is a snippet taken from the feedback provided by the participants.

"The people of Lake Toba are willing to accommodate international tourists through their hospitality and warm nature."

"The readiness of the Lake Toba community to welcome international tourists is shown through the effort to promote local culture and to welcome guests with open arms."

"Local customs and traditions should not be an obstacle to national tourist visits but serve as an opportunity for richer and more authentic tourist experiences."

"I believe that the Lake Toba community has prepared well so far in terms of service and accommodation to welcome international tourists."

"Though the customs and habits of the Lake Toba community differ from those of other places, it should be the additional attraction to the tourists at the national level in search of varied cultural experiences."

People of Lake Toba are very well prepared to welcome international tourists, such as being very friendly and eager to promote their traditional culture. The receptiveness of the town, according to respondents, is high to accommodate guests with warmth and friendliness. Provision of hospitality comes prominently for a hospitable environment for guests, and this would be important for a destination to have successful tourism. Further, there is a great degree of activity among the local population in Lake Toba related to the preservation and promotion of their local culture; this means readiness to confront international tourists and provide some meaningful immersive experiences. Local customs and traditions, however different, should be embraced as opportunities to create more authentic, immersive experiences for travellers rather than barriers. Esparon et al. (2015) reported that showing adequate understanding and appreciation of separate cultural traditions could really increase the attractiveness of some kind of tourist destination to visitors.

Furthermore, the emphasis of the community on service and accommodation preparations reflects their dedication to ensuring quality experiences for international tourists, which resonates well with Cohen's attention to the role that cultural competencies and quality in services played to enhance the existing level of visitor satisfaction. Moreover, the unique customs and habits of the Lake Toba people will be able to work as that added allurements for a tourist in search of distinct cultural experiences, improving the overall worth of the destination. Zielinski et al. (2020) have provided evidence on using

local culture and tradition to enhance community pride and to provide unique tourism products that encourage community-based tourism initiatives.

4.8. Community Engagement and Consultation

The community of Lake Toba is considerably raising its preparedness in regard to involvement and consultation efforts in accommodating international tourists. As indicated by the respondents, the community is actively involved in the process of tourist planning and decision-making to have their opinions and concerns heard and dealt with. One participant observed that this comprehensive strategy promotes a feeling of possession and accountability among the local population, which is essential for the long-term growth of tourism. Another participant emphasized the significance of ongoing communication between the community, local government, and tourism stakeholders to ensure that tourist projects align with the community's requirements and desires. Additionally, community involvement in training and capacity-building programs has enabled them to acquire the necessary skills for effective management and benefitting from tourism ventures. This creates a better ambiance within the experience, enhancing the quality of tourism and further strengthening community resilience and adaptiveness to tourism sector dynamics. The readiness and capacity for receiving international visitors are underlined by the enthusiasm of Lake Toba's community toward participation and discourses.

The participants gave responses, and here are a few instances.

"It will take wide-ranging consultations on the part of relevant parties—local communities, for instance, but more importantly the experts in the environment area—to develop the Lake Toba region."

"I strongly believe that in the vicinity of Lake Toba, there exist all the needed ingredients which will help this place become famous and in huge demand as a world class destination among tourists everywhere around the world."

"This huge Lake Toba development involves local communities and should be done carefully to avoid bad impacts on the environment and local culture."

"Warm hospitality from the local community around the Lake Toba had to be perceived as part of the richness of a cultural heritage which provides wonderful experience, not as an obstacle to national tourists."

"Willingness of the Lake Toba community to host international tourists is quite strong, and their friendliness doesn't seem to be a problem."

The community around Lake Toba is also currently better prepared and willing to discuss and participate in hosting foreign tourists. This is indeed a noteworthy point, where active inputs from the community in planning and decisions regarding tourism give birth to a sense of ownership and responsibility (Wiweka et al., 2020). In this light, constant communication between the community, local government, and tourism stakeholders in planning makes tourism projects really reflective of the needs and aspirations of the community itself (Safitri, 2021). In another study, taking part in training and capacity-building open-up opportunities for community members in gaining skills in tourism management leading to quality tourism experiences and community resilience (Situmeang, 2016). On another point, the enthusiasm of the community around Lake Toba adds that, indeed, these communities are very ready and capable of receiving international arrivals. This again points out the importance of community involvement in achieving sustainable tourism development. Embracing a participatory approach, the Toba community can more easily adjust to the dynamics of tourism yet maintain its socio-cultural and environmental integrity.

4.9. Preparation and Service Quality

Attractiveness represents the values that Lake Toba holds for visitors, and thus it significantly affects the visiting behaviour of tourists. The place becomes more attractive, with growing awareness about the region as one of the five Super Priority Destinations within Indonesia, according to the respondents who did this survey to both domestic and international visitors. One respondent claimed

that positive word-of-mouth and recommendations provided a very significant contribution to attracting tourists since they trusted the testimonials from former travellers. Another respondent noted that Lake Toba's unique cultural and natural features, such as the volcanic landscape and Batak culture, had become special features that attract tourists. Further, there are important steps taken by the local government and tourist stakeholders in promoting Lake Toba through various media, increasing its global recognition and reputation. Improvement in infrastructure and commitment to providing excellent service has also contributed to a positive reputation for this resort. Generally, the enhanced reputation of Lake Toba is the source of satisfaction and has been creating a rise not only in visiting desire but also some sorts of feelings which make a tourist feel enthusiastic and interested in visiting—one of the must-visit places.

Examples of responses from participants are presented below.

"The Lake Toba community has paid considerable attention to preparations linked with the service quality and accommodation of international tourists."

I think the community of Lake Toba has prepared everything in terms of service and accommodation to welcome international tourists."

"The readiness of the Lake Toba community in acceptance towards international tourists can be expressed by promoting local culture and welcoming visitors with open arms."

"The will of the Lake Toba community to accept international tourists has shown great strength, and their friendliness does not seem to be a problem."

"The locals are very friendly, and their local cuisine is great. Some of the areas have developed well for the tourists, however."

The attractiveness of Lake Toba is undeniably linked to cultural and natural values that play an important role in influencing the visiting behaviour of tourists. Having been recognized as one of Indonesia's five Super Priority Destinations, attention towards Lake Toba has increased nationally and internationally (Ariestyani & Utami, 2022). Positive word-of-mouth and recommendations by tourists are crucial in creating new visitors because people mostly trust others' experiences and testimonials. Features uniquely found in Lake Toba related to its volcanic landscape and rich Batak culture distinguish it from other places, offering higher value to the visitor (Rini et al., 2021). District government efforts, along with the tourism business actors in the promotion of Toba Lake, through all existing media, increase recognition and reputation to a very great extent worldwide. On the other hand, improving infrastructure and the commitment of high-quality service have built a positive image, increasing satisfaction and enthusiasm to visit among tourists. These combined factors have not only raised the urge to visit but have created a feeling of expectation and intrigue among prospective tourists.

4.10. Are the Culture and Customs of the People of the Lake Toba Area a Barrier to International Tourists Visiting?

The opinions regarding whether the culture and customs of the people in the Lake Toba area hinder the visits of international tourists can be categorised into three primary themes: Cultural Enrichment and Unique Experience, Community Engagement and Understanding, and Promotion and Cultural Integration. The first theme emphasises that the cultural abundance and distinctive customs of the Lake Toba population are regarded as appealing aspects that enrich the tourism experience, providing visitors with a genuine glimpse into Indonesian culture. The second topic highlights the community's active engagement and profound comprehension of the demands of international tourists, showcasing their preparedness to be welcoming and efficient hosts. The third topic emphasises the significance of incorporating and promoting local culture in tourist initiatives through a cooperative effort between local governments and tourism stakeholders. This collaboration aims to guarantee that infrastructure and services adhere to international standards while safeguarding cultural heritage. Collectively, these motifs indicate that the traditions and cultural practices of the Lake Toba community are not obstacles but rather wonderful resources that can greatly enhance the region's attractiveness to global tourists.

4.11. Cultural Enrichment and Unique Experience

Lake Toba's cultural enrichment and distinctive experiences significantly boost its attractiveness as a globally renowned tourist destination. Respondents emphasised the region's abundant Batak culture, which offers travellers a unique and unforgettable experience. A participant highlighted that the conventional music and dance presentations provide amusement and a profound understanding of the indigenous culture. Another participant highlighted the significance of being able to interact with local craftsmen and actively partake in the creation of traditional Batak artefacts, which enhances the cultural experience of the visit. In addition, the distinctive gastronomic encounters, where visitors may savour authentic Batak cuisine, were highlighted as a notable aspect that enhances the whole trip experience. Respondents also said that cultural festivals and rituals, which are frequently organised in the community, offer tourists a genuine insight into the local way of life. The combination of cultural immersion and the region's breath-taking natural beauty makes it a distinctive and exceptional destination that stands out in the global tourism industry.

A part of the participants' answers is expressed as follows:

"Local customs and traditions should not be a barrier to national tourist visits but an opportunity for richer and more authentic tourism experiences."

"The customs and habits of the Lake Toba community can be an additional attraction for national tourists seeking diverse cultural experiences."

"The cultural richness and diversity of the Lake Toba region support its feasibility as a world-class destination, offering unique experiences for international tourists."

"The traditions and customs of the Lake Toba community should be viewed as part of the attraction for national tourists to delve into Indonesia's cultural diversity."

"Despite differences in customs and habits, these should be seen as part of the charm of visits, providing opportunities for national tourists to learn and experience Indonesia's cultural diversity."

Local customs and culture in the Lake Toba area add value to the tourist experience and increase the region's attractiveness to international visitors rather than creating obstacles. The Lake Toba community's distinctive traditions and customs provide genuine cultural experiences that appeal to tourists interested in engaging with varied cultural environments. Studies suggest that tourists are more attracted to areas that provide authentic cultural engagements. Richards (2018) highlights the increasing desire for distinct cultural encounters in the tourism industry, which makes Lake Toba advantageous because of its abundant Batak cultural history. Moreover, Timothy and Nyaupane (2009) contend that cultural diversity plays a pivotal role in attracting tourists by offering unique experiences that differentiate a place from others. The presence of diverse customs in Lake Toba significantly enhances the visitor experience.

Additionally, incorporating indigenous practices into tourist endeavours enhances cultural durability, cultivating a sense of self-esteem within the local populace and contributing to safeguarding customary practices, as highlighted by Su and Wall (2014). Nevertheless, tackling obstacles with cultural sensitivity and a proficient understanding of local customs for international tourists is crucial. Ryan and Aicken (1997) highlight the significance of educational resources and guided experiences to ensure that tourists have a deep understanding and admiration for local traditions, improving their entire experience. Ultimately, the cultural abundance of the Lake Toba community should be utilised as a prominent draw, turning possible obstacles into chances to offer distinctive and enhancing tourism encounters. This strategy appeals to tourists interested in different cultures and contributes to the protection and long-term viability of local customs, establishing Lake Toba as a top-tier tourism spot.

4.12. Community Engagement and Understanding

Involvement and understanding within the community are very crucial in establishing if Lake Toba is ready to become one of the leading tourist destinations. As expressed by the participants, development and implementation of initiatives within the tourism sector by including the local population makes them feel part of it and creates a sense of ownership, hence responsibility. Therefore,

one respondent commented that the constant communication between the community, local authorities, and people in business in tourism ensures that development of tourism occurs in tandem with the interests and requirements of its citizens. Another respondent pointed out that the readiness of the community to undertake constant training and capacity-building programs had greatly enhanced its capacity to provide quality services to tourists. In addition, the community has a deep understanding and awareness about their cultural heritage, enabling it to share freely with visitors, thus bringing tremendous value to the tourism experience. The interaction could easily help address problems and issues and hence would provide a very amicable environment to the tourists as well as residents, according to respondents. Community engagement and understanding at Lake Toba are very important facilitators toward developing it as a sustainable and also an attractive tourism destination.

Presented below are some of the texts from the participants' answers.

"With sufficient background on the local culture, tourists from within the country would appreciate and have good times visiting the Lake Toba region."

"The readiness of the Lake Toba community in terms of international tourist visits as reflected in developing tourism infrastructure and bringing about improved transportation facilities."

Understanding the traditions and culture of the Lake Toba region can increase sense and appreciation of the place visited. This fosters the parameter for respecting local customs and thus improves the quality of a visit. Research supports this argument, stating the role of cultural competence and sensitivity in tourism. According to Cohen and Cohen (2012), tourists who have knowledge of the local culture are more likely to experience satisfaction from meaningful contacts. Notably, the Lake Toba community is also preparing itself for international tourists by constructing tourism facilities and transportation facilities so that international visitors can gain easy access there. Indeed, this construction is necessary to help facilitate such access and provide a better tourist experience. Pearce [6] postulates that the presence of strong infrastructure has a vital significance in making tourism sustainable, and it enables communities to cope with an increasing number of visitors. Better infrastructure also places an imprint on enhancing the traveller's ease of movement and demonstrates that the community is serious about providing a welcoming environment to its visitors. Therefore, the acquisition of full knowledge of the local traditions together with the enhancement of the existing infrastructure will make the cultural elements in Lake Toba remarkable resources rather than obstacles to global tourism.

4.13. Promotion and Cultural Integration

Promotion and integration of culture are important in enhancing Lake Toba's position as a world-class tourism destination. In this regard, the respondents pointed out that the local community and other stakeholders, such as local businesses or cultural organizations, are making tremendous efforts to promote the richness and uniqueness of the cultural heritage described above. One of the participants commented: "The marketing strategies put much emphasis on the richness of Lake Toba's Batak culture, which attracts tourists seeking an authentic cultural experience.". Another respondent pointed out the integration of cultural elements into various tourist activities, such as folkloric dance performances, craft workshops, and culinary tours, which give visitors a deeper understanding of the local culture and way of life. Moreover, the respondents underscored that the collaboration between the local business sector and cultural organizations has been a key factor in developing a unique and enriching tourist experience. A further advantage of the blend of cultures is that, in addition to tourist attractions, it takes part in the conservation and promotion of indigenous heritage. With the success of its amalgamation of promotional efforts and cultural assimilation, Lake Toba offers one of the most unparalleled and enticing destinations within the globe, helping to attract local and global tourists.

This is a snippet of the participants' answers.

"The Toba Lake area has shown a high spirit and enthusiasm to develop their area as an internationally known tourist destination."

"The habits and customs that are practised in the Lake Toba community should be considered part and parcel of local identity, which is attractive to national tourists who have an interest in observing Indonesian culture."

"I believe that with regard to the needs and preferences of international tourists, the Lake Toba community has good knowledge, making it ready to host."

"With a wise concept and respect for local tradition, customs, and habits, the Lake Toba community can be an integral part of the tourism experience for national tourists."

"Readiness of the Lake Toba community to host international tourists is also supported by cooperation between local governments and tourism business players."

Not only is the cultural aspect of Lake Toba integral to a diversified and captivating visitor experience; it also forms the very fundamental character of the community. This can be done efficiently by advocating and incorporating indigenous culture. The creativity and commitment of the community within Lake Toba, regarding establishing its region as a worldwide recognized attraction, proves the potential of this area. Huang and Hsu (L.-L. Huang & Hsu, 2011) comment that the success of tourism development often depends upon the wholehearted participation or support of residents because it creates an approving host environment for visiting tourists. In this respect, all the rituals and customs of the local people living on Lake Toba are a part of the locality itself but are touted as one major factor by which many tourists come to Indonesia just to experience local culture firsthand. According to Kim and Jamal [10], these cultural features are vital and a necessity for inventing unique, memorable tourism experiences that can enhance the place's attractiveness.

Moreover, the in-depth understanding that the Lake Toba community has regarding what international tourists want and prefer makes them ideal hosts. According to Cohen, flexibility and readiness are highly instrumental in providing excellent tourism experiences. Cohen underscores cultural awareness in the delivery of tourism services. Showing respect by adopting a careful and thoughtful attitude toward the traditions, customs, and practices that are native to the Lake Toba community may add some dimension to tourism by enriching visitors with invaluable knowledge about the culture of local people. Through cooperation between the local government and tourism stakeholders, better preparedness is achieved since infrastructure and training on services will be in accordance with international standards. Bramwell and Lane [11] further argue that such partnerships underline sustainable tourism development through the integration of local cultural elements into the broader tourism experience.

These comments show that the lifestyle and culture of the Lake Toba community are recognized as potential attractions to foreign visitors, not as barriers. What is important herein lies the eager enthusiasm of the local community in promoting their place and how their culture can be smoothly integrated into the tourism product. This is further supported by the fact that attuning and learning to international visitors' demands add to the destination's attractiveness. Moreover, through respectful and wise methods that include local habits and cultural aspects around Lake Toba, it can feed into the experience of visitors and make it more authentic and attractive. Coordination on the part of the local authorities and those concerned with tourism also raises preparedness in the community regarding hosting international tourists.

In this regard, Kusumaningrum (2021) calls attention to the practical value of cultural heritage and community involvement in making Borobudur attractive to tourists; these create a world-recognized destination. More recently, Gai (2024) cites that strategic planning with cultural integration is necessary in international tourist growth. These findings, therefore, are consistent with the feedback that promoting local customs will increase Lake Toba's attractiveness for international tourists. Integration of the local culture into tourism policy has a dual purpose: cultural identity preservation and delivery of unique fulfilling experiences to visitors, as highlighted in comprehensive studies on tourism.

5. Conclusion

The study assessed the viability of the Lake Toba area development into a world-class tourist destination. This research has examined the preparedness of the local community to host international tourists and determined whether there is any kind of obstacle from cultural practices or traditions typical of the people surrounding Lake Toba, such as rituals or social norms, to foreign visitors. The results indicate that Lake Toba has huge potential for development as a leading tourist destination, driven by beautiful natural landscapes and appropriate infrastructures and accesses, supported by rich cultural heritages from the local population of Batak. Scenic landscapes, as well as the existence of conservation projects to conserve the environment, attract visitors. Improved infrastructure further facilitates ease of access and enjoyment of the area by visitors. Added to this, the local people's warm hospitality and willingness to promote and conserve their culture make for the creation of a unique and scintillating visitor experience.

The results show that the area is ready to receive international visitors due to the hospitality, promotion of culture, wide extent of community participation, and level of service. The people of Lake Toba have done quite a bit to embrace tourists and include some features from the culture in the general tourism experience to make it more appealing. It also shows that the culture and practices of Lake Toba's community were the essential assets to add value to the tourism experience, rather than acting as obstacles. By actively promoting and conserving these cultural elements, Lake Toba will be able to give real, unforgettable cultural experiences to visitors. For this reason, close cooperation among the municipal authorities, tourism industry participants, and local residents plays a very important role in the effective development of sustainable tourism that is showcasing benefits for both visitors and indigenous people.

This work will make some theoretically critical contributions, given the exploration of a rather unexplored area of the possibility for Lake Toba to become an internationally popular tourist destination. It is an inquiry into how environmental conservation and infrastructure development blend with cultural diversity; thus, it forms a complete framework that offers insight into how such facets relate to tourist appeal. It shows the importance of community preparedness and cultural assimilation in the advancement of tourism. This idea is quite in line with and gives additions to already established principles of sustainable and community-based tourism. This paper melds tenets in cultural competency and sustainable tourism management to advance theoretical understanding of how local communities may use their cultural resources to attract international tourists while maintaining environmental and cultural sustainability.

Furthermore, it contributes to the debate about the power of indigenous culture and traditions in tourism development. What this research has underscored is that, instead of becoming a barrier, cultural features can turn into distinctive selling propositions that enhance the holistic visitors' experience. Hence, it dismisses the view that cultural diversity naturally implies obstacles or barriers to tourism development. The results of this study provide an affirmative answer to the latter: successful place promotion and integration in terms of its culture increase its attractiveness. This provides a theoretical foundation for further studies on strategic cultural heritage management in tourism.

The findings from this study are very useful in terms of providing practical insights for the parties concerned, particularly to those at the managerial level, on the development and promotion of Lake Toba as a first-class tourist destination. This means that environmental conservation and creating infrastructure are very important issues. The dictum, therefore, calls for investments that entail friendly environmental and modern facilities that ensure the enhancement of tourist pleasure which fosters sustainable expansion of tourism. These research findings suggest that there is a need for updating infrastructure, including better road conditions, reliable public transportation, and communication services. Upgrading such infrastructure facilities is very important to increase accessibility and attractiveness of Lake Toba to foreign tourists.

It is also insistent that local people be involved in the planning and promotion of tourism. The managers and politicians from local stakeholders should ensure the involvement of locals in decision-

making processes and offer training and capacity-building programs for their ability to deliver superior quality tourism services. For cultural promotion and integration, it takes an integrated effort of the local business community, cultural governing bodies, and institutions in setting a unique and attractive tourist experience. By capitalizing on the particular cultural heritage of the Batak population and necessarily trying to guarantee that flows from tourism dovetail into tomorrow, an attractive climate can be created that nourishes the sustainable development of tourism, linked with growing visitor satisfaction.

This research aimed at establishing the potential of the Lake Toba area as a world-class tourist destination and estimating the readiness of the community at large in hosting international tourists. Additionally, it analysed whether there were barriers to foreign tourists posed by the culture and customs of the people living around Lake Toba. There is, however, a need to factor in a few limitations or constraints. This might have added some bias, as participants were self-selected and thus not a correct representation of the broader population—that is, of the Lake Toba area or of North Sumatera province at large. Furthermore, this study was based on online questionnaires; they may miss out on those with less access to or familiarity with the internet. In light of this, such considerations will affect the generalisability that can be drawn from the results. Additionally, the data collected in this study were predominantly quantitative, which is very practical but may not capture deeply personal feelings and opinions of participants regarding subjects under discussion.

Only future research that has more rigorous sampling techniques, like random sampling, can overcome such constraints to come up with a better representation of the population in its totality. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions—qualitative approaches—are necessary for an in-depth understanding of the views of the community and their personal experiences in detail. Longitudinal studies that monitor changes over time can provide valuable information on the sustainability of tourism development in this Lake Toba region and its people. One can also learn about the perceptions of global tourists who have visited Lake Toba in a nutshell about the destination's attractiveness and points that could be improved. Therefore, by implementing the suggestions offered in this paper, follow-up studies will be able to support the current research findings and be proactive in increasing awareness regarding Lake Toba's capacity and its potential as one of the world's leading tourist destinations.

This study pointed out conclusions and recommended some of the Sustainable Development Goals that were oriented. The area surrounding Lake Toba is one of the travel destinations capable of realizing SDG 8, which concerns decent work and economic growth through the creation of jobs and boosting local business growth. The protection of cultural heritage can be orientated toward the SDG 11: Cities and Communities by taking measures for making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The focus on environmentally conscious tourism that does not impact biodiversity and ecosystems negatively strengthens work specifically in goals SDGs 12: Responsible Consumption and Production, and 15: Life on Land. Furthermore, SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) specifically underlines the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships to achieve sustainable development. This reflects the idea of empowering local communities and creating a stronger stakeholder engagement.

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